

Week of October 28-November 4

OXYMORON

Scripture Reading: Read Hebrews 4

Perhaps you have heard of the term, “oxymoron”? It’s a rhetorical device in which two seemingly contradictory words are joined together to make a point. Cruel kindness, random order, and deafening silence are all examples of oxymoronic phrases.

In verse 11 of today’s reading, the writer of Hebrews utilizes an oxymoron that’s worth noting: *“Let us labor, therefore, to enter into that rest”* (KJV). That certainly seems like a contradiction of terms, doesn’t it? Labor to enter into rest? What does it mean?

Using the history of Israel’s failure to enter the Promised Land when they came out of bondage in Egypt as a backdrop (3:7-12, 16-19), the author of Hebrews challenges his readers to lay hold of God’s promises by faith so they may enter into His Sabbath-rest (4:1,6,9-11). This type of rest is where we cease striving in our own strength and power to be made acceptable to God and learn to trust completely in the finished work of Christ by faith (4:9-10).

Sadly, such a Sabbath-rest is found too infrequently in the body of Christ. In what way? While believers all agree that we are to rest in God’s salvation as a gift of grace received through faith, far too few believers know how to rest in God’s gift of grace through faith as it relates to holy living. They strive and labor to be holy but do so too often in their own strength and not his. Such believers are challenged to “labor to enter into rest.”

How is this laboring to be done? An analogy might be helpful. When a person first attempts to learn a new language, particularly one that has a different alphabet than he or she regularly uses, everything is new and difficult to follow. It takes time and diligent study to learn the letters, the vocabulary, the grammar, and the ins and outs of the new language. However, for those who put in the time and make every effort, there comes a point when the new language “clicks” and the individual gets it. What once was difficult and unintelligible is now simple and understandable. He or she is now able to think and speak the language naturally rather than struggling to remember all the pieces. The labor has given way to rest.

The same is true spiritually. We labor to understand and apply the principles of Christ’s work at the cross, of being crucified with Christ, and of reckoning ourselves dead to sin. It’s foreign to us and difficult. We feel, at times, like giving up because we wonder if we’ll ever “get it.” Over time, however, as we make every effort to apply holiness truths something happens. The Holy Spirit opens our hearts and minds to apprehend and apply the truth. What once was difficult becomes effortless. What once seemed unnatural becomes spiritually natural as we learn to walk in the Spirit by faith through grace. Effort gives way to rest, God’s Sabbath-rest.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Where are you on your Sabbath-rest journey? Have you entered into salvation rest? If not, it’s time to come to Christ today and receive him as Savior by faith. If you have already entered into salvation rest, what about holiness rest? Are you striving under your own power or are you learning the “language” of Sabbath-rest? Ask the Holy Spirit to instruct you in the truths of Sabbath-rest.

Take-a-way: *Laboring to rest is not a contradiction of terms but a pathway to peace.*