

Monergism



*Dying Daily*

EXPOSITIONS ON HOW TO DIE WELL

**JOHN OWEN**

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## **THE CHRISTIAN'S WORK OF DYING DAILY I**

"I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily." 1 COR. 15:31.

THESE words have a great vehemency and emphasis in them, and discover an uncommon earnestness upon the spirit of the apostle when he wrote them; and indeed they carry a greater appearance of such a vehemency in the original than in our translation. For the words we put in the last place, "I die daily," are the first in the original: Καθ' ἡμέραν ἀποθνῆσκω, "I die daily;" Νῆ τὴν ὑμετέραν καύχησιν, ἣν ἔχω ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ Κυρίῳ ἡμῶν,—"Yea, I do so by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord." And there is

no expression used by the apostle that hath a greater ardour of spirit in it than this hath.

The special reason of using it in this place is, to evidence the stability of his faith about the resurrection of the dead. That, you know, is the dispute he is upon. And he proves here that it was not an opinion that he had; but a firm-rooted faith, that carried him through all difficulties and sufferings. "Why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." "I do evidence my faith," saith he, "of the resurrection, by my readiness to suffer all things in the confirmation of the truth of it." And it is the great duty of ministers to be ready at all times to evidence the stability of their own faith in the things which they preach to others, by a cheerful suffering for them.

There are two things in the words: An assertion; and the confirmation of it. The assertion is this, "I die daily." The confirmation of it, "I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord."

There are two or three difficulties in these words. I shall very little trouble you with conjectures, but give you what I think the sense of the Holy Ghost in them.

The one is from the ambiguous signification of the word καύχησις, which we render here "rejoicing." But in other places it is rendered sometimes by "confidence," sometimes by "boasting," and sometimes by "glorying." "Gloriation" is the word I would use, if our language would bear it. "And your gloriation;"—which is an exultation of joy.

There is another difficulty, in the transposition of the words, such as are not in the Scripture again. "I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus." This hath afforded variety of conjectures unto

many; but plainly the sense of it is this, "By the rejoicing which you and I have in the Lord." And I could give instances of the like trajections in the Greek tongue, from one person to another, if it were to your edification.

There is yet a third difficulty. The particle  $\nu\eta$  here is a note of an oath, or swearing; as much as  $\aleph$  in the Hebrew tongue; or in our language, "by;" yet sometimes it is used as a note of strong asseveration. And we have chosen to express it by a middle word, "I protest." If it be a note of an oath, then the word is used to denote the object, "I swear by your rejoicing in the Lord;" that is, "by the Lord in whom you rejoice." As it is said expressly, "Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac;" that is, "by Him whom his father Isaac feared." But I rather take it here as a note only of vehement asseveration; and so, says he, "It is as true as that you and I do glory in Christ, and rejoice in him, I die daily."

It may have a double sense, "I am every day, by reason of preaching the gospel, exposed to dangers and death." For he doth speak both before and after of the dangers he underwent in the work of preaching the gospel. "I die daily;" or, " 'I die daily,' by continually preparing myself to die; I am always in a preparation to die; through the faith of the resurrection, I am always prepared to die cheerfully and comfortably, according to the will of God." And this is the sense I shall fix upon. And it being in a necessary duty, I may raise a general rule from a special instance, in this example of the apostle.

Observation. It is the duty of all believers to be preparing themselves every day to die cheerfully, comfortably, and, if it may be, triumphing in the Lord.

Observe only this, that there may be a dying safely, where there is not a dying cheerfully and comfortably. Every believer, whoever he be, shall die safely; but we see many believers do not die cheerfully and comfortably. I do not speak of the first, how all persons may come to

die safely; but of the latter, how believers may die comfortably and cheerfully.

And there are two ways of dying cheerfully and comfortably:—

1. The one is in outward expressions, to the comfort of them that are about us. This depends much on the nature of the distemper whereof men may die, which may oppress the animal spirits, and cloud the mind; and therefore it falls not under rule, but is left to the providence of God.

2. But there is also a dying cheerfully and comfortably in persons' own souls; which, it may be, in their dying moments they cannot manifest, when they are thoroughly prepared for it.

Truly, brethren, all I can say is, that I am speaking to you of the things which I have considered on my own account, before ever I thought of considering them upon yours; and I cannot declare unto you what I have attained, which may be little or nothing; but only what I have aimed at, if it may be of use to us in this dying time, especially among good ministers, one or another [dying] almost every day.

I shall mention three things that, in my judgment, are requisite unto every believer who would die cheerfully, and come in a fit and full season into the presence of God:—

I. The constant exercise of faith, as to the resignation of a departing soul into the hand and sovereign will of God. "I die daily." How? Exercising faith constantly, in the resignation of a departing soul, when the time comes, unto the sovereign grace, good pleasure, power, and faithfulness of God. The soul is now taking its leave of all its concerns in this world; all that it sees, all that it knows by its senses, all its relations, everything it hath been acquainted withal, to have an eternal, absolute unconcern in them. It is entering into an invisible world, whereof it knows nothing but what it hath by faith. When Paul was taken up into the third heaven, 2 Cor. 12:2, we

should have been glad to have heard some tidings from the invisible world how things were there. He saw nothing; only he heard words. Why, blessed Paul, may we not hear those words? No; "They are not lawful to be uttered," saith he. God will not have us know any thing in the invisible world but what is revealed in the word, while we are here. Therefore the souls of them departed, who have died and lived again, as the soul of Lazarus, I doubt not but God supported in their being, but restrained all their operations. For 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 will keep those things to be objects of faith. Lazarus could tell nothing of what was done in heaven; his soul was kept in its being, but all its operations were restrained. I bless God I have peculiarly exercised my thoughts, according to the conduct of the word, about the invisible world; whereof, in due time, you may hear something: but in the meantime, I know we have no notion of it but what is by pure revelation.

Whither now is the soul going? what will be the issue within a few moments? Is it annihilated? doth death not only separate the body and soul, but destroy our being, so that we shall be no more to eternity? So some would have it; for it is their interest it should be so. Is the soul going into a state of wandering in the air, under the influence of more powerful spirits?—which was the opinion of the old pagan world, as that which caused appearances of the dead so frequently upon the earth.

And this persuasion was taken into purgatory by the Papists; from whence they concluded that there were great appearances of them that were departed continually. And you have a thousand stories of them, which we know to be all the actings and deceits of evil spirits. And such is our darkness as to the invisible world, that the greatest part of Christians have feigned a third state, that is not in it, but the fruit of superstition and idolatry. For this is superstition, to invent things in religion suited to men's natural affections, or to gratify their lusts for their own profit; both which were designed in this case. For when persons thought the souls of men that were gone into an

eternal condition were lost, and that for ever,—“No, there is another venture for them,” say they; and so they pacified them, that if they were the worst of men, yet there might be hope for them after death. Nor has it a less tendency to gratify men in their lusts, and encourage them to live at their pleasure. And the whole of this they turn to their own profit who invented it. This by the way,—only to manifest the darkness that mankind is in as to this invisible world. To proceed, therefore:—

Doth the soul go into a state wherein it is capable of no joy, no consolation? Brethren, let men pretend what they will, he that never received any joy or consolation in this world but by his senses, or his reason exercised about the objects of his senses, doth not know, nor can believe, the soul itself should be capable of any consolation in another world. He alone who hath received immediately into his soul spiritual comfort in this world, can believe that his soul is capable of it in another. But, however, this is certain, no man can undertake any thing about the conduct of his soul in another world.

What is your way, then, in this state and condition? what is your wisdom? Truly, to resign this departing soul unto the sovereign wisdom, pleasure, faithfulness, and power of God (which is the duty we have in hand), by the continual exercise of faith. So the apostle tells us, 2 Tim. 1:12. “For I know,” saith he, “whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” It is a mighty thing to keep a separate soul to the day of the resurrection. Why, saith the apostle, “I know whom I have trusted with it; I trust it with almighty power.” The Lord help us to believe that there shall be an act of almighty power put forth in the behalf of these poor souls of ours, when departed into the invisible world, to keep them to that day when body and soul shall be united, and come to enjoy God.

We have a glorious example for this duty and exercise of faith. Our Lord Jesus Christ died in the exercise of it. It was the last act of faith Christ put forth in this world, Luke 23:46, “When Jesus had cried



with a loud voice" (this was the voice of nature, but now he comes to the words of faith), "he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (my departing soul): "and having said thus, he gave up the ghost." Here was the last exercise of the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ in this world,—the committing of his departing soul into the hands of God. And to what end did he do it? We are told, Ps. 16:8–11, "I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." These are the words of David, which our Lord Jesus Christ made use of himself, when he said, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." And the psalmist adds, "Thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth," Ps. 31:5. An experience of the work of redemption, communicated to us by the truth of the promise, is the greatest encouragement to commend a departing soul into the hands of God.

This, to me now (considering the vanishing of all these shadows and appearances, and the eternal dissolution of all relation to things below, and the subsisting of a soul in a separate condition, which we are not acquainted withal), is one of the first things we have to consider, if we will die cheerfully and comfortably,—namely, how we can resign a departing soul into the hand and sovereign disposal of God.

It is both a great and eminent act of faith, and is the last victorious act of faith, so to do:—

1. It is a great and eminent act of faith. [See] Heb. 11, where the mighty efficacy and great success of faith is spoken of. One of the particulars, and that wherein many of the rest did centre, is, "These all died in faith." It was a great thing to die in faith under the Old Testament, when they were encompassed with so many shadows, and so much darkness, and when their view into things invisible,

within the veil, was exceeding much beneath what God hath communicated unto us. Nay, the state of things within the veil was not the same then as now; there was not Christ upon the throne, administering his office. Notwithstanding, faith carried them through all this darkness, and caused them to make a believing venture of their souls upon God, his faithfulness, mercy, and grace.

When it comes to this consideration, it lays all things in the balance:—in the one scale, our being, our walking, and life in this world; our sins, and their guilt; our fears, uncertainties, and darkness of a future state; our abhorrence of a dissolution, the consideration of all things that are round about us;—in the other, the power, faithfulness, and mercy of God, and his ability to receive, preserve, and keep us to that day, and to be better to us than all these things. "Here shall be my portion," saith faith; "all things in the other scale are of no value, of no weight to this exceeding weight of power and goodness of God." This is a glorious exercise of faith! Have you tried it, my brethren? Lay things on the one side and the other in the balance, and see which way the scale will draw,—what faith will do in such a case.

2. It is the last victorious act of faith, wherein it hath its final conquest over all its adversaries. Faith is the leading grace in all our spiritual warfare and conflict; but all along while we live, it hath faithful company that adheres to it, and helps it. Love works, and hope works, and all other graces,—self-denial, readiness to the cross,—they all work and help faith. But when we come to die, faith is left alone. Now, try what faith will do. The exercise of other graces ceases; only faith comes to a close conflict with its last adversary, wherein the whole is to be tried. And, by this one act of resigning all into the hand of God, faith triumphs over death, and cries, "'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' Come, give me an inlet into immortality and glory; the everlasting hand of God is ready to receive me!" This is the victory whereby we overcome all our spiritual enemies.

I thought to have made some use of what hath been said; to examine whether we do live in the exercise of this grace or no, and what benefit we have thereby: and I should have touched especially upon this one thing,—this alone will keep us from all surprisal of death. Not to be surprised with any thing is the substance of human wisdom; not to be surprised with death is a great part of the substance of our spiritual wisdom.

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## **THE CHRISTIAN'S WORK OF DYING DAILY II**

### SERMON XXVIII

I MADE an entrance upon this portion of Scripture the last Lord's day, and I judged the subject very suitable, because of the warnings God hath variously given us to be exercising ourselves unto this duty. God hath since increased the seasonableness, by taking away a great and eminent servant of his from among us; concerning whom I will say this one word, and no more:—

As far as I know by thirty years' acquaintance and friendship, and half that time in church-fellowship, it may be the age wherein he lived did not produce many more wise, more holy, more useful than he in his station, if any. And so I leave him at rest with God.

I proposed to insist upon those things which are necessary for us, to obtain a peaceable and comfortable departure out of this world. And I have spoken to one head; which was, the daily exercise of faith, in the resignation of a departing soul, to the sovereign power and will of God, to be treated and entertained by him according to the tenor of the covenant of grace.

I will not leave this point till I have made some use of it. And I shall take no other measure of my time but the strength God is pleased to give me.

Use 1. It may be worth our while to inquire into the especial nature of this duty which we are exhorted unto; for we may every day more and more understand the weakness of many, who think, it may be, they know something of it, when they know not what it means. We may, therefore, consider three things in it:—(1.) What is the special and immediate object of this exercise of faith; (2.) What is the form or special nature of it; and, (3.) What is the way and manner of its performance.

(1.) As to the especial and immediate object of this exercise of faith, and which must take with it a special motive,—that, I say, is God, under the consideration of his sovereignty, power, and faithfulness; and this upon the motive of some experience of his kindness and grace. So speaks the psalmist, Ps. 31:5, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit." What was it that gave him confidence so to do? "Thou hast redeemed me," saith he, "O LORD God of truth." A sense of redeeming grace, conveyed by the truth of the promises, is required in all that would commit their spirits into the hand of God. And therefore, brethren, when you come to the exercise of this great duty, you must lay this foundation in some sense and experience of the grace and kindness of God, or you can never perform it in a due manner. And,—

[1.] Upon this motive, the first thing we consider in God, in the resignation of our souls to him, is his sovereignty. It is mentioned in two places in the Psalms, in both which this duty is proposed unto us. Ps. 16:1, 2, "Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust. O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD" (thou hast said unto Jehovah), "Thou art my Lord." He doth not use the word יהוה again,—but אֲדֹנָי, "Thou art my Lord," (הַאֲדֹנָי) "who hast the sovereign disposal of me. I am going to give up my spirit to thee; and I do it upon the consideration of thy sovereignty, that 'thou art my Lord.' "

So Ps. 31:14, 15, "I trusted in thee, O LORD." Why so? "I said, Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand."—"It is because of thy sovereignty. 'Thou art my God,' who hast the sovereign disposal of me; therefore I commit myself to thee." It follows those words, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Faith regards the glorious sovereignty of God, as the absolute free disposer of all things here, and unto eternity, without any reserve but his own pleasure, when it makes this resignation of the soul unto him.

[2.] It hath a peculiar respect unto the power of God, 2 Tim. 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 persons to go through it in a customary manner. Die they must; but there is nothing can encourage them to yield up their souls to God, but an apprehension of such an infinite power that is able to preserve them in eternal being in the invisible world, especially to the day of the resurrection.

[3.] It respects the faithfulness of God, as one who hath promised that he will take care of us when we are gone out of this world, 1 Pet. 4:19, "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;" that is, as a God who is omnipotent, who made all things, and is faithful in the accomplishing of his promises.

So, then, this duty I exhort unto is an immediate address unto God, an exercise of faith upon him, with special respect unto his sovereignty, power, and faithfulness, upon an experience we have, in some measure, of his goodness and grace.

The seat before my eyes is very much changed in a short time, and I know not, brethren, how soon it may be the lot of any of you to stand in need of understanding this thing and bringing it into practice. You may, if you please, remember it, for it is of great importance to have immediate converse with God with respect unto those great and

awful attributes of his sovereignty, power, and faithfulness. That is the first thing.

(2.) As to the special form of this duty, there are two words wherein it is expressed, and both of the same import: for in one place it is rendered, "commending;" in another, "committing," Luke 23:46, and Ps. 31:5. But it is a re-commending or committing, as men commit a trust. If a man lay a-dying, and had an only child, and an estate to leave him, with what solemnity would he commit him to the trust of his friend, to take care of him! "I commit this poor child, who is helpless and fatherless,—I commit him to your trust," saith he? "to your love, care, and power, to look after him." He doth it with great solemnity. The psalmist calls his soul his "darling," and "only one:" "Deliver 'my darling' from the dog, and 'my only one.' " And now when a person is about to leave this world, he is to commit his soul, and leave it in trust somewhere. Then this exercise of faith is a leaving in trust or committing our "darling," our "only one," that is departing out of this tabernacle, unto God, under the consideration of his sovereignty, power, and faithfulness. I do not yet speak unto the life of this duty; which consists in committing the trust of our souls unto God, to be dealt withal, not according to our choice, but according to the terms of the covenant of grace, let it fall where it will, to all eternity: that is the solemn committing.

(3.) As to the manner of it, it ought to be done expressly in words that we should say to God. I do not give instructions to them who are dying, but to them that live, that they may be prepared to die. We should say to God, "Lord, I have been thus long in this world; I have seen much variety in the outward dispensation of things in the world, but a thousand times more in the inward frame of my spirit; and I am now leaving the world upon thy call: I am to be here no more. O Lord, after all, being to enter into a new, eternal state, I commit my soul unto thee,—I leave it with thee,—I put all my trust and confidence in thy faithfulness, power, and sovereignty, to be dealt withal according to the terms of the covenant of grace. Now I can lie down in peace."

Use 2. What benefit shall we receive hereby, if we do thus exercise our souls? I answer, We shall receive these advantages:—

(1.) I know nothing that is more meet to keep our souls in a constant reverence of God; which is the very life and soul of holiness and obedience. And the best profession, where this is not, is of no value. Now, nothing is more suited to this than an immediate access unto God every day (frequently at least), under the consideration of his glorious sovereignty, power, and faithfulness, as if you were immediately going into his presence, and into his hands. The more you abound in it, the greater will your reverence of God be. We have deceitful hearts, and a very crafty adversary to deal withal. We are commanded to draw nigh, and to have our access unto God with boldness, Heb. 10;—to "come boldly to the throne of grace," Heb. 4:16. And we should do it frequently. Now, nothing in this world is so suited to take off reverence, as boldness and frequency. Where men make bold, and where they [are] frequent,—as in a multitude of duties many are bold and frequent,—it works off the reverence of God. That is carnal boldness. But the more frequently you make your accesses unto God with spiritual boldness, the more will your hearts be filled with a reverence of God continually. And the more frequently you make your approaches unto God in outward duties without this holy and humble reverence, whatever your gifts be, reverence of God will decay. What poor, slight, withering things, have I seen some men grow to be, under a fair outward conversation, and multiplication of duties! And you may take this measure with you in all your duties;—if they increase a reverence of God, they are from grace; if they do not, they are from gifts, and no way sanctify the soul wherein they are.

(2.) It will support us under all our sufferings. The soul that is accustomed to this exercise of faith, will not be greatly moved in any of its sufferings. The Lord knows we are all moved and shaken,—and ready to be so, sometimes, very unhandsomely and unduly,—as the leaves of the forest; but it will keep us from being greatly moved. "I shall not be greatly moved," saith the psalmist. And elsewhere it is

enjoined, "Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to God, as unto a faithful Creator." This will support you under all your sufferings. It is the very case and state in Ps. 31, from whence I have taken my principal testimony: "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," etc. "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 doth he then take in all these distresses, sufferings, and persecutions? Why, saith he, "I said, Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand." He makes a resignation of himself to the sovereignty of God, and so was at peace.

I have showed you now how you may exercise this duty; and I do reckon myself to be near my account, and speak as one that is sensible of it. Would I could prevail with you to bring it more or less into actual exercise, before you give rest to your eyes, or slumber to your eyelids!

Use 3. In the next place, who are they that do or can perform this duty as they ought, to live in this exercise of faith?

I am certain that they do not do so who live as if they were to live here for ever. But this is an evident proof of that distemper and confusion which is come upon the mind and soul of man. Truly, if a man of sobriety and reputation did come to such kind of men, who live in their sensuality and wickedness, as the world is full of them, and tell them, "Sirs! what do you do? I am persuaded that there is a death to come, and an eternal state of blessedness or woe near approaching: the way wherein you are will certainly engulf you in eternal destruction;"—they would say to him, "This is your opinion." Yet one would think a wise man should prevail with them to do something according to his opinion. But it is not so. They have convictions in their minds they must die; they will not only say it is



mine or your opinion, but they themselves are convinced of a future state, and profess it. But will they do any thing from an influence of this conviction? Nothing at all; no more than if they were brute beasts. These are not able to come to the exercise of their duty.

Nor those who walk at all peradventure. They know they must die; but they are apt to think they have other things to do before they die, and it will be time enough hereafter, at one season or another, to be preparing to die. The apostle did "die daily" indeed; but they have something else to do. When death knocks at their neighbour's door, and they hear such a one is dead, and it comes to their own families, and takes away this or that person, then they have some thoughts for a little while; but they quickly wear off, and they return to their common frame of spirit again. " 'Yet a little more slumber, a little more sleep, a little more folding of the hands to sleep;'—a little more secure converse in the world, attending unto our affairs." But death will come as an armed man, and they shall not be able to escape.

There are, therefore, two things required of every one that would be found in the exercise of this duty:—

(1.) That he lay the foundation of it in some comfortable persuasion of an interest in Christ; which alone will enable him to die safely: and having obtained that, he may labour after that which will enable him to die comfortably and cheerfully. Some men die safely; but, upon many considerations not now to be mentioned, they do not appear to die comfortably. And some men die very comfortably, to all outward appearance, that do not die safely. This, therefore, is necessary, that there be this foundation laid,—some comfortable persuasion of our interest in Christ, that we may die safely; or else it is to no purpose to expect to die comfortably.

(2.) Many think a few words at last will do it, and there is an end; but let me assure you, not only upon principles of Scripture truth, but of nature, there is no man can do it that hath not a view into the glory of spiritual and eternal things, outbalancing all his soul parts withal in

this world. I hear men willing to die, and I find others do; but it is to go contrary to the principles of nature. No man under heaven (it implies a contradiction) can part with that which appears good to him, unless it be upon motives of a greater good. He must part with it; but he cannot willingly and cheerfully part with it. If you would be thus able willingly and cheerfully to resign a departing soul unto God, labour to have a view of those better things which are infinitely more great and glorious, which your souls shall come to the enjoyment of upon this departure.

The calls of God are great upon us, both public and private, and special to this congregation. God expects a special compliance with his calls from us; or else we shall yet be exercised with farther tokens of his displeasure.

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## **THE CHRISTIAN'S WORK OF DYING DAILY III**

### **SERMON XXIX**

THAT which I have been treating upon from these words is, to declare the ways and duties whereby a believer may come to die, not only safely, which all believers shall, but also cheerfully and comfortably,—so as to have a free and abundant entrance into the kingdom of God in glory.

I have spoken but to one thing; which is, the exercise of faith in the resignation of a departing soul entering into the invisible world into the sovereign hand and pleasure of God, to be disposed of according to the tenor of the everlasting covenant.

There are two things yet remaining necessary to the same end,—at least I find them so; which, if God will, I shall despatch at this time.

II. There is required, unto this great end, a readiness and willingness to part with this body which we carry about us, and to lay it down in the dust. The soul's natural aversation to let go this body, is that which we call an unwillingness to die; that hath made some say, like him of old, "Mori nolo," etc.,—"I can be content to be dead, but I would not die."

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

1. Because it is, and hath been ever since it had a being, the only instrument of all the operations and actings of its faculties and powers. The whole privilege of a being consists in its powers and acts. Now, from the first moment of its being, the soul hath had no instrument to act by but the body; and that not only in the outward actions that the body performs, but in all its internal, rational actings, it cannot act without the instrumentality of the body. Therefore we know a hurt in the body, as oftentimes in the head, hath utterly deprived the soul of the exercise of all its powers and faculties during life. It cannot act rational, internal actings but by the body, and how it can act without the body it knows not. This hath ingrafted a natural unwillingness in the soul to let go the body, whereby, from the first instant of its being, it hath constantly acted. This is but one reason of it; there is yet a greater.

2. The other reason is, that strict, near, unparalleled union and relation between the soul and the body. There is a near union between parents and children, a nearer between husband and wife; but they are nothing to this union between the soul and body. There is an ineffable, inconceivable union between the two natures, the divine and the human, in the person of the Son of God; but this union was eternally indissoluble from the first moment of it: when the body and soul of Christ were separated; yet they continued in their union with the person of the Son of God as much as before, or as now in heaven. But here is a union that is dissoluble between a heavenly spirit and an earthly, sensual body; that is, two essential

parts of the same nature. Pray give me leave to speak a little to it. I have considered what it is to die, and examined whence ariseth the difficulty. Now, I say it ariseth from this peculiar constitution of our nature; there being no such thing in all the works of God, in heaven above, or in the earth beneath. The angels are pure, immaterial spirits; they have nothing in them that can die. God can annihilate an angel,—he that made all things out of nothing, can bring all things into nothing; but an angel cannot die, from the principles of his own constitution;—there is nothing in him that can die. A brute creature hath nothing in it that can live when death comes. "The spirit of a beast" Solomon speaks of as that which "goeth downward." It is not the object of almighty power to preserve it, because it is nothing but the act of the body in its temperature and constitution. But now man is "medium participationis;"—he hath an angelical nature from above that cannot die, and a nature from beneath that cannot always live, since the entrance of sin, though it might have done so before. And therefore, in the product of man there was a double act of creation, and but a single act in any other creature's. The creation of angels is not mentioned, unless in that, "Let there be light, and there was light;" but in all other things there was but one single act for its production. But when God came to make man, there were two distinct acts of creation. "God made man of the dust of the earth." And what then? "And breathed into him the Spirit of life." Here is something that is not in all God's creation beside. And now, upon this dissolution, all the actings of this nature, as it was one person, must cease unto the day of the resurrection. A wonderful change it is, that there shall be no more acting of the entire nature of man until the resurrection; only one part of this nature continues to act itself, according to its own powers. And one end of God's work upon us in the grave is, to free our bodies from all alliance, and relation, and likeness unto the bodies of beasts. So our Saviour tells us, Luke 20. "Do not mistake," saith he, " 'you shall neither marry nor give in marriage,' nor have any one action common to brutes; but the whole man shall be ἰσάγγελοι,—'like unto the angels.' " This is the great privilege of our nature, as the wise man declares, Eccles. 3:19, where he answers the objection of an epicure: "That which befalleth the

sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: all go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." "As far as I can see it is so," saith the man. But what saith the wise man? "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" "Alas! you are mistaken: the difference doth not lie in this outward nature, wherein man and beast have a near alliance one to another; but in the spiritual, heavenly nature, that is from above;—and unless you know that, you will think all are as beasts indeed." This, then, is the foundation of the unalterable aversation in the mind and soul to part with the body,—this strange constitution of our nature, which has nothing like it in the whole work of God, nothing to give us any representation of it, but it is peculiar unto us. And then this dissolution is but once to be made. They observe of the old heroes, who would freely venture their lives, and cast them away in any great attempt, that when they came to die, when they had killed themselves, or were killed by others, their souls went away with groaning and indignation: they knew not how to bear the dissolution of the union.

And therefore this is in us all, brethren; it is our first desire, which we have upon a prospect that we cannot continue here, "to be clothed upon;" and, as the apostle says, "that mortality may be swallowed up of life,"—that the body and soul together may go into immortality and glory. But this is not God's way; this is that he will bring us to,—that we be ready and willing to part with these bodies of ours, notwithstanding this union, or we cannot die cheerfully and comfortably.

Upon what grounds, then, can a man be ready and willing to lay down his tabernacle in the dust?

I shall fix upon two reasons, both given us by the same apostle:—

(1.) The first is that which he gives us, Phil. 1:23, "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ." Ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχω, "I have a strong bent and inclination of spirit." The word is that which in Scripture is used for "lust" and "concupiscence;" that is, always working with strong bent and inclination. "It is not a desire that sometimes befalls me, now and then, when in trouble, sickness, or pain; but I have an habitual, constant inclination." Unto what? Ἀναλῦσαι, "to depart," to leave this body. "It is usually translated in the passive; "I have a desire to be dissolved." But the plain meaning of the word is this, "I do desire that the contexture of my nature may be reduced unto its distinct principles,—may be analyzed." Now, analysis is the reducing of a speech from the present contexture into its proper, distinct principles. Then, here lies the difficulty. I told you the soul hath an aversation to this dissolution; and yet the apostle saith, "I have a continual, strong inclination to it." To what? Pray observe it,—"To be with Christ." I have no inclination to be dissolved as the end, but only as the means for another end, that without it I cannot be with Christ. There is my end. And so far with respect unto that end, that which is in itself no object of inclination becomes an object of desire. Brethren, I know no man dies willingly,—no man living can have an habitual inclination to close cheerfully with this dissolution,—but by looking upon it as a means to come to the enjoyment of Christ. I tell you, your bodies are better to you than all the world, than all your goods, or any thing else; but Christ is better to the soul than any thing: and therefore, unless it be for the enjoyment of Christ, let men pretend what they will, there is no man willing to part with the body,—to be dissolved. Grow in that desire of coming to Christ, and you will conquer the unwillingness of death.

(2.) The second reason is given us, Rom. 8:10, "The body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." The body is not only doomed to death by reason of original sin, as death entered upon all on that account; but the body must be brought to death, that sin may be rooted out of it. Sin hath taken such a close, inseparable habitation in the body, that nothing but the death of the body can make a separation. The body must be dead because of sin.

Saith the sincere soul, "God knows that I have a thousand times attempted a thorough and absolute mortification of every sin, and God hath helped me to endeavour that it should abide no more in me. I have sometimes thought myself near an attainment, but I have found a disappointment; and I am perfectly satisfied in it, that as long as I have this body I shall never be without sin: it must be dead by reason of sin, or the fibres and roots of it will never be plucked up,—the nature of it can never be extinguished,—it can never be separated utterly from it." Here lies the great mystery of the grave under the covenant of grace, and by virtue of the death of Christ. What is it? worms and corruption? No; it is God's fining-pot, his way to purify: and there is no other way to make an eternal separation between sin and the body but by consuming of it in the grave. A secret virtue shall issue out from the death of Christ unto the body of a believer laid in the grave, that shall eternally purify it, at its resurrection, from every thing of sin. I will not say what apprehensions some have had concerning the state of souls upon the consumption of the body in the grave; because I will speak nothing unto you that is questionable.

This, then, is the second reason,—that all other attempts to eradicate sin have failed, and not had their issue; they have brought me to be ashamed of myself, in the frowardness, darkness, and unbelief of my nature; I will therefore be willing to part with my body. Such a one, then, will say, "This is that which God calls me unto. Go, then, thou poor, mortal, sinful flesh, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.' I give thee up unto the doom of the Holy One, whose mouth hath spoken it, that thou must return to the dust. And there he will refine thee, and purify thee; [so] that notwithstanding this departure, 'my glory shall rejoice,' and thou, 'my flesh, shalt rest in hope;' for the time will come when 'he will have a desire to the work of his hands,' and 'will call, and thou shalt answer him' out of the dust;"—as Job 14:15, "Be not afraid to enter into darkness: as there is no sting in death, so there is no darkness in the grave, whither thou art going. It is but lying so long in the hands of the great Refiner, who will purge, purify, and restore thee. Therefore, lie down in the dust in peace."<sup>1</sup>

This is the second thing that is required in men that would die with their eyes open, that would die cheerfully and comfortably, according to the will of God,—to be willing to leave the body to God's disposal, to be laid up in the dust; because thereby it shall come to see Christ, and likewise shall have an end of sin.

I shall name but one thing more, and that very briefly; but it is the great thing that I would give in charge to my own soul: I pray God help me so to do; and it is this:—

III. Let us take heed of being surprised with death.

This is that peculiar wisdom which God calls us all unto at this day. We know not how soon we may be called upon by death. It may not come in an ordinary course, by long sickness, and give us warning; nor when we have lived to the age of a man, which is "threescore years and ten," as the psalmist speaks; but we may be surprised with it when we look not for it. He that hath not learned it for himself from the dealings of God at this present in the world, and in this congregation, will not believe it if one should come from the dead and tell him so. Let this, then, be fixed upon our minds, that whatsoever be our state and condition, some are strong, young, and healthy, and some of us are old and feeble, going out of the world; but there are none of us but may be surprised with it. Take heed, therefore, that you be not surprised in an ill frame. I hope there are none of you but do understand that there is great variety in the frames of believers; sometimes they are in a good frame,—grace is active and quick,—they are ready to take impressions by the word and warnings, delighting in holy thoughts; and sometimes, again, it may be the world, temptations, or self-love, comes in, or over-valuation of our relations, and indisposes them again, and they are very unfit and lifeless for the performance of duties with delight and vigour of spirit; and these they lose, though they keep up to all their duties. I persuade myself you will confirm this with your own experience. There is no maintaining (though there may be impressions) of a quick, holy, lively frame, but by a sedulous



contemplation and constant view of things that are above. Many will tell you, that when God hath been pleased to keep up their minds unto the thoughts of things above, and draw out their affections to cleave unto them, all things have gone well with them,—every prayer had life in it, and every sermon, and duty, pleasure and joy; and their hearts have lain down and arisen in peace. But when they have lost their view of spiritual things, all other things continue, but there is a kind of deadness upon them. Why, then, our wisdom in this case is, to labour to keep up this spiritual view of eternal things, in a holy contemplation of and cleaving to them in our affections, or death will be surprising; come when it will, you will be surprised by it. But if this be our frame, what comes this messenger for? Death is a messenger sent of God; he knocks at the door, and what comes he for? To perfect the frame you are in, that you may see heavenly things more clearly. He is come to free you from that deadness you are burdened withal, that darkness you are entangled with, and to set you at perfect liberty in the enjoyment of those things your souls cleave unto. How, then, can your souls but bid this messenger welcome? Pray, then, that God would keep up your souls, by fresh supplies of his Spirit, unto a constant view of heavenly things. And you must do it by prayer, that God would give you fresh oil, to increase light in your minds and understandings. Some can tell you by experience, that, having made it their business with all their strength and study to live in that frame, they have found their own light decay, so that it would not be so fixed and constant towards heavenly things, nor so affect the heart as it had done before. Their light would work no more, until fresh supplies from the Holy Ghost gave quickness to it, and fresh oil to increase, to discern the beauty of spiritual and heavenly things. In plain terms, I speak to dying men, that know not how soon they may die. God advise my own heart of this thing, that I should labour and watch, that death might not find me out of the view of spiritual things! If it do,—if our bellies cleave unto the dust, and our eyes are turned to the ground,—if we are filled with other things, and death approaches,—do you think it will be an easy thing to gather in your minds and affections to a compliance with it? You will not find it so. When David was in a good frame, he

could say, "Thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth: O LORD, into thine hand I commit my spirit;"—"I am willing to come and lay down my tabernacle, and embrace this messenger. But David falls from his good frame, under some decays of spirit, Ps. 39, and there makes great complaint of it. Where is the readiness now of the good man, and where is his willingness of giving up his spirit into the hand of God? "Spare me a little, that I may recover my strength," verse 13. Not his outward strength, but a better frame, fit to die in. And if death overtake us in such a frame, the best of us will be found to cry so: ' "O spare me a little, to recover my strength."—"O the entanglements that have been brought upon me by this and that temptation, and diversion; by this coldness and decay! O Lord, spare me a little." There is mercy with God for persons in this frame; but if it were the will of God, I had rather it should be, "LORD, into thy hands I commend my spirit; for thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth."

## MONERGISM BOOKS

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