



DYING WELL

I. LOOKING AT THE WRONG THING

Fears & Temptations

Gerhard:

“It is appointed for all to die, but to die with piety, to die in Christ, to die happily [well] is not for everyone...For if, at any time, our clever enemy conspires against our salvation and tries to rob us of it with all his might, it will certainly be at the last hour of our life. It is for this reason that some of the ancients say that the infernal serpent bites the heel, for he knows that if he is overcome by us in that final conflict all is well on our part; it will be our eternal disgrace and doom, however, in the balance of our life, like a play, is well acted in parts, but in that final climactic moment, we conduct ourselves in a dishonorable and cowardly manner. For this reason, he assaults our hearts with various trials, as with battering rams, in times of sickness and in our struggle with death...Blessed is the one who prevails at this point.”¹⁸

The Fiery Serpents & The Fiery Serpent (NKJV)

⁴ Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. ⁵ And the people spoke against God and against Moses: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.” ⁶ So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.

¹⁸ Gerhard, preface, pg. 4

⁷ Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord that He take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.

⁸ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, **when he looks at it, shall live.**”⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, **when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.**

Three Fears that Hold Our Gaze: Death, Sin, Hell

Luther:

1. Death

“Death looms so large and is terrifying because our foolish and fainthearted nature has etched its image too vividly within itself and constantly fixes its gaze on it. Moreover, the devil presses man to look closely at the gruesome mien and image of death to add to his worry, timidity, and despair. Indeed, he conjures up before man’s eyes all the kinds of sudden and terrible death ever seen, heard, or read by man. And then he also slyly suggests the wrath of God with which he [the devil] in days past now and then tormented and destroyed sinners. In that way he fills our foolish human nature with the dread of death while cultivating a love and concern for life, so that burdened with such thoughts man forgets God, flees and abhors death, and thus, in the end, is and remains disobedient to God. We should familiarize ourselves with death during our lifetime, inviting death into our presence when it is still at a distance and not on the move. At the time of dying, however, this is hazardous and useless, for then death looms large of its own accord. In that hour we must put the thought of death out of mind and refuse to see it, as we shall hear. The power and might of death are rooted in the fearfulness of our nature and in our untimely and undue viewing and contemplating of it.”

Lot’s Wife Looks Back & Dies – Genesis 19

¹⁵When the dawn came, the angels urged Lot, “Get going! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, so that you will not be swept away by the guilt of the city.”¹⁶But **Lot was taking too much time, so the men grabbed his hand**, his wife’s hand, and the hands of his two daughters, because of the Lord’s compassion for him. They led him out and placed him outside of the city.¹⁷Then when they had taken them out, one of them said, “**Run for your life! Don’t look behind you**, and don’t stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, so that you are not swept away!”

...²⁴Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire out of the sky from the Lord. ²⁵He overthrew those cities, as well as all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and whatever grew in the soil.

²⁶But **Lot’s wife, who was behind him, looked back**, and she became a pillar of salt.

What is the World to Me? |

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Was frag ich nach der Welt
G. M. Pfefferkorn, 1645-1732
Tr. A. Crull, 1845-1923

1. *What is the world to me
With all its vaunted pleasure
When Thou, and Thou alone,
Lord Jesus, art my Treasure!
Thou only, dearest Lord,
My soul’s Delight shalt be;
Thou art my Peace, my Rest.
What is the world to me!*

7. *The world abideth not;
Lo, like a flash ’twill vanish;
With all its gorgeous pomp
Pale death it cannot banish;
Its riches pass away,*

Spangenberg:

“There are those who think that they are Christians but still cling to what is created and depart unwillingly, indeed often with hearts that are halfway in despair. They lose the temporal blessings of this earth and the eternal blessings of heaven...therefore, throughout their entire lives Christians should be learning to die to what is created, to lose those things that might draw them away from the love of their Creator.”¹⁹

Gerhard:

“As our whole heart must be given over to the love of God, whatever is given to another person or thing is subtracted from God.”²⁰

“The love of the heavenly Father is to be placed before the love of children and the love of Christ, the Bridegroom, before the love of wife. The gift is not to be loved more than the giver...if you love them dearly, you will receive them more dearly in the life to come...in that life we will know each other even better than we do now...If your relatives are dear to you, let Christ, your Brother, be dearer to you.”²¹

*And all its joys must flee;
But Jesus doth abide.
What is the world to me!*

*8. What is the world to me!
My Jesus is my Treasure,
My Life, my Health, my Wealth,
My Friend, my Love, my Pleasure,
My Joy, my Crown, my All,
My Bliss eternally.
Once more, then, I declare:
What is the world to me!*

2. Sin

“Sin also grows large and important when we dwell on it and brood over it too much. This is increased by the fearfulness of our conscience, which is ashamed before God and accuses itself terribly...[Man] finds himself so unprepared and unfit that now even all his good works are turned into sins. As a result, this must lead to an unwillingness to die, disobedience to the will of God, and eternal damnation. That is not the fitting time to meditate on sin. That must be done during one’s lifetime. Thus the evil spirit turns everything upside down for us. During our lifetime, when we should constantly have our eyes fixed on the image of death, sin, and hell—as we read in Psalm 51 [:3], “My sin is ever before me”—the devil closes our eyes and hides these images. But in the hour of death when our eyes should see only life, grace, and salvation, he at once opens our eyes and frightens us with these untimely images so that we shall not see the true ones.”

¹⁹ Spangenberg, pg. 61

²⁰ Gerhard, pg. 68 (note: Cf. Ps.-Anselm, *De mensuratione crucis*,4)

²¹ Gerhard, pg. 71

Augustine:

“We have lost our health because we have offended our Creator by sinning.”²²

Bernard:

“Therefore, if you feel the worm of conscience in this present life, you ought to suffocate it and not keep it forever before your memory because it will rot your conscience and give birth to a host of never dying worms.”²³

Gerhard:

“If the hour of death draws near and you repent, because you are deprived of the opportunity to sin, your repentance is false since you have not really abandoned your plan to sin as much as the occasion for sin has abandoned you.”²⁴

A Dove (Soul) Flies to the Rock (Christ) – Song of Songs 2:14

¹⁴My dove is in the clefts of the rock,
in the hiding places on the mountainside.
Let me see how you look.
Let me hear your voice,
because your voice is pleasant,
and you are lovely to look at.

Bernard:

“The infernal hawk presses hard and pursues your soul. Therefore, let it flee like a fearful and terrified dove to the cliffs of the rock, which are the wounds of Christ.”²⁵

A Good Conscience Means Sin is Forgiven – 1 Peter 3:19-21

[Christ] was put to death in flesh but was made alive in spirit, 19in which he also went and made an announcement to the spirits in prison.

²⁰These spirits disobeyed long ago, when God’s patience was waiting in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In this ark a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. ²¹And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the body but the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me | 286

A. M. Toplady, 1740-78, alt.

1. *Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood
From Thy riven side which flowed
Be of sin the double cure:
Cleanse me from its guilt and pow’r.*

2. *Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill Thy Law’s demands.
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.*

3. *Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace.
Foul, I to the fountain fly—
Wash me, Savior, or I die!*

4. *While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eye-lids close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!*

O Sacred Head, Now Wounded |
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O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden
Attr. Bernard of Clairvaux, 1090-1153; P. Gerhardt, 1607-76
Tr. composite

7. *The joy can ne’er be spoken,
Above all joys beside,
When in Thy body broken
I thus with safety hide.
O Lord of life, desiring
Thy glory now to see,
Beside Thy cross expiring,
I’d breathe my soul to Thee.*

²² Augustine, *Sermon 153.8.10* (quoted in Gerhard, pg. 16)

²³ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo de conversione ad clericos*, V. 7 (quoted in Gerhard, pg. 45)

²⁴ Gerhard, pg. 46

²⁵ Gernard, pg. 19

Luther:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will help you.” In this way you may view your sins in safety without tormenting your conscience. Here sins are never sins, for here they are overcome and swallowed up in Christ.

Bernard:

Let the Passion of our Savior Jesus Christ be your final refuge and only remedy of your sins. It is able to help you when your wisdom fails, your righteousness proves insufficient, and the merits of your holiness give way.”²⁶

*8. Be Thou my consolation,
My Shield when I must die;
Remind me of Thy Passion
When my last hour draws nigh.
Mine eyes shall then behold Thee,
Upon Thy cross shall dwell,
My heart by faith enfold Thee,
Who dieth thus dies well!*

*9. And when I am departing,
O part not Thou from me;
When mortal pangs are darting,
Come, Lord, and set me free:
And when my heart must languish
Amidst the final throe,
Release me from mine anguish
By Thine own pain and woe.*

3. Hell

“Hell also looms large because of undue scrutiny and stern thought devoted to it out of season. This is increased immeasurably by our ignorance of God’s counsel...Man looks with suspicion upon God, so that he soon desires a different God. In brief, the devil is determined to blast God’s love from a man’s mind and to arouse thoughts of God’s wrath... In the end he cannot save himself, and he falls prey to hatred and blasphemy of God. What is my desire to know whether I am chosen other than a presumption to know all that God knows and to be equal with him so that he will know no more than I do? Thus God is no longer God with a knowledge surpassing mine. Then the devil reminds us of the many heathen, Jews, and Christians who are lost, agitating such dangerous and pernicious thoughts so violently that man, who would otherwise gladly die, now becomes loath to depart this life. When man is assailed by thoughts regarding his election, he is being assailed by hell, as the psalms lament so much. He who surmounts this temptation has vanquished sin, hell, and death all in one.”

Luther:

“You must not regard hell and eternal pain in relation to predestination, not in yourself, or in itself, or in those who are damned, nor must you be worried by the many people in the world who are not chosen...After all, you will have to let God be God and grant that he knows more about you than you do yourself.”

Salvation Unto us Is Come | 227

Es ist das Heil uns kommen her
P. Speratus, 1484-1551
Tr. composite

*9. The law reveals the guilt of sin,
And makes man conscience-stricken;
The gospel then doth enter in,
The sin-sick soul to quicken.
Come to the cross, look up and live!
The law no peace to thee doth give,
Nor can its deeds bring comfort.*

²⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs, Sermon 22, III.8 (Quoted in Gerhard, pg. 19)

Gerhard:

“Indeed, if the scriptures testify by words, Christ by tears, and God by oath that He desires none to perish, that He wishes the death of no sinner...then by what appearance of truth...are you able to say that those who possess an absolute hostility toward God are excluded from salvation and the saving work of the Mediator?”

Chosen for Salvation – Ephesians 1

⁴He did this when he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. He did this in accordance with the good purpose of his will, ⁶and for the praise of his glorious grace, which he has graciously given us in the one he loves.

Luther:

But he who wants to fight against them [death, sin, and hell] and drive them out will find that it is not enough just to wrestle and tussle and scuffle with them. They will prove too strong for him, and matters will go from bad to worse. The one and only approach is to drop them entirely and have nothing to do with them. But how is that done? It is done in this way: **You must look at death while you are alive and see sin in the light of grace and hell in the light of heaven, permitting nothing to divert you from that view.**”

11. *Hope waits for the accepted hour
Till God give joy for mourning;
When He displays His healing pow'r,
Thy sighs to songs are turning.
Thy needs are known unto thy Lord,
And He is faithful to His Word,
This is our hope's foundation.*

12. *Though it may seem He hears thee not,
Count not thyself forsaken;
Thy wants are ne'er by Him forgot,
Let this thy hope awaken;
His word is sure, here is thy stay,
Though doubts may plague thee on thy way,
Let not thy faith be shaken.*

By Grace I'm Saved | 226

Aus Gnaden soll ich selig werden
C. L. Scheidt, 1709-61
Tr. composite

9. *By grace! On this I'll rest when dying;
In Jesus' promise I rejoice;
For though I know my heart's condition,
I also know my Savior's voice.
My heart is glad, all grief has flown
Since I am saved by grace alone.*

10. *By grace! Sin, death, and Satan hearken!
I bear my flag of faith in hand
And pass— for doubts my joy can't darken—
The Red Sea to the Promised Land.
I cling to what my Savior taught
And trust it, whether felt or not.*

II. LOOKING UPON CHRIST

Luther:

“So then, gaze at the heavenly picture of Christ, who descended into hell [1 Pet. 3:19] for your sake and was forsaken by God as one eternally damned when he spoke the words on the cross, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani!”—“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” [Matt. 27:46].”

On My Heart Imprint Thine Image
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Skriv dig, Jesu, paa mit Hjerte
T. H. Kingo, 1634-1703
Tr. P. O. Strømme, 1856-1921, alt.

*On my heart imprint Thine image,
Blessed Jesus, King of Grace,
That life's riches, cares, and pleasures
Have no pow'r Thee to efface.
This the superscription be:
Jesus, crucified for me,
Is my Life, my hope's Foundation,
And my Glory and Salvation.*

Looking away from Christ, One Will Flee Their Enemies – Leviticus 26

¹⁴But if you will not listen to me...I in turn will do this to you: I will inflict upon you panic, wasting disease, and fever, which will cause your eyes to fail and your vitality to slip away. You will sow your seed but get no return, for your enemies will eat it. ¹⁷**I will set my face against you.** You will be beaten by your enemies, and those who hate you will rule over you. You will flee, even though nobody is pursuing you...They will flee as though fleeing from a sword, and they will fall though no one is pursuing them. ³⁷Each of them will stumble over his brother, as if from a sword, even though no one is pursuing him. You will have no power to stand against your enemies, ³⁸and you will perish among the nations.

Looking at Christ, Your Enemies Will Flee You - Judges 7

²The Lord said to Gideon, “There are too many people with you for me to give Midian into your hands. If I did that, Israel would glorify itself at my expense and say, ‘My own hand has delivered me.’

...[32,000 men are whittled down to the weakest and foolish 300 men]...

²²When the Israelites blew the three hundred ram's horns, the Lord turned the sword of each Midianite against the person next to him throughout the whole camp.

The Midianite army fled up to Beth Shittah, toward Zererah, up to the border of Abel Meholah, as far as Tabbath.

That I May Die Unfearing

"That I may die unfearing" is a prayer of Christians. We pray it because we need to pray it.

Gerhard:

"Without a doubt, it is a weakness of our flesh and a peculiarity of our corrupt nature that we are more desirous of this momentary life than the everlasting one to come."²⁷

Romans 8:38-39

³⁸Neither life nor death, nor any creature can separate or tear us from the love of God which is Christ Jesus" (Gerhard's translation)²⁸

Lord, Thee I Love With All My Heart | 406

Herzlich lieb hab ich dich, o Herr
M. M. Schalling, 1532-1608
Tr. C. Winkworth, 1827-78, alt.

*3. Lord, let at last Thine angels come,
To Abram's bosom bear me home,
That I may die unfearing;
And in its narrow chamber keep
My body safe in peaceful sleep
Until Thy reappearing.
And then from death awaken me
That these mine eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, Thy glorious face,
My Savior and my Fount of grace,
Lord Jesus Christ,
My prayer attend, my prayer attend,
And I will praise Thee without end.*

We Now Implore God the Holy Ghost | 33

Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist
German Hymn, c. 13th century, st. 1
M. Luther, 1483-1546, st. 2-4
Tr. The Lutheran Hymnal, St. Louis, 1941

*4. Thou highest Comfort in ev'ry need,
Grant that neither shame nor death we heed,
That e'en then our courage may never fail us
When the foe shall accuse and assail us.
Lord, have mercy!*

²⁷ Gerhard, pg. 60

²⁸ Gerhard, Ibid.