

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 253

DEATH AND DYING

*It is appointed unto
men once to die.*

Hebrews 9:27

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

Free Grace Broadcaster

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253

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DEATH DEFINED

Christopher Bogosh

DEATH is ultimately undefinable. The reality of felt separation that it conveys when we lose our loved ones goes far beyond words. The word *separation*, therefore, must lie at the heart of our feeble attempts to define death. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. But that is not all there is to death, since our physical death is never the end of our existence. The Bible also speaks of two kinds of death that are far worse: *spiritual* death and *eternal* death. These two kinds of death are also the wages of sin.

Spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God's favor. That happened instantaneously to Adam in Paradise when he fell into sin. That is how we are born by nature as fallen sons and daughters of sin, separated from God in our soul though receiving benefits from God for our bodies. David put it this way: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa 51:5). And Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). That is why Jesus said of everyone who is born into this world: "Ye must be born again" (Joh 3:7).

Eternal death is the separation of a person's soul and body from God forever in hell. Hell is a final and irreversible state (Luk 16:25-26) of punishment (Mat 25:46), torment (Mar 9:44), destruction (2Th 1:9), imprisonment (Jude 6), as well as darkness, grief, and pain (Mat 8:12). In eternal death, those justly condemned to hell do not even experience the common mercies of God that the unbeliever experiences in this life; the wrath of God is poured out without mixture upon the damned forever (Rev 14:10-11). In hell, the damned are ever dying but never fully physically dead even as they remain under spiritual and eternal death—without intermission, without a second chance, without annihilation, and without end (Isa 33:14; Mat 25:41; Jude 8). Truly, "the wages of sin is death"—physical death, spiritual death, eternal death.

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DEATH AND IMMORTALITY

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

WHAT does the Bible tell us about death? The first thing is this: Death is not merely the cessation of existence. The common view held by the world is that death is just the end of life. Death means, it is said, cessation of existence. A man exists; he dies; he is no longer existing, and that is the end of that. But that is not the biblical teaching at all! In fact, biblical teaching is the exact opposite, as I shall try to show you. Bible writers are very anxious to assert and to emphasize that death does *not* mean the cessation of existence. Death, according to the Bible, is simply the separation of the soul and the physical body. Here we are in this life, and the soul and the body are intimately connected; they are one. My soul functions in and through my body. When I die, my soul will leave the body. My body will still be left here in this world; my soul will go on. So, death is the separation of soul and body, but by no means the cessation of existence.

Now, I could give you many texts. Two very important ones clinch the whole matter. The first is Luke 12:4-5. Here our Lord says to His disciples, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But...Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell." Or, as we read in the parallel passage, Matthew 10:28: "him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." There are some people who can destroy the body. "Do not be afraid of them," our Lord says. The One to fear is the One Who can destroy the soul as well as the body.

And our Lord's teaching in Luke 16 about Lazarus and Dives¹ obviously teaches the same thing. The rich man, Dives, dies; the poor man, Lazarus, the beggar at his gate, also dies. They both leave their bodies behind; but their souls are there, existing in that other realm: it is the separation of the soul from the body. That is the fundamental biblical definition of death.

So, the next question to ask is this: Why do we die? Why is there such a thing as death at all? The popular view here, the popular philosophical view, is that death is inherent in life, that death is a part of the life process. Life comes into being: there is a beginning, a sprouting. And that is followed by a movement: life develops, it blossoms, it matures,

¹ **Dives** (dī' -vēz; from the Latin Vulgate) – rich man at whose gate Lazarus lay (Luk 16:19-31).

it attains its full maturity, and then it begins to decay. Why? It is because life is meant to go so far but no further; and when it reaches its peak, it begins to go down the other side of the hill. So, the teaching is that as life was constituted, it had within it this germ, this seed, of death.

But that is, again, far from being biblical teaching. According to the Bible, death is not a part of life. It is not something inherent in it but is the punishment for sin. It was introduced because of sin. You will find this in Genesis 2:17: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”—or, “dying thou shalt die”... You find the same teaching exactly in Genesis 3:19. And it comes in the New Testament in Romans 5, where the apostle Paul shows how death entered in because of the sin of Adam: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (v. 12). Death, you see, came by sin.

There is another very interesting statement of the same teaching in the epistle of James: “Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jam 1:14-15). So, the biblical teaching is that death was introduced as God’s punishment for sin. There was no death until man sinned and there would have been no death if he had not sinned. This is a vital biblical principle, and it cuts right across the popular modern philosophy that controls the teaching of the vast majority of people.

So then, we have seen that we die because of sin, and we have seen what death is. But at this point many people are in trouble. They say, “All right, I’ll accept that; but then the problem you leave with me now is this: Why does a *Christian*, a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, have to die?” “I’ll admit,” says this person, “that death was the punishment of sin; but after all, if I have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, my sins are forgiven. I am justified.² I am reconciled to God. ‘There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus’ (Rom 8:1). Why, then, does a Christian have to die?”

Now, that is a most interesting and important question, and there is a kind of subdivision to it. There are many people who argue in the same way that a Christian should never be ill because Christ’s death

² **justified** – Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins (Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7), and accepts us as righteous in His sight (2Co 5:21) only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us (Rom 5:19), and received by faith alone (Gal 2:16; Phi 3:9). (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 32) See Free Grace Broadcaster 187, *Justification*, both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

on the cross dealt with all the consequences of sin. This very argument forms much of the basis of the popular “faith-healing” movements today—as well as of the cults. Those who believe this say that a Christian should never be ill because healing is a part of the atonement,³ and they quote Matthew 8:17, which is itself a quotation from Isaiah 53:4 about Christ bearing our sicknesses. They say that when Christ died on the cross, He nullified all the consequences of sin. So, it is important that we should take those two ideas together because it is clear, is it not, that death was most certainly not dealt with in that way in the atonement.

Regarding physical death, the Christian believer must die just as the unbeliever has to die. We are waiting for “the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23), which means that we are waiting for the body to be delivered from death, from sin, and from sickness. They all go into the same category. It has pleased God to allow sickness to persist, death to persist, and sin to persist, even in the Christian. He could have made us immediately perfect had He chosen to do so. He could have abolished death immediately and all sickness, but He has not so chosen. The teaching of the Scriptures is surely perfectly clear in these respects; and it is a misunderstanding of the atonement with regard both to sickness and to death to say, without any qualification, that the atonement has dealt with all the consequences of sin. It has done so for some immediately. Ultimately, it will do so for all.

So, it seems clear that Christians are still left subject to suffering, sickness, and death as a part of the process of their sanctification.⁴ These are a part of God’s chastisement (*see* Heb 12:3-13), so that the Christian can say today, as the psalmist says in Psalm 119, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted,” and, “Before I was afflicted I went astray” (vv. 71, 67). There is also that teaching in 1 Corinthians 11 in connection with the Communion Service...that because some people do not examine themselves, they are “weak and sickly” (v. 30). Illness is a part of God’s process of discipline. This does not mean that every time we are taken ill, we are of necessity being punished for sin. But we may be.

There is also no doubt that death, like illness, is one of the means

³ **atonement** – act of bringing reconciliation by paying the debt owed for an offense. See Free Grace Broadcaster 227, *The Atonement*.

⁴ **sanctification** – Sanctification is the work of God’s Spirit whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 34) See Free Grace Broadcaster 215, *Sanctification*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

that God uses to sanctify us. The fear of death has often been a blessing to Christian people. There have been Christians who, carried away by success in this world, have started to backslide,⁵ forgetting God and their relationship to Him. But suddenly they have been taken ill or have seen someone die, and this reminder of death has brought them back again; and God has healed their backsliding. God has chosen, it seems to me, to use sickness and death very much as He used the nations that He left behind in the land of Canaan to perfect the children of Israel when He brought them out of captivity in Egypt.

But let me hasten to add that though Christians are still subject to death, their view of death should be entirely different from that of the unbeliever. Why? Because of what they know. You can see this, for instance, in that great statement in 1 Corinthians 15:55. Every one of us should be able to look in the face of death and say, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” In Christ we know that “the sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (vv. 56-57). This does not mean that we speak lightly and loosely and flipantly about death, but it does mean that we know that its sting has been taken away by the atoning death of Christ and by the satisfaction He gave to the Law. We know, too, the teaching of the apostle Paul about death being a “gain”: “Having a desire to...be with Christ,” he says, “which is far better” (Phi 1:21-23), while Revelation 14:13 tells us, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.”

So far, then, we have been considering the question of death itself and have thought about why Christians must die.

The next question that follows is: What happens after death? And here we come face to face with the idea of immortality. This has often been hotly debated. Is the human soul immortal? Has it an inherent, essential immortality or has it not? Great volumes have been written on this subject, but generally most of their pages are devoted to a philosophical discussion of the subject, and I do not think it is a part of my task to weary you with that.

We start by saying quite frankly that the Bible does not use the term “immortality”: it does not make an explicit statement that the human soul is immortal. But while there is not an explicit statement, I suggest to you that no one can read the Bible in an unprejudiced way without gathering the impression that it assumes everywhere that the human soul *is* immortal. If, for instance, nobody ever told you that the

⁵ See Free Grace Broadcaster 197, *Backsliding*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

immortality of the soul is in doubt, reading the Bible would never have raised the question in your mind.

But first let me put the arguments against the belief in the immortality of the soul. There is a statement in 1 Timothy 6:16 that says of God, "Who only hath immortality." "Now," it is said, "if anything can be plain, there it is. There is a specific statement to the effect that God alone is immortal." Now, the answer is that that statement is perfectly true. God alone has immortality in and of Himself. But the fact that this is true only of God does not mean that God may not have decided to give that gift to men and women. No one would claim that they, in and of themselves, are inherently immortal or can, indeed, achieve immortality. But the reply of those of us who do accept the immortality of the soul is that God, in His infinite wisdom, has chosen to give the gift of immortality to the human soul. He need not have, but He has chosen to do so. We can say, therefore, that God alone has immortality in and of Himself as His right and as His possession, but He has given it as a gift to the souls of men and women.

But let us consider further arguments. It is said that as we read the Old Testament, we do not get the suggestion and the teaching that the human soul is immortal. Everything seems uncertain; everything seems shadowy. As the author of the book of Ecclesiastes puts it, "A living dog is better than a dead lion" (Ecc 9:4), as if to say that, of course, when we are dead that is the end; we are finished. The Old Testament, it is said, seems to indicate that death is just the end.

Now, the answer that is generally given to that argument is that there is a kind of progressive revelation in the Scripture and that ideas are much plainer and clearer, for instance, in the New Testament than in the Old Testament. As we work through the Bible, we find a kind of development of doctrine. Things are hinted at, then they become a little plainer, and then yet more plain, and finally absolutely plain. Indeed, Scripture tells us that it is the Lord Jesus Christ alone, by His resurrection, Who has "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2Ti 1:10). But they were there before. There were these suggestions; there were all these adumbrations.⁶ Christ has brought life and immortality into the full light of day. But when we say that, we must not say that there was nothing there before. There was, but it was inchoate,⁷ incomplete. It was a mere suggestion; and, therefore, there is a development in the Old Testament teaching. For instance, the Old

⁶ **adumbrations** – symbolic representations prefiguring the reality.

⁷ **inchoate** – just begun and not fully formed.

Testament does state very clearly that there is a place called *Sheol*, a state where the dead go. The Old Testament teaches that death is not the end but that the dead go on living; and all people, the good and the bad, descend together to Sheol, or (to use the Greek word) to *Hades*.

Not only that, but certain specific statements in the Old Testament teach the immortality of the soul. Verses 10-11 of Psalm 16 say, “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” And if we go on to the next psalm, we again find immortality stated very clearly in verse 15: “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (Psa 17:15). You could not have anything stronger or more explicit than that. Psalms 16 and 17 are of very great importance in this connection, and that is why they are quoted several times in the New Testament itself.

In the book of Job, Job states, “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25-26). And there is a very strong affirmation of belief in immortality in Psalm 73, where the psalmist says that his hope is in God, that he has no one on earth but God, and also says, “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (v. 24). There it is. And there are many other verses. If you go through the Old Testament and make a note of them, you will find that the evidence is very powerful...

In addition to all this evidence, there is a further piece of evidence that always seems to me to be very important. It is the prohibition in the Old Testament against consulting familiar spirits. This prohibition is referred to, of course, by the so-called Witch of Endor who, when consulted by that tragic man, Saul, the first king of Israel, was able to produce the presence of the prophet Samuel. Now, there is a great deal of teaching in the Old Testament against the consulting of familiar spirits and against resorting to spiritism⁸ or spiritualism, and this prohibition is a powerful argument in favor of the immortality of the soul. If the spirits of men and women did not persist after the death of the body, there would be no need for such a prohibition.

Then, finally, let me come to the New Testament teaching, which is very striking. There is the statement in Luke 12:4-5, which I have

⁸ **spiritism** – the belief and practice of communication with the dead by means of a medium.

already quoted to you, that we should fear Him Who not only can destroy the body but can cast the soul into hell, suggesting that though the body may be destroyed in this world, the spirit goes on. And then there is the evidence produced by the event that took place on the Mount of Transfiguration when Moses and Elias appeared and spoke to our Lord. This shows that Moses and Elias are still in existence (Mat 17:1-8).

And notice, too, the use that our Lord made of the statement, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Mat 22:32). He was being questioned by a clever man who was trying to trap Him regarding this question of the immortality of the soul, the persistence of life after death. When the trick question was brought to Him, that was His reply, and He continued, “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” In other words, our Lord’s argument was that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive and God is their God now.

Then look again at the story of Dives and Lazarus in Luke 16. Lazarus is there in Abraham’s bosom. The rich man is also there: he is dead—yes—but he is still active. He is conscious; he is seeing; he is concerned. Death is not the end. That is very definite and specific evidence that the soul goes on after death.

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David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981): Welsh expository preacher and author; born in Cardiff, Wales, UK.



When Christ died, He suffered the penalty of death on the behalf of all His people, and therefore no believer now dies by way of punishment for sin, since we cannot dream that a righteous God would twice exact the penalty for one offence. Death since Jesus died is not a penal infliction upon the children of God: as such He has abolished it, and it can never be enforced. Why die the saints then? Why, because their bodies must be changed ere they can enter heaven. “Flesh and blood” as they are “cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” A divine change must take place upon the body before it will be fit for incorruption and glory; and death and the grave are, as it were, the refining pot and the furnace by means of which the body is made ready for its future bliss.

—Charles H. Spurgeon

DEATH IS AN ENEMY

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.—1 Corinthians 15:26

DEATH is the child of our direst¹ foe, for “sin when it is finished bringeth forth death” (Jam 1:15). “Sin entered into the world and death by sin” (Rom 5:12). Now, that which is distinctly the fruit of transgression cannot be other than an enemy of man. Death was introduced into the world on the gloomy day that saw our fall, and he that had the power of it is our arch enemy and betrayer, the devil. From both facts, we must regard it as the manifest enemy of man.

Death is an alien in this world: it did not enter the original design of the unfallen creation, but its intrusion mars and spoils the whole. It is no part of the Great Shepherd’s flock, but it is a wolf that cometh to kill and to destroy...Certain it is that as far as this present creation is concerned, death is not God’s invited guest, but an intruder whose presence mars the feast. Man in his folly welcomed Satan and sin when they forced their way into the high festival of Paradise, but he never welcomed death. Even his blind eyes could see in that skeleton form a cruel foe. As the lion to the herds of the plain, as the scythe to the flowers of the field, as the wind to the sere² leaves of the forest, such is death to the sons of men. They fear it by an inward instinct because their conscience tells them that it is the child of their sin.

Death is well called an enemy for *it does an enemy’s work* towards us. For what purpose doth an enemy come but to root up, to pull down, and to destroy? Death tears in pieces that comely³ handiwork of God, the fabric of the human body, so marvelously wrought by the fingers of divine skill. Casting this rich embroidery into the grave among the armies of the worm, to its fierce soldiery death divideth “to every one a prey of divers colours, of divers colours of needlework” (Jdg 5:30); and they ruthlessly rend in pieces the spoil. This building of our manhood is a house fair to look upon, but death the destroyer darkens its windows, shakes its pillars, closes its doors, and causes the sound of the grinding to cease. Then the daughters of music are brought low, and

¹ **direst** – most dreadful; most horrible.

² **sere** – withered; dry.

³ **comely** – beautiful; attractive.

the strong men bow themselves. This vandal spares no work of life, however full of wisdom or beauty; for it looseth the silver cord and breaketh the golden bowl (*see* Ecc 12:6).⁴ Lo, at the fountain, the costly pitcher is utterly broken; and at the cistern, the well-wrought wheel is dashed in pieces. Death is a fierce invader of the realms of life; and where it comes, it fells every good tree, stops all wells of water, and mars every good piece of land with stones. See what a ruin man is when death has wrought his will upon him! How is his beauty turned to ashes and his comeliness to corruption! Surely an enemy hath done this (Mat 13:28).

Look, my brethren, at the course of death throughout all ages and in all lands. What field is there without its grave? What city without its cemetery? Whither can we go to find no sepulchers? As the sandy shore is covered with the upcastings⁵ of the worm, so art thou, O earth, covered with those grass-grown hillocks⁶ beneath which sleep the departed generations of men. And thou, O sea, even thou, art not without thy dead! As if the earth were all too full of corpses, and they jostled each other in their crowded sepulchers. Even into thy caverns, O mighty main,⁷ the bodies of the dead are cast. Thy waves must become defiled with the carcasses of men, and on thy floor must lie the bones of the slain! Our enemy, death, has marched as it were with sword and fire ravaging the human race. Neither Goth nor Hun nor Tartar could have slain so universally all that breathed, for death has suffered none to escape. Everywhere it has withered household joys and created sorrow and sighing; in all lands where the sun is seen it hath blinded men's eyes with weeping. The tear of the bereaved, the wail of the widow, and the moan of the orphan—these have been death's war music, and he has found therein a song of victory.

The greatest conquerors have only been death's slaughtermen—journeymen butchers working in his [meat market]. War is nothing

⁴ **Looseth the silver cord...golden bowl** – The emphasis in this section [of Ecclesiastes] is on the dissolution that comes to the human being at death. Four metaphors are used to describe death...“the silver cord,” “the golden bowl,” “the pitcher,” and “the wheel at the well”...a common view is to take the four metaphors to be describing two images. The golden bowl is a lamp with the bowl holding the oil (Zec 4:2-3). The silver cord is either a cord that holds the bowl in suspension or a part of the lampstand. When “*the silver cord is snapped*” then “*the golden bowl is smashed*” so that the light of the lamp, which symbolizes life, is gone. The other two metaphors are understood to describe a well with a broken pitcher and a wheel that no longer works so that water cannot be taken out of the well. (Belcher, *A Study Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, 331-332)

⁵ **upcastings** – soil or other material thrown up in digging.

⁶ **hillocks** – little hills.

⁷ **main** – open ocean.

better than death holding carnival and devouring his prey a little more in haste than is his common wont.⁸

Death has done the work of an enemy to those of us who have yet escaped his arrows. Those who have lately stood around a newly made grave and buried half their hearts can tell you what an enemy death is. It takes the friend from our side and the child from our bosom; neither does it care for our crying. He has fallen who was the pillar of the household; she has been snatched away who was the brightness of the hearth. The little one is torn out of its mother's bosom though its loss almost breaks her heartstrings; and the blooming youth is taken from his father's side though the parent's fondest hopes are thereby crushed. Death has no pity for the young and no mercy for the old; he pays no regard to the good or to the beautiful. His scythe cuts down sweet flowers and noxious weeds with equal readiness. He cometh into our garden, trampleth down our lilies, and scattereth our roses on the ground; yea, death spieth out even the most modest flowers planted in the corner, hiding their beauty beneath the leaves that they may blush unseen, and cares nothing for their fragrance, but withers them with his burning breath. He is thine enemy indeed, thou fatherless child, left for the pitiless storm of a cruel world to beat upon with none to shelter thee. He is thine enemy, O widow, for the light of thy life is gone, and the desire of thine eyes has been removed with a stroke. He is thine enemy, husband, for thy house is desolate and thy little children cry for their mother of whom death has robbed thee.

He is the enemy of us all, for what head of a family among us has not had to say to him, "Me thou hast bereaved again and again!" Especially is death an enemy to the living when he invades God's house and causes the [ministers] to be numbered with the dead. The church mourns when her most useful ministers are smitten down, when the watchful eye is closed in darkness and the instructive tongue is mute. Yet how often does death thus war against us! The earnest, the active, the indefatigable⁹ are taken away. Those mightiest in prayer, those most affectionate in heart, those most exemplary in life, those are cut down amid their labors, leaving behind them a church that needs them more than tongue can tell. If the Lord does but threaten to permit death to seize a beloved pastor, the souls of his people are full of grief, and they view death as their worst foe, while they plead with the Lord and entreat Him to bid their minister live.

⁸ **wont** – habit.

⁹ **indefatigable** – persons incapable of being wearied; tireless people.

Even *those who die* may well count death to be their enemy: I mean not now that they have risen to their seats and, as disembodied spirits, behold the King in His beauty, but aforetime while death was approaching them. He seemed to their trembling flesh to be a foe, for it is not in nature, except in moments of extreme pain or aberration¹⁰ of mind or of excessive expectation of glory, for us to be in love with death. It was wise of our Creator so to constitute us that the soul loves the body and the body loves the soul, and they desire to dwell together as long as they may, else had there been no care for self-preservation, and suicide would have destroyed the race...It is a first law of our nature that skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life, and thus we are nerved to struggle for existence and to avoid that which would destroy us. This useful instinct renders death an enemy, but it also aids in keeping us from that crime of all crimes, the most sure of damnation if a man commit it willfully and in his sound mind—I mean the crime of self-murder.

When death cometh even to the good man, he cometh as an enemy, for he is attended by such terrible heralds and grim outriders¹¹ as do greatly scare us...None of these add to the aspect of death a particle of beauty. He comes with pains and griefs; he comes with sighs and tears. Clouds and darkness are round about him, an atmosphere laden with dust oppresses those whom he approaches, and a cold wind chills them even to the marrow. He rides on the pale horse; and where his steed sets its foot, the land becomes a desert. By the footfall of that terrible steed the worm is awakened to gnaw the slain. When we forget other grand truths and only remember these dreadful things, death is the king of terrors to us. Hearts are sickened and reins are loosened because of him.

But, indeed, he is an enemy, for what comes he to do to our body? I know he doeth that which ultimately leadeth to its betterness, but still it is that which in itself and for the present is not joyous but grievous. He comes to take the light from the eyes, the hearing from the ears, the speech from the tongue, the activity from the hand, and the thought from the brain. He comes to transform a living man into a mass of putrefaction, to degrade the beloved form of brother and friend to such a condition of corruption that affection itself cries out, “Bury my dead out of my sight” (Gen 23:4). Death, thou child of sin, Christ hath transformed thee marvelously; but in thyself, thou art an enemy before

¹⁰ **aberration** – deviation from what is normal, expected, or usual.

¹¹ **outriders** – escorts that ride ahead of someone; bodyguards.

whom flesh and blood tremble, for they know that thou art the murderer of all born of woman, whose thirst for human prey the blood of nations cannot slake.

If you think for a few moments of this enemy, you will observe some of his points of character. He is the *common* foe of all God's people, and the enemy of all men: for however some have been persuaded that they should not die, yet there is no discharge in this war. And if in this conscription,¹² a man escapes the ballot many and many a year until his grey beard seems to defy the winter's hardest frost, yet the man of iron must yield at last. It is appointed unto all men once to die (Heb 9:27). The strongest man has no elixir of eternal life wherewith to renew his youth amid the decays of age; nor has the wealthiest prince a price wherewith to bribe destruction. To the grave must thou descend, O crowned monarch, for scepters and shovels are akin. To the sepulcher must thou go down, O mighty man of valor, for sword and spade are of like metal. The prince is brother to the worm and must dwell in the same house. Of our whole race it is true, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen 3:19).

Death is also a *subtle* foe, lurking everywhere, even in the most harmless things. Who can tell where death has not prepared his ambuscades?¹³ He meets us both at home and abroad; at the table he assails men in their food; and at the fountain, he poisons their drink. He waylayeth¹⁴ us in the streets, and he seizeth us in our beds. He rideth on the storm at sea, and he walks with us when we are on our way upon the solid land. Whither can we fly to escape from thee, O death? For from the summit of the Alps, men have fallen to their graves; and in the deep places of the earth where the miner goeth down to find the precious ore, there hast thou sacrificed many a hecatomb¹⁵ of precious lives. Death is a subtle foe and, with noiseless footfalls, follows close at our heels when least we think of him.

He is an enemy whom *none of us will be able to avoid, whatever bypaths we may take.* Nor can we escape from him when our hour is come. Into this fowler's nets, like the birds, we shall all fly; in his great seine¹⁶ must all the fishes of the great sea of life be taken when their day is come. As surely as sets the sun, as the midnight stars at length descend beneath the horizon, as the waves sink back into the sea, or as the

¹² **conscription** – compulsory military service.

¹³ **ambuscades** – ambushes; forces in hiding waiting to attack.

¹⁴ **waylayeth** – lie in wait for someone with evil or hostile intent.

¹⁵ **hecatomb** – great public sacrifice of 100 oxen among the ancient Greeks and Romans.

¹⁶ **seine** – large fishing net made to hang vertically in the water.

bubble bursts, so must we all early or late come to our end, and disappear from earth to be known no more among the living...

Such things have happened as for men to die without an instant's notice; with a psalm upon their lips they have died; or engaged in the daily business they have been summoned to give in their account. We have heard of one who, when the morning paper brought him news that a friend in business had died, was drawing on his boots to go to his counting-house and observed with a laugh that as far as he was concerned, he was so busy he had no time to die. Yet, ere¹⁷ the words were finished, he fell forward and was a corpse. Sudden deaths are not so uncommon as to be marvels if we dwell in the center of a large circle of mankind. Thus is death a foe not to be despised or trifled with. Let us remember all his characteristics, and we shall not be inclined to think lightly of the grim enemy whom our glorious Redeemer has destroyed.

From a sermon delivered on Lord's Day morning, December 17, 1876,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK.



It is a solemn thing to die. Death is a solemn parting of two near friends: soul and body. Remember, all other preparations are to no purpose, if a man be not prepared to die. What will it avail a man to prepare this and that for his children, kindred, or friends, when he hath made no preparations for his soul, for his eternal wellbeing? As death leaves you, so judgment shall find you. If death take you before you expect it and are prepared for it, it will be the more terrible to you; it will cause your countenance to be changed, your thoughts to be troubled, your loins to be loosed, and your knees to be dashed one against another. Oh, the hell of horrors and terrors that attends those souls that have their greatest work to do when they come to die! Therefore, as you love your souls and as you would be happy in death, and everlastingly blessed after death, prepare and fit for death. Look that you build upon nothing below Christ. Look that you have a real interest in Christ. Look that you die daily to sin, to the world, and to your own righteousness. Look that conscience be always waking, speaking, and tender. Look that Christ be your Lord and Master. Look that all reckonings stand right between the Lord and your souls. Look that you be fruitful, faithful, and watchful, and then your dying day shall be to you as the day of harvest to the husbandman, as the day of deliverance to the prisoner, as the day of coronation to the king, and as the day of marriage to the

bride. Your dying-day shall be a day of triumph and exaltation, a day of freedom and consolation, a day of rest and satisfaction. Then the Lord Jesus shall be as honey in the mouth, ointment in the nostrils, music in the ear, and a jubilee in the heart.—*Thomas Brooks*

¹⁷ ere – before.

DEATH DEMYSTIFIED

Christopher Bogosh

MODERN medicine commonly promotes the view that death is a natural and normal part of human existence. Since dying is a process running parallel with life, in modern medicine the death of the body has become associated with the outworking of natural laws of life. In medical literature, one will often find dying and death associated with pregnancy and birth or as a stage in a natural process, much like a caterpillar emerging from a cocoon as a butterfly. This interpretation is rooted in the rise of evolutionary biology in the late nineteenth century. According to this viewpoint, no line exists between dying and the death of the body because they are both the outworking of natural laws of survival occurring in the larger cycle of life. Thus, people facing death should accept and even welcome death with optimism as a transition to a self-customized hereafter.

These naturalistic and evolutionary theories have also prevailed in modern medicine to define death. To determine the moment when life ceases and death occurs, doctors today speak of “brain death,” the point at which, in the judgment of the attending physician, “worthwhile activity” ceases in the three pounds of biochemical tissue in the skull. According to modern medicine’s definition of death, an individual may have a beating heart, a level of integrative function between the brain and body, and the continuation of cellular processes in the body indicating life, but the person may still be pronounced dead. The residual signs of life are interpreted as mere operations of the laws of nature that will not sustain the ongoing survival of a human person as a whole. Contrary to popular belief, biblically informed medical science has proven that we are more than biochemical substances bent on survival. Dying and death are not natural and normal parts of life: there is in fact a distinct line separating dying from living and even the death of the body from its life.

Dying and the Death of the Body—the Facts: We may learn a true view of physical death by studying the Word of God. Although the Holy Scriptures are not a book of science, they do provide a basic framework to understand life and death—a framework within which we can accurately view the findings of science. The Bible teaches us that human life is a creation and gift of God: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;

and man became a living soul” (Gen 2:7). An essential element of our life is “breath,” a quality that man shares with the animals (Gen 7:21-22). The Bible also closely associates “blood” with life, going so far as to say that the life of a man or beast is in the blood (Gen 9:4-5; Lev 17:11, 14; Deu 12:23). Consequently, “blood” can represent violence and death (Gen 4:10-11). Death itself is God’s judgment upon sin (Gen 2:17), a doctrine to which we will return in a later [article]. God pronounced that judgment in these words: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen 3:19). Therefore, life is found in the breath and blood of the body, and death is marked by the decomposition of the body into the earth from which God formed it.

Medical science also identifies the physical death of a human being with the end of cardiopulmonary activity (breath and blood) and the onset of decomposition (to dust). These set an observable boundary dividing the state of physical life from the state of death. When the heart, lungs, and circulatory system cease to distribute oxygen throughout the body, there is a change from aerobic (oxygen-fueled) action in the body to anaerobic (non-oxygen fueled) activity, which is referred to as corruption or decomposition. During decomposition, autolysis or self-digestion starts. As the temperature of the body continues to decrease, rigor mortis (stiffness of limbs) sets in. About four days later, putrefaction¹ begins. It is interesting to note that Jesus lay in the grave for three days without corruption (Psa 16:10; Act 2:27) and Lazarus for four with suspected putrefaction (Joh 11:39). During putrefaction, foul-smelling methane, hydrogen sulfide, and ammonia fumes are released from rotting tissues, the body liquefies, and eventually the entire body dissolves or disintegrates—“unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen 3:19). The death of the human body, then, is not merely the death of certain cells in it. On a microscopic level, cells are constantly dying in our bodies. Nor is it the death of an organ in the body. Medically speaking, death comes from the systemic disruption of cardiopulmonary activity such that oxygen-based life processes are replaced by a process of decay into earth.

Since the 1980s, it has become common to certify a person’s death by the end of measurable brain activity, a condition commonly referred to as “brain death.” As noted above, both the Bible and a basic scientific understanding of death focus on the end of breathing, but the invention of the ventilator blurred this definition. Thus, it is possible for

¹ **putrefaction** – organic process of decay or rotting.

a nonresponsive person to have no detectable brain activity and for the air-pumping machine to aerate the lungs. This mechanical process provides the heart with oxygen-rich blood to keep it beating, which in turn circulates the blood throughout the body. While the heart can initiate an impulse to beat without the brain, the lungs require a stimulus from the brain, more specifically the brainstem, for them to function. The ventilator bypasses this physiological process, and rather than just removing the non-responsive person from the life-sustaining apparatus to see if breathing stops, and soon after the beating heart, the medical community has adopted brain-death criteria to certify death. This legal move enables the procurement of healthy organs from “brain-dead” donors. At least two serious matters may be raised about defining death in such a manner.

First, “brain death” is often ambiguous and poorly defined. To what extent must the brain be inactive for it to be considered “dead”? Aside from the beating heart, it is necessary to point out that a level of activity still occurs between parts of the brain and body, which indicates the brain is not truly dead according to brain-death criteria, which in the United States is “irreversible cessation of *all* parts of the brain” (italics ours). It is well documented that when a surgeon cuts into a “brain-dead” organ donor, heart rate and blood pressure increase, which indicates a physiological interaction between the brain and organs in the body. This is a common stress response on the heart occurring along the hypothalamic, pituitary, and adrenal axis (HPA axis). The hypothalamus is a region in the brain, the pituitary gland is a structure at the base of the brain, and the adrenal glands are on the top of the kidneys in the body; and this physiological pathway modulates heart rate and blood pressure. “Brain-death” can be a dangerous definition of death insofar as it can prove expedient to justify acts that terminate a still-living human body, perhaps to harvest its organs.

Second, those who believe that human life begins at the cellular level contradict themselves if they define life by brain activity. One cannot be consistent in believing that life begins at conception and accept brain death as a valid definition of death since the nervous system and brain do not develop until five to six weeks after conception...

Biblical conclusions: Biblically informed medical science proves the death of the body is not a natural aspect of life or a necessary concomitant to it, and brain death can be a dangerous way to define the boundary between life and death. Agnosticism about what happens after physical death is indefensible, for Holy Scripture is emphatically clear: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every

one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2Co 5:10-11). “*Knowing* therefore...we persuade men” (italics ours). What is known? The “fear of the Lord” as the Judge of the whole human race! All will “appear,” body and soul, “before the judgment seat of Christ” to account for every thought, word, and deed done while living. Finally, contrary to the false hopes encouraged by agnostic modern thought and modern medicine, the death of the body is only the beginning of sorrows for those who have been so foolish as to live apart from God and continue in sin. After death there is a day of judgment slated on the calendar of God; all must appear before His tribunal, and none shall be spared (2Co 5:10). Death is an enemy, but Christ overcame death by His own resurrection from death and has robbed death of its sting or power to hurt those who belong to Christ (1Co 15:54-57). Ultimately, He will destroy death itself, raising the dead from their graves and summoning all human beings to appear before His judgment seat. Those who in this life were joined to Him by a true faith will be acknowledged by Him and received into the glory and life of heaven. Those who hardened their hearts and went on in their sins will be condemned by Him and cast out into the horrible darkness and everlasting burnings of hell. Such is the future of the human race according to the plan of God revealed in His word. While agnostics claim that what may follow death is mysterious and nothing can be known about it for certain, those who receive the Holy Scriptures as the true and trustworthy account of the will of God for our salvation have a sure and certain knowledge about these things. Thus, the Scriptures expose and refute the errors of agnosticism and modern medicine, demystifying their view of death, and giving hope to those who trust in Christ alone for the victory over death that their Savior grants.

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BLESSED ARE THE DEAD

Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843)

Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.—Revelation 14:13

THERE are two remarkable things in the manner in which those words are given to us: (1) *They are the words of the Father echoed back by the Spirit.* “I heard a voice from heaven...Yea, saith the Spirit” (Rev 14:13). John’s eye had been riveted upon the wondrous sight mentioned in verse one. A Lamb stood on Mount Zion, and one hundred and forty-four thousand redeemed ones following Him “whithersoever he goeth” (Rev 14:4), when suddenly a still small voice broke upon his ear, saying, “Write, Blessed are the dead”; and then the Holy Spirit-breathed amen: “Yea, saith the Spirit.”

It is written in the Law that the testimony of two witnesses is true. Now, here are two witnesses—the Father of all and the Holy Spirit the Comforter, both testifying that it is a happy thing to die in the Lord. Are there any of you, God’s children, who tremble at the thought of dying? Does death appear a monster with a dreadful dart, ready to destroy you? Here are two sweet and blessed witnesses who declare that death has lost his sting—that the grave has lost its victory (1Co 15:55). Listen, and the frown will disappear from the brow of death: the valley will be filled with light. The Father and the Holy Spirit both unite in saying, “Blessed are the dead.”

(2) “*Write.*” Whatever is written down is more durable and less liable to be corrupted than that which is only spoken from mouth to mouth. For this reason, God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments written with His own finger on two tables of stone. For the same reason, He commanded them, on the day they passed over Jordan, to set up great stones, plaster them with plaster, and *write* upon them all the words of that Law. For the same reason, God commanded His servants the prophets to *write* their prophecies and the apostles to *write* their gospels and epistles, so that we have a permanent Bible instead of floating tradition. For this reason, Job did wish his words to be written: “Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For I know that my redeemer liveth” (Job 19:23-25). It was one of his precious, ever memorable sayings—a saying to comfort the heart of a drooping believer in the darkest hour: “I know that my redeemer

liveth.” For the same reason did the voice from heaven say, “*Write*”—do not hear it only, but *write it*; print it in a book; grave it with an iron pen with lead in the rock forever.

“Blessed are the dead.” Learn the value of this saying. It is a golden saying; there is gold in every syllable of it. It is “sweeter...than honey and the honeycomb”—more precious “than gold, yea, than much fine gold” (Psa 19:10). It is precious in the eyes of God. *Write it* deep in your hearts; it will solemnize your life and will keep you from being led away by its vain show. It will make the siren songs of this world inconvenient and out of tune. It will sweetly soothe you in the hour of adversity: it will rob death of its sting and the grave of its victory. *Write, write* deep on your heart: “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.”

Now, consider the words themselves: (1) *Blessed are the dead*. The world says, “Blessed are the living.” But God says, “Blessed are the dead.” The world judges things by sense, as they outwardly appear to men. God judges things by what they really are in themselves. He looks at things in their real color and magnitude. The world says, “A living dog is better than a dead lion” (Ecc 9:4). The world looks upon some of their families, coming out like a fresh blooming flower in the morning—their cheeks covered with the bloom of health; their step bounding with the elasticity of youth; riches and luxuries at their command; long, bright summer days before them. The world says, “There is a happy soul.” God takes us into the darkened room where some child of God lately dwelt. He points to the pale face where death sits enthroned, the cheek wasted by long disease, the eye glazed in death, the stiff hands clasped over the bosom, the friends standing weeping around, and He whispers in our ears, “Blessed are the dead.”

Ah, dear friends, think a moment—does God or you know best? Who will be found to be in the right at last? Alas, what a vain show you are walking in! “Disquieted in vain” (Psa 39:6). “Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish” (Psa 49:20). Even God’s children sometimes say, “Blessed are the living.” It is a happy thing to live in the favor of God—to have peace with God, to frequent the throne of grace, to burn the perpetual incense of praise, to meditate on His Word, to hear the preached gospel, to serve God. Even to wrestle, run, and fight in His service is sweet! Still God says, “Blessed are the dead.”

If it be happy to have His smile here, how much happier to have it without a cloud there! If it be sweet to be the growing corn of the Lord here, how much better to be gathered into His barn! If it be sweet to have an anchor within the veil, how much better ourselves to be there,

where no gloom can come! “In thy presence is *fulness* of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psa 16:11). Even Jesus felt this—God attests it. “Blessed are the dead.”

(2) *Not all the dead, but those that “die in the Lord.”* It is truly amazing the multitudes that die. “Thou carriest them away as with a flood” (Psa 90:5). Seventy thousand die every day, about fifty every minute—nearly one every second passing over the verge. Life is like a stream made up of human beings, pouring on, and rushing over the brink into eternity. Are all these blessed? Ah, no. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” Of all that vast multitude continually pouring into the eternal world, a little company alone have savingly believed on Jesus. “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and *few* there be that find it” (Mat 7:14). It is not *all* the dead who are blessed. There is no blessing on the Christless dead: they rush into an undone eternity, unpardoned, unholy. You may put their body in a splendid coffin. You may print their name in silver on the lid. You may bring the well-attired company of mourners to the funeral in suits of solemn black. You may lay the coffin slowly in the grave. You may spread the greenest sod above it. You may train the sweetest flowers to grow over it. You may cut a white stone and grave a gentle epitaph to their memory—still it is but the funeral of a damned soul. You cannot write *blessed* where God hath written “*cursed*.” “He that believeth... shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mar 16:16).

Consider what is implied in the words *in the Lord*: (1) that they were joined to the Lord. Union to the Lord has a beginning. Everyone that is blessed in dying has been converted. You may dislike the word, but that is the truth. They were awakened. [They] began to weep [and] pray—weep as they went to seek the Lord their God. They saw themselves lost, undone, helpless. [They saw] that they could not be just with a holy God. They became babes. The Lord Jesus drew near and revealed Himself: “I am the bread of life” (Joh 6:35). “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Joh 6:37). They believed and were happy; [they] rejoiced in the Lord Jesus, counting everything but loss for Christ. They gave themselves to the Lord. This was the beginning of their being *in* Christ.

Dear friends, have you had this beginning? Have you undergone conversion—the new birth—grafting into Christ? Call it by any name you will, have you the thing? Has this union to Christ taken place in your history? Some say, “I do not know.” If at any time of your life you had been saved from drowning—if you were actually drowned and brought to life again, you would remember it to your dying hour. Much

more if you had been brought to Christ...So, if you have been truly brought into Christ, you may easily remember it. If not, you will die in your sins. Where Christ has gone, there you cannot come. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luk 13:3, 5).

(2) *Perseverance is implied.* Not all that seem to be branches are branches of the true vine. Many branches fall off the trees when the high winds begin to blow—all that are rotten branches. So, in times of temptation or trial or persecution, many false professors drop away. Many that seemed to be believers went back and walked no more with Jesus. They followed Jesus, they prayed with Him, they praised Him; but they went back and walked no more with Him. It is still so. Many among us doubtless seem to be converted; they begin well and promise fair, who will fall off when winter comes...These will not be blessed in dying. Oh, of all deathbeds, may I be kept from beholding the deathbed of the false professor! I have seen it before now, and I trust I may never see it again. They are not blessed after death. The rotten branches will burn more fiercely in the flames. Oh, think what torment it will be to think that you spent your life in pretending to be a Christian and lost your opportunity of becoming one indeed! Your hell will be all the deeper, blacker, hotter [because] you knew so much of Christ, were so near Him, and found Him not. Happy are they who endure to the end, who are not "moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col 1:23), who, when others go away, say, "Lord, to whom can we go?" In prosperity, they follow the Lord fully; in adversity, they cleave to Him closer still, as trees strike their roots deeper in storms. Is this your case? Endure it to the end. "Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col 1:23). "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end" (Heb 3:14). Even in the dark valley you will cling to Him still. Come to Him as ye came at first—a guilty creature, clinging to "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer 23:6). Thou wast made my sin. This is to die in the Lord, and this is to be blessed.

From *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (Edinburgh; London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1894), 448-451;
in the public domain.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843): Scottish Presbyterian minister; born in Edinburgh, Scotland.



HOW TO MEDITATE ON DEATH

Thomas Boston (1676-1732)

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide.—Genesis 24:63

MEDITATION is a necessary duty, to the performance of which people should set themselves, seriously making choice of such times and places for it [so that] the duty may be gone about with the best advantage. I shall first explain the duty, and then apply the subject.

I am to shew what meditation is. It is twofold. *Occasional* [meditation] is of some spiritual thing arising from such occasions as offer themselves, [such as] ejaculatory prayer (a short occasional thought). *Fixed and solemn* [meditation is] when the soul deliberately sets itself to think upon some spiritual thing to the bettering of the heart thereby. This is the meditation in the text, in which three things are to be considered.

1. *A choice of some spiritual subject to meditate upon.* Many meditate upon sin with delight, and so ride post¹ to hell with little din.² “He deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil” (Psa 36:4). Others employ their thoughts only in the meditation of things of the world. But he that would meditate aright must choose some spiritual subject to think upon. And it is needful [to] select one and not abide in generals (Psa 63:6; Song 1:4).

2. *A calling in of the heart from all other objects.* The mind of man is too narrow to be taken up to purpose about many things at once, especially with thoughts of diverse kinds; therefore, David prays, “Unite my heart to fear thy name” (Psa 86:11).

3. *Employing the heart on the spiritual subject so chosen,* to think upon it, study it, and seriously consider it; to lay it before our understandings to move our affections and improve our hearts.

Let us apply the subject. I exhort you to make conscience of this duty of meditation, and particularly of fixed meditation, setting yourselves as solemnly to it as to prayer and other duties.

Motives: 1. *Consider [that] it is the command of God.* “Commune with

¹ **ride post** – ride quickly.

² **din** – noise.

your own heart upon your bed” (Psa 4:4). And “meditate upon these things,” says Paul to Timothy (1Ti 4:15). Why do you perform other duties but because God commands you? Well, He that bids you do other duties bids you do this also. Remember you shall not be ashamed when you have respect to all his commandments (Psa 119:6). If the command of God hath due weight with you in one case, it will have weight in all (Jam 2:10-11).

2. *It is made desirable by the testimony that it hath from the practice of the people of God.* Thus was Isaac employed, [and] thus David (Psa 63:6). Yes, David puts it in the description of the godly man: he meditates on the Law of God “day and night” (Psa 1:2).

3. *It is of notable use for a Christian’s improvement.* It much increases knowledge: “I have more understanding,” says David, “than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation” (Psa 119:99). It is the way to comfort under affliction. When David’s enemies plotted against him, “Thy servant,” says he, “did meditate in thy statutes” (Psa 119:23). It makes a Christian tender in his way. “I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways” (Psa 119:15). It gives a Christian a sweet relish of the goodness of God (Psa 63:5-6).

Now I would lay before you some directions to your right managing of this work:

1. *Habituate yourself to occasional meditation, to take up a holy meditation on things that you see or hear, turning them to a spiritual use.* This was the practice of Christ: to spiritualize worldly things. None have fairer occasion of it than husbandmen, whose calling is so much spiritualized in the Scripture.

2. *If your occasions will permit, and sometimes they will, retire by yourselves for solemn meditation, so as you may go about it without disturbance.* But sometimes a man may have good occasion for meditation even while at his employment in the world.

3. *Make choice of some spiritual matter to meditate upon.* Fix this in the first place so that you may not be rambling from one thing to another. There is great variety of subjects: God, Christ, His sufferings, the love of God, death, judgment, heaven and hell, eternity, the graces of the Spirit (faith, love, hope), the Word and works of God.

4. *Begin with a short and earnest prayer:* either ejaculatory or more solemn. Pray as David: O Lord, “open...mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psa 119:18).

5. *When you enter the duty, be resolute to go through with it, for Satan will strive to divert you.* So that you [do] not lack matter, take these few

rules. When you enter upon a subject of meditation, if it will bear it, observe: (1) Begin with a description of the thing—what it is; as what God, faith, love is or whatever be the matter of meditation. (2) If there be sundry kinds of these, observe them, [such] as faith feigned or unfeigned. Consider (3) the causes; (4) the effects; (5) its properties; (6) its opposites; (7) what it is compared to. Lastly, (8) consider scriptural testimonies concerning it.

6. *Think and enlarge on the subject, so that your heart may be affected and touched with it.* Here I would advise you: (1) To get suitable affection and relish of it in your souls. (2) To bewail the lack of that relish. (3) To desire that, which you complain that you lack. (4) Confess your inability to do for yourself what you wish to have. (5) Petition for the Lord's working it in you. Lastly, (6) believe the Lord will grant your request.

7. *Conclude all with thankfulness to the Lord and committing yourself to Him.*

8. *Take all outward helps you can for right managing of the duty.* Because the sight of the eyes may divert you, if need be, go into the dark or shut your eyes. And if you cannot get your heart kept while your tongue is not employed, stand not³ to speak your meditation anyway, so [long] as you are not overheard. The Hebrew word in the text signifies both meditation and speaking.

To make this plainer to you, I will give you a short meditation on death, enlarged according to these rules.

Lord, gather my thoughts that I may profitably meditate on this, which will gather me and all mankind into the grave at length; and open mine eyes to see it before I feel it. O my soul! *What is death?* It is a dissolution of soul and body; a parting of these two loving companions, which God did unite in the womb. Consider, O my soul! There is a twofold death—violent and natural; and which of them may be my lot, I do not know. Each of these may be done [in] several ways. Either this life of mine must go as a candle that is blown out, or else will waste with diseases or age until, like a candle, it dies out of itself when the wick and grease are consumed. But oh, *what are the causes of death?* Why, the cause is in myself. I bear about the seeds of so many diseases as will cut me off at length; but the first cause of all is sin, which brought death into the world with it. Seeing I have sinned, I must die. And now, my soul, cast thine eyes on the *effects* of death. How does the

³ **stand not** – do not hesitate.

approach of this grim messenger fill all the body with pains, make the eyes stare, and the face grow pale. When he gives his stroke, the breath goes, the soul departs, the body is left a lump of lifeless clay, while friends fall a-weeping that the dead is gone and they will see him no more in the land of the living. But what are the *properties* of death? Why, it is certain, it is uncertain. It is terrible in its most pleasant shape. It is a way we can go but once; if it once goes wrong, we cannot put it right. O my soul, what are the *opposites* of it? Even life that we now enjoy here, which is sweet, and eternal life in glory, where we shall be liable to no more death. And why should I forget the death of Christ that unstings it, according to Hosea 13:14? *What is death like?* To what may I compare it? It is like the blowing out or wasting of a candle. Like the Egyptian jailor who opened the prison door to the baker and butler, restoring the one to the court and sending the other to the gibbet.⁴ What say the Scriptures? They tell me, “It is appointed unto men once to die” (Heb 9:27).

Now, O my soul, how terrible is death! What a king of terrors is this! What need of preparation for it! But alas! How little is my hard heart touched with the consideration of this! How little am I affected with this, which I must feel! Oh, that I were suitably affected with it, that I were wise to consider my latter end! But alas! I cannot command this of myself; I cannot have one serious thought of it! I may as well dig through a rock with my nails as think to affect mine own heart with it. But, O Lord, to Thee I make my request. Do Thou give me a heart duly touched with it. Thou hast prepared death for me; prepare me for it. And I desire to believe Thou wilt do it, for Thou workest all our works in us. Blessed be the Lord Who has opened a way that we may be delivered of its sting. And so, into Thy hands I commit my spirit. Be my God and guide even unto death (Psa 48:14). Amen.

From *The Whole Works of Thomas Boston: Sermons, Part 2*, ed. Samuel M’Millan, vol. 4 (Aberdeen: George and Robert King, 1849), 454-457; in the public domain.

Thomas Boston (1676-1732): Scottish Presbyterian minister and theologian; born in Duns, Berwickshire, UK.



Sickness and death are solemn things. They strip off all the tinsel and paint from a man’s religion; they discover the weak places in our Christianity.—*J. C. Ryle*

⁴ **gibbet** – place for execution by hanging; gallows.

IF YOU SHOULD DIE THIS YEAR

Samuel Davies (1723-1761)

This year thou shalt die.—Jeremiah 28:16

THIS year you may die! And should you die in your sins this year, you will be forever cut off from all the pleasures of life! Then farewell—an everlasting farewell—to all the mirth and gaiety, to all the tempting amusements and vain delights of earth! Farewell to all the pleasures you derive from the senses and all the gratifications of appetite. This year, the sun may lose his luster as to you, and all the lovely prospects of nature may become a dismal blank. To you, music may lose all her charms and die away into everlasting silence; and all the gratifications of the palate may become insipid.¹ When you lie in the cold grave, you will be as dead to all such sensations as the clay that covers you! Then, farewell to all the pompous but empty pleasures of riches and honors. The pleasures both of enjoyment and expectation from this quarter will fail forever. But this is not all.

If you should die in your sins this year, then you will have no pleasures, no enjoyments to substitute for those which you will lose. Your capacity and eager thirst for happiness will continue, nay, will grow stronger and more violent in the [improved state] of your nature. And yet you will have no good—real or imaginary—to satisfy it. Consequently, the capacity of happiness will become a capacity of misery; and the privation of pleasure will be positive pain. Can imagination [feign] anything more wretched than a creature formed for the enjoyment of the infinite good, pining away forever with hungry, raging desires without the least degree of gratification? Banished at once from the supreme good and from all the created enjoyments that were accustomed to being poorly substituted in its stead! Yet this may be your case in the short compass of the following year! Oh! What a terrible change! What a prodigious² fall!

If you should die in your sins this year, then all your hopes and prospects of a long life will perish abortively.³ Several of you now are in a state of education, preparing to enter upon the stage of the world; and

¹ **insipid** – lacking flavor; tasteless.

² **prodigious** – impressively great in size or power.

³ **abortively** – failing to produce the intended result.

you are perhaps often pleasing yourselves with mirthful and magnificent dreams about the figure you will make upon it. You may be planning many schemes to be accomplished in the several periods of a long life and are perhaps already anticipating in idea the pleasure, the profit, or the honor you expect to derive from their execution. In these fond hopes, your affectionate parents, friends, and teachers concur with generous pleasure.

But alas! In the swift revolution of this beginning year, all these optimistic expectations and pleasing prospects may vanish into smoke! Youth is the season of promise, full of fair blossoms; but these fair blossoms may wither and never produce the expected fruits of maturity. It may, perhaps, be the design of God that after all the flattering hopes and projects, after all the pains and expense of a fine education, that you shall never appear upon the public stage or that you shall vanish away like a phantom as soon as you make your appearance! Certainly, then, you should extend your prospects beyond the limits of *mortality*; extend them into that world where you will live to execute them without the risk of a disappointment. Otherwise,

If you should die in your sins this year, then you will not only be cut off from all the flattering prospects of this life, but from all hope entirely, and forever! You will be fixed in an unchangeable state of misery: a state that will admit of no expectation but that of uniform or rather ever-growing misery; a state that excludes all hopes of making any accomplishment, except as the monuments of the vindictive justice of God and the deadly effects of sin! How affecting is the idea of a promising youth cut off from the land of the living—useless and hopeless in both worlds, fallen from the summit of hope into the gulf of everlasting despair! Yet this may be your doom, my dear youth, your doom this very year if you should die in your sins!

If you should die in your sins this year, then all the ease and pleasure you now derive from thoughtlessness, self-flattery, and suppressing the testimony of your consciences, will forever be at an end! You will then be obliged to view yourselves in a just light and to know the very worst of your condition. The secret plaudits of self-flattery will be forever silenced, and conscience will recover itself from that state of insensibility into which you have cast it by repeated hardenings; and, as exasperated by your ill-treatment, it will become your everlasting tormentor! It will do nothing but accuse and upbraid you forever; you will never more be able to entertain so much as one favorable thought of yourselves!

And what a wretched state will this be—for a man to be self-condemned! to disapprove of his whole past conduct! to be pleased with

nothing in himself but heartily, though with horror, to concur in the condemning sentence of the Supreme Judge! to esteem himself a fool, a sinner, a base and sordid wretch, an enemy to himself and the whole universe, a self-destroyer, an outcast from all happiness and from the society of all happy beings, a vile, odious, useless, miserable, despairing creature forever! O miserable situation! Does it not alarm you to think you may be so near to it?

If you should die in your sins this year, you will be deprived forever of all the means of salvation. All these are confined to the present life and have no place in the world of eternal punishment. There the thunders of the divine Law roar, but the gentle voice of the gospel *never* sounds. There the Lion of the tribe of Judah tears the prey, but never exhibits Himself as a Lamb that was slain, an atonement for sin, and the Savior of the guilty. There conscience exerts its power, not to excite the medicinal anguish of kindly repentance, but the hopeless horrors of everlasting despair! There *Jehovah* works, but not to enable the sinner to work out his own salvation, but to touch all the springs of painful sensation and open all the sources of misery in the criminal. There mercy no more distributes her bounties, but justice reigns in her dreadful rigors! There the sanctifying Spirit no more communicates His purifying, all-healing influences; but sin, the great Apollyon,⁴ diffuses its deadly poison!

In a word, when you leave this earthly state of trial, all the discipline of the present state, all your advantages for salvation, all the means of grace, and all the encouragements of hope will be forever removed out of your reach. Consequently, all possibility of your salvation will cease forever; for when the *necessary means* are taken away, the *end* becomes utterly impossible. Therefore, if you should die this year, then all your hopes of heaven will vanish forever!

From "A Sermon on the New Year" in *Sermons on Important Subjects*, Vol. 2
(New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1854), 144-147.

Samuel Davies (1723-1761): Presbyterian minister; born near Summit Ridge, New Castle County, Delaware, USA.



The sight of Jesus, as He thrusts in the key and opens that gate of death,
shall make you forget the supposed terrors of the grave.

—Charles H. Spurgeon

⁴ **Apollyon** – "The Destroyer," a name for Satan, used here as a figure of speech for sin.

PRAYING TO PREPARE FOR DEATH

Christopher Bogosh

THE human mortality rate is 100 percent. God may grant episodes of deliverance, but the reality is that eventually death will come. Even the people Jesus healed and raised from the dead died one day, and we too will die one day (unless Jesus returns first). In the end, medical intervention will always become futile, hope for a cure will become idolatrous, and the “wages of sin” (Rom 6:23) will lead to earthly death. You need to pray fervently at end of life, for the enemies of the soul strike hard. Prayer for the terminally ill believer is the same in practice as that for the recovering believer; it is prayer *with* and *for* him and her, but the substance of your prayers will be different. It will not be prayer for healing and recovery but for preparation for death.

The content of your prayers should encompass three important areas. *First*, pray for clear evidence of salvation in Christ—the Rock to which unshaken faith is cemented. *Second*, pray for the renewing of the inner man, even as the sinful outer man decays. The body is dying away, but a renewal of the soul is occurring day by day, as it is being prepared for a glorious resurrection body at the second coming of Christ. *Third*, pray that the believer will be equipped by God to face death without fear by believing in the mercy of Christ without doubting, by tightly embracing the end of his or her faith—Christ—and by resting in the merits of Christ’s righteousness alone for salvation. We will explore [the first two] points more closely.

Salvation in Christ is the rock [to which] saving faith anchors itself. It is no surprise, then, that the surety¹ of this salvation is an area of great battle for the afflicted believer. Sin has corrupted our bodies, so biochemical imbalances occur. Our minds are sinful and therefore plagued with psychological anomalies² that give rise to a whole host of inappropriate thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Our hearts are sinful and therefore full of idolatry, immorality, and rebellion toward our Creator. We also face an enemy, Satan, who is seeking to devour us by preying on this deep-rooted depravity (1Pe 5:8). It is no wonder, then, that as the curse of death nears, the body, mind, and heart become

¹ **surety** – that which is given as a pledge to secure against loss; a security.

² **anomalies** – departures from the general rule; abnormalities.

vulnerable, and Satan ramps up his attacks.

Ask God to assist the believer bodily and mentally. As the organs of the body become oxygen-deprived and shut down, confusion, stupor, nervous excitability, lethargy, and a whole host of other problems may result. This impairment may cloud mental clarity and therefore obscure clear evidences of salvation in Christ. Faith operates in the realm of abstract thought; anxiety, fear, depression, and neurological and psychological instability may obscure thought and therefore hinder the exercise of faith in the revealed knowledge of Christ. Medications and medical and surgical means may be helpful in assisting bodily stability and mental clarity, so you should ask God to bless these means; but you should pray, most importantly, for God to act directly by His Spirit in the believer's soul in order to confirm clear evidences of salvation in Christ.

Pray, also, that God would assist the believer in acts of self-denial so that idolatry will not obscure Christ. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me," and this mandate is no less authoritative on the sickbed (Mat 16:24). Pray that the believer will not make the illness, bodily pain and suffering, and the alleviation of them, the focus of devotion. Christ must be the focus! Pray as well that self-pity will not consume the believer. Self-pity is never justified in the Christian life. Only acts of self-denial are.

The ultimate enemy is Satan. He is the great deceiver, liar, and murderer. Satan is seeking to devour us, and he does so by preying on bodily, mental, and spiritual weaknesses. He is a master at using human depravity to accomplish his ends. Satan's goal is to obscure clear evidences of salvation in Christ so that we will feel forsaken by God or question His authority over our lives. The phrase, "Hath God said?" (Gen 3:1) is still uttered by Satan today, and when a believer is suffering from bodily, mental, and spiritual assaults on every side, a form of this short phrase is used by Satan like a crowbar to pry the believer from dependence on Christ.

In the area of bodily affliction, Satan will attempt to focus the believer's attention on the suffering. Satan may say such things as, "This suffering is useless; put an end to it! You can euthanize³ yourself legally in some states. Over-medicate yourself. What kind of God would allow you to suffer like this?" Alternatively, he might say, "Do you really think you will be free from bodily suffering after you die? This is it. Heaven is fiction! You must live for the here and now. Go after one

³ **euthanize** – kill purposely, gently, and painlessly, as with an injection.

more treatment. There is another research drug to try. Go after it, ‘Live Strong!’ Do all in your power to eradicate this bodily suffering. God wants you to be healed at all costs, even if it means destroying your body and family in the process.”

In the area of the believer’s mental and spiritual life, Satan will attempt to cause doubt and despair. He will say such things as, “My friend, you have reason to be anxious. You are dying, and everything you believe in is utterly false. Jesus, salvation—this is nonsense! Look, my friend, if God really existed, He would never allow you to go through this. Your ‘hope is built on nothing less’ than empty promises from an outdated book.” On the other hand, he might say, “Hell is a reality, and that is where you are going! Come on, if you really believed in Jesus, you would not fear death; but look at you. You are so afraid, so fearful, so depressed, so anxious, so sick, so sinful, and you call yourself a Christian! God will never accept somebody like you; in fact, He hates you!” Satan will whisper these, and a million other things, into the ears of afflicted believers. You need to pray passionately that God will allow His child to see through Satan’s smoke screen to see the clear evidence for his or her salvation in Christ.

Having prayed for clarity to perceive the evidence for salvation in Christ, move on to pray that the afflicted believer may experience renewal in the inward man, even as the outward man decays. Pray that God will be pleased to grant His child an increase of faith, hope, and love. Paul says, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1Co 13:12-13).

When love for God and His ways are not central, we do not live like people of faith and hope. If this happens, we distort true knowledge of God, we give assent to human plans, and we invest our trust exclusively in people and institutions. As a result, the indwelling Spirit is grieved, His power is withdrawn, and our souls and bodies suffer the consequences (*cf.* 1Co 11:30-32). In the soul, we will experience a loss of love, joy, peace, and hope, and we may suffer from bitterness, anger, anxiety, guilt, despair, fear, and depression. In the body, we may experience pain, restlessness, agitation, nausea, and lethargy; and decisions and actions will be ungodly, hypocritical, and self-serving. You have the important responsibility of praying for the believer to steer a sure course away from these things by cultivating faith, hope, and love—even as death comes into view.

Pray specifically for spiritual renewal in the inner man, even as the outward man is dying away. Through the new birth, we became free from bondage to sin, idolatry, Satan, and death. A process of spiritual renewal began in the whole person. Outwardly, our material bodies are wasting away, writes Paul, yet inwardly our immaterial souls are being “renewed day by day” (2Co 4:16). Illness, disease, trauma, decay, death, and all the evils of this present world will take their inevitable toll on all people, but we can take heart because the Holy Spirit is renewing us inwardly day by day in faith, hope, and love. Under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God on the soul, the body is now able to function as God originally created it—namely, to manifest man’s original image (Gen 1:27).

It is important to note that this spiritual renewal does not conclude at death, but at the second coming of Christ. Therefore, pray as John did, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20). The consummation of glorification is the goal, and this will arrive when Jesus returns. On that great day, we will possess a body like that of the resurrected Christ. Until that day, all those who possess “the firstfruits of the Spirit...groan within ourselves” (Rom 8:23), waiting eagerly for Christ to return and for the perfected union of their bodies and souls—the day when faith and hope will be fully realized and love unhindered will be everlastingly expressed.

Prayer on behalf of the believer reaches past the sufferings of the present to the future of peace, rest, bliss, and glorification. Prayer must not be nearsighted, looking only to death and the entrance of the soul into heaven; rather, it must be farsighted, looking past death and the disembodied existence (intermediate state) to the end of the age, the second coming of Christ, and the glorification of the body and soul. Prayer takes into account the fullness of God’s redemptive plan established before time began. Prayer spans the annals of time, to the end of all time, and it places the believer’s present sufferings within their proper eternal context of glorification.

In Romans 8:18 the apostle Paul said, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” In this passage, Paul talks about glory revealed in us. The apostle John echoes Paul, but he advances one step further and explains what this glory is like. He says, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1Jo 3:2). John says we do not know now “what we shall

be,” but when Jesus returns, we will know because “we shall be like him.”

We will possess a glorified resurrection body that will be the same as the one at present, and yet it will be different. This mysterious change will occur simultaneously and instantaneously to all of us, both the dead and the living, when Jesus returns. “Behold, I shew you a mystery,” said Paul. “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.” He goes on to say, “For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1Co 15:51-52). When Jesus returns, believers who are living will experience a transformation of their bodies and souls, and the bodies of those who are dead will rise from the grave and receive their disembodied souls. The believer will possess the same body, but it will be different, because it will be like the glorified resurrection body of Jesus.

The glorified body is raised imperishable, says Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:42: “It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.” Our present body is decaying; it is perishing. The glorified resurrection body will be imperishable; it will be eternally rejuvenated and full of health, wellness, and vibrant life. In 1 Corinthians 15:43, Paul says that the body “is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory.” The inevitable reality for us is death, which is the ultimate form of dishonor to human life. Miraculously, the Holy Spirit will transform these same dead, decayed, and dishonored bodies and raise them in glory and honor. In the latter part of 1 Corinthians 15:43, Paul says that our bodies are “sown in weakness...raised in power.” Our bodies are weak and frail. One day, however, the Holy Spirit will raise our bodies in power, and they will no longer be subject to fatigue, weakness, and frailty. Finally, in 1 Corinthians 15:44, Paul says, “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” The “natural” body is temporal and plagued by sin. In the glorified state, the Holy Spirit will completely dominate us. We will be completely free from sin, and we will live on in Spirit-possessed “supernatural” bodies! Your prayers for the believer need to set his or her life in its proper eternal context of glorification—this is the hope we need to long after.

From *The Puritans on How to Care for the Sick and Dying*
(CreateSpace: 2011), 62-69.



Never mourn immoderately at the death of any believer, let them be the most excellent and useful that ever lived. Death is to them the greatest gain.—*Thomas Brooks*

UNWILLING TO DIE?

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

WELL, Christians! Let me a little expostulate¹ the case with you, that if it be possible I may work your hearts into a willingness to die, yea, to desire death, to long for death, so that you may come to a full fruition of whatever is reserved in heaven for you. [In order] that I may, I beseech you, Christians, tell me,

Can death dissolve that glorious union that is between you and Christ? No (Rom 8:35-39). Why, why then are you unwilling to die, if in death your union with Christ holds good? As in death Saul and Jonathan were not parted (2Sa 1:23), so in death a believer and Christ are not parted, but more closely and firmly united. It is not death but life that joins the dying man *to* Christ; and it is not life but death that separates the living man *from* Christ. As it is impossible for the leaven that is in the dough to be separated from the dough after it is once mixed, for it turneth the nature of the dough into itself, so it is impossible, either in life or death, for the saints ever to be separated from Christ. For Christ, in respect of union, is in the saints as nearly² as the leaven in the very dough—so incorporated one into another as if Christ and they were one lump (Joh 17:20-21; 15:1-6)... Tell me, O Christian, who art unwilling to die,

Whether death can dissolve or untie the marriage-knot that by the Spirit on Christ's side, and by faith on thine, is knit between Christ and thy soul? No. Death cannot untie that knot (Hos 2:19-20). Why, why then, O Christian, art thou unwilling to die, if the marriage-knot holds fast between Christ and thy soul (Mat 25:1-2; Rom 7:1-4)? I readily grant that death dissolves the marriage-knot that is knit between man and wife; but death nor devil can never dissolve the marriage-knot that is knit between Christ and the believing soul. Sin cannot dissolve the marriage-knot that is knit between Christ and a believer; and if sin cannot, then certainly death that came in by sin cannot. Though sin can do more than death, yet sin cannot make null and void that glorious marriage that is between Christ and the soul; therefore, a Christian should not be unwilling to die (Jer 3:1-5, 12-14). But,

Can death, O Christian, dissolve the glorious covenant that God

¹ **expostulate** – argue.

² **nearly** – closely; intimately.

hath taken thee into? No. Death can never dissolve that covenant. “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” (Jer 32:40). Though Abraham be dead, yet God is Abraham’s God still (Mat 22:30-32). By covenant, and by virtue of this everlasting covenant, Abraham shall be raised and glorified. Oh, then, why shouldst thou be afraid of death? Why shouldst thou be unwilling to die?

When David was upon his dying bed, he drew his strongest consolation out of this well of salvation—the covenant: “Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow” (2Sa 23:5). Dear hearts, the covenant remains firm and good between you and the Lord, both in life and in death; and therefore, there is no reason why you should be unwilling to die. There are three things that are impossible for God to do: viz.³ to die, to lie, or to deny Himself or the gracious covenant that He hath made with His people. Therefore, death should be more desirable than terrible to gracious souls. But,

Tell me, O Christian, can death dissolve the love⁴ that is between the Lord and thy soul (Psa 116:15; Deu 7:7-8)? No, death cannot; for His love is not founded upon any worth or excellency in me, nor upon any work or service done by me, but His love is free; He loves because He will love. All motives to love are taken out of that bosom that is love and sweetness itself. His love is everlasting, it is like Himself: “I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee...Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end...In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I will not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee” (Jer 31:3; Joh 13:1; Isa 54:8-10). The love of Jesus Christ was to Lazarus when dead, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth” (Joh 11:11). By all of which it is most evident that death cannot dissolve the precious love that is

³ viz. – from Latin *videlicet*: that is to say; namely.

⁴ See FGB 238, *God’s Love*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

between the Lord and His children. Oh, why then are they afraid to die? Why then do not they long to die, that they may be in the everlasting arms of divine love? The love of the Lord is everlasting; it is a love that never dies, that never decays nor waxes cold. It is like the stone albestos,⁵ of which Solinus⁶ writes, that being once hot, it can never be cooled again. Death is nothing but a bringing of a loving Christ and loving souls together. Why then should not the saints rather desire it than fear it or be dismayed at it? But,

Can death, O thou believing soul, dissolve those gracious grants or those grants of grace that the Lord hath vouchsafed to thee? [Can it dissolve] the grant of reconciliation, the grant of acceptation, the grant of justification, the grant of adoption, the grant of remission, etc. (2Co 5:18-19)? No. Death cannot dissolve any of these gracious grants, “for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Rom 11:29). Why then, O Christian, art thou unwilling to die? Indeed, were it in the power of death to make void any of those noble and gracious grants that God hath vouchsafed to thee, thou mightest be afraid and unwilling to die; but that being a work too great and too hard for death to accomplish, why shouldst thou not, in a holy triumphing way, say with the apostle, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Co 15:55-57). A Christian, upon the account of what is laid up for him, may and ought divinely to out-brave death, as this precious saint did. A little before she breathed out her last into the bosom of Christ, she called for a candle. “Come,” saith she, “and see death”; and this she spake smilingly, out-braving death in a holy sense. Being free both from the pains of death and from the fear of death, she knew Him in Whom she had believed (2Ti 1:12). She knew right well that death could not dissolve those gracious grants that God had vouchsafed⁷ to her; and therefore, when she came to it, she made no more of it to die than we do to dine. But,

Tell me, Christians, did not Christ come to deliver you from the fear of death? Yes, He did come into the world and did take our nature upon Him, so that He might deliver us from the fear of death (Heb 2:14-15). Why then should you be unwilling to die? Tell me, hath not Christ disarmed death of all its hurting power and taken away its sting so that

⁵ **stone albestos** – “the unquenchable stone”; a fabulous stone, the heat of which, when once kindled, was alleged to be unquenchable.

⁶ **Gaius Julius Solinus** (early 3rd century AD) – Latin grammarian and compiler.

⁷ **vouchsafed** – given in a gracious manner.

it cannot harm you? Yes, He hath (1Co 15:55-57). Why then should you be unwilling to die? Tell me, souls, will not Christ be with you in that hour? Will He not stand by you, though others should desert you? Yes, we have it under His own hand that He will be present with us, and that He will neither leave us, living nor dying, nor forsake us (Psa 23:4; Heb 13:5-6). Why then should you be unwilling to die? Tell me, O trembling Christians, shall death be any more to you than a change—a change of place, a change of company, a change of employment, a change of enjoyment? No, certainly! Death to us will be but a change; yea, the happiest change that ever we met with (Job 14:14, Joh 11:26; 1Th 4:14). Why then should you be unwilling to die, seeing that to die is nothing but to change earth for heaven, rags for robes, crosses for crowns, and prisons for thrones, etc.? But tell me once more, Christians: hath not Jesus Christ, by His lying in the grave, sanctified the grave, and perfumed and sweetened the grave? Hath He not, by His blood and death, purchased for you a soft and easy bed in the grave? Yes, we believe He hath done all this for us. Oh, why then should you be unwilling to die? Once more, tell me, Christians, will not Jesus Christ raise you out of the grave after you have taken a short nap? Will He not cause you to hear His voice? Will He not call you out of that withdrawing room, the grave, and bring you to immortality and glory? Yes, we believe He will (Joh 6:39-40; 1Co 15; 1Th 4:14-18). Oh, why then should you be unwilling to die? Oh, why should you not, upon all these accounts, long for it and—whenever it comes, readily and willingly, cheerfully and sweetly— embrace it? O Christians, Christians! Let but your hopes and your hearts be more fixed upon the things that are reserved in heaven for you, and then you will neither fear death nor feel it when it comes. But,

Death will perfectly cure you of all corporal and spiritual diseases at once: the aching head and the unbelieving heart, the ulcerous body and the polluted soul. Now your bodies are full of ails,⁸ full of aches, full of diseases, full of distempers,⁹ so that your wisest physicians know not what to say to you, nor what to do with you, nor how to cure you. It is often with your bodies as it was with the civil and ecclesiastical body of the Jews, which “from the sole of the foot even unto the head” was full of “wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores” (Isa 1:6). But now, death will perfectly cure you of all. Death will do that for you that you could not do for yourselves; death will do that for you that all your friends could not do for you; death will do that for you that the ablest

⁸ **ails** – troubles; afflictions.

⁹ **distempers** – diseases; maladies.

and wisest physicians could not do for you. It will cure you of every ache, of every ail, etc. At Stratford-Bow, in Queen Mary's days, there was a lame man and a blind man burned at one stake. The lame man, after he was chained, casting away his crutch, bade the blind man be of good comfort, "For death," said he, "will cure us both: thee of thy blindness and I of my lameness."

Ah, Christians! Death will cure you of all your infirmities, of all your distempers. Why then should you be unwilling to die? Mæcenas¹⁰ in Seneca had rather live in many diseases than die; but I hope better things of you, for whom Christ hath died.

And as death will cure all your bodily diseases, so it will cure all your soul distempers also. Death is not the death of the man, but the death of his sin. Sin was the midwife that brought death into the world, and death shall be the grave to bury sin. Death shall do that for a Christian that all his duties could never do; that all his graces could never do; that all his experiences could never do; that all ordinances could never do. It shall at once free him fully, perfectly, and perpetually from all sin, yea, from all possibility of ever sinning more...Death came in by sin, and sin goeth out by death. As the worm kills the worm that bred it, so death kills sin that bred it (Heb 12:23; Rom 6:7; 1Co 15:26).

And why then should Christians be afraid of death or unwilling to die, seeing death gives them a writ of ease from infirmities and weaknesses, from all aches and pains, griefs and gripings, distemper and diseases, both of body and soul?...Death will certainly and perfectly cure you of all bodily and soul distempers at once. But,

A believer's dying day is his *best* day, and why then should he be unwilling to die? "A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth" (Ecc 7:1). In respect of profit, pleasure, peace, safety, company, glory, a believer's last day is his best day; and why then should a believer be unwilling to die? In a printed sermon on this very text, I have proved this truth at large, and to that I refer you, who desire further satisfaction about this truth.¹¹ But,

Thy dying day, O believer, will be thy *triumphing* day (Joh 11:26). Now thou shalt gloriously triumph over sin, Satan, the world, thy own base heart, yea, and over death itself. I readily grant that if you consider believers in Christ, as He was a public person, they have then already

¹⁰ **Gaius Maecenas** (c. 70-8 BC) – friend and political advisor to Octavian, who later reigned as Augustus.

¹¹ See *A Believer's Last Day His Best Day*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

triumphed over principalities and powers. What Christ did in His greatest transaction, He did as a public person, representing all His chosen ones. He suffered as a public person, representing all His elect; He died as a public person, representing all His precious ones. He rose, He ascended, and now He sits in heaven as a public person, representing all His children. “And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6). Christ hath taken up His children’s rooms in heaven aforehand; Christ hath already taken possession of heaven in their names, in their steads; they do now sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. And so when Jesus Christ “spoiled principalities and powers” and triumphed openly over them on the cross (Col 2:15), He did this as a public person, representing all His children who triumphed in His triumph over all the powers of darkness. And therefore, in this sense, believers have already triumphed; yea, and I readily grant that believers—even in this life, by virtue of their union and communion with Christ, and by virtue of His gracious presence, influence, and assistance—do always triumph, as the apostle speaks: “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ” (2Co 2:14).

Believers now are more than conquerors, they are triumphers over the world, the flesh, and the devil. Christ so routed Satan upon the cross, saith Ignatius,¹² that he never since either hears or sees the cross, but he falls shaking and trembling. Believers, by holding forth to Satan the cross of Christ in the arms of faith, and by their laying hold on His cross and pleading His cross, do easily, they do frequently overcome him and triumph over him. But notwithstanding all this, ah, how often doth the best of saints find the world, the flesh, and the devil triumphing sadly over them? Now a Christian triumphs over Satan (Rom 7:14-25); by and by Christ withdraws, and then Satan triumphs over him. Now the believer leads captivity captive; anon¹³ the believer is led captive. This day a saint gets the wind and the hill¹⁴ of Satan and beats him quite out of the field; the next day Satan draws forth and falls on with new forces, with new arguments, with fresh strength, and then puts a Christian to a retreat, ay, too often to a rout. In many a battle, a Christian is worsted¹⁵ and he hath much ado¹⁶ to come off with his life. Oh, but now death brings a Christian to a full, perfect, complete,

¹² **Ignatius of Antioch** (c. 67-107) – Apostolic Father, third bishop of Antioch and a student of John the Apostle; he was martyred for his faith.

¹³ **anon** – soon; immediately.

¹⁴ **wind and hill** – the advantage over.

¹⁵ **worsted** – defeated.

¹⁶ **ado** – difficulty.

absolute, and perpetual triumph over the world, the flesh, and the devil. Now a Christian shall forever have the necks of these enemies under his feet; now these enemies shall be forever disarmed, so that they shall never be able to make resistance more, they shall never strike stroke more, they shall never affront¹⁷ a believer more, they shall never lead a believer captive more, etc. Oh, why then should believers be afraid to die, be unwilling to die, seeing that their dying day is their triumphing day? But...

Consider, O believer, that thou always standest before God in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. [He] is called “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and “who of God is made unto [thee] wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption (Jer 23:6; 1Co 1:30). Whilst thou livest thou standest before God, not in the righteousness of thy duties, nor in thy gracious dispositions, which are but weak and imperfect, but in the pure, perfect, matchless, and spotless righteousness of Jesus Christ. And when thou diest thou appearest before God in the same glorious righteousness, so that thou mayest appear before God’s unspotted justice and holiness with the greatest boldness and comfort that is imaginable, upon the account of that righteousness with which thou art clothed. “The king’s daughter is all glorious within” (Psa 45:13a); there is her inward glory; grace makes the soul glorious within. “Her clothing is of wrought gold” (v. 13b). Some read it purled work, or closures of gold, enameled with gold—such as precious stones were set in, which were exceeding splendid and glorious, and which shadowed forth the glorious righteousness of our Lord Jesus (Exo 28:11, 14; 39:1-5, etc.). This clothing of wrought gold is the glorious righteousness of our Lord Jesus. Now, in life and in death, the believer stands before God in the glorious golden robes of Christ’s righteousness; and hence it is that believers are said to be all fair and without spot, to be without spot or wrinkle, to be complete in Christ, and to be without fault before the throne of God. Why then should a believer be unwilling to die and appear before God? By reason of this clothing of wrought gold, you stand spotless, blameless, and faultless before God. This golden clothing, this glorious righteousness of Christ, is as truly and really the believer’s, and as fully and completely the believer’s, as if it were his very own. Ah! No clothing [can compare] to this. The costly cloak of Alcisthenes, which Dionysius¹⁸ sold to the Carthaginians for a hundred talents, was indeed a mean and beggarly rag [compared] to this embroidered mantle that Christ puts upon all believers.

¹⁷ **affront** – confront defiantly.

¹⁸ **Dionysius I of Syracuse** (c. 432-367 BC) – Greek tyrant of Syracuse, Sicily.

And therefore, a Christian, both living and dying, should say with the psalmist, “I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only” (Psa 71:15-16, 19). Let them be afraid to die, let them be unwilling to die, who must appear before God in their sins and in their own righteousness, which at best is but “as filthy rags” (Isa 64:6). But as for thee, O Christian, who shalt always appear before God in clothing of wrought gold, be not thou afraid of death, be not thou unwilling to die, but rather desire it, rather long for it (1Co 15:55-57), because thou art clothed with such righteousness as will bear thee up sweetly in it, as will carry thee bravely through it, and as will make thee triumph over it. Christ’s righteousness is a Christian’s white raiment in which he stands pure before God (Rev 3:18). “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Rev 19:7-8). By the fine, clean, white linen that is here called “the righteousness,” or, as the Greek hath it, “the righteousnesses” of saints, most understand the glorious righteousness of Christ. Righteousness is a Hebraism, noting that most perfect absolute righteousness that we have in Christ. White is a natural color. It is a color of purity, ornament, and honor. It was the habit¹⁹ in times past of nobles, saith Drusius,²⁰ and others. Now in this pure, clean, white linen all the saints are clothed and so presented to God by Jesus Christ; and why then should they be unwilling to die? Here is not a speck, not a spot, to be found upon this white linen, which is “the righteousness of saints,” which should make saints rather to pursue after death than to fly from it or to be unwilling to welcome it when it comes.

From *The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh; London; Dublin: James Nichol; James Nisbet and Co.; G. Herbert, 1866), 451-463; in the public domain.

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680): English Nonconformist Puritan preacher and advocate of Congregationalism; buried in Bunhill Fields.



Depend upon it: your dying hour will be the best hour you have ever known; your last will be your richest moment; better than the day of your birth will be the day of your death. It shall be the beginning of heaven, the rising of a sun that shall go no more down forever. Let the fear of death be banished from you by faith in a living Savior.—*Charles H. Spurgeon*

¹⁹ **habit** – dress.

²⁰ **Johannes van den Driesche or Drusius (1550-1616)** – Flemish Protestant theologian.

THE SAINTS' DEATH PRECIOUS

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.—Psalm 116:15

TRUE believers die in the Lord, and this imparts a character and preciousness to their death delightful to God. What significance and depth of meaning in these words: “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord!” (Rev 14:13). The thought of dying out of Christ may well impart to the unbeliever a fearful dread of dying. Such may truly regard death as the most terrible of all terrible things. Unconverted reader! Better never to have been born into this world than to pass into the next out of Christ. It is to die as you were born—in sin, in rebellion against God, unconverted, under the curse, and condemned forever. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (Joh 3:36). Oh, to confront the “king of terrors” with all your sins upon you, with all your guilt attaching to you, cherishing the enmity against God of your carnal mind, the weapons of rebellion in your hand, the love of sin and supremacy of Satan and the slavery of the world in your heart...

But believers die in Christ. They die interested in Christ, they die shut up in Christ, they die clothed with Christ, they die in a union with Christ from which nothing shall ever separate them. In the fullest, broadest, most emphatic, and blessed meaning of the words, they “die in the Lord” (Rev 14:13), and precious in His sight is their death. The glory that the death of the saints brings to God must endear to Him their departure. “This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God” (Joh 21:19). The Lord is glorified by the death of His saints. Their faith in Him at that solemn hour glorifies Him. The grace that sustains them under their sufferings glorifies Him. Their confidence in His promises, their hope in His salvation, their patient submission to His will, and their longing to depart to see His face, to be perfected in His likeness, and to be with Him forever, glorifies Him. And do you not think that glory surpassing all conception is brought to Christ when the dying saint, in that solemn moment, commits, entrusts, and breathes out his precious soul into the hands of Jesus, exclaiming, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day”

(2Ti 1:12). “Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth” (Psa 31:5).

Precious, indeed, must the death of His saints be to the Lord because then it is that He gathers them to Himself. “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory” (Joh 17:24). Behold how Christ longs to have His saints in heaven with Him! So near and precious are they to His heart, He will not rest until all the travail of His soul, all the sheep of His fold, all the precious gems of His cabinet, encircle His throne, cluster around His person, fill and sparkle in His jeweled diadem. Not one shall be lost. Not a babe of the family, not a lamb of the flock, not a crown jewel shall be missing in that day. “They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (Joh 10:28).

Deity has redeemed them, deity has preserved them, and enshrined in the glories of deity they spend their happy eternity. Blessed truth! Glorious hope! Weak saints shall be there, doubting believers shall be there, restored backsliders shall be there. The hand that but touched the hem (Mat 9:20) shall wave the palm; the eye that but dimly beheld the cross shall drink in all that splendor. The tongue that but lisped, “My Father,” shall join the song and swell the chorus. Child of God! Trembling believer! Doubting, fearful one, to whose heart the Savior is more precious than life itself! You shall be there. There is a place in that crown, a mansion in that home, a bower in that paradise for you. And when death releases you from the bondage of corruption, and your happy spirit wings its way to heaven, the angels will clap their wings, and all the family above will strike their golden harps and cry, “Welcome, welcome home!”

So precious are you to Jesus—the fruit of His dying agonies, the “pearl of great price” (Mat 13:46), bought with His most precious blood, and kept by His divine power—He must have you to behold His glory, to see His face, to repose upon His breast, to bask in His smiles, to chant His praises, to serve Him day and night in His temple, to be like Him and with Him forever. We wonder not, then, that “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”

But is it death to die? Approach that chamber where the saint of God is departing. Enter with a hushed footstep, for solemn is that scene, sacred is that spot—it is the verge of glory, it is the expanding gate of heaven. Celestial beings, viewless and noiseless, are there—angels and the spirits of the glorified hover round that bed. The Triune Jehovah is there—the Father watching the child He adopted, the Son upholding the soul He redeemed, the Holy Spirit strengthening the heart He had

made His temple. Is this the chamber of death—this the last enemy, the final conflict, the closing scene? Surely this is not dying! What! This mental calmness, this spirit-joy, this soul-sunshine, this victory of faith, this stupendous, glorious triumph of the immortal over the mortal—is this death? Hark! What angel sounds are those? Whence this melody? It is the voice of the departing one...And then all is still! The “silver cord [is] loosed” (Ecc 12:6), and the panting spirit, borne on the wing of song, has swept upwards into the beaming presence of God and rests in the embrace of Christ. Call not this death—it is *life!* Call it not destruction—it is the renewal of vigor of the soul, the moment when it renews its youth and expatiates¹ amid the wonders, glories, and sublimities of its newborn creation. All this triumph, all this glory, all this joy, we owe to Jesus’ death and resurrection...

Precious, too, because death is the end of all their sorrows and sufferings, their infirmities, sicknesses, and sins. It is the termination of all evil, the birthday of all good. Oh, precious death—that dissolves the last link that binds me to corruption, that breaks the last fetter of sin, stifles the last groan, hushes the last sigh, dries the last tear, and introduces me to the sinless, sorrowless companionship of those who are before the throne of God and the Lamb “without fault” (Rev 14:5)! Oh, who with but the lowliest hope in Christ longs not, wearies not, sighs not to be there? How the contrast intensifies this yearning! Here is earth—there is heaven. Here is sin—there is purity. Here is toil—there is rest. Here is continual sorrow—there is fullness of joy. Here is exile—there is home. Here are imperfect saints—there, the “spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23). Here are partings and changes—there, eternity restores the holy loves of earth, sanctifies and fixes them forever! Oh, pants not your spirit for the eagle’s flight that you may be there?...

But while thus, beloved, we have concentrated your meditation for a time upon the death, the preciousness of the death, of all who believe in Jesus, we by no means would have you infer that this is the subject that should the most preeminently, earnestly, and exclusively arrest and fix the thoughts and expectations of your soul. The coming of the Lord, and not the death of the saints, is the grand theme, the “blessed hope” (Ti 2:13), which the Holy Spirit proposes for our meditation and presents to our faith! The great motive to watchfulness and prayer, to separation from the world, holiness of life, and readiness of habit to meet the Lord, is drawn, not from our going to Christ by death, but

¹ **expatiates** – speaks or writes at great length.

from Christ's coming to us in personal glory. Death is a part—a fearful, gloomy, repulsive part of the curse. View it in its most pleasant and attractive light: it is a humiliation. It is a conquest, a separation, a change, a decay, a solemn, a fearful plunge of the spirit into a world mysterious, invisible, unknown!

But turn your thoughts to *the coming of the Lord*. How different the spectacle! It is a glory, a triumph, a reunion, the advent of a Conqueror, the appearing of a Savior, and the coming of a Friend. Not, then, by the approach of death—precious though to Christ that death may be—but by the yet more powerful, yet more precious, yet more persuasive, lovely, and soothing prospect of the coming of Jesus, does the Holy Spirit seek to awaken, sanctify, and comfort the saints. How impressive is the language: “Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus...To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints...I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...We beseech you...by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him...Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord...For the coming of the Lord draweth nigh...Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ...Unto all them...that love his appearing...I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also...He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20).

Is not this a prospect worthy the study, the hope, the longing, the future, the destiny of the church? Dwell upon the scene—a master's hand has sketched it. “In the first place, it presents to the expectation of the saints all that is to be loved and desired in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom he has been redeemed, and upon Whom he has been nourished and sustained, not in His humility, as heretofore, but traveling in the greatness of His strength; not as a servant, but as a sovereign, uniting in Himself all the tender intercessions of the priest and the powerful majesty of the king, “a priest upon his throne” forever (Zec 6:13).” We shall behold Him Whom, not having seen, we loved; “we shall see him as he is” (1Jo 3:2); in Whom, while yet we saw Him not, we rejoiced “with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1Pe 1:8). We shall see all the glorious attributes of God made manifest in manhood: the son of Mary glorified into the Son of God and clothed with the all-sustaining power of the Word of God.

In the next place, we shall behold all enemies put under His feet: Satan, the accuser of the brethren, cast out of the earth and with him all his evil angels that dwell in the natural man and rule the world. And we shall see the prison doors of death unbarred, and the grave yield up her dead; and then shall come to pass that saying of the prophet, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1Co 15:54).

In the next place, we shall be gathered with all the saints of God since the world was, who shall all stand in their lot in the latter day, and in their flesh shall see God—the general assembly of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven: the church of the living God, the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the glorious army of the martyrs, the whole host of the redeemed, whom He shall bring with Him. And we who remain until His coming shall be caught up with Him into the air, and shall be forever with the Lord. This is not a cheerless parting, but a joyful meeting and eternal union of those who are spiritually dear to one another. And as touching natural affections, let it be remembered that the natural man is then no more, the spiritual man alone is, and his affections alone remain. Then our father, mother, brother, and sister are they who have fulfilled the will of our heavenly Father.

In the next place, this body of wickedness, this body of sin and death, shall be exchanged for the likeness of Christ’s glorious body; for sinful flesh and blood shall not inherit that kingdom, nor corruption incorruption. Mortality shall be “swallowed up of life” (2Co 5:4); “it is sown a natural...it is raised a spiritual body”; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in honor; “it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power” (1Co 15:43-44). So, all shall be strength, harmony, and union within us: the perfect man, the holy man, complete in all things, and lacking nothing.

In the next place, we shall be forever with the Lord, partakers of His throne, partakers of His crown, and partakers of His government: His assessors in judgment, His deputies in power, ruling over the cities of His dominion, and judging the tribes of the sojourners of the earth. For though I inquire not into the mode or manner of our being, yet this I am not ashamed to declare: that we shall be like the Lord Who ascended up from earth as easily as He descended; Who after His resurrection, and even before it, passed to and fro without let² or impediment of matter and governed the elements with a sovereign control. And so shall we, in the exercise of that government and sovereignty which we shall then be permitted to hold of the earth, be as Adam, a king in his majesty whom the elements of nature and all living, moving

² let – hindrance; obstacle.

creatures upon the earth harmed not, but delighted to obey.

Finally, we shall behold the earth and all the sojourners therein living in peace and blessedness under the government of the Lord Jesus Christ; nature repossessed of all her original beauty, and society of all its proper blessedness; peace, gentleness, and meekness restored on every hand; all men blessed in Jesus, and calling Him blessed. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain," saith the Lord, "for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9). Look, then, on this picture and on that, and say which is the most pleasant, attractive, and hopeful—which the best calculated to soothe in grief, to sustain in trial, to fortify in assault, to nerve in conflict; to animate in service, to stimulate to holiness, and to throw over all the future of the soul the glory and radiance of Christian expectation and hope: the dread approach of the grim king of terrors or "the glorious appearing of the great God...our Saviour" (Ti 2:13)?

For His coming, then, let us be looking—let us be prepared for it. Gird up the trailing robe, trim the waning lamp, nerve the trembling arm, and rouse the drooping heart. Our Lord is coming to bring us to Himself. All things betoken His near approach. Soon we shall behold His chariot, hear His voice, see His face, and fall in love and ecstasy upon the bosom that sorrowed, sighed, and bled for us on the cross. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching" (Luk 12:35-37)...Oh, look to JESUS—cling to JESUS—live, labor, die for JESUS!

From *The Precious Things of God*, in the public domain.

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878): Nonconformist pastor; born in London, England, raised in New York, buried in Abbey Cemetery, Bath, UK.



Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.—*1 Corinthians 15:24-26*

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.—*Philippians 1:21-23*