

The Sentence of Death in Ourselves

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"But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us." 2 Cor. 1:9, 10

We may admire Paul's grace, stand amazed at the depth and variety of his experience, and almost envy him the abundance of his revelations and consolations. But do we envy him his deep afflictions, his cruel persecutions, his heavy trials, his sore temptations, his unceasing sufferings for Christ's sake? When we read of his being caught up into the third heaven, and there hearing "unspeakable words which it was not lawful (or possible) for a man to utter," we may wish to be similarly favoured; but what should we say if we had the subsequent lacerating thorn in the flesh, the pitiless, merciless messenger of Satan to buffet us? We may envy him his abundant consolations; but do we covet his stripes, his imprisonments, his tumults, his labours, his watchings, his fastings? And what should we think, say, or do, were his lot to be our own, as he himself has so vividly depicted it? "Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep: in journeyings often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." (2 Cor. 11:25, 26.) Could we endure a tenth of such

afflictions as he here enumerates?

But these things must be set one against the other, for there is a proportion between them, as he declares in this chapter:—"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort: who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." (2 Cor. 1:3-5.) And to show us that these sufferings and these consolations, both in their nature and in their proportion, are not peculiar to apostles and ministers, he says, addressing himself to his Corinthian brethren, "And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation." If no suffering, then, no consolation; if no affliction, no enjoyment; if no trial, no support; if no temptation, no deliverance. Is not this apostolic argument? Is not this gracious reasoning? Is not this sound divinity? Yes; so sound, so scriptural, and so experimental that it can never be overthrown whilst the Church of God holds this epistle in her hands and has the substance of it in her heart.

But it would appear from the context, that over and above his usual amount of sufferings, a short time previous to the writing of this epistle, a trial of extraordinary depth and magnitude had, by God's sovereign will, befallen him, for he speaks in the verse immediately preceding our text, "We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life." (2 Cor. 1:8.) What that trouble was he has not told us. Whether it were an affliction in providence, or whether it were a trial in grace, or, what is more probable, whether it were a

temptation from Satan of extraordinary magnitude and of long endurance, we are not informed; but we are told what it was as regarded its extent and magnitude, for he says he was "*pressed out of measure*"—as though he had no measure of comparison to determine its greatness, for he was so pressed down by it that, like a heavy load under which a person might lie, he could not tell its weight. It was beyond all his limited means, not only of natural endurance, but even of clear and exact description. And not only so, it was "*above strength*," so that had he not been supported by Almighty power, he must have been crushed under its weight. Nay even then, supported as he was by Almighty power, so pressing was it that it almost reduced him to despair, for he adds "*insomuch that we despaired even of life.*" He hardly knew whether he should be able to live through it, whether his mind might not give way, and whether he should escape even with the maintenance of his natural life or of his reasoning powers. He then goes on, in the words of our text, to show us from what quarter his deliverance came, and what was the effect which this trial wrought in his soul: "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us."

Let us look at these words, if the Lord grant it, in the light of the Spirit, and may he graciously help me this morning so to open them up in harmony with the word of his truth and his teaching in the hearts of his saints, that they may be commended with divine unction, life, and power to your conscience, that being enabled according to the measure of your faith to trace out the work of God's grace in you heart, you may gather up a comfortable hope, or be favoured with a sweet encouragement to believe that you are under the same teaching wherewith God blessed this eminent saint and

servant of the Lord. But in doing so, I shall

I.—*First*, show you what it is to *have the sentence of death in oneself*. "*But we have the sentence of death in ourselves.*"

II.—*Secondly*, what is *the effect* of this internal sentence of death: *the destruction of self-confidence*, and *the raising up of a trust in God*: "*that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.*"

III.—*Thirdly*, the *appearing of God in answer to prayer*, and the putting forth of his Almighty power in *vouchsafing a gracious deliverance*: "*Who delivered us from so great a death.*"

IV.—*Fourthly*, the *present enjoyment* of that deliverance, and the *future anticipation* that in every time of need there will be an experience of the same: "*And doth deliver in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.*"

I.—There is a difference between "*death*" and "*the sentence of death*;" and there is a similar distinction between the sentence of death *generally*, and the sentence of death in *ourselves*. Let me by two simple illustrations endeavour more fully to explain my meaning, and to clear up the points of distinction which I have thus advanced.

i. All men are doomed to die. Every tolling bell, every passing funeral, the closed shutters of the house of mourning, the cemetery gleaming with its spire and white monuments in the distance, daily remind us of the mortality of man. Men may try to forget or drown the thoughts of this gloomy guest that haunts all their banquets of pleasure, but sooner or later he will strike his dart into the bosom of all that sit round the table. But though death hangs thus as a doomed sentence

over the whole human race, over every one old or young within the reach of my voice, yet how few feel, how still fewer tremble at that sentence of death which they must know daily impends over them! But now look at a criminal, who, by the commission of some capital crime, say murder, has brought himself under the sentence of the statute law. As long as he was innocent of the crime, though the statute book denounces death as the penalty of murder, it reached not him. But directly he had imbrued his hands in innocent blood, that sentence which before lay in the statute book harmless as regarded him, began to lift up its angry brow and launch forth its thunder against him. Conscience brings it home to his bosom, and he who never trembled before now trembles at the sight of the officers of justice. But in spite of all his tremblings he is seized, brought before a jury of his fellow-countrymen, and found guilty of the crime laid to his charge; the judge puts on the black cap, and ratifies the verdict by pronouncing sentence of death against him. Now that man has "*the sentence of death*" recorded against him. You might stand in the court and hear the trial; you might see the criminal pallid and trembling at the bar; though you could not justify his crime, you might even sympathise with him in his mental sufferings and agonies. But however keenly you might suffer partly from horror at the act and partly from seeing a fellow mortal doomed to die, how different would your feelings be from his who is anxiously watching the faces of the jury as they come in with their verdict—from his, who is eagerly scanning every look and listening to every word of the judge—from his, who is hanging as it were between life and death, and whose hope trembling in the scale sinks at the word "death" almost into despair! Here then we have in the case of a criminal condemned to die "*the sentence of death*:" but still, though he has the sentence of death, he may not yet have the sentence of death *in himself*. It is in the criminal law; it is in the verdict of the jury; it is in the

mouth of the judge; but it may not have reached his inmost soul. He may hope still to escape. The Queen may show mercy; he may still receive a pardon; he may have the sentence of death commuted into penal imprisonment for life. But when all hope is taken away; when every application to the Crown for mercy is rejected, when the day of execution is fixed, and he stands under the gallows with the rope round his neck, then not only has he the sentence of death *in himself*, for in a few moments he will be launched into eternity.

Take another figure to illustrate the meaning of the apostle. As long as you are in vigorous health and strength you may hear of sickness and disease, and you may see your weak and aged neighbours dropping around you almost like leaves in autumn. You may hear the funeral bell, and see the melancholy procession go to the cemetery, the hearse bearing away your next-door neighbour, whom you have so often seen and perhaps conversed with. But the sight does not touch *you*. The funeral bell strikes no note of alarm on your mind. You are young and healthy, sound and strong, and what is death to you? Yet the sentence of death is impending over you as it impended over your neighbour, who perhaps thought no more that he should die than you. But say that you were, in the very midst of all your health and strength, seized by some disease which is well-known to be sooner or later fatal: say that cancer or consumption laid hold of you, and that after long and careful examination by an experienced physician, your case was pronounced incurable. Then the sentence of death would be recorded against you in the mind, if not by the mouth of the physician. The first glance of his eye, the first click of his fingers, have told him that the seeds of death are in you. He might not think it prudent to tell you; but even were you informed of it from his lips you might have hope that the disease might be

palliated if not thoroughly cured, and that it might not actually shorten life, though it might abridge you of much of its enjoyment. But should the disease make rapid and further progress, should all hope now be taken away, so as to be but a matter of a few weeks or days, and you inwardly felt that any moment might be your last, then not only would you have the sentence of death by the mouth of the physician and its seeds in your constitution, but the sentence of death would be *in yourself*.

So you see there is a distinction between these three things—death, the sentence of death, and having the sentence of death in oneself. Now take these ideas which I have thus endeavoured to illustrate into spiritual things, and see how far they agree with the work of grace upon the heart and with the experience of a living saint of God.

ii. *The law is a ministration of death*, as the apostle speaks, "But if the ministration of death written and engraven in stones was glorious." (2 Cor. 3:7.) By the ministration of death is meant that the law as a minister or messenger from God brings death as message from himself. It speaks his words, which are, "The soul that sinneth it shall die;" "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (Ezek. 18:20; Gal. 3:10.) But though the law speaks thus, and by so speaking condemns every human being who transgresses it, yet as death in a general way impends over all, and yet men go about their usual occupations as if they never were to die, so until the law is applied to the conscience by the power of God, though it is actually hanging over men as a sentence of death, yet it is not felt by them as such. The apostle describes in his own case how men are affected toward the law before it enters as a condemning sentence into their heart. He says, "I was alive without the law once." (Rom.

7:9.) The law was hanging over him as a condemning sentence, as a minister of death, as a messenger of wrath, as a consuming fire, but he felt it not. As with a thunderstorm in the remote distance, he might hear the low mutterings of the thunder which once rolled over Sinai's fiery mount, or might see from far the play of those lightnings which scorched its top. But at present the storm was in the distance. He went about without thinking, or feeling, or fearing, or caring whether the law was his friend or enemy. In fact he rather viewed it as his friend, for he was using it as a friendly help to buildup his own righteousness. He had gone to it, but it had not come to him; he knew its letter but not its spirit; its outward commands but not its inward demands. He therefore speaks of himself as being "alive without the law," that is, without any knowledge of what it was as a ministration of condemnation and death. But in God's own appointed time and way, "the commandment came;" that is, it came with power into his conscience. He found that he could keep every one of the commandments but the tenth; for according to his apprehension and his interpretation of them, they did not extend beyond an external obedience. But the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet," struck into the very depth of his conscience, for it was a prohibition from the mouth of God of the inward lusts of the heart, and that prohibition attended with an awful curse. Under this stroke sin, which before lay seemingly dead in his breast, revived like a sleeping serpent; and what was the consequence? It stung him to death, for he says, "And I died;" for the commandment which was ordained unto life he found to be unto death! (Rom. 7:9, 10.) Sin could not brook to be thwarted or opposed: it therefore rose up in enmity against God, took advantage of the commandment to rebel against the authority of Jehovah, and its guilt in consequence falling upon his conscience made tender in the fear of God slew him. It would not have done so had there been no life in his soul;

but there being light to see and life to feel the anger of God revealed in the commandment, when the law came into his conscience as a sentence from a just and holy Jehovah, the effect was to produce a sentence of death in himself. And this experience which the apostle describes as his own is what the law does and ever must do when applied to the conscience by the power of God. It kills, it slays the condemned sinner; it is a sentence of death in a man's own conscience, which only awaits the hour of death and the day of judgment to be carried into execution.

But the apostle, in the words before us, does not seem to be speaking of the work of the law in issuing the sentence of death. He had passed through that, had been delivered from it by a revelation of the Son of God to his soul, and been blessed with the love of God shed abroad in his heart, before he wrote this epistle and before he described the afflictions out of which the Lord delivered him, and in the midst of which he had so abundantly comforted him. He is not therefore speaking here particularly of the work of the law upon the conscience, but rather of those distressing trials, temptations, and exercises which in the hands of God bring the soul down, lay it low in the dust, cut it up as to any expectation in self, and slay it to any and every creature hope. *"We had the sentence of death in ourselves."*

iii. But let us now see the various ways in which these trials and exercises bring about the inward sentence of death. You will see from what the apostle says that it is not once or twice only that this sentence of death is recorded or felt. Thus we find him speaking of *"Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus;"* again, *"For we which live are *a/way* delivered unto death for Jesus' sake."* (2 Cor. 4:10, 11.) And thus again he says, *"In deaths oft,"* that is, spiritual and experimental as well as natural and literal; for he could

only once die literally, though in deaths oft spiritually. And again, "I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily." (1 Cor. 15:31.)

Now what is life naturally and what is death naturally? Is not that life in which there is breath, energy, movement, activity? And what is death but the utter cessation of all this moving activity and vital energy? To die is to lose life, and by losing life to lose all the movements of life. Thus, when the Lord takes, as it were, out of our heart and hands everything in which we once had life, in which we lived and moved and seemed to have our earthly, natural, and enjoyed being, and condemns it by his holy word, so as to record therein, and in our conscience as an echo to his voice, a continual sentence of death against it, he delivers us over unto death. And you will observe that none but the living family of God are so delivered: "*For we which live* are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake" and observe also that the reason for this mysterious dispensation is to bring to light the hidden life of Jesus within, for the apostle adds, "that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." And observe also the connection which this sentence of death has with the death of Christ: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus." We must suffer with Jesus if we are to be glorified with him; must die with him if we are to live with him. (2 Tim. 2:11, 12.) His death is the exemplar, the model, and the means of our own; and as he had the sentence of death in himself upon the cross, so must we be crucified with him, that we may be conformed to his suffering, dying image. (Rom. 8:29; Gal. 2:20.) Thus not only is there a death by, under, and unto the law, so as to kill the soul to all creature hope and help, to all vain confidence, and all self-righteousness; but in the continual teachings and dealings of God upon the heart, and especially in times and by means of heavy affliction, painful trial, and powerful temptation, does

the Lord by his Spirit and grace execute a sentence of death in all those to whom he is giving to drink of Christ's cup and to be baptized with Christ's baptism.

iv. But if there be a sentence of death in oneself it will produce some sensible, experimental effect. The apostle in the same epistle in which he speaks of being crucified with Christ adds, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Gal. 6:14.) There is then a crucifixion of the flesh, which we may call a dying unto it by having the sentence in our own souls against it. Look at this in the light of your own experience.

1. What influence *the world*, for instance, naturally has over us and how we are sure to be entangled in it, except so far as delivered from it by the power of sovereign grace! Look at the hold that worldly business has over the mind when fully engaged in it. Look at the power which pride and covetousness have over the human heart; how easily we get entangled almost before we are aware in a worldly spirit, and are drawn aside into carnal thoughts, plans, schemes, and anticipations, and spend time and stretch forth vain and foolish desires after objects which we know can never bring with them any real peace to our conscience, or indeed any profit to our soul. The Lord, therefore, at times sees it necessary to put a check on this *worldly* spirit, to crucify the world unto us and to crucify us unto the world, by putting a sentence of death in it and upon it. But in order to do this he sends some heavy affliction, brings some painful trial, or allows Satan to set upon us with some severe temptation. What is the effect? An inward sentence of death against it. In the light of the Lord's teaching, as shining through the dark clouds of affliction and temptation, we begin to see what the world truly and really is—a dying world, agonising as it were

in the last throes of death, and carrying upon its heaving, struggling bosom dying men and women, gasping, groaning, and falling in all directions. As with a dreary desert, or volcanic region strewn with wreck and ruin, covered with lava and ashes, no plant lives and thrives in its burnt and arid soil. Can happiness then be gathered from it? Do the flowers of Paradise, does the tree of life, grow amidst these ashes? No. According to the primeval curse, nothing grows therein but thorns and thistles. Is not this then the effect of afflictions, trials, and temptations; that every expectation of happiness or comfort from the world is effectually cut off; and that if we attempt to gather pleasure from it, all it can do for us is to lead us into snares, cast temptations into our path, and, as the miserable issue of such courses, to bring guilt and trouble into our conscience? In this way then do we learn to find and feel the sentence of death in ourselves as pronounced by the voice of the Lord against the world, and more especially against that worldly spirit which makes the world within a greater snare and a more dangerous enemy than the world without.

2. But look at it again as regards our *own righteousness*. How few even of the living family of God are delivered from self-righteousness! What a Pharisaic spirit is plainly and evidently to be seen in some of the best of men! How slight and superficial a view many who fear God seem to have of the depths of the fall, of the utter ruin and thorough helplessness into which it has cast the whole human race! What a slight, slender acquaintance have many gracious people with the corruptions of their heart, and how little they seem to know and feel of their inward leprosy, their wounds and bruises and putrifying sores, and what pollution and defilement are in them to the very core! But need we wonder at this when we see them so little tried, tempted, or exercised? It is for want of these inward exercises that there

are so many Pharisees in the inner court, and so few lepers outside the camp with the covering on the upper lip and the cry, "Unclean, unclean," out of their mouth. This is the reason why so many are secretly trusting to their own righteousness; for until we have the sentence of death in ourselves, to cut up, pull down, root out, and destroy our own righteousness, we shall in some way or other, and that probably hidden from ourselves, put trust in it. But when we have a discovery to our heart and conscience of the holiness of God, of the infinite purity of his righteous character, and have a corresponding sense of our deep sinfulness and desperate depravity before him; when seeing light in his light and feeling life in his life we see and feel how holy he is and how vile we are, then a sentence of death enters the conscience against our own righteousness and we view it as a condemned thing, as doomed to die, as having no more chance of escape from the justice of God than a malefactor has of evading the law when he stands upon the gallows with the executioner behind him. We view it as a guilty, condemned criminal justly doomed to die under the wrath of God. Thus we die to it, as the wife of the criminal dies to him at the gallows' foot, and by dying to it, it effectually dies unto us; we renounce it; we see death in it, and it drops out of our arms as a corpse falls to the ground when death strikes its natural life out of it.

3. So again as regards *our own strength*. There was a time with us when we thought we could do something towards our own salvation; when we might repent, or believe, or pray, or praise in our own strength; when we proposed to ourselves a vast number and variety of good works, whereby we hoped in some measure to gain the favour of God, and if not by them altogether to scale the battlements of heaven, at least to secure a sense of the Lord's approbation in our own conscience. This was indeed a pleasing dream in which many

have so deeply slumbered that they never waked out of it until they opened their eyes in hell. But what dispelled so pleasing a dream as this? What aroused the soul out of a sleep worse than Samson's or Jonah's? The loud and angry voice of the Lord in the conscience. And this voice spoke through heavy trials, powerful temptations, and a distressing sense of our thorough ruin in the Adam-fall. Here was the sentence of death passed and executed against this imaginary strength of ours, this thief, this robber, who would not only spoil the soul of the strength of Christ made perfect in weakness, but even rob the Lord himself of his grace and glory. So, then, how there issues as if from the mouth of God a sentence of condemnation against all creature strength under which it passes as a condemned thing. Does not the Lord himself say, "Without me ye can do nothing;" and again, "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me?" (John 15:4.) And is it not the express testimony of the Holy Ghost, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly?" (Rom. 5:6.) Is it not also the express declaration of the apostle, "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing?" (Rom. 7:18.) It is God that must work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13), for from him and from him only is our fruit found. (Hosea 14:8.) Thus we have the testimony of the word of God as well as the experience of our own hearts to prove to us that we have no strength to believe, to hope, or to love; no power even to command a good thought, no power even to raise a hearty sigh, to bid a single tear to drop from the eye, or a groan of contrition to gush out of the bosom.

Then again, as regards *our own wisdom*. Against this too, as against every fancied good in the creature, is the sentence of death recorded in the word and in the experience of the tried

and tempted saint of God. There was a time probably with us when we thought we could easily understand the scriptures and could explain them to others; the little light which we had seemed to us much greater than it really was, and, what through pride and what through ignorance, it seemed as if we could understand all mysteries and all knowledge. There are few things young Christians are more blind to than their own ignorance and their own folly. But apart from any light upon the scripture, in our fancied wisdom we thought we could easily see our way through this trial, or mode of escape through that temptation; that we could shape our own path, design our own way, and model our own end, both in providence and grace. But after a time, when brought into very trying circumstances, so as to despair even of life, then we began to find that much of the light which was in us was darkness; that in ourselves we really had no wisdom to see the snares laid for our feet or to escape them; that whatever knowledge we might have of the letter of scripture or of the truth in the mere doctrine of it, a thick veil of darkness was drawn over the whole word of God as regarded our experience of its saving, sanctifying power; that we might read the Bible till our eyes dropped out of their sockets, and yet remain in ignorance of the sweetness and savour of divine truth as applied to the heart by the power of God. We began also to see from innumerable stumblings and staggerings, backslidings and wanderings, slips and falls, that we had in ourselves no real or available wisdom to guide our own steps into the strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life, or keep ourselves in it when found; that we could not direct our own thoughts and meditations so as to be fixed upon the things of God; that we could not experimentally understand the scriptures of truth, know the mind and will of God, or find any mode of escape from besetting sins or besetting fears. We thus began to know the meaning of those words, "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this

world, let him become a fool that he may be wise" (1 Cor. 3:18); and, again, "We are fools for Christ's sake." (1 Cor. 4:10.) Our wisdom then being shown in the light of God's teaching to be folly, a sentence of death was executed against it, and it hung as it were before our eyes as a crucified thing.

5. But then, again, there is *our own fleshly holiness* which is one of the last things with which we are willing to part. It is as if the youngest and fairest of the little ones of Babylon is to be taken and dashed against the stones. (Psl. 137:9.) The law may have cut to pieces our self-righteousness, as Saul destroyed the Amalekites with the edge of the sword. But as he spared Agag who walked delicately, and the best of the sheep and of the oxen, so we might have had some secret reserve of our own holiness which we spared, when everything that was vile and refuse we were willing should be destroyed utterly. But O, this delicately walking religion of ours! Must that go too, must that be hewed in pieces in Gilgal? Our long and earnest prayers, our diligent and constant reading of the Scriptures, our careful and continued separation from the world, our consistent lives, our devotedness to the service of God in the house of prayer, and in the observance of his ordinances, our attention to every moral, social, and relative duty—that is, assuming that we had rigidly observed all these matters—must all this fair, pleasing reserve of fleshly holiness, which we have toiled for so laboriously and won so hardly, must this youngest babe die? But do not mistake me here. I am not condemning those things, but condemning the wrong use made of them. They are all good as appointed means of grace, but when they are abused to lift up the heart with pride and self-righteousness, then it is necessary that we should be shown what is their real character, and that that they are so defiled by sin that they cannot stand for a single moment before the eye of

infinite Purity. When, then, through trials and temptations, all this rubbish which we have gathered up with so much toil and labour, is scattered like chaff before the wind; when God discovers to the heart and conscience, in the light and life of his Spirit's teaching, his holiness and purity, and the glorious majesty of his all-seeing presence and power; when this fancied holiness of ours is dispersed to the four winds of Heaven, all its beauty becomes filth, and all its loveliness, shame and disgrace. Was not this the case with Isaiah, when he beheld the glory of the Lord in his temple? What was his cry but, "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts?" (Isai. 6:5.) So was it with Daniel when his comeliness was turned in him to corruption (Dan. 10:8); and so with Habakkuk, when his lips quivered at God's voice, and rottenness entered into his bones. (Hab. 3:16.)

Thus have we seen, both from Scripture and experience, how the sentence of death is passed and executed upon all our righteousness, strength, wisdom, and holiness.

II.—But, to come to the *second* point, *let us now see what is the effect of this inward sentence of death.* Two things are effected thereby; 1, *the destruction of self-confidence;* and 2, *the raising up of a trust in God,* according to the apostle's description of his own experience: "*That we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead.*"

1. As, then, the sentence of death is felt in our conscience, it cuts off all hope of escape by the deeds of the law, and indeed by any word or work of the creature. To effect this is God's intention in sending the sentence of death into our heart. As an illustration, look for a moment at the condemned criminal to whom I have before referred. He is

put in the condemned cell; he is there heavily ironed; the bolts and bars of his prison door are firmly fastened against him; warders are on the watch to prevent him from making the least attempt to escape. See him there in gloom and solitude, shut up without any hope of escape, or any possibility of avoiding his sentence. Or to revert for a moment to my second illustration. Look at a person upon his bed gasping for breath, emaciated to the last degree, worn out with pain and disease, in the last stage of consumption. Now both these persons, by the very sentence of death which they carry in themselves, are precluded from all creature hope; if they are to escape their allotted doom it must be by the interposition of some power distinct from their own. It must be in the case of the criminal, by the Queen in a most unexpected manner showing mercy almost at the last hour; it must be in the case of the consumptive, by God himself almost working a miracle. Thus it is in grace. The effect of the sentence of death in a living conscience, is this, that we *should not trust in ourselves*. Can the guilty criminal, can the dying consumptive trust in themselves? How can they with the sentence of death against them and in them? But without this experience of the sentence of death, there will always be a measure of self-confidence. I do believe that every person, whatever be his knowledge of the letter of truth, however high or low he stand in a profession of religion, will ever trust in himself until he has felt and experienced something of the sentence of death in his own conscience, whereby all hope of escape from the wrath to come through creature obedience, wisdom, strength, or righteousness, is utterly taken away. But what a state a man must be in to have the sentence of death in his conscience, so as to despair even of life; not to know what to do to obtain deliverance, and all hope effectually cut off to procure it by any exertion of his own strength, wisdom knowledge or ability! If the danger is very great and pressing; if as Elihu describes, "his soul draw near

to the grave, and his life to the destroyers," if God do not interpose perhaps at the last moment, what can save him from utter despair? And God has dealt so with many of his people, as to lay them in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps, until their soul is full of troubles, and their life draweth nigh unto the grave. (Psl. 88:3, 6.) But it is God's purpose thus to wean them from trusting in themselves, that they might look out of self to seek help from whom help comes, and hope in Him from and by whom deliverance will be granted. It is thus that the saint of God is taught to cast himself as a dying wretch, as a guilty criminal, as one past all help and hope, upon the bowels of free mercy, upon the superaboundings of sovereign grace, and to depend for salvation on the finished work of the Son of God, and the manifestation of that finished work to his conscience. It is easy to say, "We do not trust in ourselves." The lowest Arminian will say as much as this; but in what situation are we when we say that we are not trusting to ourselves? Say, for instance, that you were on the very borders of death; say that every evidence of your interest in Christ was removed from your eyes; say that the law was discharging its awful curses into your bosom, an angry God frowning over your bed, conscience recording a thousand unpardoned sins, the king of terrors staring you in the face, and the death-rattle almost in your throat:—then to look round and see what you are in yourself as a poor condemned sinner, and not to have the shadow of a hope as springing from anything you have done or can now expect to do! Were you ever brought here in anticipation, in experience? Here you would have learnt so to have the sentence of death in you as to despair even of life, and thus be taught not to trust in yourself. But what a way is this for God to take to teach us experimentally! How deep-rooted must be our self-confidence that God is obliged, so to speak, to take such a way as this to root it out! If there were a tree in your garden but lately planted, it might be

almost pulled up by the hand; but if it had stood long and struck its roots deep into the soil, if thirty or forty years had passed over its head, it might be the work of a day to remove it. You would need to bring axe and saw to cut it down, and then spade and mattock to dig about the roots, before you could pull it up from the bottom. So God knows what a deep root self-confidence has struck the human breast. It is not then a slight effort that will pull it out thoroughly; he must dig deep, and that with his own hands, and pull it out by the very roots, that he may plant in it the tree of life of his own providing, even Christ in the heart, the hope of glory. Then think not that you are hardly dealt with, or that God is your enemy, because he at times brings into your conscience this most painful sentence of death. Is he an unkind surgeon who, when a patient goes to him with a cancer in her breast, cuts out the diseased part? She may shrink and wince and cry under the keen knife, but the operator knows that every diseased part must be clean cut out, or the disease will spread and be worse than before. And is God unkind if he puts his knife deep into your heart to cut out the cancer of self-righteousness and vain confidence, which even now is mining within? For if there be any left, it will assuredly grow again. Yet it will grow again, for, like the cancer, the roots are too deep to be fully got out, and therefore again and again must the keen knife be thrust in. But his hand is as skilful as it is powerful. He will not let us bleed to death under his hand. All that he does, he does for our good; and this is the object of all these dealings, that we should not trust in ourselves.

2. But this is not the only effect. As, when the old worn-out or barren tree is cut down and taken out of the garden, it is only preparatory to the planting of another and better in its room; as when the cancer is cut out it is that the breast may kindly heal and health be restored, if God please to bless the

operation, so the sentence of death is not to destroy but to save, not to kill, but to make alive. Out of this sentence of death then, there springs by the power of divine grace, *a trusting in God "which raiseth the dead."* Most men, and indeed, in a sense, many even of those who desire to fear God's name, are practical atheists. As far as regards vital faith, they live without God, and without hope in the world. They know little or nothing of any close dealings with God, as not far from every one of us (Acts 17:27); and indeed, so far from coveting any nearer acquaintance with him they view him rather as an enemy, and thus, if I dare use the expression, think him best at a distance. And indeed, how few of the Lord's own family are brought into any intimate union and communion with the God of all their mercies! And why? Because they have not yet felt their deep need of him; therefore God and they are as if strangers to each other. But the Lord will not suffer his people to be always strangers to him: they shall not live and die alienated from the life of God. Though sometime alienated, and enemies in their mind by wicked works, yet having reconciled them unto himself through the blood of the cross, he will bring them near to his bosom, will make it manifest that they have a place in his eternal love and an interest in the finished work of his dear Son. It is for this reason that he sends the law with its curse and bondage into their conscience, to purge out that miserable self-confidence which keeps them looking to themselves and not unto him. As, then, this is driven away like the smoke out of the chimney by the furnace which God hath set in Zion, and they find that unless God appear for them they must sink for ever, they begin to look out of themselves that they may find some hope or help in the Lord. And as the Lord is pleased to help them with a little help, and to raise up and strengthen faith in their heart, they look unto him, according to his own invitation, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." And what a God

they have to look to! He is described in our text as he who "*raiseth the dead.*" These words admit of several explanations.

1. First, as simply pointing out the *Almighty power of God*. Think, for a moment, of the multitudes who have died since the creation of the world. To concentrate more closely your thoughts, think of some individual who died a hundred years ago, or a thousand years ago. Where is he? Open the grave: where is the body committed to it? A heap of dust; and how much of that dust which was once a human being has long ago been scattered to the winds? How almighty then must be the power of God to collect from the four winds of heaven, the scattered dust of the millions of human beings who have been interred since the foundation of the world! Let us assume for a moment that you are a believer in Jesus. The time must come when your body must be laid in earth till the resurrection morn, in the sure hope that God will then raise you from the dead; that he will know your sleeping dust, call up your body from its narrow bed, and re-unite it to your glorified soul. Mighty must that power be to raise up millions in the twinkling of an eye at the sound of the great trump! But if, as the Apostle here intimates, God must exert the same power in delivering a soul from going down into the pit that he will put forth when he raises up the sleeping dust of millions, what a view it gives us of that mighty power which is needed to liberate, to deliver, and to bless a soul under the sentence of death! Yet nothing less than the same almighty power which raises the dead out of the grave, can raise up a soul sinking under wrath and condemnation unto a good hope through grace.

2. But take the words in another sense: view them as having a reference to *the resurrection of Jesus Christ*, which Scripture ascribes again and again to the mighty power of

God. We have in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, a comparison drawn between the power put forth by God in raising Christ from the dead and the exceeding greatness of his power to those who believe, and it seems plain from the language of the apostle, that this power is one and the same. (Eph. 1:19, 20.) How great then must that power be! Now the apostle says of himself that he was reduced by the trial which came upon him in Asia to that degree of self-despair that he could not trust in himself; but was compelled by the necessity of the case, as well as led and enabled by the inward teaching of the Spirit and the promptings of his grace, to cast the whole weight of his sinking soul upon him "who raiseth the dead." He had, no doubt, a view in his soul of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and of the power that God displayed in raising up his dear Son when he had sunk into the tomb under the weight of the sins of millions; and thus looking up to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, as having highly exalted him to the right hand of his power, he felt he could trust in him as able to support him under, and deliver him out of his pressing trial.

3. But take another sense of the words: God "raiseth the dead" when *he quickens the soul into spiritual life*. Paul wanted the exertion of the same power, the manifestation of the same grace, and a display of the same sovereign authority, as that whereby he had been called and quickened at Damascus' gate. Many think that when life has been once implanted in the soul there is power to exercise faith. But such persons have never passed through severe trials and powerful temptations, or they would speak a purer language. I am sure that we have no more power to believe after the Lord has called us than we had before. We therefore need that the Lord should put forth again and again the same power which he manifested in raising us up from the death of

unregeneracy.

4. But there is one meaning more of the words "*God which raiseth from the dead,*" for you will observe it is in the present tense, and therefore implies some continued actings of that mighty power. In this sense therefore God may be said to raise the *dead in self-condemnation*, those who are, through the strength of temptation, sunk into self-despair, and have no hope but in the power of God to raise them up out of that sentence of condemnation and death, which they carry in their own consciences. Have you not sometimes fallen down before God with a feeling sense in your soul that none but he can save you from death and hell; that it must be an act of his sovereign grace to give you any present or even any hope of future deliverance; that to have your sins pardoned and your soul saved with an everlasting salvation, must come from the bowels of his free mercy; and that he, and he alone, can exercise that power in saving you from what you have most justly merited, even the lowest hell?

If, then, you have felt anything of the sentence of death in yourself and have been brought no longer to trust in yourself, but in God which raiseth the dead, you have had wrought in your soul a measure of the same experience that Paul speaks of as wrought in his. But remember this: a man may have a sentence of death in himself, yet never know what it is to trust in God which raiseth the dead. Saul had the sentence of death in himself when he fell upon his sword. Ahithopel had the sentence of death in himself when he went home and hanged himself. Judas had the sentence of death in himself when he put a halter round his neck. Many such characters have lived and died in awful despair under the tremendous displeasure of God, who never were able by his power and grace to trust in him which raiseth the dead. It is not then conviction, or condemnation, or doubt and fear, nor

even a distressing sense of your state before God that can save your soul. These things are necessary to bring you down to his feet; but you must have something given beyond this, even a living faith, whereby you trust in God which raiseth the dead, and cast the whole weight of your soul upon him who is able to save from death and hell.

Now can you find in your conscience those two distinct acts— 1, condemnation by the sentence of death in yourself, and yet, 2, a measure of faith communicated to your soul, whereby, looking up to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who raised him from the dead, you feel that you can put your trust in him? But how can you do this if you have no ground to go upon? which brings me to the third point, viz.:

III.—To show how God wrought this faith in his apostle's heart, and "*vouchsafed him a gracious deliverance: Who delivered us from so great a death.*" It was "a great death." The death was so great that it must have killed him if God had not interposed. And so your sins will kill you and sentence your soul to eternal condemnation unless you get some deliverance from their guilt, filth, and power from the same God of all grace from whom Paul got it, and receive it into your breast as a message from Him with the same savour and sweetness that he experienced when he felt that as his afflictions abounded, so his consolations abounded also.

1. "*Who delivered us from so great a death.*" Now in delivering the apostle, the first thing God delivered him from was self-despair. There are two things, the exact opposites of each other, which are greatly to be dreaded, and I hardly know which is the worse, for if one has slain its thousands, the other has slain its tens of thousands: *self-confidence* and *despair*. Despair has slain its thousands; self-confidence its

tens of thousands. The Lord keep us from both, for the path to heaven seems to lie between the two: on the one hand rise the lofty crags of presumption, on the other sinks the precipice of despair. God delivered Paul from *despair*, for he tells us that he despaired even of life. I do not say that a child of God ever falls into real despair, but he may feel as much of it as for a time stops the voice of prayer, grievously hinders, if it do not altogether destroy, the actings of faith, and leaves the soul in possession of little else but a sense of guilt and misery. To break up, then, those dark and gloomy clouds of despondency, the Lord graciously sent a ray of hope into the apostle's heart. He does not tell us *how* it came; but it evidently must have come, or he could not have had the deliverance of which he speaks. It might have been by bringing to his recollection his past dealings with him; it might be by applying some passage of scripture to his heart with power; it might be by favouring him in an unexpected manner with a Spirit of grace and of supplications, enabling him to pour out his heart before him; it might be by vouchsafing a sense of his gracious presence to support him under his trial, and give him some testimony that he would in due time appear. For in all these ways the Lord deals with his people in delivering them out of temptations and trials. Thus he sometimes delivers by sending a promise into their heart; sometimes by shining with a peculiar light upon a passage of his holy word; sometimes by a blessed manifestation of Christ and a revelation of his Person, blood, and work; and sometimes by strengthening faith and drawing it forth upon his own promises, so that the soul holds him by his own faithfulness, as Jacob held the angel. But in whatever way the apostle was delivered there was a most blessed reality in it, so that he could say in the language of the firmest confidence, "Who delivered us from so great a death." The Lord assured him that however great was the death he should not die under it, but live through it and come out of it

unharméd, as the three children came out of the fire and not a hair of their head was singéd. So in love to the soul of Hezekiah, he delivered it from the pit of corruption. (Isa. 38:17.) So he assured repenting David by the mouth of Nathan, "The Lord hath put away thy sins; thou shalt not die." (2 Sam. 12:13.) It was "a great death," so great that none but the Lord could deliver him from it. But the Lord did deliver him, as he will deliver all that trust in him; and this deliverance gave him a most blessed testimony that the Lord was his God.

2. But you may depend upon it that he was not delivered except *in answer to prayer and supplication*; for the effect of a beam of hope shining into the mind or of any manifested presence of the Lord of life and glory, is to raise up a Spirit of prayer and to enable the heart to pour itself out before him. Indeed we may lay it down as a most unerring rule that whenever the Lord is pleased to pour out upon the soul a Spirit of prayer, he is sure in his own time and way to give the answer; for he sends that Spirit of prayer as a forerunner of the answer. It is meant to draw the promise out of his hands and to bring deliverance out of his breast. To be in guilt and condemnation, or under trial and temptation, and yet to be enabled by the power of God to pour out the heart before him; to confess our sins, to seek his face, to call upon him for mercy, and wrestle with him that he would in due time appear,—this is like the dawning of the day before the sun rises; it is like the parting of the clouds in the midst of a storm, like the hushing of the wind in gale, like the blooming of the grape before we have the fruit,—all being certain heralds and indications of good things to come, and intimations that the Lord will deliver us. Now in proportion as the soul sinks, so must it rise. If you sink very deep, you will need a very long arm and a very strong arm to pull you out. If you fell into a well of only two, three, or four feet depth

from the surface of the soil, you might extricate yourself; if it were six or eight feet deep, you would need help from another; but O, if it were twenty or thirty feet deep, how much more then would you require assistance from above to deliver you from death! So in grace: if you have little trials, you will need but little support under them; if your sinkings be few and small, few and small will be your risings; should you sink lower than usually, you will need to be raised up more than usually; but should you sink very deep into trouble and sorrow, then you will need the display of such a mighty and supernatural power to pull you up and lift you out and bring you to the very bosom of God as perhaps you have not yet experienced since you made a profession.

IV.—But, to come to our last point, the apostle not only had experienced a blessed deliverance from so great a death, but he was in some measure *enjoying it at the time*, and in the strength of faith was *anticipating* similar blessings *for the future*. "*And doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.*" This is one of the richest mercies of delivering grace, that when the Lord is pleased in any measure to bless the soul he does not leave it as he found it, but goes on to bless it more and more, so that day by day it sees and acknowledges God's delivering hand. Now it may not be above once or twice or thrice in our lives that we are plunged into very deep trouble, brought into such trying circumstances as I have described, so as to despair even of life. But all through the course of our spiritual life, we shall know something of being continually delivered over unto death. As the apostle says, "I die daily." The sentence of death will be ever taking place in our conscience against our strength, wisdom, righteousness and holiness; not indeed always or often to the same degree, to overwhelm the soul in guilt or despair, but sufficiently to keep alive the sentence of condemnation in the breast, sufficiently to make us feel that

we are still in the flesh, and carry about with us a body of sin and death. The criminal, according to my figure, might be respited; he might be delivered from the hand of the executioner, but he would be remitted to penal servitude for the rest of his life, and thus still carry about with him the sentence of death, though delivered from its full execution. So the Christian; though delivered from death eternal by the blood of the Lamb and from death spiritual by regenerating grace, still he carries with him the sad mementos of the fall. He still is reminded of what he has been and what he ever must be but for the grace of God. Thus there is a continual sentence of death in the conscience of the man who lives and walks before God in godly fear. Every day sentence of death is recorded in his conscience against the world without and the worldly spirit within; against pride in its risings; against covetousness in its workings; against self-righteousness in its deceptive movements; against the flesh in all its cravings. Thus more or less a daily sentence of death is passed in a godly man's conscience, so that he dies daily in that sense as to any hope or expectation in himself. And as he thus dies in self, the Lord keeps giving him deliverance—not to the same extent, not in the same marked way as in times passed when he needed the special deliverances of which I have spoken. These he does not now need; but deliverances suitable to his actual state and case; deliverance from coldness, carnality, and death by communicating a spirit of prayer; deliverance from love of the world, by dropping in a taste of love divine; deliverance from the snares spread in his path by causing godly fear to spring up in the heart; deliverance from the power of sin by showing him that he is not under the law but grace. The Lord is always delivering his people—sometimes from evil, sometimes from error, and sometimes from the strength and subtlety of the flesh in all its various deceptive workings. The Lord is ever putting forth his mighty power to deliver the soul. It is but once a year that the trees are

sharply pruned; but the good gardener is ever watching how they are going on. And so in grace: sharp pruning times may be rare, yet the husbandman is ever attending to the state of his vine, and purging (or "cleansing," as the word means) the branches that they may bring forth more fruit. Does not he himself say, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment!" (Isai. 27:3.)

2. And this present deliverance *made him look forward* confidently *to the future*: "In whom we trust that he will yet deliver us." The Lord's delivering hand experienced day by day not only makes and keeps the conscience tender, but faith trusting, hope expecting, and love flowing. He who being thus favoured looks to the Lord day by day as his only hope and help, can also look forward even to expiring moments, trusting that when death comes the Lord will be with him even in nature's darkest hour, to smile upon his soul, to give him a peaceable death-bed, and then to take his ransomed spirit to be for ever with himself in the realms of eternal bliss.

How kindly, then, yet how wisely, does the Lord deal with his people! If he afflict them, it is in mercy; if he cast them down, it is to raise them up; if he bring a trial, it is as a preparation for deliverance; if he send a sentence of death into their conscience, it is not to execute it and hang them up like a murderer upon the gallows to be a spectacle to men and devils; but to prepare them for the communication of his grace, to make a place for the manifestation of his dying love, to work in them a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, that instead of being, as they deserve, hung upon a gibbet, the scorn of men, they might be monuments in heaven, and that to all eternity, of the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths of redeeming love and superabounding grace.