

## **We All Stand Condemned by the Law**

John Calvin

*But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.—Gal. 3:11-12*

We have seen that men must be worse than insane (whatever they say) if they do not come to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. For if they cling to the law, it will only bring damnation, as I have shown; this is borne out sufficiently by our own experience. Indeed, when Paul in his Epistle to the Romans seeks to prove that men are greatly deceived if they trust in their own merits, he points out that the law can only bring God's wrath and vengeance upon us (Rom. 4:15). For although we already stand condemned (even before God has opened his mouth in judgment against us), our evil is exposed by the law because it is written that if we transgress in just one area, we are God's enemies and have provoked his wrath against us. What can be gained by protesting when the sentence is given from the heavenly throne? There is no room for appeal. Thus, to have a proper understanding of the gospel, we must recognise that we need to lean entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ and his mercy alone as our only hope of salvation. We all need to examine our own lives, for if we do so honestly and without hypocrisy, our spiritual standing will be abundantly clear. The Papists will not agree that faith alone can render us acceptable to God. This is because they have never been willing to place themselves before the judgment seat of God, but, instead, prefer to dwell in the darkness, as it were. Therefore, it should not surprise us if they grant themselves complete liberty to do as they please. However, the way of true, pure religion is for each of us to scrutinise our own lives. Surely, even if we were carefully to examine just one minute of our lives, we would find ourselves worthy of eternal death. Indeed, each one of us would discover ourselves to be sinners, not in just one area but a hundred thousand; not due to some one fault but to countless millions. Now if even we ourselves acknowledge that we are full of so many blemishes, surely God is aware of many more than we could ever perceive, because he sees more deeply than we can, as John writes in his epistle (1 John 3:20). Thus, the case is settled. The verdict is that no one can be justified by the law; justification is through faith alone.

The apostle continues his discourse by adding another argument, which is this: if we seek our righteousness in the law, it will be clean contrary to the righteousness obtained by the elect children of God through faith. 'What is justification by the law?', Paul asks. He answers: 'The man that doeth them shall live in them.' In other words, whoever obeys God and keeps his commandments will have salvation as his reward. This is a wonderful promise, but what good will it do us? If we were to try to do perfectly all that God commands, we would find God revealing just what a grievous state of condemnation we are in, by bringing our failure to the forefront. What sort of salvation would it be, if each of us had to achieve it ourselves and deserve it? At first, when we hear that God is willing to reward with the gift of eternal life all who have honoured and served him by keeping his law, it seems like a wonderful prospect (that is, before we ponder its implications!). 'What!', we say, 'Here is God indebted to us, assuring us that we will inherit paradise if only we serve him and do his will.' But if we pause to place our lives alongside his commandments, we will find that although it appears that God is willing to be so kind and indulgent towards us as to reward us if we serve him and keep his law, the purpose of this is to plunge us deeper into the pit in which we already find ourselves by nature. What hope, therefore, can we have? The solution is set forth here by the apostle in the words of Habakkuk: 'The just shall live by faith' (Hab. 2:4). Let us, therefore, turn away from the promise which the law gives us, for it is of no value to us, and accept the free grace of our God, who is stretching out his arms to receive us, that is, if we first rid ourselves of all pride. This is, in effect, what Paul means here.

This argument discloses two opposites. Imagine this: one person claims that fire is a source of heat, and another arrives and rather obstinately argues the opposite. We might say to him, 'Can ice or frost create heat, then? Surely, they are opposite elements, and completely incompatible with one another!' Or imagine a quarrel about whether the heat of the sun is necessary to this life of ours or not. Well, what would happen if there were no sun in the world? We would all choke on filthy air, which is only purged by the shining of the sun. Therefore, as there are opposing forces in the realm of nature, so the apostle says that we cannot be justified by both the law and the grace of God! If we desire to be in his favour, it can only be through his own goodness and love for us, which he has revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and not through any dignity we possess in and of ourselves. But in order properly to understand this teaching, we need to pay careful attention to Paul's words here. He says that the righteousness of the law is achieved by observing whatever God has commanded us. This proves that keeping the law is quite sufficient to save us, for God has clearly declared, 'This is how you are to live. This is how you are to order your lives', and he has given us the ten commandments contained in the law. This law is an infallible rule for our lives, and we are not to seek for perfect righteousness anywhere else. This is why we are so opposed to the Papists, who think they are serving God so faithfully by devising their own commandments. God demands obedience. Let us be clear that the law contains the perfection of holiness in its teachings; it is not lawful to add anything to it. Man's struggle to introduce devotions which he has conceived in his own imagination is vanity.

However, the fact that the teachings of the law are sufficient to show us the nature of true righteousness, is not the end of the matter. We must move on to the next point, which is, 'Can we do what God has commanded?' We saw this morning that we fall very far short and, thus, the promise for all who keep the law is not applicable to us. The Papists are greatly deceived in this matter: they still hold to the lie that God has not commanded anything that we cannot accomplish ourselves. Yet, Paul says the very opposite. They claim in support of their error that God must, therefore, be cheating us, because he clearly says, 'The man that doeth them shall live in them.' But it is very easy to resolve this objection. Yes, we would, indeed, be most confused over the meaning of this verse, had not God granted us a remedy to this problem; otherwise, it would mean that no one could live! As I have said, it would seem, superficially, that we have everything to gain, because God tells us that we can be acceptable in his sight by keeping the law, and he promises us a crown of glory; in fact, it would seem that we just cannot lose! But when all is taken into account, we come back to this same conclusion: no man can obtain eternal life in this way, no matter how much he desires it. Why? Because no man observes the law perfectly. It is not written that 'The man who keeps part of the law will live', but all of it. What, then, is justification by the law? A perfect obedience to it which does not fall short in any way. Such obedience cannot be found on earth: it therefore follows that we are all excluded from the promise which is given in the law.

This, however, does not mean that God is cheating us. He makes such a promise because men deceive themselves through pride and boast of their own merits; he therefore wishes to convict us of our guilt and of our inability to fulfil his demands. What would become of us if there were no law, nor such a promise as this? Think of the heathen—they have always sought to be pleasing to God through their own virtuous conduct. Yet, at the same time, they have an awareness of their shortcomings. This is why they retain the use of sacrifices. Of course, they do not understand the true purpose of sacrifice; when the heathen sacrifice something, they confess that they are in debt to God and need to find acceptance with him. Much like the Papists today, they amass many little rituals in their service to help them find reconciliation with God. Pagans throughout the ages have observed the kind of practices that the Papists use today. Whatever they may say, both groups think they can make themselves worthy of God's salvation. Now, here the Lord is saying that we are wrong if we think he will not reward us, for out of his free goodness he promises to count us righteous if we observe his law. The question is: do we keep it? No; we fall very far short, in fact so short of it that we are made to feel desperate. God has good reason for making such a promise, even though it cannot be realised in our lives. Its intention is to correct the pride which fills us to the point of bursting, and which requires

a drastic remedy. And what is this remedy? Well, God knows that we begin to murmur if he does not treat us according to our desires, and therefore he is willing to pour out his grace and blessings upon us in this world, in this passing life. Furthermore, he says he is willing to reserve an immortal inheritance for us, upon condition that we serve him. If we submit to him and keep a good account with him, he says he will reward us both in this life and the next. In saying all these things, he intends that all flesh should remain silent before him, confessing that if God were to punish them, or send them many afflictions and trials, they would be well deserved. For those of us who have properly examined their lives will confess without hypocrisy that we are not even worthy to eat the bread that sustains our physical lives on this earth. How, then, could we possibly merit paradise and the glory that belongs to God alone? How could we reach this by our own virtues? Thus, men's boasting tongues are silenced, even through this most generous and bountiful promise of the Lord.

At this point, we ought to note that this same promise is free in and of itself, but that we fall so far short of its standards that it will do us no good whatsoever until we relinquish our claim upon it. This would seem rather unclear to us, if I did not expound it in more detail. The heathen, as I mentioned earlier, think that God will reward them if they live honest and blameless lives in the sight of men. But this is foolishness, even madness, for how could God possibly be indebted to us? (This is made clear in the seventeenth chapter of Luke—Luke 17:10.) Even if we could do better than the angels in heaven, would it mean that God would be bound to repay us? Not at all! For we belong to him; we are his possession. Our Lord Jesus Christ uses the picture of a servant; not speaking of a servant as we know it today, but, rather of a slave like the ones they used to have in those days. Even if a servant were killed a hundred times over for his master, as it were, living or dying, he is at his master's disposal. Our Lord Jesus Christ is saying to us, 'You are no more than poor mortal creatures yourselves, yet if any of you has a slave, he treats him like an ass or an ox. After working and labouring hard all day long, he returns home in the evening, but the master will not even let him sit down at his table! Even so, a servant has only done his duty and only that which he was hired to do.' Has God less authority than mortals? Even though you may be his, and are seeking to walk in obedience to his will, it can never be said that he is in any sense beholden to you. Thus (as I have already proved), although the Lord declared in the law, 'The man that doeth them shall live in them', it is important to consider what moved him to make such a bountiful promise of eternal life. It was not because he was indebted to us! If we kill ourselves, as it were, a hundred times in his service, this cannot make him obliged to pay us any wages whatever. But, in his mercy, he draws near and says, 'Although I owe you nothing, and although you can bring me nothing worthy of a reward (for you are bound to me in all points and in every respect), yet I desire to recompense you for your labour. Therefore, do your duty, do whatsoever I command and then you will not be disappointed but will receive your reward.' This is what we need to remember, and we will hear more of this shortly.

As for the Papists, they accept part of this, but not all. Most of them (I refer to those who are the Pope's closest allies) know nothing of these principles. Yet there are some who will grant that the divine promise of the law (to give life to all who have served God) does not teach that the works themselves have any merit in terms of eternal life, but only because of the promise. However, given that God has bound himself in this way, they nevertheless hope to deserve some reward at his hand. Why do they think in this way? Well, they say that, otherwise, his promise ('The man that doeth them shall live in them') was made in vain. However, these wretches do not understand what I have been expounding, namely, that God's promise does not mean that men can merit salvation by their own works, but was rather intended to convict their souls and to lead them to true humility. This they shun, through their own foolish pride and ambition.

Now we can see the purpose behind Paul's words—if we claim to be justified through the law or through our own works, we must not fail in the least duty or omit to do anything, however small. For it is written, 'The man that doeth them shall live in them'. Now, what man is so proud that he would dare boast he has fully discharged his duty towards God? None but a hypocrite who has been

overtaken by devilish pride, or a profane person who despises God and who has never truly repented, whose conscience is either asleep or bewitched. Only such a person can deceive himself into thinking he deserves anything. Thus, since the righteousness of the law is unattainable, and is something from which we are utterly barred, we need to find another righteousness. Put another way, we need God to accept us through his free grace. Instead of God receiving anything from us, we need the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ to be imputed to us, though we do not deserve it. Thus, we are delivered by God from our state of condemnation by nature through the abolition of all our offences and iniquities. In effect, this is what is meant in another passage, where Paul argues so admirably about this very doctrine (Rom. 3:19). In this place, too, the point at issue is the righteousness of the law. It is a wonder to me that the Papists have gone so far astray as to ignore such a clear warning as Paul makes in the latter text. They still protest thus: 'What!', they say, 'You are making a mockery of God! He has promised a reward for good works. Since he has promised on so many occasions to recompense us, how can he not carry it out? Otherwise, men might accuse him of lying.' But Paul answers them thus: 'My friends, if we think God will accept us because we deserve his favour, let us examine the promise he made us. If an argument breaks out between two men over buying or selling or some such thing, they will say, "Let us examine the contract and what is contained within it." As soon as the document has been read, the case will become plain. One of them will say, "This article belongs to you, upon condition that you pay for it. If you do not pay, you can lay no claim to it." In the same way, with reference to the way of salvation, we must come to the original and chief contract that God made with us. Now, that contract is the law. Therefore, if men are seeking to be paid according to their service, they will find that this will banish them from everlasting life rather than enable them to obtain it. For God has declared that they have to perform all that he has commanded them, before they can inherit the salvation he has in store.' All that remains is to find out whether or not it is possible for any man to perform these commandments perfectly.

Well, as we have already discovered, no one fulfils these requirements satisfactorily; thus, the promise cannot apply to us in our natural state. However, this is not what the Papists believe. They hear the words, 'The man that doeth them shall live in them' and think the most important thing is to observe the law. It is enough for them that God has given his Word to reward them. Whilst it is true that God has indeed said this, he requires that we actually fulfil his demands. The Papists will then use the following passage, where Paul says, 'For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified' (Rom. 2:13). They will use such quotations, but are clearly blind to their meaning, for Paul is saying that we can only be justified if we obey all that is commanded. The Jews used to glory in the law that had been given to them, saying, 'The law tells us that we are the people of God.' But there was a condition attached to this. And who has fulfilled that condition? Have you? Not in the least! Thus, we cannot be justified by hearing the law, as Paul says. How foolish if each of us simply came to church to hear the message that was being declared here, and then went away again, gratifying our own lusts. Paul says we must observe what God commands us, yet, since no one can do this properly, we all stand condemned.

The Papists, however, fail to reach the same conclusion because they only cling to half the text: 'But the doers of the law shall be justified.' Yes, this is so if a person has kept the law, but first show me such a man. In the same Epistle to the Romans, Paul later declares that God's promise of eternal life to all who keep his law is of no value to us because we can never perform it adequately (Rom. 8:3). In fact, by nature we are completely hostile to God's righteous standards. Now that he has regenerated us by his Holy Spirit, we are entirely indebted to him; every good thing we possess we have received from his hand, and he simply rewards his own gifts in us. Can we, therefore, speak of merit? No. Indeed, we must go further and say that even though our Lord deigns to crown our works when they are good in his sight, they can only be partly good, for there will always be enough sin mixed in with them to condemn us. Thus, we are stripped of all confidence in our own righteousness, because our works have insufficient worth in the eyes of God. If we were being judged by the text, 'The man that doeth them shall live in them', our works would be shown to be totally offensive to God. He would say,

as it were, 'You are all dead, damned and lost. Why? Because none of you have done the things I asked you to do, whereas it was your duty to do so.' This is why we need to consider the second aspect to the solution I mentioned, which is 'living by faith'.

Paul, in the passage I referred to earlier (Rom. 3:21-22), does not quote the words of Habakkuk as he does in Romans chapter one and the seventeenth verse. But he says that the law points to the righteousness which is by faith. The righteousness of the law (that is, the God-given rule in the law which justifies us) is that we must obey and observe all his commandments. But the righteousness of faith speaks another language. It says that it is not for man to seek to win God's favour through the way he lives his life, and thus earn his reward or crown; rather, it is for man to rest entirely upon God's Word, allowing it to dwell in his heart and upon his lips. For if we believe in our hearts that the Lord Jesus Christ has died, and confess with our lips that he has risen again, we shall be counted righteous in God's sight (Rom. 10:9). Notice that Paul explains his meaning at some length here for us to comprehend why he separates the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith, showing us that they are incompatible and can no more be mixed together than fire and water. Not that there is any contradiction between the law and the gospel (as I have already made clear), for we know that they both proceed from the same God. But we must remember God's purposes, as we have said all along. By giving us the righteousness of the law, he intended to humble us. Next, we will come before him realising we are condemned; this we would never have done if he had not revealed to us our own poverty. When we read that God promises justification if we serve him aright, he is saying in effect, 'Poor creatures, what worth or value do you have in and of yourselves? Weigh up my commandments and consider what they involve, and then reflect upon how each of you have lived. This will make you feel as if you could drown in self-despair.' Yet, though God speaks in this vein, he also grants a remedy —'Come', he says, 'to the teachings of the gospel'. And what are they? Paul quotes the expression of Habakkuk, from chapter two and the fourth verse: 'The just shall live by his faith'. And in this passage he explains it more clearly, as we have seen, stating that we need to resort wholly to the Lord Jesus Christ. For the 'Word' that should be in our hearts and upon our lips, bringing us to God, and opening the kingdom of heaven to us, is not a Word that makes us cleave to this world below. Nor does it lead us to believe that God will praise us for our merits, allowing us to be puffed up with pride. Not at all; rather, it makes us cling to the Lord Jesus Christ. The righteousness of faith that God grants us involves the following: understanding that our sins are blotted out through the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ; understanding also that through his resurrection we have obtained righteousness, and are now heirs of his heavenly kingdom (whereas before we were condemned to the pit of hell, which is the heritage that belongs to us and of which we are worthy by nature). We must also realise that in Jesus Christ, all that we lost in Adam is restored to us. The curse which covered us is removed when God sets us free. This is the righteousness of faith, and indeed, when we examine the context of the verse Paul quotes from the prophet Habakkuk, we will see that it is to this very doctrine that the Holy Spirit is pointing.

Now, the prophet had spoken about the chastisements and judgments that God would send on the people; therefore, having examined the situation, we might well have concluded that all was lost. Then he says that the pride of the wicked will swell and increase, but that their feet are in a slippery place and they will stumble in the way. The more they seek to exalt themselves, the more grievous will be their fall. This is what the prophet pronounces upon the wicked. On the other hand, he says of the just that they shall 'live by faith'. Notice he says that the just shall live, implying that God's children will not find life here below. Even if they were to travel all over the world, and search high and low, they would soon realise that there is death and decay everywhere and in everything. However, though they do not enjoy this 'life' at the present time, they look forward to a life to come, and cherish it in their hearts and minds by faith. The prophet is seeking to draw the minds of God's elect away from both the world and themselves, so that they may cleave entirely to God, finding his grace alone sufficient for their salvation. Yet, Paul puts the case more briefly in our passage, because he was fully persuaded of the things I have expounded, and had already written of them—he always taught that

faith leads us to find salvation in God alone. The law, though it may appear to be teaching something very different, actually shows us that there is no life in us at all, if we understand it aright. The law says, 'Work hard and do what you can to obtain paradise.' Why does it say this? Not to feed man's vain confidence in his own merits—certainly not! Rather, to prepare us to receive the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in humility. For (as I have said), although we are far away from God, we all like to think we are worthy of his acceptance. But our Lord will be avenged on such presumptuousness. He says to us, 'Let me see what you have done, draw near and we will begin the reckoning. Whichever of us owes anything to the other will have to pay it. I will not disappoint you; I have the reward in my hand. It is all ready. If you have done what I have commanded you, do not worry, you will be well paid for your labour. Therefore, set to work and let me observe how you will serve me.' In saying this, our Lord, as I have said, prepares and disposes us to know what we are by nature. When we have acknowledged our poverty, then we will come to him to supply what we lack. Thus, the law leads to faith, albeit by a surprising route!

Whatever we may think, there will always be the paradox of which Paul speaks here. That is to say, that a person cannot be justified by faith unless he has first recognised and acknowledged in complete sincerity that he is lost. For salvation must be based upon the knowledge that we deserve damnation. It might seem as if Paul has taken the prophet's words too far, if Habakkuk was simply speaking of the afflictions of this transitory life. The just 'shall live' could mean 'shall survive', even though God may afflict and torment him. He will not fall if he rests upon the promises of God. Paul, however, is not dealing with the question of God comforting us and delivering us from the calamities to which we are subject in this world; he is concerned with the question of our eternal salvation, which is of far greater importance than anything else in this fleeting life. It might appear, therefore, as if he has misapplied the words of the prophet. But let us remember that the words themselves would have been uttered in vain if the thoughts of the prophet had gone no further than this world, for afflictions come upon all, upon good and bad alike. How, then, can we speak of living by faith, if we are constantly falling into the same trials that God has already delivered us from once, twice or three times before? If God has comforted me today in some affliction or other, and shown me his grace, tomorrow he may afflict me with another trial. What would my life be like if I had but this world alone to trust in? Therefore, to sum up, the prophet was saying that although believers may be miserable and may languish in this life, nevertheless, God blesses them in this world, and, furthermore, all the evil they endure here below shall turn to felicity. Why? Because they trust in their God. We ought to be aware, therefore, that there is a better inheritance than this, and we need to seek true, everlasting happiness—the kind that endures.

We must be careful to comment on the word 'just' here. For if Habakkuk had said, 'Wretched sinners shall live by faith', we would perhaps have imagined that his words were addressed to just a handful of people. Most will freely accept that poor sinners need to flee to God for refuge, but as for those of nobler virtues, surely they are exempt from what applies to the common people, God having exalted them to a higher degree? Surely it is their prerogative to be justified? Even today, though the Popish clergy (as they call them), with all their ceremonies, are filthy in God's sight, and ought to be abhorred by both God and man, yet they presume, because of their monkish habit and all the rest of their nonsense, that God is greatly in their debt! These bigots, having done all their babbling, and trotting up and down from altar to altar, and from chapel to chapel on various pilgrimages, hope that God will remember all their works. They hope that all of this will be put towards the payment of their account, with a hundred thousand other things that they plan to present to God! This is why the Lord Jesus Christ said that poor wretched sinners, even harlots, would enter the kingdom of heaven sooner than all these foul toads who are puffed up with pride in their own merits (Matt. 21:31)! Although their lives are full of wicked abominations, yet in their hypocrisy they suppose that God is bound to reward them.

Now, to eliminate all opportunity of entertaining such thoughts, the prophet expressly says,

'The just shall live by his faith.' At first, the meaning of this verse might be obscure to us. Does it mean that in order to have righteousness we must first live by faith? If this is the case, those who do not live by faith cannot be righteous. But what is the justification spoken of in the gospel? It is this—God freely granting us the means by which we may have access to him. We can be acceptable to him in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, for we cannot obtain righteousness through the law. Thus, although a man may live by faith, he is not righteous in and of himself. The prophet, therefore, means that the just are saved by the free grace of God alone. It is as if he were saying, 'Perhaps God will grant you grace to serve him acceptably, impressing upon your heart by his Holy Spirit true fear and a zeal to glorify him as he deserves. He may well enable you to struggle against the lusts of the flesh to a great extent, striving with the sin which is part of your nature. Yet for all this, you must still turn your back upon all that you have done if you are seeking to please God.' Indeed, we must rest upon the Lord Jesus Christ alone. If even those who are righteous can only be justified through faith, who is there who will dare to seek to be justified through merit? Only devils, wicked men and the enemies of God.

Thus, when the Papists boast today (as they do) about the purity of their works and meritorious deeds, they only prove that they do not know the meaning of true righteousness. They are flying in the face of both God and nature. They say they want to be righteous— what do they mean? They mean in themselves, through works of merit. But what does the prophet say? He does not say that the just shall live by their works, but that they will be saved by the grace of God alone. If the just renounce, as they ought, all trust in their own merit, it follows that those who think they can come before God in the strength of their own deeds and that he will be bound to reward them, are striking themselves off the register of the righteous. Thus, according to the statement uttered here by the prophet, the Papists are rejected by God if they continue in their errors. Paul quotes the words of David: 'Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.' He teaches us that the righteous are those who condemn themselves, feeling in the very depths of despair, until God, in his goodness, rescues them (Rom. 4:8; Psa. 32:1ff). When David said, 'Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin', he was not, at this stage of his life, a wicked or dissolute man, nor one who despised God or who had never examined his conscience to expose his sin! On the contrary, God had chosen him; he had anointed him through Samuel; he had made him one of the foremost prophets. His kingdom prefigured that of the Lord Jesus Christ. In short, God had so transformed him that he was now like an angel living amongst men. Yet, he confessed and acknowledged his sins, sorrowing and mourning over them, and was in a state of torment like that of hell itself. He remained thus tortured until God came and displayed his mercy, knowing no joy or peace until God granted him forgiveness. We, too, can only be happy if God overlooks all our deeds and blots out all our sins. This joy is ours if God is gracious to us, no longer considering what we are by nature—poor, condemned sinners—and accepting us, not as we are in our own persons, but for the sake of his only Son. Indeed, David reiterates this teaching in another place (Psa. 143:2): 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.'

Let us, therefore, learn the following lesson: the more a man fears God, the more he will be ashamed of his sin. Consciousness of sin is not something that should last for a mere three or four months—we ought to detest our sins for the rest of our lives. After all, let us remember that the mouth of hell is open, ready to swallow us up unless God supplies the grace we need so desperately and plucks us out of the pit of death. This is why it is written that 'the just shall live by faith'—not as a doctrine that applies for three or four months only; nor is it written for those whose lives are less holy than others. God addresses these words even to the very noblest amongst us.

Now before we end, we need to comment upon the word 'live'. It does not refer to a fixed length of time, say a day or three months. It speaks, instead, of a life lived by God's grace every moment, in which we seek his presence and grace day by day to the end of our earthly lives. Although our lives are hidden in this world, as Paul says (Col. 3:3), and we see nothing but death in front of us, we need to rest entirely upon the promise of God. He has assured us of eternal life and this life is his to give—he

will reserve it for us! He has pledged it to us by sending the Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for our sakes. Now we no longer need ask, 'Who will go up for us to heaven?'. Or, 'Who will descend into the depths?' Or, 'Who will go over the sea for us?'. 'The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart' (Deut. 30:12; Rom. 10:6-8). We know that our Lord Jesus Christ descended into the deep; that is, he became a curse for us (as we shall see, God willing, in the next sermon—let this suffice us for now). Also he ascended into heaven and opened the door for us, since he entered on our behalf. Let us find great assurance in these truths and allow ourselves to be like poor, dead men in this world while we await the revelation of the life which has been promised us. There is no doubt but that God will reveal and manifest it to us in his time, and we will fully rejoice in that 'life' which his holy gospel has so long proclaimed.

Now let us fall before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and praying that he would make us increasingly conscious of them. May we be so affected by them that we cast ourselves down before him, trembling and groaning under the burden of the weaknesses and sins which beset us, until he has fully purged us. Let us also pray that, during this mortal life, he would bear us up until he has utterly delivered us from slavery to sin and bondage to Satan; until, I say, he has granted us complete liberty. May he not only grant this grace to us, but to all peoples, etc.

---

*Marked up by Lance George Marshall*