

The Saint's Desire to be with Christ

by Thomas Watson

"I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." Philippians 1:23

We are met to solemnize the funeral of our deceased friend, and to perform the last office of love. A looking-glass of mortality is here set before us, wherein we may see our own fragile condition. There is a sentence passed upon us all: "It is appointed unto men once to die" (Hebrews 9:27); so that our life is but a short reprieve from death, which is granted to a condemned man.

A wise man's life, said Plato, is nothing else but a contemplation of death. The Lord would have us accustom ourselves to dying thoughts (Deuteronomy 32:20); and, as it were, by meditation, often to stretch ourselves upon our deathbed. God clothed our first parents with skins of dead beasts, and feeds us with dead flesh—that as often as we see the death of other creatures we might not forget our own.

The text presents to us Paul in a holy pathos, or fit of longing to be with Christ. His heart was with Christ, and he wanted only the swift wing of death to carry him there. "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." I shall briefly explain the terms as they lie in order.

"I am torn between the two," or, "I am hemmed in." This may allude to a castle which is so straitly besieged and hemmed in that it has no way out. It fared now with Paul as with a woman who has her children at home with her and her husband beyond the seas; she would gladly be with her husband—yet is loath to leave her children. So Paul would gladly have been with Christ—but was loath to leave the Philippians, his spiritual children.

The apostle does not say, "I must depart," but "I desire to depart." All men must depart. There is a dying principle in all; the frame and composition of their body is earthly, and tends to a dissolution. Nebuchadnezzar's image, though it had a head of gold—yet had feet of clay (Daniel 2:33). Take the strongest man, let him be Samson or Hercules, of him we may yet say that he stands upon feet of clay! He is but animated dust, and must molder away in time. Death will come with its summons at last.

"Is my strength," said Job, "the strength of stones," (Job 6:12). Suppose it were—yet the continual dropping of sickness would in time wear away this stone. There is no such thing as an earthly eternity; death is called "the house appointed for all living" (Job 30:23).

But though death is in itself necessary—to Paul it was voluntary. It was not so much a debt as a vote; not so much Paul's task as his choice. He did not say, "I must depart," but "I desire to depart."

The apostle does not say, "having a desire to die," but "to depart," a softer word which takes off the sharp edge of death and make it less formidable.

This phrase "to depart" may refer to soldiers who pitch their tents in the field, and upon the least word of command from their general loosen the cords of their tents, pluck up the stakes, and march forward. So death loosens the silver cord which fastened the soul in its earthly tent, and a Christian marches forward to the heavenly Canaan.

Or "to depart" may be a metaphor taken from mariners, who loosen anchor so that they may sail from one port to another. So Paul desired to loosen anchor. Death to a believer is but loosening the anchor and sailing from one port to another—from earth to heaven.

The world is an inn; we are travelers who take up our lodging here for a night, and Paul longed to be out of his inn.

"And to be with Christ." The apostle had three great desires, and they were all centered upon Christ.

One was to be found in Christ (Philippians 3:9);

another was to magnify Christ (Philippians 1:20);

the third was to be with Christ (Philippians 1:23).

Observe that Paul does not say, "I desire to depart and be in heaven," but "to be with Christ." It is Christ's presence which makes heaven, as the king's presence makes the court. It is not the cherubim or seraphim which make paradise; "the Lamb is the light thereof" (Revelation 21:23).

From the connection of the words, "having a desire to depart and to be with Christ," we clearly see that the soul of a believer does not sleep in the body after death (a drowsy opinion)—but goes immediately to Christ. Upon the divorce of the soul from the body—there follows an espousal of the soul to Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:8, "absent from the body" means to be "present with the Lord." It would be better for believers to stay here if they did not immediately go to Christ after death. For here the saints are daily improving their graces; here they have many sweet tastes of God's love—so that it would be better to stay here. And Paul wished that which would be to his loss—if the soul should sleep in the body and not go immediately after death to Christ.

"Which is far better." A believer is no loser by death. His change is for the better; a scion that is grafted into a stock and planted in a better soil in no way is hindered. A believer after death is set into a better stock, Christ, and is planted in a better soil, heaven. This can be no loss—but an advantage. Well therefore may the apostle say that to be with Christ is far better!

In the words there are these three parts:

Paul's choice: "to be with Christ";

the excellency of his choice: "it is far better";

and the dilemma he was in: "I am torn between the two."

This holy man was in a great dilemma; he was torn between service and reward. He was desirous of glory—yet willing to adjourn his own happiness and stay out of heaven a while—so that he might be a means to bring others there.

From the words thus opened, there are three observations.

1. It is the desire of a true saint to leave this present world, and be with Christ.

2. To be with Christ is far better. How much better it is, we shall better understand when we are in heaven. Some angel is best able to speak to this point.

3. That which keeps a saint here in the world, is a desire of doing service. This cast the balance with the apostle, and was the only enticing motive to keep him here a while. He looked upon his abode in the flesh as an opportunity of service. Paul was willing to die—yet content to live, so that he might be a factor for Christ upon earth.

I shall at this time insist upon the first proposition, that it is the desire of a true saint to leave this present world, and be with Christ.

I. It is the desire of a true saint to be gone from this present world, "having a desire to depart." What a wicked man fears, that a godly man hopes for. "I desire," said Paul, "to depart." A sinner is reluctant to depart; he does not say, "Come, Lord Jesus," but "Stay, Lord Jesus." He desires to live in this present world forever; he knows no other heaven but earth—and it is death to him to be turned out of his heaven. It was the speech of Axiochus the philosopher, when he was to die, "Shall I be deprived of this life? Shall I leave all my sweet delights?"

David calls death a going out of the world (Psalm 39:13). A wicked man does not go out—but is dragged out; he is like a tenant who has gotten possession, and will not go out of the house until the police pull him out. If a wicked man were put to his choice, he would never come where God is; he would choose the serpent's curse—to eat dust (Genesis 3:14)—but not return to dust. If a wicked man might have his wish, he would serve no other God but his belly, and to this he would ever liberally pour drink offerings.

But a soul enlivened and ennobled with a principle of grace, looks upon the world as a wilderness wherein are fiery serpents, and he desires to get out of this wilderness. Simeon, having taken Christ in his arms, cried out, "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace" (Luke 2:29). He who has taken Christ in the arms of his faith, will sing Simeon's song, "Lord, now let Your servant depart!" David prayed to know the measure of his days (Psalm 39:4), because, said one, he desired to hear the good news of death's approach.

The saints of God have looked upon themselves as imprisoned in the body, and have longed for a jail-delivery. The bird desires to get out of the cage, though it is made of gold. Hilarion chided himself for not being more willing to die: "Go forth my soul, what do you fear?" Ignatius was desirous of martyrdom, that he might gain the presence of Christ in glory.

A Christian of the right temper, is ambitiously desirous to put off the earthly clothes of his body and make his bed in the grave. How this bed is perfumed with Christ's lying in it! A pillow of down is not so sweet as a pillow of dust. A regenerate person, looking upon himself as held with the earthen fetters of the flesh, and his soul put into a moveable sepulcher, cries out with David, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove, that I might fly away and be at rest!" (Psalm 55:6).

And, indeed, it is no wonder that a true saint desires a dismissal, and is so earnest to be gone from this present world, if we consider how beneficial death is to a child of God. Death puts an end to all his evils! In particular, there are ten evils which death will put an end to:

1. Death will put an end to a believer's SINS. Sin is the great incendiary; it does us all the mischief. Sin has a malignant influence. It is the womb of our sorrows—and the grave of our comforts!

Sin is the sinner's bondage (Acts 8:23) and the saint's burden (Psalm 83:3). How a believer is worn out with his corruptions? "I am weary of my life!" said Rebecca, "because of the daughters of Heth" (Genesis 27:46). That which makes a child of God weary of his life is his proud, unbelieving heart. Paul could better carry his iron chains—than his sins. "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver

me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24). When grace spurs the soul forward, the curbing bit of sin checks it and pulls it back again. There is much of the old man in the new man; there is a part in every regenerate heart, which is true to the devil—a part which will not pray, which will not believe. A Christian has a double bias; he has an earthly bias upon his will as well as a spiritual bias, and these draw him several ways; "For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do" (Romans 7:19).

Sin mingles itself with our holy things; we cannot do either our duties or our graces without sin; we are like children who cannot write without blotting! The sweet rose of grace does not grow without its prickles. No wonder then that a believer desires to depart; death will free him from his spiritual distempers! When we are done breathing—we will be done sinning!

2. Death will put an end to a believer's TEMPTATIONS. "Our whole life," said Augustine, "is nothing but a temptation; we tread upon snares." Satan is ever casting in the hook of a temptation to see whether we will bite. He knows how to suit his temptations: he tempted Achan with a wedge of gold; he tempted David with beauty. We cannot lock the door of our heart so fast by prayer—but a temptation will enter. Sometimes Satan comes more furiously, as a red dragon; sometimes more slyly, as a serpent. Sometimes he baits his hook with Scripture, and tempts us to sin under a mask of religion, as when he tempts to evil that good may come of it. Thus he can transform himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Is it not a grievous thing for a virgin to have her chastity assaulted? Is it not sad to have the devil's bullets continually flying about our ears? No wonder then that a believer is willing to depart; death will put him out of gunshot range! He shall never be troubled with Satan's fiery darts any more! Though grace puts a child of God out of the devil's possession; it is death only that frees him from the devil's temptation!

3. Death will put an end to a believer's FEARS. Fear is the soul's palsy; there is torment in fear. Cicero calls fear one of the three plagues of mankind; and the best of the saints are haunted with this evil spirit. They cannot rejoice without trembling. The believer fears that his heart would cheat him; he fears that God does not love him; he fears that he should tire in his march to heaven. The best faith may sometimes have its fears, as the best stars have their twinklings. "These fears," as Socrates said, "arm a man against himself." They are very afflictive, leaving sad impressions of melancholy behind. No wonder, then, that a believer longs to depart out of this life. Why should he fear that which frees him from fear? The king of terrors makes all fear vanish!

4. Death will dry up a believer's TEARS. Revelation 7:17: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes!" Weeping is nothing but a cloud of sorrow gathered in the heart, dropping into water. A Christian often has no one to keep him company but his own griefs and sorrows; he sits as Israel by the rivers weeping. As soon as the child is born, it weeps. When Moses was born, he was laid in an ark of bulrushes, where he baptized himself, as it were, with his own tears. Exodus 2:6: "And behold the babe wept." Ever since we looked upon the tree of knowledge, our eyes have watered.

There are many things to occasion weeping: our sins (who can look into his own heart with dry eyes?) and a loss of relations, which is like pulling a limb from the body. Joseph wept over his dead father (Genesis 50:1). Well, then, we should not be astonished that a believer desires to depart from hence. He shall leave the valley of tears! The bottle of tears shall be stopped; his weeping water shall be turned into wine, his mourning shall be turned into music, and his lamentations shall be turned into hallelujahs. Death is the handkerchief to wipe away all tears!

5. Death will put an end to a believer's TROUBLES. "Man is born to trouble" (Job 5:7). He is the natural heir to it. This life is subject to injury; we never finish our troubles while we live here—but

only change them for others. Everyone has his cross to carry; sometimes poverty pinches, sometimes sickness tortures, sometimes lawsuits vex. Man is like a tennis ball, bandied up and down by providence. While wicked men are in the world, never look for rest. These troubled seas, as the prophet calls them, will be casting forth their foam and mire upon the godly. Well then may a believer say, "Lord, now let You Your servant depart!" Death gives a child of God his quiet rest (Isaiah 57:20); it sends him a writ of ease. Job 3:17: "There (that is, in the grave) the wicked cease from troubling—and there the weary are at rest."

6. Death puts an end to a believer's CARES. Care is vexatious and anxious; it eats out the comfort of life. The Greek word for "care" signifies to cut the heart in pieces. Care frets as a canker; it excruciates the mind; it breaks the sleep, it ravages the energies. This is the rack which the soul is stretched upon. It is hard (I almost said "impossible") to shake off this viper of care while we live. All our comforts are care-full comforts. Care is to the mind as a burden to the back: it loads the spirits and, with overloading, sinks them.

Care is a fruit of the curse. Adam's lack of care—has brought us to care. Have you not sometimes seen the briar growing by the honeysuckle, so that you cannot easily gather the honeysuckle without being scratched by the briar? Thus in gathering riches, how the head and heart are pricked with care! And is there not great reason why a child of God should desire to depart? Is it good being among the briars?

Death is the cure of care! We are thoughtful and solicitous how to get such an estate, how to provide for such a child; now death comes to a believer as a friend, and says, "Never perplex and distract your mind thus. I will free you from all these heart-killing cares! I will strike but once, and that stroke shall relieve you of all your cares!"

7. Death will put an end to the night of spiritual DESERTION. "You hid Your face—and I was troubled" (Psalm 30:7). The soul in desertion is within an inch of despair. In affliction the world is against a man; in temptation Satan is against a man; in desertion God is against a man. Alstead calls desertion "an agony of conscience." This made the prophet Jonah call the whale's belly "the belly of hell," because he was deserted there. Jonah 2: 2, 4, "Out of the belly of hell I cried! I am cast out of Your sight!"

The Psalmist despaired, upon the suspension of God's favor. Psalm 88:15: "I have suffered your terrors and am in despair." But death will free from desertion; a believer after death shall never see any more eclipses. God will draw aside the curtain and pull off His veil, and the soul shall be forever sunning itself in the light of God's countenance!

8. Death will put an end to all our NATURAL imperfections. Our natural knowledge is very imperfect; the most perceptive, intelligent person may say as did Agur in Proverbs 30:3, "I have not the understanding of a man!" Since the fall, the lamp of reason burns dim; there are knots in nature that we cannot untie. Why should the Nile overflow in summer when, by the course of nature, waters are lowest? Why should a magnet incline to the polar star? Why should the sea be higher than the earth—yet not drown it? How do bones grow in the womb (Ecclesiastes 11:5)? Many of these things are riddles and paradoxes. By eating of the tree of knowledge, we have lost the key of knowledge, and now we are maimed in our minds! By the fall we have lost our headpiece!

Socrates said on his deathbed that there were many things which he had yet to learn. Our knowledge is like the twilight—dim and dusky. The greatest part of our knowledge is not so much as the least part of our ignorance; all which considered, no wonder to hear this language from a saint, "I have a desire to depart." Death crowns a Christian with fullness of knowledge. When he is snuffed out by

death, the candle of his understanding will burn brighter. At death, a child of God perfectly recovers the use of his reason.

9. Death will put an end to the imperfections of GRACE. Our graces are our best jewels—but here they are in their infancy and immaturity. Therefore the saints are said to receive but the first-fruits of the Spirit (Romans 8:23). The best Christian is like a child—he is very weak in grace. Faith is feeble, and love is lukewarm; though grace is not dead, it is sick. Revelation 3:2: "Strengthen the things which are ready to die." Grace is like gold in the ore—drossy and impure; the most refined soul has some dregs. This motto may be written upon a Christian's graces: He who shoots farthest in holiness comes short of the mark of perfection. Well then may a believer desire to depart! Death will free him from all the imperfections of his holiness. It will make him as pure as the angels—having neither spot nor wrinkle (Ephesians 5:27).

10. Death will put an end to a weary PILGRIMAGE. We are here in this world, in a pilgrim condition (1 Peter 2:11). A Christian walks with his pilgrim's staff in his hand, the staff of the promise in the hand of faith. Now death will put an end to this pilgrimage. Death takes away the pilgrim's staff—and sets a crown upon his head. No wonder that the gracious soul cries out with Paul, "I have a desire to depart."

OBJECTION. But some of the saints have prayed against death. Hezekiah, when the message of death was brought, prayed against it and wept sorely (Isaiah 38:2-3). So Hezekiah had no desire to depart.

ANSWER 1. Hezekiah desired to live a while longer that he might do more work for God. Verse 18: "The dead cannot praise You," intimating that if he had been then taken off by death, he was capable of doing God no more service. He was loath to be cut down, until he had borne more fruit. Besides, had he then died in the infancy of reformation, the adversaries of God would have exulted and made songs of triumph at his funeral.

ANSWER 2. Hezekiah was unwilling to die at that time because he had no son to succeed him on the throne. God had promised to David in 1 Kings 8:25, that those of his line who were godly, would not lack offspring to succeed them in the throne. Now in this respect it was a great discomfort to Hezekiah to die childless; for he might have thought himself no better than a hypocrite, inasmuch as God had promised offspring to the kings of David's line who feared him. Upon these and other considerations, Hezekiah might pray against death at that juncture of time.

And whereas it may be said that many of God's children are unwilling to die, I answer, a Christian is a compound creature, flesh and spirit; and from this composition there may be a conflict between the fear of death and the desire of death. But at last the spiritual part prevails; and, as faith grows stronger, fear grows weaker. Thus it was with Paul, who had "a desire to depart." I proceed now to the second branch of the doctrine,

II. It is a saint's desire to be with Christ. Paul longed to lie on that soft pillow where John the beloved disciple did—the bosom of Jesus. There would have been little comfort in departing, if the apostle had not put in these words, "to be with Christ." Death will make a glorious change for a believer; it is but crossing the dead sea, and he shall be with Christ. Death to a child of God is like the whirlwind to Elijah—it blew off his mantle—but carried the prophet up to heaven! So death is a boisterous wind which blows off the mantle of the flesh (for the body is but the mantle the soul is wrapped in)—but it carries the soul up to Christ! The day of a believer's dissolution is the day of his coronation! Though death is a bitter cup, there is sugar at the bottom; it translates the soul of a believer to Christ. Though the flesh calls death the last enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26)—yet faith calls it the best friend; it brings a man to Christ, which is far better.

These words "to be with Christ" imply intuition, enjoyment, and duration.

1. To be with Christ implies INTUITION. 1 John 3:2: "We shall see Him as He is." Here we see Him as He is not. He is not mutable and He is not mortal; but in heaven we shall see Him as He is. When Socrates was to die, he comforted himself with this—that he would go to the place where he should see Homer and Museus, and other worthies who lived in the ages before him. A believer may comfort himself with this—that he shall see Christ! Here we see him but through a dark glass; but what will it be when He shall be bespangled in all His embroidery, and shall show Himself forth in His full glory to His saints!

Lucian said to his friend, "I will show you all the glory of Greece; when you have seen Solon, you have seen all." So he who sees Jesus Christ sees all the glory of paradise, Christ being the mirror of beauty and the quintessence of happiness!

Some ask the question, "How and in what manner shall we see Christ? Shall we see His godhead with bodily eyes?" It is not good to be wise above what is written—but I think we may with modesty assert that we shall, with our bodily eyes, behold Christ's human nature. His glory as a Mediator shall be visible to the saints, and shall be beheld by glorified eyes; in this sense Job 19:25 is to be understood: "With these eyes shall I see God!" Great and amazing will that glory be, which shall sparkle from the human nature of Christ; if His transfiguration was so glorious—what will His coronation be! Augustine wished that he might have seen three things before he died: Paul in the pulpit, Rome in its glory, and Christ in the flesh. But what would those things be, compared to this sight of Christ in heaven? We shall behold not a crucified Christ—but a glorified Christ!

2. To be with Christ implies ENJOYMENT. We shall not only see Him—but enjoy Him. Therefore in Scripture the saints are said not only to behold Him—but to be glorified with Him (Romans 8:17). And glory is said not only to be revealed to us—but in us (Romans 8:18). "Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:21); we shall not only see it—but enter into it! A man may see a fair arbor drawn upon the wall—but he cannot enter into it. This glory of heaven may be entered into. As the sponge sucks in the wine, so there shall be sucking in of glory. From this enjoyment of Christ—a torrent of divine joy will flow into the soul!

3. To be with Christ implies DURATION. 1 Thessalonians 4:17: "So shall we be forever with the Lord!" "This world and all it contains will pass away" (1 Corinthians 7:31). Earthly comforts, though they may be sweet, are swift. Plutarch reports that Alexander caused a sword within a wheel to be painted on a table, implying that what he had gotten by his sword was subject to be turned about with the wheel of providence. If we had the longest lease of these things, it would soon be run out. But this privilege of being with Christ runs parallel with eternity, "So shall we be forever with the Lord!"

Application

Information. See from all this, the difference between a believer's departing, and a wicked man's departing. To a believer it is a happy departing; to a wicked man it is a sad departing. To the wicked man there is nothing but departing; he departs out of this life and he departs from Christ. "Depart from Me, you who are cursed." A wicked man departs from beams of glory—into flames of fire! He departs from the society of angels—into the fellowship of devils! (Matthew 25:41). He is never done departing; the wicked shall be ever consuming—yet never consumed. They may well tremble—to think of departing. Well may the mourners go about the street when a wicked man dies! Hell may rightly be called the place of weepers.

And see how little cause a child of God has to fear death—when it only carries him to Christ! This is a deathbed cordial; we are naturally possessed with a strange kind of palpitation and trembling at the

thoughts of death, as if we were in a shaking palsy, whereas there is nothing more really advantageous to a Christian, than death! Death is a bridge which leads to the paradise of God; all the hurt that death does to a believer—is to carry him to Christ, and is not that far better? Death pulls off the rags of the body—and puts Christ's robes upon the soul. The serious consideration of this, would raise a believer above the desire of life, and the fear of death.

OBJECTION. But a child of God may say, "I could rejoice at the gain of death—but I fear the pain of death. I desire the haven—but I tremble at the voyage."

ANSWER 1. In other cases we do not refuse pain; there is pain in the setting of a bone, in the lancing of an abscess; yet we endure the pain contentedly, because it is in order to a cure. Death is a healing thing; it will cure a Christian of all his wounds! By making one pain, it cures all the rest.

Do we endure no pain at all in our life? Job felt so many miseries that he chose to die rather than to live. Job 7:5: "My flesh is clothed with worms, my skin is broken and become loathsome, so that my soul chooses strangling, and death rather than life." The life of man is a continual misery, and is interwoven with miseries. Some have felt more pain in their life—than others have at their death.

ANSWER 3. What are a few pangs of death—compared with the pangs of a guilty conscience, or with the flames of hell, from which God has freed a believer! How light is death—compared with the weight of glory! (2 Corinthians 4:17) How short is it—in respect of eternity! The present suffering, is not worthy of comparison, to the glory which shall be revealed in the children of God (Romans 8:18).

ANSWER 4. We make death more than it is. As the Moabites thought the waters had been blood, when they received only a color and tincture from the sunbeams (2 Kings 3:22), we imagine death to be worse than it is. We look upon it through a magnifying glass. Fear makes a Christian see double; if we would shut the eye of sense and open the eye of faith—death would appear less formidable.

Examination. Let us then put ourselves upon a scrutiny and trial whether we are people who shall go to Christ when we die. It is certain that we shall depart—but the question is whether we shall go to Christ or not?

QUESTION. How may that be known?

ANSWER. By faith. Faith is the uniting grace; it is the vital, radical, cardinal grace which gives us a saving interest in Christ. Faith is the queen of the graces; by faith we take Christ as a Husband—and give ourselves up to Him as a Lord. Faith is a Christ-appropriating grace; it has both a relying and an applying faculty. Christ is the ring; faith is the finger which puts on this ring. Faith opens the orifice in Christ's sides—and drinks His blood. Faith is both justifying and sanctifying; it fetches blood out of Christ's sides to pardon, and water out of His sides to purge! (1 John 5:6). Oh, with all gettings, get faith!

QUESTION. But there is much deceit about this grace. The Cyprian diamond, said Pliny, looks like the true diamond—but it is not of the right kind; it will break with the hammer. The devil has his bad wares and counterfeit graces to put off; how therefore shall we know a true faith from a false and spurious one?

ANSWER. I shall give you two different evidences.

1. True faith is ever found in a heart deeply humbled for sin. Acts 2:37: "They were pricked at their hearts." Here was the first budding of faith; you never saw a flower grow out of a stone—nor faith out of a heart of stone. Faith is an herb which always grows in a moist soil—in a weeping eye and a

broken heart. Mark 9:24: "The father of the child cried out with tears, Lord I believe." This flower of faith, grows in the water.

2. True faith is operative. The jewelers say there is no precious stone but has some latent virtue in it. Just so, we may say of precious faith—it has hidden virtue in it. It is very operative, for it works out sin (Acts 15:9); it works by love (Galatians 5:6); it is full of good works (James 2:17). It makes the tongue speak for Christ, the head study for Christ, the hands work for Christ, and the feet run in the ways of His commandments. Faith comes with power upon the heart. 2 Thessalonians 1:11 speaks of the work of faith with power. It has a restraining and constraining power; by this we may know whether ours is a true faith or not.

I have read of a father who had three sons and, being about to die, he left in his will all his estate to that son who could find his ring with the jewel which had a healing virtue. The case was brought before the judges; the two elder sons counterfeited a ring—but the younger son brought the true ring, which was proven by the virtue of it, whereupon his father's estate went to him. To this ring I may compare faith: there is a counterfeit faith in the world—but if we can find this ring of faith which has the virtue in it—both purgative and operative, this is the true faith which interests us in, and entitles us to—Jesus Christ. And if we are in Christ while we live, we shall be with Christ when we die. Where faith gives a propriety, death gives a possession.

Comfort. Here then is comfort in the death of our pious friends. Though they depart from us—yet they go to Christ, which is far better. We should mourn for those who are living—yet dead in sin; and rejoice for those who are dead—yet live with Christ. Our dear departed brother had holy pangs of desire which seemed no less strong than the pangs of death. He panted after God as his ultimate and supreme desire. He did often with joy repeat the words of the text, and seemed to roll them as honey under his tongue. We may therefore entertain good hopes of him who is placed in that paradise of God, which he thirsted after. I wished him to look up to the merits of Christ. "I must," said he, "rest there or nowhere."

Oh, what a comfort is this, to think that our friends are not only taken away from the evil to come (Isaiah 57:1)—but that they are with Christ! Why should we be sad at their advancement? They have their crown (2 Timothy 4:8), their throne (Revelation 3:21), and their white robes (Revelation 7:9). Why should we weep immoderately for those who have all tears wiped from their eyes? They enter into the joy of their Lord! Why should we be swallowed up by grief for those who are swallowed up by joy! They who die in the Lord are not lost—but sent to heaven a little before us; we shall shortly join them. It is but a short while—and godly friends shall meet in heaven and feast together at the supper of the Lamb! (Revelation 19:9). It is but a short while—and the saints shall lie together in Christ's bosom, that hive of sweetness, that bed of perfume! "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13). Why should we mourn excessively for those who are blessed? Oh, let us not weep at the happiness of our friends—but rather long to depart and be with Christ, when we shall drink of these rivers of pleasures which run at His right hand forevermore!