

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTION # 85.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #85. *Death, being the wages of sin, why are not the righteous delivered from death, seeing all their sins are forgiven in Christ?*

A. The righteous shall be delivered from death itself at the last day, and even in death are delivered from the sting and curse of it;¹ so that, although they die, yet it is out of God's love,² to free them perfectly from sin and misery,³ and to make them capable of further communion with Christ in glory, which they then enter upon.⁴

Question 1—*What is the sting and curse of death?*

Answer—Death, as it has respect to some, has a sting and a curse joined hard to it, 1 Cor. 15:56. As sin brought death into the world; so it is the guilt of it lying on the consciences of men, which is the principal thing that makes them afraid to leave the world, Job 24:17. It is not that death is in itself an evil which nature cannot think of without some reluctance, for though Paul expressed his assurance of happiness in another world; yet, he would have been happy to avoid the dissolution of the flesh, had it been the will of God to bring him to heaven by a way more agreeable to nature, 2 Cor. 5:2. However, when the two evils of death meet together, that which is abhorrent to nature, and the sting which makes it much more formidable, they constitute an evil beyond measure distressing, Ps. 89:48. It is that whereby a person apprehends himself liable to the condemning sentence of the law, separated from God, and excluded from his favour; so that death appears to him to be the beginning of sorrows, Ps. 73:19. This view of death is what tends to embitter it, and fills him with dread and horror at the thoughts of it, Job 18:14.

Question 2—*What is the advantage of death to believers?*

Answer—Although they shall not be delivered from death, it is the peculiar privilege of the righteous that it shall redound to their advantage, Eccl. 12:7. That they shall not be exempted from death, it is evident, Eccl. 3:19; because the decree of God relating to it extends to all men, Rom. 5:12. We read only of two who escaped death; Enoch, who was translated that he should not see death, Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5; and Elijah, who was carried to heaven in a fiery chariot, 2 Kings 2:11, 12. These were extraordinary instances, not designed as precedents for believers, but as two to bear witness that death is not natural or necessary to man but the result of the decree of God for sin, Deut. 19:15. Furthermore, the saints which shall be found alive at Christ's second coming, shall undergo a change, the equivalent of death, though it cannot properly be called a dying, *cf.* 1 Thess. 4:17 *with* 1 Cor. 15:51. So, although we must not conclude that believers are delivered from the stroke of death, we may understand, with the apostle, that death is ordered for their good, Phil. 1:21. Thus, when he speaks of the blessings believers possess, he lists death, 1 Cor. 3:22.

¹ 1 Cor. 15:26, 55-57; Heb. 2:15.

² Isa. 57:1, 2; 2 Kings 22:20.

³ Rev. 14:13; Eph. 5:27

⁴ Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:23.

That the righteous, or believers, have advantage in death appears in several things:

First, the sting of death is taken away from them, Heb. 2:15. This is the result of their being in a justified state, Prov. 14:32. For as a person's being liable to the condemning sentence of the law is the principal thing which has a tendency to make him uneasy, and may be truly called the sting which wounds the conscience, 1 Cor. 15:56; so a sense of his interest in forgiveness through the blood of Christ, tends to give peace to it, 1 Cor. 15:55, 57. A person who has this sense of interest in forgiveness, though he has contracted guilt, which renders him unworthy of divine favor, yet is persuaded that guilt is removed and iniquity shall not be his ruin, Rom. 8:33, 37.

Second, their dying is an instance of God's love to them, even as those whom Christ said he loved to the end of his life, John 13:1; so, too, of believers it may be said he loves them to the end of their lives, 1 Cor. 1:8. As nothing has hitherto separated them from his love, nothing shall be able to do it, Rom. 8:35, 38, 39.

In death, God frees his saints from sin and misery, which they never will or can be until death, Luke 16:22; for them, there is some good thing found even in death, 1 Kings 14:13. As for sin, there remains of it in the best of men, which give them great disturbance, and occasion for the daily conflict which there is between the flesh and the spirit, 1 Cor. 15:31. But at death the conflict will be at an end, and the victory which they shall attain over it complete, Ps. 98:1; Rev. 15:2, 3. There shall be no law in the members warring against the law of the mind, Rom. 7:23; no propensity or inclination to what is evil, Rom. 7:15; nor any guilt or defilement contracted, 2 Cor. 7:1; which would be inconsistent with a state of perfect holiness, Eph. 5:27. Through death they are removed from the evils of judgment which God brings upon the earth, 2 Kings 22:20; together with an entire freedom from all those miseries which sin brought into this lower world, Isa. 57:1, 2. These are either internal or external, personal or relative; none of which shall occur to allay, or give disturbance to, the saints' blessedness after death, Rev. 14:13.

Again, the death of a believer appears to be an instance of divine love, as it is the means of his being made capable of farther communion with Christ in glory, Luke 23:43. Persons must be made meet for heaven before they are admitted to it, Heb. 12:14. Our present season and day of grace, indeed, is a time in which God is training his people for his glory, 1 Pet. 1:14-16; and there is a habitual preparation for it, when the work of grace is begun, which the apostle intends when he speaks of some who were translated into Christ's kingdom, Col. 1:12. This, however, falls very short of that actual meetness which the saints must have when they are brought to take possession of the heavenly blessedness, for the very frame of nature must be changed, 1 Cor. 15:50. The soul, therefore, must be so changed as to be rendered receptive of that glory; and, in order to its being so, all its powers and faculties must be greatly enlarged, 1 Cor. 15:53; John 1:18; otherwise, it could no more receive the immediate rays of the divine glory, than the weak and distempered eye can look steadily at the sun in its meridian brightness, 1 Tim. 6:16. This is done at death, when our powers and faculties are rendered capable of farther communion with Christ, hence Paul's desire, Phil. 1:23.

Finally, it is to be noted that the righteous shall be delivered from death itself at the last day, 1 Cor. 15:26. For in Christ, who is the death of death, death has been abolished in its strength and power, 2 Tim. 1:10; and on Judgment day, death itself shall be utterly destroyed, Rev. 20:14. For the righteous, the introduction of the kingdom of God in glory entails the complete absence of death, Rev. 21:4.