

Articles and Sermons :: The Christian View of Death-Flavel**The Christian View of Death-Flavel - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2007/2/7 14:43**

The Christian View of Death

John Flavel

I shall offer several considerations calculated to help the people of God in time of sickness, to keep their hearts loose from all earthly objects, and cheerfully willing to die:

1. Death is harmless to the people of God; its shafts leave no sting in them. Why then are you afraid that your sickness may bring you to death? If you were to die in your sins; if death were to reign over you as a tyrant, to feed upon you as a lion does upon his prey; if death to you were to be the precursor of hell—then you might reasonably startle and shrink back from it with horror and dismay! But if your sins are blotted out; if Christ has vanquished death in your behalf, so that you have nothing to encounter but bodily pain, and possibly not even that; if death will be to you the forerunner of heaven—why should you be afraid? Why not bid it welcome? It cannot hurt you; it is easy and harmless; it is like taking off your clothes, of taking rest.

2. It may keep your heart from shrinking back, to consider that death is necessary to fit you for the full enjoyment of God. Whether you are willing to die or not, there certainly is no other way to complete the happiness of your soul. Death must do you the kind office to remove this veil of flesh—this animal life which separates you from God—before you can see and enjoy him fully. "While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." And who would not be willing to die for the perfect enjoyment of God? I think one would look and sigh, like a prisoner, through the grates of this mortality—"O that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest!" Indeed most men need patience to die; but a saint, who understands what death will introduce him to, rather needs patience to live. On his deathbed he should often look out and listen to his Lord's coming; and when he perceives his dissolution to be near, he should say, "The voice of my beloved! Behold he comes, leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills!"

3. Consider that the happiness of heaven commences immediately after death. That happiness will not be deferred until the resurrection; but as soon as death has passed upon you, your soul will be swallowed up in life. When you have once loosed from this shore, you shall be quickly wafted to the shore of a glorious eternity! And can you not say—I desire to die, and to be with Christ? Did the soul and body die together, or did they sleep until the resurrection, as some have fancied, it would have been folly for Paul to desire to die, for the enjoyment of Christ; because he would have enjoyed more in the body than he could have enjoyed out of it.

The Scripture speaks of but two ways in which the soul can properly live—that is, by faith and vision. These two comprehend its present and future existence. Now, if when faith fails, sight should not immediately succeed, what would become of the soul? But the truth on this subject is clearly revealed in Scripture. See Luke 23: 3; John 14: 3, etc. What a blessed change then, will death make in your condition! Rouse up, dying saint, and rejoice; let death do his work, that the angels may conduct your soul to the world of light!

4. It may increase your willingness to die, to reflect that by death, God often removes his people out of the way of great troubles and temptations. When some extraordinary calamity is coming upon the world, God sometimes removes his saints out of the way of the evil. Thus Methuselah died the year before the flood; Augustine a little before the sacking of Hippo; Pareus just before the taking of Heidelberg. Luther observes that all the apostles died before the destruction of Jerusalem; and Luther himself died before the wars broke out in Germany. How it may be that by death you will escape some grievous trial, which you could not and need not endure. But even if no extraordinary trouble would come upon you, yet God desires by death to relieve you from innumerable evils and burdens which are inseparable from the present state. Thus you will be delivered from indwelling sin, which is the greatest trouble; from all temptations from whatever source; from bodily illnesses and failings; and from all the afflictions and sorrows of this life. The days of your mourning will be ended, and God will wipe away all tears from your eyes. Why then should you not hasten to depart?

5. If you still linger, like Lot in Sodom, what are your pleas and pretenses for a longer life? Why are you unwilling to die? Are you concerned for the welfare of your relations? If so, are you anxious for their temporal support? Then let the word of God satisfy you: "Leave your fatherless children to me, I will keep them alive, and let your widows trust in me." Luther

says, in his last will, "Lord, you have given me a wife and children, I have nothing to leave them, but I commit them unto you. O Father of the fatherless and Judge of widows, nourish, keep and teach them."

But are you concerned for the spiritual welfare of your relations? Remember that you cannot convert them, if you should live; and God can make your prayers and counsels effectual when you are dead.

Perhaps you desire to serve God longer in this world. But if he has nothing further for you to do here, why not say with David, "Here am I, let God do what seems good to him." He is calling you to higher service in heaven, and can accomplish by other hands what you desire to do further here. Do you feel too imperfect to go to heaven? Consider that you must be imperfect until you die; your sanctification cannot be complete until you get to heaven.

But, you say, 'I lack assurance; if I had that I could die easily.' Consider, then, that a hearty willingness to leave all the world to be freed from sin, and to be with God—*is* the direct way to that desired assurance; no carnal person was ever willing to die upon this ground.