

Monergism



Dying Daily

EXPOSITIONS ON HOW TO DIE WELL

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THE CHRISTIAN'S DAILY WORK OF DYING I

"I solemnly affirm, by the joy I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, that I die daily" 1 COR. 15:31.

These words carry a strong intensity and emphasis, revealing the exceptional earnestness the apostle felt when he wrote them. In fact, they convey even greater fervor in the original text than in our translation. The phrase "I die daily," which we place last, actually appears first in the original: Καθ' ἡμέραν ἀποθνήσκω, meaning "I die daily"; Νῆ τὴν ὑμετέραν καύχησιν, ἣν ἔχω ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ Κυρίῳ ἡμῶν, translated as "Yea, I do so by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord." No other expression used by the apostle conveys a greater ardency of spirit than this one.

The particular reason for using it here is to demonstrate the steadfastness of his faith in the resurrection of the dead, which, as you know, is the subject of the dispute he is addressing. He proves that this is not merely an opinion he holds, but a deeply rooted faith that sustains him through all difficulties and sufferings. "Why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I solemnly affirm, by your rejoicing in Christ Jesus our Lord, that I face death every day. If, in a human

sense, I fought with wild beasts in Ephesus, what good is it to me if the dead are not raised? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." "By willingly enduring all things in the confirmation of this truth," he declares, "I demonstrate my faith in the resurrection." It is the significant duty of ministers to be ever ready to demonstrate the stability of their own faith in the things they preach to others by cheerfully suffering for them.

The passage contains two elements: a statement and its confirmation. The statement is as follows: "I die daily." The confirmation is given in the phrase: "I solemnly affirm, by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord."

There are two or three difficulties in these words, and I will not trouble you with mere conjectures but provide what I believe to be the Holy Spirit's intended meaning.

The first difficulty arises from the ambiguous meaning of the word "rejoicing," which we use to translate the Greek word *καύχησις*. However, in other contexts, it is sometimes rendered as "confidence," sometimes as "boasting," and sometimes as "glorying." If our language permitted, I would use the term "gloriation," which signifies a jubilant joy.

The second difficulty lies in the word order, which is unique and does not appear elsewhere in Scripture. "I solemnly affirm, by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus." This has given rise to various interpretations, but plainly the sense is this: "By the rejoicing that both you and I have in the Lord." I could provide examples of similar transpositions in the Greek language between individuals if it would edify you.

There is yet a third difficulty. The particle $\nu\grave{\eta}$ here serves as an oath or swearing, similar to א in Hebrew or "by" in our language. However, at times it functions as a strong affirmation. We have chosen to express it as "I solemnly affirm." If it is an oath, then the word denotes the object: "I swear by your rejoicing in the Lord," meaning "by the Lord in whom you rejoice." This usage is explicitly seen in the expression "Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac," which means "by Him whom his father Isaac feared." However, in this instance, I understand it merely as a note of vehement affirmation, indicating that it is as true as our shared glorying and rejoicing in Christ—I die daily.

This phrase can be understood in two ways: "Every day, due to preaching the gospel, I am exposed to dangers and death." He speaks both before and after this passage about the dangers he faces in his work of preaching the gospel. "I die daily." Or, "By continually preparing myself for death, I am always in a state of readiness to die; through faith in the resurrection, I am constantly prepared to die cheerfully and comfortably according to God's will." This is the interpretation I will settle upon. Since it pertains to a necessary duty, I can derive a general principle from this specific example of the apostle.

Observation: It is the duty of all believers to daily prepare themselves to die cheerfully, comfortably, and, if possible, triumphantly in the Lord.

Note that one can die safely without necessarily dying cheerfully and comfortably. Every believer, regardless of who they are, will die safely, but we witness many believers who do not die cheerfully and comfortably. I am not speaking here about how all individuals can

come to die safely, but rather about how believers can die with comfort and cheer.

There are two ways to die cheerfully and comfortably:

1. One way is through outward expressions that bring comfort to those around us. This greatly depends on the nature of the illness from which a person may die, which can oppress the spirits and cloud the mind. Therefore, it is not subject to rules but left to God's providence.
2. But there is also a dying cheerfully and comfortably in individuals' own souls, which they may not be able to display in their dying moments when they are thoroughly prepared for it.

Truly, brothers and sisters, all I can say is that I am speaking to you about the things I have contemplated for myself before ever considering them for you. I cannot declare what I have achieved, which may be little or nothing, but only what I have aimed for, if it may be useful to us in this time of dying, especially among good ministers, with one or another [dying] almost every day.

I shall mention three things that, in my opinion, are necessary for every believer who desires to die cheerfully and enter into the presence of God in a suitable and complete manner:

I. The constant exercise of faith in surrendering a departing soul into the hand and sovereign will of God. "I die daily." How? By constantly exercising faith in surrendering a departing soul, when the time comes, to the sovereign grace, good pleasure, power, and faithfulness of God. The soul is bidding farewell to all its concerns in this world—everything it sees, everything it knows through its senses, all its relationships, everything it has been acquainted with—to have an

eternal, absolute indifference towards them. It is entering into an invisible world of which it knows nothing except through faith. When Paul was taken up into the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2), we might have wanted to hear news from the invisible world, how things were there. But he saw nothing; he only heard words. "Why, blessed Paul, can we not hear those words?" No, "They are not lawful to be uttered," he says. God does not want us to know anything in the invisible world except what is revealed in the word while we are here. Therefore, the souls of the departed who have died and lived again, like Lazarus, I have no doubt God sustained in their existence but restrained all their activities. If a separate soul had one natural, intuitive view of God, it would be the greatest misery in the world to send it back into a dying body. God keeps those things to be objects of faith. Lazarus could not tell anything about what was happening in heaven; his soul was preserved in existence, but all its activities were restrained. I thank God that I have particularly focused my thoughts, guided by the word, on the invisible world, about which you may hear something in due time. But for now, I know that our understanding of it is purely through revelation.

So where is the soul going now? What will be the outcome in a few moments? Is it annihilated? Does death not only separate the body and soul but also destroy our existence so that we cease to be for eternity? That is what some would like, for it is in their interest. Is the soul going into a state of wandering in the air under the influence of more powerful spirits? That was the belief of the ancient pagan world, which caused frequent appearances of the dead on earth.

And this belief was incorporated into purgatory by the Catholics, from which they concluded that there were constant appearances of the departed. You have thousands of stories about them, but we know they are all the workings and deceptions of evil spirits. Our

ignorance of the invisible world is such that the majority of Christians have invented a third state that does not exist, a product of superstition and idolatry. For it is superstition to fabricate religious notions that cater to people's natural affections or gratify their desires for their own profit, both of which were the motives in this case. When people thought that the souls of men who entered an eternal state were lost forever, "No, there is another chance for them," they said, and so they pacified them, assuring them that even if they were the worst of men, there might be hope for them after death. And those who invented it turned it into their own profit. This is just to show the darkness that mankind is in regarding this invisible world. So, let us proceed:

Is the soul going into a state where it is incapable of any joy, any consolation? Brothers and sisters, no matter what people pretend, anyone who has never experienced joy or consolation in this world except through their senses or reasoning about sensory objects does not know, nor can they believe, that the soul itself is capable of any consolation in another world. Only someone who has immediately received spiritual comfort into their soul in this world can believe that their soul is capable of it in another. However, it is certain that no one can undertake anything regarding the conduct of their soul in another world.

So, what is your approach in this state and condition? What is your wisdom? Truly, it is to surrender this departing soul to the sovereign wisdom, pleasure, faithfulness, and power of God (which is the duty at hand) through the continual exercise of faith. As the apostle tells us in 2 Timothy 1:12, "For I know whom I have believed and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day." It is a mighty task to guard a separate soul until the day of the resurrection. So, says the apostle, "I know the one I have

entrusted it to; I entrust it to almighty power." May the Lord help us to believe that there will be an act of almighty power exerted on behalf of our departed souls in the invisible world to preserve them until the day when body and soul will be united and come to enjoy God.

We have a glorious example for this duty and exercise of faith. Our Lord Jesus Christ died while exercising it. It was the final act of faith Christ performed in this world. Luke 23:46 states, "When Jesus had cried out with a loud voice" (this was the voice of nature, but now he comes to the words of faith), "he said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit' (my departing soul)." After saying this, he breathed his last. Here was the last exercise of faith by our Lord Jesus Christ in this world—committing his departing soul into the hands of God. And for what purpose did he do it? We are told in Psalm 16:8–11, "I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." These are the words of David that our Lord Jesus Christ himself used when he said, "Into your hands I commit my spirit." And the psalmist adds, "You have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God" (Psalm 31:5). Experiencing the work of redemption, communicated to us by the truth of the promise, is the greatest encouragement to entrust a departing soul into the hands of God.

Now, for me (considering the disappearance of all these shadows and appearances and the eternal dissolution of all connection to earthly things, and the existence of a soul in a separate condition with which we are unacquainted), this is one of the primary considerations if we

desire to die cheerfully and comfortably—how we can resign a departing soul into the hand and sovereign control of God.

It is both a significant and remarkable act of faith to do so:

1. It is a significant and remarkable act of faith. Hebrews 11 speaks of the powerful efficacy and great success of faith. One of the specific instances, in which many others are encompassed, is that "all these died in faith." It was a remarkable thing to die in faith under the Old Testament, when they were surrounded by so many shadows and much darkness, and when their insight into the invisible things behind the veil was far inferior to what God has revealed to us. Moreover, the state of things beyond the veil was not the same as it is now; Christ was not yet enthroned, carrying out his office. Nevertheless, faith carried them through all that darkness and led them to venture their souls on God, relying on His faithfulness, mercy, and grace.

When it comes to this consideration, it weighs everything in the balance: on one side, our existence, our life in this world, our sins and their guilt, our fears, uncertainties, and the darkness surrounding the future state, our aversion to dissolution, and all the considerations that surround us; on the other side, the power, faithfulness, and mercy of God, and His ability to receive, preserve, and keep us until that day—and to be more valuable to us than all these things. "Here shall be my portion," says faith. "All things in the other scale hold no value, no weight compared to this overwhelming weight of God's power and goodness." This is a glorious exercise of faith! Have you tried it, my brothers and sisters? Place things on either side of the scale and see which way it tips—observe what faith can accomplish in such a situation.

2. It is the ultimate triumphant act of faith, in which it achieves its final victory over all adversaries. Faith is the leading grace in all our spiritual warfare and conflict. Throughout our lives, it is accompanied by other faithful companions that support and assist it. Love works, hope works, and all the other graces—self-denial, willingness to bear the cross—they all work alongside and aid faith. But when we face death, faith stands alone. Now, let us see what faith can accomplish. The exercise of other graces ceases, and faith engages in a decisive battle with its last adversary, where the entire struggle is tested. And through this one act of entrusting everything into the hand of God, faith conquers death and declares, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? Come, grant me passage into immortality and glory; the eternal hand of God is prepared to receive me!" This is the victory by which we overcome all our spiritual enemies.

I intended to draw some practical application from what has been said—to examine whether we truly live in the exercise of this grace and what benefits we derive from it. I would have specifically emphasized that this alone will protect us from being caught off guard by death. To avoid being surprised by anything is the essence of human wisdom, and to be unprepared for death is a significant deficiency in our spiritual wisdom.

THE CHRISTIAN'S WORK OF DYING DAILY II

I addressed this portion of Scripture on the previous Lord's Day, and I deemed the subject highly fitting due to the various warnings God

has given us to be diligent in this duty. God has further emphasized its timeliness by taking away a remarkable and esteemed servant from our midst. Regarding him, I shall say only this: based on my thirty years of acquaintance, friendship, and half that time in church fellowship, I believe that few were wiser, holier, or more useful than he in his role, if any. And so, I leave him in the peace of God.

My intention was to discuss the necessary elements for attaining a peaceful and comfortable departure from this world. I have already addressed one aspect: the daily exercise of faith in surrendering a departing soul to the sovereign power and will of God, to be cared for and received by Him according to the covenant of grace.

I will not move on from this point until I have drawn some practical application from it. And I will rely solely on the strength that God is pleased to provide me.

Application 1: It may be worthwhile for us to examine the specific nature of this duty to which we are exhorted, for we may increasingly realize the ignorance of many who mistakenly believe they understand it when they do not comprehend its true meaning. Therefore, let us consider three aspects: (1) The special and immediate object of this exercise of faith, along with the motivating factor; (2) The form or specific nature of this exercise; and (3) The manner in which it is performed.

Regarding the special and immediate object of this exercise of faith, which must include a particular motive, it is God Himself, considered in terms of His sovereignty, power, and faithfulness. This motive is grounded in the individual's experience of His kindness and grace. As the psalmist declares in Psalm 31:5, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit." What instilled such confidence in him? "Thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth." All who commit their spirits into God's

hands must possess a sense of redeeming grace, conveyed through the truth of His promises. Therefore, brethren, when you engage in this great duty, you must establish this foundation—an awareness and experience of God's grace and kindness—otherwise, you will never be able to fulfill it properly. And—

[1.] Based on this motive, the first aspect of God we consider in surrendering our souls to Him is His sovereignty. It is mentioned in two places in the Psalms where this duty is presented to us. In Psalm 16:1-2, we read, "Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust. O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord." Here, the psalmist uses the word "Jehovah" and then "Lord" (Adonai). He declares, "You are my Lord, the one who has complete control over me. I am about to entrust my spirit to you, and I do so on the basis of Your sovereignty." Likewise, in Psalm 31:14-15, the psalmist says, "I trusted in thee, O LORD." Why? "I said, Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand." The psalmist commits himself to God because of His sovereignty. "You are my God, the one who has absolute control over me. Therefore, I entrust myself to You." In making this surrender, faith recognizes the glorious sovereignty of God as the ultimate, unrestricted ruler of all things in this world and for eternity.

[2.] It also has a distinct regard for the power of God. As stated in 2 Timothy 1:12, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." It is common for individuals to approach this duty merely as a customary practice. They know they must die, but only an apprehension of God's infinite power, capable of preserving them in eternal existence in the invisible world, particularly until the day of resurrection, can encourage them to yield their souls to Him.

[3.] It relates to the faithfulness of God as the One who has promised to care for us when we depart from this world. First Peter 4:19 states, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." In other words, we entrust our souls to Him as to a faithful God who is omnipotent, the Creator of all things, and faithful in fulfilling His promises.

So, then, the duty I exhort you to is an immediate addressing of God—an exercise of faith in Him, with a special regard to His sovereignty, power, and faithfulness—based on our experience, to some extent, of His goodness and grace.

The circumstances before me have changed significantly in a short time, and I do not know, brethren, how soon it may be the fate of any of you to require an understanding and practice of this matter. You may choose to remember it, for it is of great importance to have direct communion with God, considering His glorious attributes of sovereignty, power, and faithfulness. That is the first point.

(2.) Regarding the specific form of this duty, it can be expressed in two words that carry the same meaning. In one instance, it is rendered as "commending," and in another, as "committing" (Luke 23:46 and Psalm 31:5). However, it is a re-commending or committing, like entrusting a trust. If a dying person had an only child and an estate to leave behind, how solemnly would they commit the child to the care of a trusted friend! They would say, "I entrust this vulnerable and fatherless child to your care—for your love, concern, and ability to look after them." It is done with great solemnity. The psalmist refers to his soul as his "darling" and "only one": "Deliver 'my darling' from the dog, and 'my only one.'" Now,

when a person is about to leave this world, they must commit their soul and leave it in trust somewhere. This exercise of faith is the act of leaving our "darling," our "only one," which is departing from this earthly tent, to God, considering His sovereignty, power, and faithfulness. I am not yet addressing the essence of this duty, which lies in committing the trust of our souls to God, to be dealt with according to the terms of the covenant of grace, wherever it may lead, for all eternity. That is the solemn act of committing.

(3.) As for the manner of it, it should be done explicitly in words spoken to God. I am not giving instructions to those who are dying but to those who are living, that they may be prepared to die. We should say to God, "Lord, I have spent this much time in the world. I have witnessed a great variety in the external events of the world, but a thousand times more in the inward state of my spirit. And now, as I am departing from this world at Your call, I will be here no longer. O Lord, after everything, as I am about to enter into a new, eternal state, I commit my soul to You—I leave it with You—I place all my trust and confidence in Your faithfulness, power, and sovereignty, to be dealt with according to the terms of the covenant of grace. Now I can lie down in peace."

Application 2: What benefits will we receive if we exercise our souls in this manner? I answer, we will receive these advantages:

(1.) I know nothing better suited to keep our souls in constant reverence of God, which is the essence of holiness and obedience. Without this reverence, the finest profession holds no value. And nothing is more suited to cultivate this reverence than approaching God immediately each day, or at least frequently, contemplating His glorious sovereignty, power, and faithfulness, as if we were immediately entering His presence and placing ourselves in His

hands. The more we engage in this practice, the greater our reverence for God will be. We have deceitful hearts and a cunning adversary to contend with. We are commanded to draw near to God and approach His throne of grace boldly (Hebrews 10, Hebrews 4:16). And we should do so frequently. However, boldness and frequency have a tendency to diminish reverence. Carnal boldness arises when people make themselves bold and frequent in a multitude of duties, but it diminishes reverence for God. The more frequently we approach God with spiritual boldness, the more our hearts will be filled with continuous reverence for Him. Conversely, if we approach God in outward duties without this holy and humble reverence, regardless of our gifts, reverence for God will decline. I have witnessed some individuals with outwardly commendable conduct and a multitude of duties who have become poor, superficial, withering souls. You can apply this measure to all your duties: if they increase reverence for God, they are from grace; if they do not, they are based on gifts and do not sanctify the soul.

(2.) This practice will sustain us through all our sufferings. A soul accustomed to exercising this faith will not be greatly shaken by its sufferings. We are all shaken and stirred—sometimes quite improperly and indecently—like leaves in the forest. But it will prevent us from being greatly shaken. As the psalmist says, "I shall not be greatly moved." Furthermore, we are instructed to commit the keeping of our souls to God, as to a faithful Creator, when we suffer according to His will. This will provide support through all your sufferings. The psalmist's condition in Psalm 31, from which I drew my primary testimony, exemplifies this: "Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed," and so on. "For I have heard the slander of many;

fear was on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life." What course does he take in the midst of these distresses, sufferings, and persecutions? He says, "I said, Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand." He resigns himself to the sovereignty of God and finds peace.

I have now shown you how you can practice this duty, and I consider myself near my own account as one who is aware of it. I wish I could persuade you to bring it into actual exercise, to a greater or lesser extent, before you close your eyes or find slumber upon your eyelids!

Application 3: Next, who are those who can perform this duty as they should, living in this exercise of faith?

I am certain that those who live as if they were to remain in this world forever do not perform this duty. But this clearly demonstrates the disorder and confusion that have befallen the minds and souls of humankind. If a person of sobriety and reputation were to approach individuals who live in sensuality and wickedness—as the world is full of such people—and say to them, "Sirs! What are you doing? I am convinced that there is death to come and an eternal state of blessedness or woe that is rapidly approaching. The path you are treading will surely engulf you in eternal destruction," they would dismiss him by saying, "That's just your opinion." Yet one would think that a wise person could convince them to act in accordance with his opinion. But it is not so. They have convictions in their minds that they will die. They not only acknowledge it as an opinion, but they themselves are convinced of a future state and profess it. However, do they take any action based on this conviction? Not at all, no more than if they were mere animals. Such individuals are incapable of engaging in the exercise of this duty.

Nor do those who walk without any thought of death. They acknowledge its inevitability, but they tend to believe that they have other things to attend to before facing death. They think there will be plenty of time in the future, at some point or another, to prepare for death. The apostle did indeed "die daily," but they have other matters to attend to. When death knocks on their neighbor's door and they hear of someone's passing, or when it strikes their own families and claims the lives of individuals, they have fleeting thoughts for a brief moment. But those thoughts quickly fade, and they return to their usual state of mind. "Just a little more slumber, a little more sleep, a little more folding of the hands to sleep"—a little more carefree engagement with the world, tending to our own affairs. However, death will come like an armed man, and they will not be able to escape.

Therefore, two things are required of anyone who desires to engage in this duty:

(1.) They must establish its foundation in a comforting conviction of having a share in Christ, for that alone will enable them to die safely. Once that foundation is established, they can strive for that which will allow them to die comfortably and joyfully. Some individuals die safely, but for various reasons that need not be discussed here, they do not appear to die comfortably. On the other hand, some people appear to die very comfortably outwardly, but they do not die safely. It is necessary, therefore, to have this foundation—a comforting conviction of our share in Christ—in order to die safely. Otherwise, there is no point in expecting to die comfortably.

(2.) Many believe that a few last words will suffice, and that will be the end of it. But let me assure you, based not only on the principles of Scripture truth but also on natural principles, no one can achieve

this unless they have a vision of the glory of spiritual and eternal things that outweighs everything their souls find desirable in this world. I hear people expressing willingness to die, and indeed some do so, but it goes against the principles of human nature. No person on this earth (it implies a contradiction) can let go of what appears good to them unless there is a greater good motivating them. They must let go of it, but they cannot do so willingly and cheerfully. If you desire to have the ability to willingly and cheerfully surrender a departing soul to God, strive to have a vision of those superior things that are infinitely greater and more glorious, which your souls will come to enjoy upon departing from this world.

The calls of God are significant upon us, both in public and private spheres, and especially within this congregation. God expects a special response to His calls from us, or else we will continue to experience further signs of His displeasure.

THE CHRISTIAN'S WORK OF DYING DAILY III

What I have been discussing based on these words is to reveal the ways and responsibilities through which a believer can not only die safely, which is the case for all believers, but also die cheerfully and comfortably, so as to have a smooth and abundant entry into the kingdom of God in glory.

I have only addressed one aspect, which is the exercise of faith in surrendering a departing soul to the sovereign hand and will of God as it enters the unseen realm, in accordance with the eternal covenant.

There are two more things necessary for the same purpose, at least in my understanding, which I hope to cover now.

II. In order to achieve this great objective, there must be a readiness and willingness to part with the physical body we carry and lay it to rest in the ground. The soul's inherent reluctance to let go of the body is what we call an unwillingness to die. It has led some to say, like the ancients, "I do not wish to die," etc.—"I can accept being dead, but I do not want to go through the process of dying."

There are two reasons why the soul has a natural unwillingness to part with the body:

1. Because the body has been the sole instrument for all the operations and functions of the soul since its existence. The essence of being lies in its faculties and actions. From the very beginning of its existence, the soul has had no other instrument for its actions than the body. Not only does the body perform outward actions, but it is also essential for all internal, rational activities of the soul. Thus, we know that an injury to the body, particularly to the head, can completely deprive the soul of the exercise of its faculties and powers during life. The soul cannot engage in rational, internal activities without the body. It does not know how it can act without the body. This has naturally instilled an aversion in the soul to let go of the body, which has been its constant means of action since the moment of its inception. This is one reason for its unwillingness, but there is a greater reason.
2. The other reason is the profound, intimate, and unparalleled union and relationship between the soul and the body. There is a close union between parents and children, a closer one between husband and wife, but they pale in comparison to the union

between the soul and body. The union between the two is indescribable, beyond comprehension. In the person of the Son of God, there is an ineffable and eternal union between the divine and human natures. Even when the body and soul of Christ were separated, they remained united with the person of the Son of God just as much as before or as they are now in heaven. However, here on earth, there is a dissoluble union between a heavenly spirit and an earthly, carnal body—two essential parts of the same nature. Allow me to elaborate on this. I have contemplated what it means to die and explored the source of the difficulty. I can affirm that it arises from this unique constitution of our nature, which has no parallel in all of God's works, whether in heaven above or on earth below. Angels are pure, immaterial spirits; there is nothing in them that can die. God can annihilate an angel—He who created all things out of nothing can reduce all things to nothing—but an angel cannot die based on its own constitution. A brute creature has nothing within it that can live when death arrives. Solomon speaks of the "spirit of a beast" that "goeth downward." It is not within the scope of almighty power to preserve it because it is merely a manifestation of the body's activity within its temperament and constitution. However, humankind is a "medium participationis"; we possess a divine nature from above that cannot die, as well as a nature from below that cannot always live due to the entrance of sin, although it could have before. Therefore, in the creation of humankind, there were two distinct acts of creation, whereas only one act sufficed for the creation of any other creature. The creation of angels is not explicitly mentioned, except perhaps in the phrase "Let there be light, and there was light." However, when it came to creating humankind, two distinct acts of creation occurred: "God made man from the dust of the earth." And then? "And breathed into him the Spirit

of life." Here, something unique is introduced that is absent in all of God's other creations. Now, upon dissolution, all the actions of this nature, as one person, must cease until the day of resurrection. It is a remarkable change that there will be no complete action of human nature until the resurrection. Only one part of this nature continues to function according to its own powers. One purpose of God's work in the grave is to sever all connection, relationship, and resemblance between our bodies and those of beasts. As our Saviour tells us in Luke 20, "Do not be mistaken. In the resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage. They will no longer engage in actions common to animals. Instead, they will be like angels." This is the great privilege of our nature, as the wise man declares in Ecclesiastes 3:19, where he responds to the objection of an epicurean: "What happens to humans also happens to animals; the same fate awaits them both. As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. They all go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return." "From what I can see, it is true," says the person. But what does the wise man say? "Who knows the spirit of humans that goes upward and the spirit of animals that goes downward to the earth?" "Alas! You are mistaken. The difference does not lie in this outward nature, where humans and animals share a close kinship. The difference lies in the spiritual, heavenly nature that originates from above. Unless you understand that, you will consider all beings to be no different from beasts." This, then, is the foundation of the unalterable reluctance in the mind and soul to part with the body—this peculiar constitution of our nature that has no likeness in all of God's creation, nothing to give us a point of reference except our own experience. And this dissolution only occurs once. It is noted that when ancient heroes, who were

willing to risk their lives and sacrifice themselves for great causes, came to die, when they either killed themselves or were killed by others, their souls departed with groaning and indignation. They did not know how to bear the dissolution of the union.

Therefore, my dear brethren, this is inherent in all of us. It is our initial desire when we realize that we cannot remain here—to be clothed with a new body. As the apostle says, "that mortality may be swallowed up by life," so that the body and soul together may enter immortality and glory. However, this is not the way of God. He desires us to be ready and willing to part with these bodies of ours, despite this union, or else we cannot die cheerfully and comfortably.

So, how can a person be ready and willing to lay down their mortal body in the dust? I will focus on two reasons, both provided by the same apostle:

(1.) The first reason is found in Philippians 1:23, where the apostle says, "I have a desire to depart and be with Christ." The word used for "desire" (ἐπιθυμίαν) signifies a strong inclination or craving. It is not a sporadic desire that arises only in times of trouble, sickness, or pain, but a constant and habitual inclination. But what is the desire for? It is to depart, to leave this physical body. The word is often translated as "dissolved," but its actual meaning is to have the contexture of our nature reduced to its distinct principles, to be analyzed. Here lies the challenge. As I mentioned before, the soul has an aversion to this dissolution, yet the apostle declares that he has a continuous and strong inclination towards it. Why? Pay attention to the answer: "To be with Christ." His inclination is not towards dissolution as an end in itself, but as a means to reach another end—being with Christ. That is the ultimate goal. Therefore, unless it is for

the purpose of enjoying Christ, no one willingly parts with their body or desires to be dissolved. Your bodies may be more valuable to you than the whole world, all your possessions, or anything else, but Christ is more valuable to the soul than anything else. Consequently, unless it is for the sake of being with Christ, no one truly desires to let go of their body. Cultivate a strong desire to be united with Christ, and you will overcome the unwillingness to face death.

(2.) The second reason is found in Romans 8:10: "The body is dead because of sin, yet the Spirit is life because of righteousness." The body is not only subject to death due to original sin, as death entered the world through sin, but the body must also die in order for sin to be rooted out of it. Sin has taken such a close and inseparable residence in the body that only the death of the body can bring about a separation. The body must die because of sin. A sincere soul may say, "God knows that I have attempted countless times to completely mortify every sin, and He has helped me in my efforts to ensure that it no longer reigns in me. At times, I believed I was close to achieving this, only to experience disappointment. I am now fully convinced that as long as I have this body, I will never be without sin. The body must die because of sin, otherwise, its fibers and roots will never be uprooted, its nature will never be extinguished, and it will never be entirely separated from it." Here lies the great mystery of the grave within the covenant of grace and through the death of Christ. What is it? Worms and corruption? No, it is God's refining pot, His means of purification. The only way to achieve an eternal separation between sin and the body is through its consumption in the grave. From the death of Christ, a secret virtue will flow into the body of a believer laid to rest, purifying it eternally at the time of resurrection, removing all traces of sin. I will refrain from discussing certain speculations concerning the state of souls after the body is consumed in the grave, as I do not wish to introduce any questionable matters.

Therefore, the second reason is that all other attempts to eradicate sin have failed and not produced the desired outcome. These attempts have led me to be ashamed of my own nature, its obstinacy, darkness, and unbelief. As a result, I am willing to part with my body. A person with this mindset will say, "This is what God calls me to. Therefore, mortal, sinful flesh, go—'Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.' I surrender you to the decree of the Holy One, whose mouth has spoken that you must return to the dust. It is there that He will refine and purify you. Despite this departure, 'my glory shall rejoice,' and you, 'my flesh, shall rest in hope.' For the time will come when He will take pleasure in the work of His hands, and He will call, and you shall answer Him from the dust" (Job 14:15). Do not be afraid to enter into darkness; there is no sting in death, and there is no darkness in the grave where you are going. It is simply a period of being in the hands of the great Refiner who will purge, purify, and restore you. Therefore, lie down in the dust in peace.

This completes the second requirement for those who wish to die with their eyes open, to die cheerfully and comfortably according to the will of God—to be willing to leave the body in God's hands, to be laid to rest in the dust. By doing so, one will come to see Christ and will experience an end to sin.

I will mention one more thing, and I'll keep it brief. It is the most important thing I want to impress upon my own soul, with God's help. And that is this:

III. Let us be cautious not to be caught off guard by death.

This is the particular wisdom that God calls us to embrace in these times. We do not know when death may come upon us. It may not follow the usual course of a prolonged illness that gives us warning, nor does it wait until we have reached the age of seventy, as the

psalmist says. We may be taken by surprise when we least expect it. Those who have not learned this lesson from observing God's dealings in the world and in our congregation will not believe it, even if someone were to come back from the dead and tell them. Therefore, let us firmly fix in our minds that regardless of our present state and condition—whether we are strong, young, and healthy, or old and feeble, nearing the end of our lives—we can still be taken by surprise. Therefore, be careful not to be caught off guard while in a negative state of mind. I hope none of you are unaware that believers experience various states of mind. Sometimes they are in a good state—grace is active and responsive, they are receptive to the Word and warnings, and take pleasure in holy thoughts. At other times, the world, temptations, or self-love intrude, and they become indifferent and lethargic, making it difficult to perform their duties with joy and spiritual vitality. Although they continue to fulfill their obligations, they lose the fervor they once had. I believe you can attest to this through your own experiences. Maintaining a lively, holy, and vibrant state of mind is not possible without diligently contemplating and consistently focusing on heavenly matters. Many will tell you that when they kept their minds fixed on heavenly things and their affections attached to them, everything went well for them. Every prayer, sermon, and duty was filled with life, pleasure, and joy. Their hearts were at peace. However, when they lost sight of spiritual matters, everything else remained the same, but a sense of lifelessness accompanied them. Therefore, our wisdom in this matter is to strive to keep this spiritual perspective of eternal things alive, continuously contemplating and cleaving to them in our affections. Otherwise, death will take us by surprise. Whenever it comes, we will be caught off guard. But if we maintain this mindset, what is the purpose of this messenger called death? Death is a messenger sent by God. It knocks at the door, but why? To perfect the frame of mind you are in so that you can have a clearer vision of heavenly things. It

has come to free you from the burden of lifelessness and darkness, and to grant you perfect freedom in the enjoyment of the things your soul clings to. How can your soul not welcome this messenger? Pray, therefore, that God will sustain your souls with fresh supplies of His Spirit, keeping you constantly focused on heavenly things. You must also pray for fresh oil to increase the light in your minds and understanding. Some can testify from experience that when they made it their priority, with all their strength and effort, to live in this frame of mind, they discovered that their own light began to fade. It was no longer as steadfast and unwavering towards heavenly things, nor did it affect their hearts as strongly as before. Their light ceased to work until fresh supplies from the Holy Spirit reinvigorated it and increased their ability to discern the beauty of spiritual and heavenly matters. To put it plainly, I speak to those who are facing their mortality without knowing when death may come. May God remind my own heart of this matter, that I should labor and watch so that death does not find me without a focus on spiritual things! If it does—if we are consumed by worldly matters and our eyes are fixed on the ground—if we are preoccupied with other things and death approaches, do you think it will be easy to gather our minds and affections to face it willingly? It will not be so. When David was in a good state of mind, he could say, "You have redeemed me, O LORD, God of truth. Into your hand I commit my spirit." He was willing to come and lay down his mortal body and embrace this messenger. But when David fell from his good state, experiencing spiritual decline in Psalm 39, he made a great complaint about it. Where is the readiness now of the righteous man? Where is his willingness to entrust his spirit into God's hand? "Spare me a little, that I may regain my strength," he says in verse 13. Not physical strength, but a better state of mind suitable for death. Even the best among us, if overtaken by death in such a state, will cry out, "Oh, spare me a little, that I may regain my strength." They will lament the entanglements brought

upon them by various temptations and distractions, by spiritual coldness and decline. "Oh Lord, spare me a little." There is mercy with God for those in this state. However, if it were up to me, I would rather say, "LORD, into your hands I commend my spirit, for you have redeemed me, O LORD, God of truth."

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