Dying Thoughts

Consisting of a Few Unfinished Hints, Written by Dr. Gill, A little before his Decease

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The use our Lord makes of the doctrine of death, is, *Matt.* 24:44. *Therefore be ye also ready, for in such hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh*: Either to judgment, or by death: and happy they, who, with the wise virgins, are ready to go in to the marriage-chamber, and partake of the marriage-supper, *Matt.* 25:10. and it is one great business of the gospel ministry, under the influence of the Spirit and grace of God, *to make ready a people prepared for the Lord*, Luke 1:17. that is, the elect of God, whom he has reserved for himself. But the great question is, wherein lies this readiness and preparation for death and eternity? and this may be considered,

First, *Negatively*, what it is not. Many and fatal are the mistakes of persons about it; some placing it in one thing, and some in another.

(1.) Some think it is a *well-spent life*; and that if a man can look back on such a life, he is ready for death, come when it may. But let us consider what this well-spent life is. The life of the apostle *Paul* was undoubtedly a life as well-spent, as, perhaps, any that can be mentioned among men. Before conversion, his life was irreproachable; as to external morality, he lived in all good conscience before men; after conversion, his

life was devoted to the service of Christ and his gospel; his gladness and ambition were, to spend and be spent, wherever he came, for the good of immortal souls; he travelled much, endured great hardships, and laboured more than the rest of the apostles; which he imputes not to his own goodness, industry and power, but to the grace of God. And when the time of his departure was at hand, as it was when he wrote his epistle to the Philippians, being then a prisoner at *Rome*; what did he seek after, or judge to be his readiness for another world? not his well-spent life: no, he desired to be *found in* Christ, *not having his own righteousness*; in which must be included his well-spent life, and which indeed was the main of it; *but the righteousness which is of God by faith*, even the righteousness of Christ. He *forgot* the things which were *behind*; his labours, services and sufferings for Christ, all his attainments and usefulness; and *pressed forward*, not in a view of his well-spent life, but having his eye on the *mark*, Christ and his righteousness, *for the prize of the high calling of God* in him, *Phil.* 3:9-13, 14. The life of a common believer is a well-spent life, in comparison of others; he lives by faith on Christ, and gives him the glory of his salvation; and, from a principle of love to him, walks in all his commandments and ordinances, and is very desirous of living a life of holiness, and of spiritual and heavenly-mindedness, and does so live in some measure. But when the believer comes to look back on his past life of faith and holiness, what *deficiencies* and *imperfections* in his faith! what unbelief in him, at such and such a time will he observe! what tarnishes in his life and walk! and how few the minutes were in which he was spiritual and heavenly-minded! and how frequently and long was such a frame interrupted with

carnal and sensual lusts! The saint, before his conversion, is as other men, being born in sin, and living in it: after conversion, prone to backsliding; even in all things he offends, and sins in his most solemn religious services. He must therefore betray great ignorance of himself, who flatters himself, or suffers himself to be flattered, with the reflection on a well-spent life, as his readiness and preparation for death and another world.

(2.) Others imagine, because they have *done no injury* to any man's person and property, nay, have *done justice* between man and man, and have *paid* every man his own, they are ready for death come when it may. These are all very good things, and ought to be done; for it is written, *owe no man any thing*; but then they are no other than what such a man would chuse to have done to himself, and which he ought to do to others; and are no other than what honour, conscience, and the laws of God and man oblige to; and where is the *merit* of all this? And what obligation does this lay upon God? As *Elihu* argues, Job 35:7, 8. *If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man, as thou art*, by injuring his person or property; *and thy righteousness may profit the Son of man*, by fair trade and paying just debts; but what profit is this to God? And, perhaps, after all, such a man has never thought about the payment of his debts to God, and how THEY must be paid, when he owes ten thousand talents, and has nothing to pay, nor to make a composition with, How can he think of appearing before his great creditor, with such a charge and load of debts upon him? may he not justly fear, that he will order him to prison, there to lie, until the uttermost farthing is paid? The great concern should be, to know whether Christ is his surety, and has

paid his debts for him, cancelled the bond, and blotted out the hand-writing against him, and so his account with God stands clear and fair. This is the best preparation for death and eternity.

(3.) Others think, that by *giving alms to the poor*, they get a readiness for death. *To do good and to communicate*, to do acts of beneficence from a right principle, are sacrifices with which God is well pleased; but these may be done only to be seen of men, and get applause from men; and such have their reward in this world, but not in another. A man may give all his goods to the poor, and yet not have charity, or true grace, and so be unfit to die. And very preposterous and monstrously absurd it is, in some persons, who choose to give little away in their lifetime, and leave large estates for charitable uses after their death, as if what was to be done *after* death could be a *preparation* for it: than which nothing can be more ridiculous.

(4.) Some place readiness for death in the *mercy of God*; imploring that in their last moments: and yet they cannot be sure they shall have time even to say, "Lord have mercy on us." There is mercy with God, and it is a ground of hope; but then it must be applied for by such who are sensible of their sins, confess them, forsake them, and turn to the Lord; such find mercy. And besides, mercy is only had through Christ. God, out of Christ, is a consuming fire; a sinner should go to God through Christ for mercy, saying, as the publican did, *God be merciful*, or propitious, *to me a sinner*; that is, through the [pro]pitiatory sacrifice of his Son, *Luke* 18:13.

(5.) Others flatter themselves that they have *made their peace with God*, and so are prepared for death whenever it comes. And yet these persons, perhaps, never

saw the flaming sword of justice brandished against sin, nor the heavens opened, and wrath of God revealed from thence against all ungodliness of men; nor never heard the vollies of curses from a righteous law, which pronounces every man *cursed*, that continues not in all things written in it [to] do them; and were never truly acquainted with what is required to be done in order to make peace, as satisfying justice by fulfilling the law, through obeying its precepts and bearing its penalty, with their own inability to do these things: they imagine, that their own humiliation, repentance, and imperfect obedience, are to make peace for them. They should know, that *Christ* ONLY *is the peace-maker*; and their concern should be to know that *he* HAS *made peace* for them by the blood of his cross, and to lay hold upon him as such, *Isai.* 27:5.

(6.) Others make their readiness for death to lie in a little negative holiness, and thank God, as the Pharisee did, that they are not as other men are; *not guilty* of such gross and flagitious crimes as some are; they have not been guilty of *murder*, *adultery*, *theft*, and such like sins as others have. But this is a very slender preparation for death; publicans and harlots, repenting and believing, go into the kingdom of heaven before such.

(7.) Others, with greater plausibility, please themselves with a *profession of religion* they have made and held. They have constantly attended on hearing the word, have submitted to baptism, sat down at the Lord's table, and observed every duty of religion. But all this a man may do, and not be ready. He may have *a form of godliness*, without the *power* of it. Some who have heard Christ preach, or his ministers, have eat and drank in his

presence, will be bid to depart from him, as not known by him. In short,

(8.) *Not any external righteousness whatever* makes a man ready for death and eternity. For by it he is not justified before God, and by it he is not saved. Except he has *a* BETTER *righteousness*, he will never enter into the kingdom of heaven. And it should be our concern, with the apostle, to be *found in Christ*, and in *his* righteousness, and not in our *own*, which will leave us short of heaven and happiness.

SECONDLY, *Positively*, what that is, which constitutes a readiness and preparation for death; that which is certain, constant, and abiding, let a man's frames and circumstances be what they may; lies in the following things:

(1.) In *regeneration*. Without this, a man cannot see, nor enter into, the kingdom of heaven. It is by *the washing of regeneration* God saves men; and the life with which a man is then quickened, is connected with eternal life. The grace then implanted is *a well of living water*, *springing up* into a life that never dies. As soon as a man is born again, he is prepared for death, be his regeneration sooner or later, and from that moment always continues so.

(2.) In *sanctification*, or a work of grace and holiness, which takes place immediately upon regeneration; and without which no man shall see the Lord; but where this is begun, it shall be carried on, and be performed, until the day of Christ; and so furnishes us with a readiness for that day. This is the oil of grace, which the wise virgins had in the vessels of their hearts, besides lamps of profession; and so were ready when the bridegroom came.

(3.) The *righteousness of Christ imputed*, is a constant readiness for death and eternity. The church is said to *make herself ready*; which was done, by putting on *the fine linen clean and white*, the righteousness of Christ, which made her ready to meet him. Were it possible for a man to get into heaven, the marriage-chamber, without the nuptial robe, as it is not; he would be turned out, as unready and unfit, with, *friend, how comest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment*? And he *speechless*, having nothing to alledge as a plea for his being there. Now such as are found in Christ, and cloathed with his righteousness, will be found, at death, neither *naked* nor *speechless*, but shall have a ready and an abundant entrance into Christ's kingdom and glory.

(4.) A *being washed in the blood of Christ*, and so clear from all guilt and charge of it, and condemnation by it, is a sure and lasting readiness for death. Christ's blood is a fountain opened to wash in; and it has such virtue in it, as to cleanse from *all sin whatever*, and leaves *none* behind; so that a person once washed and purged by it, is clear from it, and when death comes, shall immediately inherit the kingdom of God: which none shall, but those who are washed, sanctified, and justified.

(5.) Spiritual *knowledge of Christ*, and true *faith* in him, have eternal life connected with them inseparably; though not always clear, and unbeclouded, and in lively exercise, yet the principle itself always abides, and is never lost; and such who know in whom they have believed, are faithfully kept by him, to whom they have committed themselves, against the day of death and judgment.

There is another sort of readiness which is not always the same, and lies in the *frame* and posture of

the soul, and which a saint is desirous of having when death comes, both for his own comfort and the glory of God; though he knows that his safety does not lie in it, yet he wishes to be found in the lively exercise of faith, and hope, and love, and patience, and resignation to the will of God: to be awake, and not in a slumbering frame; but watching and on his guard against the enemy, and expecting his Lord's coming; to be frequently meditating on death, and making it familiar to himself, and so become free from the fear and dread of it; and to be in such a disposition of mind, as to be desirous of death, and willing to depart; and rather choosing it, and longing for it; saying, *why are his chariot-wheels so long in coming*? And to be so fearless of death, as to triumph over it, and say, *Death, where is thy sting*! *Grave, where is thy victory*! Or however, he wishes to be in a waiting posture when death comes, waiting for the hope of righteousness by faith, and looking for his Lord's coming, with his loins girt and his lamp burning; and *blessed* indeed *are those servants whom, when their Lord comes, he shall find so doing*, Luke 12:35-37, 43.

II. There are several things which may serve to reconcile men to death, though it is so disagreeable to nature; as 1. The necessity of death to free them from sin and sorrow, without which they will not be free. Whilst they are in this tabernacle they are burdened with sin, and groan under their burden; nor will they be eased till the tabernacle is dissolved, or pulled down by death. Whilst they are in this land, the Canaanites are in it, their inbred sins and corruptions, and these are *thorns in their sides, and pricks in their eyes*; and will continue such. But, when they have got through death into the better and heavenly country, there will be no pricking briar, nor

grieving thorn, throughout the land. 2. Death is no other to saints, than going to their father's and Christ's father's house; where are many mansions provided, and where they shall enjoy the kingdom it is their father's good pleasure to give, and where they shall have his presence for evermore. 3. It is in order to be with Christ, which is infinitely preferable to being in this world, and where they shall be for ever with him and behold his glory. 4. Which, though of lesser consideration than the former, yet it has something in it to reconcile to death, that that will introduce them into the presence and company of pious relations and friends that are gone before, and died in Christ; so *David* took some satisfaction in this, that though his child was dead, and should not return to him, yet he should go to that, 2 *Sam.* 12:23. 5. Death is the time of the Lord's in-gathering of his people to himself; then it is he comes into his garden, and gathers his lilies, and this the other flower, to put into his bosom. Heaven is his garner, into which he gathers his wheat; and this is done at death. Now it is, that he *makes up his jewels*, his full number of them, one by one, and will lose none. 6. The death of the saints is precious in the sight of God, *Psal.* 116:15. and if it is precious to him, they should not shrink at it themselves.

Thirdly, Death is very terrible to nature, and to natural men. The philosopher calls it, *the most terrible of all terribles.*[1] And the wise man, when he suggests what is most grievous, distressing, and intolerable, says, "What is *more bitter than death*?" Eccl. 7:26. To Christless sinners, death is the king of terrors; and even some gracious

[1]Τῶν φοβερῶν φοβερώτατον ὁ θάνατος. Aristot. Ethic. l. 3. c. 9. and no wonder he should call it so, since he adds, according to his opinion, *it is the end of all things: and to one that is dead, there is neither good nor evil.* Such a notion of death, as being an extinction, must be terrible.

persons *are*, *all their lifetime*, *through fear of death*, *subject to bondage*; but as formidable as it is, there are some things which may serve to fortify us against the fears of death: as, 1. That the *sting* of death is *taken away* in Christ; which is sin: and a very venomous sting it is; and death, thus armed, is to be feared. But, when its sting is taken out, it is not to be dreaded: any insect with a sting we are naturally afraid of, but if its sting is drawn, we have no fear of it, though it flies and buzzes about us; the believer may sing and say, *Death where is thy sting*? and be fearless of it. 2. It is a blessing and privilege to a believer, it is reckoned among his privileges, 1. Cor. 3:22. *they are blessed that die in the Lord*; and are more happy than the saints alive, because free from sin and sorrow, see *Rev.* 14:13. *Eccl.* 4:2. 3. Death is but once, and soon over; the bitterness of it is quickly past, and will never be repeated; *it is appointed to men* ONCE *to die*, and no more. 4. The consideration of the resurrection from the dead, may yield comfort in the view of death, as it did to *Job*, ch. 19:26, 27. the body, though a vile body as laid in the grave, *will be raised*, *and fashioned like to the* GLORIOUS *body of Christ*. It will be raised in *incorruption*: *this corruptible shall put on incorruption*. It will be raised in *glory*, like Christ; it will be raised in *power*, and be *durable*, and always remain in a state of immortality. It will be raised a *spiritual* body, and so more fit for spiritual services than ever, 1 *Cor.* 15:42, 43. so that the saints will be no loosers, but gainers, by death; and need not fear it. 5. Be it that death is an *enemy*, as it is contrary to nature; it is the *last* enemy that shall be destroyed; and, when that is conquered, the victory will be compleat over every enemy, sin, satan, the world, death and the grave, 1 *Cor.*

15:26, 55, 57. *Thanks, therefore, to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

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