

OF THE BENEFITS WHICH BELIEVERS RECEIVE AT DEATH.

PHIL. I. 21.—*To me—to die is gain.*

ALL must die; but as men's lives are very different, so their account in death also. To an ungodly man death is a loss, the greatest loss: but to a believer it is gain, the greatest gain.

Paul was now a prisoner in Rome, and his case in itself was doubtful whether it would terminate in life or death, (though he was assured it would not be death at that time, ver. 25.) But having taken a view of both, he does in the text, in his own person, give us, (1.) The sum of a believers life, that is, Christ. As all the lines drawn from the circumference meet in the centre, so the whole of a believer's life in Christ, his honour being the scope of all. (2.) His estimate of a believer's death; he will not be a loser, but a gainer by it: it brings him in many benefits, and so is a gainful exchange.

The doctrine of the text is,

DOCT. 'Death is gain to a believer.'

In discoursing this doctrine, I shall shew,

I. In what respect death is gain to believers.

II. How it comes to be gain to them.

III. Deduce an inference or two.

I. I am to shew in what respects death is gain to believers. It is so in respect of their souls and their bodies.

FIRST, In respect of their souls. It separates their souls from their bodies, but not to their loss, but to their gain.—It is with the souls of believers at death, as with Paul and his company in their voyage, Acts xxvii. The ship broke in many pieces, but the passengers came all safe to land. So when the eye-strings break, the speech is laid, the last pulse beats, the last breath is drawn, the soul escapes, and gets safe away out of the troublesome sea of this world, into Immanuel's land. Now, there is a twofold gain or benefit which the souls of believers receive at death, namely perfection in holiness, and immediate entering into glory.

First, Perfection in holiness, Heb. xii. 23.—'The spirits of just men made perfect.' In regeneration the elect get a new nature, which is a holy nature, 2 Pet. i. 4; but much of the old nature still remains. Then grace is planted in them by the Spirit. It grows up in the gradual advances of sanctification; but at death it is perfected, they are made perfectly holy. This perfection consists in two things.

1. A perfect freedom from sin, Eph. v. 27. The spiritual enemies they see to-day, they shall never see more, when once death has closed their eyes. Many a groan and struggle there is now to be free of sin, but still it hangs about the believer. Sometimes he gets his feet on the neck of his lusts, but they rise up again upon him: therefore he is never in safety to let down his watch, or to lay by the sword of the Spirit. The spiritual bands are never quite off here; but then it will be said, 'Loose him and let him go.' At death the saints shall be free,

(1.) From all commission of sin, Rev. xxi. 27. In the earthly paradise, sin was found, there Adam broke the whole law; but into the heavenly paradise no sin can enter. Not a vain thought shall ever go through a believer's heart more; there shall be no more temptation to sin, nor the least inclination to it.

(2.) From the very inbeing of sin. The body of death shall go out with the death of the body, and then shall the desire be answered, 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' Sin's reigning power is broken in sanctification: yet it still abides as a troublesome guest; but at death it is plucked up by the roots. It is like the house under the law infected with the leprosy, for the removal of which the stones were carried to an unclean place.

(3.) From a possibility of sinning, Rev. iii. 12. 'Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out.' The first man in paradise, yea the angels in heaven till they were confirmed, were but as reeds liable to be shaken with the wind of temptations as the doleful event made appear. But by death putting an end to the believer's probationary life, he becomes a pillar in the temple of God, which can never more be moved.

2. In the arrival of their holiness at the highest pitch they are capable of, Eph. iv. 13. Now every sincere soul has a perfection of holiness in respect of the parts thereof; they are like little children who have all the parts of a man, but none of them grown to their utmost pitch; but then they will have a perfection of degrees, answering to the holy law in all points, like men who are come to their full growth. Sincerity shall then be turned to legal perfection.

(1.) Their understandings shall be perfectly illuminated, 1 Cor. xiii. 12. 'For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.' There shall then be no more complaints of weakness of knowledge in them who in their life were the weakest of all saints. There shall not be the least remains of darkness there, but a full sunshine shall be in them.

(2.) Their wills shall be perfectly upright, so that they shall will nothing but what is good, and that without the least bias to the other side, Rev. xxi. 27. A perfect conformity shall then be betwixt God's will and theirs, without the least possible jarring, 1 John iii. 2.

(3.) The executive faculty shall then perfectly answer their will, readily and with all imaginable ease and delight, Matth. vi. 10. Now the believer is often in the dark, he knows not what to do. Sometimes when he knows his duty, he has no will to it; there is a great aversion and backwardness that he has to strive with. Oft-times, when he would fain do it, he cannot, Matth. xxvi. 41. 'The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' But then there shall be no more such impotency; he will be able to do whatever he will, and will nothing but what is good.

Secondly, Immediate entering into glory. As Pharaoh's jailor opening the prison-door to the butler, let him out into the court; so death letting the soul out of the body it goes to glory. Christ said to the thief on the cross, 'This day shalt thou be with me in paradise,' Luke xxiii. 43. So death is to them the beginning of an immortal life; a strait entry by which they go out into the heavenly paradise; the ship by which they are transported into Immanuel's land. Here consider,

1. The glory they enter into. They pass after death into,

1st, A glorious place, namely, heaven, the seat of the blessed, 2 Cor. v. 1. It is Christ's Father's house, where their room is ready for them, when they have no more place on earth, John xiv. 2. 'In my Father's house,' says Christ, 'are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you.' The place which has no need of the sun and moon, but the glory of God lightens it, Rev. xxi. 23. Behold the outside bespangled with sun, moon, and stars; how glorious must it be within!

2dly, A glorious society, namely, the society of other saints gone before them, 'The general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven,' Heb. xii. 23. the society of the holy angels, ib. the society of the glorious Mediator, his Father, and Holy Spirit, even the blessed Trinity, John xvii. 24. Heb. xii. 23, 24. It is a glorious society they are admitted into.

3dly, A glorious state. This is 'the house in the heavens, eternal, not made with hands, 2 Cor. v. 1. It is a glorious state the soul enters into, a glory God puts on the souls of believers when out of the body. It is what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive; it is what we cannot make language of.—It is a state of rest and perfect blessedness.

2. That they immediately after death pass into it, and do not abide any where else, and sleep until the day of judgment, as some profane men would have it, is clear. For,

(1.) Scripture instances plead this. So to the thief upon the cross it was said, 'This day shalt thou be with me in paradise,' Luke xxiii. 43. So of Lazarus it is said, that 'he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom,' Luke xvi. 22. And if it be a parable, as most likely it is, it is the more full to the purpose. And there is the same reason for all the saints as for one, they being all as ready at death as ever they will be, working-time for preparation being then over, John ix. 4.

(2.) There is no middle state; but when the saints put off the body, they put on glory, 2 Cor. v. 1, 2. When they are 'absent from the body,' they are 'present with the Lord,' ver. 8. When they 'depart,' they are 'with Christ,' Phil. i. 23. When they die, they 'enter into peace' and rest, Isa. lvii. 1. the 'rest remaining for the people of God,' Heb. iv. 9.

(3.) *Lastly*, The contrary doctrine is utterly inconsistent with the blessed state the scriptures ascribe to believers after death, Rev. xiv. 13. 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours.' And it is inconsistent with believers their desire of death, that they may be with Christ in glory, 2 Cor. v. 1, 2. Phil. i. 23. What was to make Paul in that strait? if he could not be with Christ before the general judgment, he would have chose rather to have lived till then, that he might have been with him in some sort, than to have died.

SECONDLY, In respect of their bodies, death is gain.—They must lie down in a grave; but death,

1. Cannot harm them, nor bring them to any real loss to be lamented. For,

(1.) Their dead bodies are still united to Christ. Though death separate their souls from their bodies, it cannot separate them from Christ, even every part of their body from another, 1 Thess. iv. 14. They are members of Christ still, though in a grave, Rom. viii. 11. 'Our friend Lazarus is dead,' said Christ.

(2.) They cannot be held there for ever. It is but till the resurrection, Job xix. 26. The saints' dust is precious, locked up in the grave as a cabinet, till the Lord have further use for it. They are his precious fruit, that lie mellowing in the grave, and ripening for a glorious resurrection.

2. It is a real gain to them, in respect their graves are the places of their rest; not their prison, but their beds of rest, wherein they

are to rest till the morning of the resurrection. The soul is the man, and it enjoys the glory of heaven; mean while the body rests in the grave, where it will enjoy a profound and tranquil repose, till it be united to the soul at the time when the dead in Christ shall rise from their long sleep.

II. I come to shew how death comes to be gain to them. It is a rest.

1. From all the ordinary troubles and afflictions of this life, Rev. xiv. 13. forecited.

2. From all persecutions and hardships from men for the cause of Christ, Job viii. 17. 'There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest.'

I shall conclude with a few inferences.

Inf. 1. That the saints may be encouraged and stirred up to press after perfection in holiness, since they shall certainly obtain it at length, Phil. iii. 13, 14.

2. The wicked shall come to a perfection, so to speak in their wickedness, and immediately pass into hell, Luke xvi. 22, 23.

3. There is no purgatory nor middle state betwixt heaven and hell.

4. The toils and troubles of the world, that find men in the way of the Lord, should not discourage them, or carry them off their way, since they will all soon have an end.'

5. There is no reason to mourn for the death of godly relations, as those who have no hope, 1 Thess. iv. 13.

6. *Lastly*, A dying day is the best day for a believer that is in all his life, Eccl. vii. 1. It is their marriage, home-coming, and redemption day.