

The Separate State, and the Resurrection

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When we have learned a truth, even in power from God, such is the narrowness of the human mind, that we are in serious danger of making it a shut-door against other truths, and thus of stopping short of the largeness of God's thoughts. Indeed the more imposing a truth, the greater is the peril lest it become all-absorbing. "But the Advocate, who is the Holy Ghost (blessed and divine safeguard!) whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." "When he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all the truth."

Thus Jesus, after speaking of the many mansions in His Father's house, and of going there to prepare a place for His own, said, "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." It is clear that He did not mean death, nor the destruction of Jerusalem, nor the end of the world. He Who was going away promised to come again. If it was a real and personal departure of Jesus, it was to be as real and personal a return, not to reign over them in their place, but to take them to His place that He and they might be in heavenly bliss together. Right therefore it is, that our hearts should feel how very distinct a thing our going to Him is from His coming to receive us unto Himself in such sort as this.

Again, our souls may have drunk somewhat into the triumphant strain of the apostle when he cries, "Where, death, is thy sting? where, death, is thy victory?" Death is not our joy, but He that has won the victory, the Living One Who became dead, and, behold, He is alive for evermore and has the keys of death and of hades. Hence can the Christian say that all things are his, life or death, things present or things future. But death is not, nor ought to be, the object of His affections. Christ is the Bridegroom; not Christ known after the flesh, for henceforth as a new creation we know no one thus. We know Him the risen and ascended Man; and, He being of heaven, we look for Him to come for us to fetch us there. For us He is the Heavenly; as even we are so too by His grace, and no longer of the man of dust as once.

Meanwhile in the Spirit knowing Him where He is, we long for that which will fully express His power and glory, assured even now of His love in all its fulness. We long for His coming and the resurrection of all that slept in Christ; we long for His coming that in those surviving till then the mortal may be swallowed up of life, without even dying. Happy as it is assuredly to be rid of the body of humiliation as now, happier still in the departing to be with Christ, it is not all that our hearts are set on. Living or dying, we long for His full triumph, and the consummation of His joy, in having all His heavenly ones as Himself and with Him at His coming.

For we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in an instant, in an eye's twinkling, at the last trumpet. For sound it will, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. "Far better" than the present life is our departure to be with Him in the separate state; yet it is not His victory, but rather the last experience for the body of that which sin brought in. It is "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then (and not before) shall come to pass the word written: Death is [lit. was] swallowed up in victory."

Nevertheless it is an error to depreciate the blessedness of those who, absent from the body, are present with the Lord. When the word of truth in its simplicity and its fulness speaks out, this may not be touched. To the dying robber, who prayed the Lord to remember him when He should come in His kingdom, Jesus said, "Verily I say to thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." He thus proffers a

blessing beyond and better than he asked, to the renewed mind a dearer prize than any outward display, however glorious: the joy of being that very day with Christ Himself, where the Father delights to love and honour the Son. It is not that the presence of Christ will be lacking in the kingdom, nor shall we be less able to enjoy it in that day. But He promised him this blessed companionship at once on high before He comes in His kingdom. This none should disparage: no honour or reward can equal it; and thanks be to God, we shall have it for ever.

The saints then that were put to sleep through Jesus, as 1 Thess. 4: 14 beautifully puts it, shall not be separated by death from God's love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nor did Stephen when stoned only look to the coming of Christ, though this he surely did, but says, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;" as the Lord had said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." So Paul later says, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain . . . having the desire for departure and being with Christ-it is very much better" (Phil. 1: 21-23). There was not nor could be a doubt between death and resurrection. The hesitation was about "living in the flesh," as being needful for others in loving service; but as for himself individually, to depart and be with Christ was "very much better."

The best of all is for Christ to come; and so at the end of the same Epistle (Phil. 3) we have the proper hope for Paul and all. "For our citizenship (or, commonwealth) is in the heavens; from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity with his body of glory, according to the working of his power to subdue even all things to himself."

This quite agrees with the apostle's language in 2 Cor. 5, where in the face of death and the judgment-seat he expresses the common Christian confidence and willingness to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. But here he speaks of what is the best of all. "We groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed (*i.e.* death and the separate state), but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." He longed for the change at Christ's coming.

But we must beware of a prevalent error which denies the heavenly blessedness of paradise and seeks to make a purgatory of it. Scripture is wholly opposed to this falsifying of its character. Even where it first occurs, the aim is to reveal that the converted robber can forthwith be with Christ. Such is the immediate efficacy of His redemption for one who truly believed in Him, though only at the last brought to God.

Not less inconsistent with the low and superstitious idea is the light conveyed by the apostle Paul's words in 2 Cor. 12: 2-5. He identifies being caught up to "the third heaven" with being caught up into "Paradise." It is the highest view of heaven that scripture discloses; it leaves no room for the idle dream which consigns to some lower receptacle a soul whose fitness to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light is not achieved. For this meetness is taught by Col. 1: 12 to be already conferred by grace on all believers here. The scheme, so widely preached now, is a dark unbelief of the gospel, derived from mere Jews and Gentiles, not from scripture, and meant to comfort those who die in their sins without Christ by a hope wholly unwarranted. There is not the smallest ground for it in inspiration.

The testimony of our Lord in Rev. 2: 7 is if possible more explicit and absolutely decisive. For to the overcomer in the church at Ephesus He promises that He will give him to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God. No one can question that this contemplates the future glory when that which is perfect is come, and the redeemed are changed into His image even for their bodies. Yet He

calls it paradise; and in Rev. 22: 2 we see it fulfilled. Both texts therefore of this wondrous final book of scripture concur to explode as unfounded the assumption that paradise is not heaven. It is its most favoured quarter, where Christ went when His atoning work was done; where those who die in faith of Him and His work go to be with Him; and where they shall taste its sweetest enjoyment, when they have their bodies changed into the likeness of His glory at His coming. The revival of patristic tradition is a revival of heathenism, entirely at issue with what has now been manifested by the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1: 10).

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