

"It Is Appointed Unto Man Once to Die"  
(Hebrews 9:27)

Introduction: The Lord is transforming us into His image from one level of glory to the next even now in this life. The blessed Spirit of holiness, the down payment, or engagement ring whom Christ gives to His bride, is changing us gradually into the likeness of Christ as we behold the glory of our risen Lord. This, of course, refers to the inner man, which, by the Spirit, and through the use of the means of grace, is being renewed day by day. But what about the outer man? What about our bodies? Doesn't the Lord have the same desire to redeem them as well? Isn't it necessary for man, since he is both a spirit and a body, if he is to be fully delivered from the consequences of sin, to have his physical members delivered as well? The Scripture does not say that the body is being renewed now at all, but rather that it is decaying. It is not being transformed into the image of the Lord, but is growing older and weaker and will eventually die. All through the Bible we see death present among the people of God. And even those who were raised up at the time of Elijah and Elisha, and of Christ and His apostles, all had to die again. Why is this? The Bible tells us that it is the result of the broken Covenant of Works, the covenant which was broken by Adam. Paul writes, "THROUGH ONE MAN SIN ENTERED INTO THE WORLD, AND DEATH THROUGH SIN, AND SO DEATH SPREAD TO ALL MEN, BECAUSE ALL SINNED" (Rom. 5:12). All sinned in Adam, and the Bible tells us very clearly that "THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH" (Rom. 6:23). But if death is the wages of sin, and yet all of the sins of the believer have been forgiven in Christ, why then does it still remain true, even for the believer, that, "IT IS APPOINTED UNTO MAN ONCE TO DIE"? Why are believers not set free from the all of the consequences of that sin?

Well the fact is that Christians are set free from all of those consequences, but not in this life, only in heaven. The guilt of your sin is removed in Christ even now, so that nothing you have done or ever will do, will ever again rise up to condemn you in the day of judgment, since you have fled to Christ for refuge. And even the effects of sin on your body will be overcome someday when Christ comes and raises your bodies from the grave. However, the believer will, by God's decree, still have to die, if that time should come before His Second Coming. But it is very helpful for us to know that even though this is so, God means it for our good. And so what I want you to see tonight is,

*God, in His love, allows your body to perish in this life so that you might be brought into a place of greater enjoyment.*

*First, I want you to see that God allows you to die in this life to deliver you from sin and pain; secondly, He does so that you might enjoy closer communion with Christ; and thirdly, that even in death, God has removed for His children the sting and curse of it.*

I. *When Christians Die, It Is Because God Is Delivering Them from Sin and Its Effects.*

A. *As Long As You And I Remain in this Life, We Are Liable to*

Sin and to the Consequences of Sin.

1. As long as we are still in the body, we will be tempted to fall into sin.
  - a. We don't need to look very far to find many examples of the most eminent saints in Scripture falling into sin.
  - b. Abraham, when he went into Egypt and later into Gerar, on both occasions said of his wife Sarah that she was his sister, so that she was actually taken both into Pharaoh's and Abimelech's houses, although by the grace of God, she was not violated (Gen. 12:15; 20:2).
  - c. When certain men were sent by James to where Peter was, he began to put a distance between himself and the Gentiles because he feared the Jews. The result was that a number of Jews, and Barnabas, were all carried away in his hypocrisy, for which he was rebuked by Paul at Antioch (Gal. 2:11-13).
  - d. And as long as you are in the world, as long as you still have the corruption that indwells you, you also will daily be plagued by the temptation to sin, and you will in fact fall into sin.
  - e. And along with this you will have the pain of failing your Lord, even as Peter, after he denied his Lord, wept in amazement that he could do such a thing.
  
2. And as long as we are in this fallen world, we will suffer the consequences of sin as well.
  - a. Paul suffered from a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him so that he would not be exalted in his own eyes because of the revelations that were given to him. He entreated the Lord three times to remove it from him, but the Lord saw it best not to (2 Cor. 12:7-8).
  - b. Timothy was afflicted in his stomach and by frequent illnesses, for which Paul prescribed for him a little wine to drink (1 Tim. 5:23).
  - c. And even Epaphroditus, who had gone to Rome to minister to Paul's needs in prison, had almost lost his life from some sickness that he contracted in the process (Phil. 2:25-27).
  - d. As long as you live in this world, you also will be liable to all of the pain and suffering, all the sickness and disease, and all of the dangers which are common to mankind.
  - e. One way of looking at it is that this is the closest thing to hell that you will ever experience, although it is so far from being anything like hell, that, for the reprobate, it is the closest thing to heaven that they will ever experience.
  
- B. But When We Depart from this Life and Enter into the Heavenly Realm of Glory, God Frees Us from All Our Sin and Misery. It Does Not Exist in Heaven.

1. We will be freed from all sin.
  - a. In heaven all the saints walk in the brilliant light of holiness, and they are forever confirmed in it.
  - b. The author to the Hebrews writes, "BUT YOU HAVE COME TO MOUNT ZION AND TO THE CITY OF THE LIVING GOD, THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM, AND TO MYRIADS OF ANGELS, TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND CHURCH OF THE FIRST-BORN WHO ARE ENROLLED IN HEAVEN, AND TO GOD, THE JUDGE OF ALL, AND TO THE SPIRITS OF RIGHTEOUS MEN MADE PERFECT" (Heb. 12:22-23).
  - c. In heaven we will be finally and fully set free from sin and confirmed in everlasting righteousness and holy desires.
  
2. We will no longer suffer any of the effects of sin.
  - a. In heaven we will also be forever freed from all of the evils to which we are liable on earth.
  - b. The prophet Isaiah writes, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN PERISHES, AND NO MAN TAKES IT TO HEART; AND DEVOUT MEN ARE TAKEN AWAY, WHILE NO ONE UNDERSTANDS. FOR THE RIGHTEOUS MAN IS TAKEN AWAY FROM EVIL, HE ENTERS INTO PEACE; THEY REST IN THEIR BEDS, EACH ONE WHO WALKED IN HIS UPRIGHT WAY" (Isa. 57:1-2).
  - c. And the Lord spoke to the righteous King Josiah, through Huldah the prophetess, saying, "THUS SAYS THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL, 'REGARDING THE WORDS WHICH YOU HAVE HEARD, BECAUSE YOUR HEART WAS TENDER AND YOU HUMBLED YOURSELF BEFORE THE LORD WHEN YOU HEARD WHAT I SPOKE AGAINST THIS PLACE AND AGAINST ITS INHABITANTS THAT THEY SHOULD BECOME A DESOLATION AND A CURSE, AND YOU HAVE TORN YOUR CLOTHES AND WEPT BEFORE ME, I TRULY HAVE HEARD YOU,' DECLARES THE LORD. 'THEREFORE, BEHOLD, I WILL GATHER YOU TO YOUR FATHERS, AND YOU SHALL BE GATHERED TO YOUR GRAVE IN PEACE, NEITHER SHALL YOUR EYES SEE ALL THE EVIL WHICH I WILL BRING ON THIS PLACE'" (2 Kings 22:18-20).
  - d. When you die as a Christian, it is not a curse from the Lord, rather He is removing you from any more pain and suffering that you might otherwise experience if you were to remain here on earth.
  - e. Far from being a curse, it is a blessing. So that Elijah, when it was time to be taken to heaven in a fiery chariot and a whirlwind, did not argue with the Lord about his being taken up, but went willingly, even expectantly (2 Kings 2:1-12).
  
3. In heaven, we will experience nothing but perfection and bliss.
  - a. Having all sin removed, as well as the pain and suffering that it brings would be heaven enough. But there is more.
  - b. There is no more laboring under the burden of so much work and so little help. John writes, "AND I HEARD A VOICE FROM HEAVEN, SAYING, 'WRITE, "BLESSED ARE THE DEAD

WHO DIE IN THE LORD FROM NOW ON!" 'YES,' SAYS THE SPIRIT, 'THAT THEY MAY REST FROM THEIR LABORS, FOR THEIR DEEDS FOLLOW WITH THEM'" (Rev. 14:13).

- c. The saints will be ruling and reigning with Christ in His mediatorial kingdom, until Christ returns again to set up the eternal kingdom (Rev. 20:6).
- d. And then there will also be no more curse, as His bond-servants serve Him there forever in His presence and the presence of the Lamb (Rev. 22:3-4).

## II. When Christians Die, It Is Because God Is Desiring to Bring Them into Closer Communion with His Son.

- A. As Long As You and I Remain in Our Bodies, We Are Absent from the Lord.
  - 1. Paul writes, "THEREFORE, BEING ALWAYS OF GOOD COURAGE, AND KNOWING THAT WHILE WE ARE AT HOME IN THE BODY WE ARE ABSENT FROM THE LORD -- FOR WE WALK BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT -- WE ARE OF GOOD COURAGE, I SAY, AND PREFER RATHER TO BE ABSENT FROM THE BODY AND TO BE AT HOME WITH THE LORD" (2 Cor. 5:6-8).
  - 2. Our flesh, or the life in our bodies, is the only thing which keeps us in the world right now.
  - 3. As long as we are in the body, as long as this union between our souls and our bodies exists, we are absent from that realm of glory where the resurrected glorified Christ is.
    - a. He who was the desire of the righteous men of old, the One whom the prophets prophesied of, and the One whom they desired to see, but could not, He who is the greatest desire of every Christian heart, now abides in heaven.
    - b. It is true that as to His divine nature He is everywhere at once, but it is His resurrected and glorified humanity, which is united to His divine personhood, that is now enthroned in the heavens after His ascension.
    - c. And as long as there is breath in our mortal bodies, then we will be separated from perfect fellowship with our glorious Lord.
- B. But to Be Absent from the Body Is to Be Present With the Lord.
  - 1. Once we put off this mortal coil, then we will step into glory.
    - a. There is no soul sleep; you do not die and then await the resurrection before you become conscious again.
    - b. Rather, when you die, you are immediately conveyed by the angels into the bosom of heaven. Jesus said of Lazarus, "NOW IT CAME ABOUT THAT THE POOR MAN DIED AND HE WAS CARRIED AWAY BY THE ANGELS TO ABRAHAM'S BOSOM" (Luke 16:22).
    - c. Even as Jesus said to the thief on the cross who believed on Him, "TRULY I SAY TO YOU, TODAY YOU SHALL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE" (Luke 23:43).
  - 2. And once we are there, we will enjoy perfect and

uninterrupted fellowship with Christ.

- a. We will know fully what Paul meant when he said, "TO DEPART AND BE WITH CHRIST . . . IS VERY MUCH BETTER" (Phil. 1:23).
- b. When we ascend to heaven, we will be where Christ is and behold His glory, even as Jesus prayed, "FATHER, I DESIRE THAT THEY ALSO, WHOM THOU HAST GIVEN ME, BE WITH ME WHERE I AM, IN ORDER THAT THEY MAY BEHOLD MY GLORY, WHICH THOU HAST GIVEN ME; FOR THOU DIDST LOVE ME BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD" (John 17:24).
- c. And when we finally arrive there, we will see Him face to face, "AND THE THRONE OF GOD AND OF THE LAMB SHALL BE IN IT, AND HIS BOND-SERVANTS SHALL SERVE HIM; AND THEY SHALL SEE HIS FACE, AND HIS NAME SHALL BE ON THEIR FOREHEADS" (Rev. 22:3-4).
- d. The desire of the saints throughout the ages has been what is called "The Beatific Vision," or the blessed sight of their Lord and their Redeemer, and this is what you will see when once you depart into glory.

### III. And Lastly, Although Christians Die, for Them the Sting and Curse of Death Has Been Removed in Christ.

- A. Because the Seeds of Physical Death Are Still Sown in Our Bodies, We Will Die.
  1. Adam's disobedience to God brought about the consequences of the broken covenant of Works on all of his descendants.
    - a. He represented us in the garden.
    - b. Therefore, His sin was credited to us as if we had done it ourselves.
  2. Because of this, we will all die, "IT IS APPOINTED UNTO MAN ONCE TO DIE."
    - a. Just look at the record of Genesis after the Fall, "SO ALL THE DAYS THAT ADAM LIVED WERE NINE HUNDRED AND THIRTY YEARS, AND HE DIED" (Gen. 5:5), "SO ALL THE DAYS OF SETH WERE NINE HUNDRED AND TWELVE YEARS, AND HE DIED" (v. 8), "SO ALL THE DAYS OF ENOSH WERE NINE HUNDRED AND FIVE YEARS, AND HE DIED" (v. 11), "SO ALL THE DAYS OF KENAN WERE NINE HUNDRED AND TEN YEARS, AND HE DIED" (v. 14), and so on.
    - b. After the Fall, every single human being has died, excepting those special cases of Enoch and Elijah who were pictures to us of what the rapture will be like.
    - c. It is appointed unto man once to die. And notice that it is but once, there is no reincarnation; you do not come back into the world as another person, or as a animal. There are no second chances.
    - d. That is why it is important that when you die, you die in Christ.
      - (i) If you die outside of Him, then you will

certainly feel the full power of death and its curse.

- (ii) If you do not put your full trust in Christ to save you and turn from all of your sins, then death will be but the translating of your soul into the jaws of hell, which will open wide to swallow you up eternally.

B. *But for the Christian, There Is No Sting and There Is No Curse in Death.*

1. The sting of death has been removed by Christ, so that now we simply fall asleep in Christ.
  - a. It is not death as the unregenerate will experience, but a falling asleep in Jesus (1 Thes. 4:14).
  - b. We fall asleep in this life, only to awaken in the next.
2. And death for us is no longer a curse, but a blessed release from the pain and sorrow of this life, to enter into the blessings of heaven.
  - a. As we've seen, we leave all the pain and misery of this life immediately behind and enter into perfect communion with the One who is at the center of our love and affection.
  - b. The sting and curse of death are overcome in principle by the resurrection of Christ. Because He was raised, so shall we be.
  - c. But there is yet that final consummation when Christ comes again to transform our bodies and to raise them from the dust. Paul wrote, "THE LAST ENEMY THAT WILL BE ABOLISHED IS DEATH. . . . BUT WHEN THIS PERISHABLE WILL HAVE PUT ON THE IMPERISHABLE, AND THIS MORTAL WILL HAVE PUT ON IMMORTALITY, THEN WILL COME ABOUT THE SAYING THAT IS WRITTEN, 'DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?' THE STING OF DEATH IS SIN, AND THE POWER OF SIN IS THE LAW; BUT THANKS BE TO GOD, WHO GIVES US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST" (1 Cor. 15:26, 54-57).
  - d. Christ is coming again to show the whole world that He has vanquished death for all time.
3. And so people of God, do not fear death. Death is no longer the Christian's enemy, but that which brings us closer to Christ.
  - a. Can you say with the apostle, "FOR TO ME TO LIVE IS CHRIST AND TO DIE IS GAIN"? Can you say, "TO DEPART AND TO BE WITH CHRIST . . . IS VERY MUCH BETTER"?
  - b. Until we can all echo these words of the apostle, the fear of death will always cripple us and keep us from serving Him with everything we've got. Christ came so that He "MIGHT DELIVER THOSE WHO THROUGH FEAR OF DEATH WERE SUBJECT TO SLAVERY ALL THEIR LIVES" (Heb. 2:15).
  - c. It was those who were fearless for Christ in history that have brought Him the greatest glory.

- (i) *If Martin Luther had cowered at the threats of the Roman Church, we may still be burning incense to the saints.*
  - (ii) *If Athanasius had not thundered against the Arians, the truth of the Triune God may not have been what you were taught in the organized church, although God would have preserved His truth elsewhere.*
- d. *May God grant to each of us such a sight of the glory of Christ, that our hearts would long to be with Him even now, and that we might serve Him fearlessly in this generation as we seek to carry out the whole will of God. Amen.*