

Shall I ever die?

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(This paper was enclosed in a letter to a brother by the beloved late G. V. W., and was afterwards printed in *The Present Testimony*. — *Ed.*)

"Of course you will, sooner or later," most men will answer. "I DO NOT KNOW," is the answer which most Bible students *ought* to give.

Of believers, it is only those who have a special revelation that they will die, as Peter had had (John 21: 19; 2 Peter 1: 14) and Paul (2 Tim. 3: 6), who are justified in saying, "Certainly I shall die." Peter could say so; for the Lord Jesus had promised to him in particular the martyr's crown. Paul knew the same of himself; but *I* am only an ordinary Christian, and I do not pretend to be either a Peter or a Paul, and I do not either pretend to have had any revelation direct from the Lord Himself to me about my own private self in particular, therefore I am obliged to be satisfied with the general light which God in His word gives to His family as such, that clear and broad light which shines upon the people of Christ as such.

I am thus obliged to be satisfied with such words as these: "As it is appointed unto man [man as a sinner; not, as often wrongly quoted, unto all men] once to die, but after this the judgment [so far we read of what awaits man in fallen nature, death and the judgment, then comes what is true of the believer only] (v. 28.); "so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." As mere man is a sinner, and as such is appointed to death and judgment, so the believer (every believer) had all the penalty due to his sins borne by Christ. He looks for Him; to "them that look for Him He will appear a second time without sin unto salvation." Again, 1 Thess. 1: 9: "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." Again, 1 Thess. 4: 15-18: "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise *first*: *then* we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Again John, in Rev. 1: 7, says, "Behold, He cometh with clouds;" and (Rev. 3: 11) the Lord says to John, and to us too, "Behold, I come quickly;" and, in Rev. 22: 7, 12, "Behold, I come quickly; and (v. 20) when the Spirit and the bride (v. 17) invite Him to come — "The Spirit and the bride say, Come" — He answers, "Surely I come quickly." To which John replies, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." These Scriptures and many others show: first, that the path of the believer, as laid down in Scripture, leads the mind, not down to the grave, but up to meet the Lord at His coming; and secondly, that the believer in apostolic times did look up that bright and shining way to the Lord returning as their hope, even as it becomes those "whose conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil. 3: 20.)

Thus did they, as I, having no special communication of my death, act up to the word of the two in white apparel, who stood looking up steadfastly toward heaven (where a cloud had received Jesus from their sight). "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you

into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." (Acts 1: 10, 11.) Being myself only one of the flock, nor bell-bearer, nor shepherd, the prospect of the flock is my prospect, nor more nor less. Special communication to myself as an individual as to what ought to be looked for by myself in particular have I none, so I must content myself with the hope set before all Christians, and seek to be like unto one that waits for His Lord from heaven, "who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself." (Phil. 3: 21.)

It must be so. The Lord has not yet fulfilled the promise which He gave to poor self-confident Peter (see John 13: 38; John 14: 1-3): "Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice. Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Yes, such is our hope; that "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." (Col. 3: 4.)

Someone may say, If these things are so in the Scriptures, how come the religious people of our day not to see them? To this I answer, The pentecostal Christians were by faith, and through the Holy Ghost, occupied with the ascended Lord, who, having by His death cleared them of all guilt, was in heaven caring for all their heavenly and spiritual interests, and about to come again, that He might receive them unto Himself. Few of the religious nowadays know even what the value of His death and resurrection is to them; they, therefore, cannot study His glory in heaven, and they do not long for His return, or even wish to do so.

It may be said, "Are you alone right, and everyone else wrong?" I reply, "Thank God, I am not alone in this; but if I were alone, I would be alone in truth, rather than with a multitude in error." "But are you sure you are right?" Of this I am sure: first, that God's word is with me; and secondly, that God will not suffer those that prayerfully search His word, and lean not to their own understanding, to err in their faith and hope.

Certainly Christ in His coming, and not death, was the hope of the early Christians. Certainly too it is *written* at the end of the Revelation (and it cheers my heart to read it for others' sake as well as for my own), "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." "Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." G. V. W.