

The End Better Than the Beginning

President John W. McGarvey
The College of the Bible

Solomon makes the rather striking declaration that “The end of a thing is better than the beginning.” This, like many other oriental aphorisms that we find in the Bible, though universal in form is not so in meaning and application. There are many things of which the beginning is better than the end. Take, for example, the beginning of a bad habit. It begins often with a great deal of pleasure and gratification to him who indulges it, and without much fear or apprehension to the person’s friends; but it often ends in disgrace. How much worse, in that case, is the end than the beginning. In business undertakings, it is often the case that the enterprise begins with bright prospects before it, everything cheering and hopeful; but ends in disaster, perhaps in bankruptcy. We might specify many other examples, marriage begins, O how hopeful. You cannot find words to express the delights of the young couple when they are first united in matrimony, looking forward with all the skies above them cheering them on. But, how often the end is worse than the beginning, ending in divorce, or suicide, or both, and sometimes in murder. You can scarcely count the number of things in human experience the end of which is worse than the beginning. Often the whole life, beginning with wealth, health, friends, and bright prospects, ends in disgrace.

Often when a thing that is good and wise is undertaken, the question whether the end is to be better than the beginning, is determined by the way the enterprise is conducted; consequently, the wise king adds a qualifying clause to the one I have quoted, saying, “A patient spirit is better than a proud spirit”. If a man undertaken anything that is desirable, good and wise, whether its end shall be better than its beginning, depends upon its being accompanied with the proper spirit, a spirit that is patient; and this does not mean a spirit that is lazy and inactive, but one that perseveres in its undertaking – patient in the way of enduring without discouragement all of the hardships through which it must pass in order to accomplish the ends it has in view.

Now, all of you have made a beginning – the beginning of a new college session. Shall the end of this session be better than the beginning? The beginning to most of you is very pleasant. To those who are old students, as we call them, it is a renewal of friendships, the reuniting of fellowship that has been slightly suspended for a time, the renewal of very special enjoyment. There are very few enjoyments in

this life equal to those of college students. I remember very well remarking to my roommate as we were walking along the bank of the Buffalo at Bethany, "We are spending the happiest days we will ever know". "Oh", he said, "why do you think so?" "Why, here we are with no cares, no labors or anxieties, but to rise every morning, get our lessons, and recite them. We will never see such a time as this again." I believe that is true. You have entered once more the beginning of a new session in that kind of enjoyment. You may have your little troubles and anxieties, but they are like summer clouds which make very little shadow and quickly pass away. What will be the end of the session? If it ends as you have hoped, and as your friends have been wishing, the end will be far better than the beginning. Better, because it will find your mind loaded with a large amount of valuable information which you will have accumulated during the year, and will find it invigorated, better prepared for future achievements, and you will be looking out from a broader horizon on the affairs of life. How much better the end than the beginning depends upon the patient spirit which Solomon mentions. It will require all of the patience that you can have with the help of your friends and the help of God, to go through the session in such manner as to say with deep satisfaction, "The end is better than the beginning."

And so in regard to the whole college course. The beginning to the young man or young woman on first entering college is usually bright, cheerful, and hopeful. Often it is that these bright hopes are dashed to the ground before the first session ends; and before the diploma is gained the undertaking is abandoned, and the person drops back into the kind of life, sometimes bad, sometimes a little useful, sometimes like a drop of water in the sea – the life to which you should have gone if you had never opened the door of the college. Again, that depends upon the patient spirit with which the whole course of study in the college curriculum is pursued from time to time. Of course, you now hope that in this case the end is going to be better than the beginning. I hope so too.

The same is true even of Christian life. How delightful is the Christian's beginning! How natural[ly] he joins with all of his heart in singing that blessed hymn,

"How happy are they who their Savior obey,
And have laid up their treasures above!
Tongue cannot express the sweet comfort and peace
Of a soul in its earliest love."

Is it possible that the end of that life is going to be better than the beginning? Sometimes it ends in failure for the want of this persevering, patient, spirit of which Solomon speaks, and sometimes we may imagine that inasmuch as death, the most horrible calamity in the minds of most men that can befall a human being, will end the Christian career in this world...We may be tempted at times to think that even in that case the end will be worse than the beginning; but looking at it in the light of the Gospel, we see that death is only the last step in the pilgrim's upward journey to Heaven.

So the end, though it be in death, is better than the beginning. How much better was the death of Stephen, though he died under the stones hurled at him by his old friends and neighbors, than any experience he had in his previous Christian life.

“Sadly we sing, and with tremendous breath,
As we stand by the mystical stream,
In the shadows by the dark river of death;
Yet death is no more than a dream.
Only a dream; only a dream,
And glory beyond the dark stream!
How peaceful the slumber! How happy the waking!
For death is no more than a dream.”

 Pension Fund
of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Strong. Smart. Savvy.

Lexington
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

 FLOURISHING IN MINISTRY
a Wellbeing at Work project

MINISTRY LIFE CHOICES
Initiative

*A ministry of the Pension Fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in partnership with Lexington Theological Seminary, the **Ministry Life Choices Initiative** will help those in the early years of ministry to develop practices for a successful and sustainable ministry.*

> To learn more: Email Dr. Charisse L. Gillett at cgillett@lextheo.edu.