

OF DYING IN FAITH.

These all died in faith.—HEB. XI. 13.

THE apostle having in the former chapter exhorted them to persevere in the faith, in this he explains the nature of it. 1. Describing it by some properties, ver. 1. 2. Confirming the description by examples of the faithful in general, ver. 2, particularly of Abel, ver. 4, Enoch, ver. 5, 6, Noah, ver. 7, Abraham, ver. 8, 9, 10, Sarah, ver. 11, 12, and gives an account of their faith in four particulars, ver. 13. 1. The continuance of their faith: died; as lived by it, so died in it. 2. The object of it, the promises. 3. The acts of it: (1.) see; (2.) persuaded; (3.) embraced. 4. The effect of it, an acknowledgment they were strangers. From the first,

Obs. The elders died in the faith.

1. In the profession of the faith. They held fast the truths of God to the death. They denied not, they made not shipwreck of faith; they suffered not Satan or his instruments to cheat them of it; exchanged it not for fancies, delusions; did not apostatise, fall from it, as was prophesied of many in the last times; made not their opinions subservient to carnal interests; did not tack about, not carried about with every wind. Judgments firmly anchored in truth could ride out foul weather, bear up against storms.

2. In the state of faith. As they lived, so they died believers. Having begun in the Spirit, they did not end in the flesh. They kept faithfully the Spirit's *παρρησιαθηνη*. They lost not the habit of faith; suffered it not to decay, languish; but strengthened it, bore on towards perfection; that when their outward man decayed, faith increased, and was strongest in the greatest weakness, in death.

3. In the expression of faith. The genuine expression of faith in God is faithfulness to God; and they were faithful unto the death. Though sometimes in the place of dragons, yet did not deal falsely in the covenant; endeavoured to perform the conditions of it, to walk before God in uprightness. Deal faithfully in the covenant, when do what is promised, answer engagements, as intent upon repentance and new obedience.

4. In the exercise of faith. Though the other be true, this seems most proper. As they acted faith in their life, so in their death. Their life

was the life of faith, as Paul, Gal. ii. 20. Faith had an influence into every act of their life. *Natural* acts, Sarah conceived by faith, and was delivered, Heb. xi.; *civil* acts, Abraham sojourned, ver. 9; *spiritual* acts, Abel sacrificed by faith, ver. 4; *ordinary* acts, Abraham's travel, ver. 8; *extraordinary*, Noah's building an ark, ver. 7. What they did, they did by faith, *i. e.*, depending upon Christ for strength, believing the promise for assistance and success. And from the considerations of God's nature, attributes, providence, and their experiences of his goodness and faithfulness, did whatever they were commanded, went wherever they were called, expected whatever was promised. Thus they lived, and thus they died in faith, with confidence that God would perform what he had promised, even after their death, to them or theirs. Those that were begun to be performed in their lives, should be perfectly accomplished in or after their death; and those that were not at all performed before, should be fully accomplished after. God had promised to Abraham the land of Canaan, and heaven which that typified, and the Messias the purchaser of it. Abraham died in faith, that is, went out of the world confident that he should be admitted into heaven, ver. 10, and that his posterity should inherit the land of Canaan, and that the Messias should proceed from his loins. He saw the day of Christ, and that sight, strengthened by faith, made the day of death a day of joy, a glad some day. Died in faith, *i. e.*, in expectation of the performance of promises.

Uss. Let us endeavour to imitate the ancient worthies; so to live by faith, as we may die in it. There can be no scruple of endeavouring an imitation here, since their example is commended to us by God, verse 2. Paul exhorts, Philip. iv. 8, 'Whatsoever things are of good report,' &c. He that dies in the faith dies honourably, comfortably, happily.

1. Honourably. He honours God, and God honours him. A strong faith does honour God at any time, Rom. iv. 20, sure then in death, since faith has then the most discouragements. How the Lord honours faith, we need go no further for instance than this chapter, where the apostle, by special instinct from God, makes honourable mention of faith and the faithful, and leaves an eternal monument thereof to all posterity. Thus shall it be done to the men who honour God, whom God will honour; their memory shall be blessed, and all generations shall call them so. When they are dead, and turned to ashes, rather than they shall want a testimony, the Lord will give one from heaven, a sufficient vindication against all the slander of the world. And who will put dishonour upon these whom the Lord will honour?

2. Comfortably. Faith and joy are mutual causes. Where strong faith, there is strong consolation in life or death. When faith ebbs, joy ebbs; a spring-tide of faith brings a strong stream of joy. Where there is *πληροφορία πίστεως*, full assurance of faith, then the soul is carried with full sail into the bosom of Christ. A weak faith does but creep into heaven, strong faith gives an abundant entrance.

3. Happily. 'He that continues faithful to the end, shall be saved.' It is he who must hear that ravishing welcome from the mouth of God, 'Well done, good and faithful servant,' and must receive a glorious crown from the hand of Christ; 'Be thou faithful unto death,' &c. Faith enters with triumph into heaven, it conquers all opposition; 'This is your victory whereby ye overcome the world, even your faith.' It conquers Satan; the shield of faith quenches his darts, conquers sin, conquers death, *jam deventum est ad triarios*; it disarms him, and then enters heaven with a

triumph, 'O death, where is thy sting?' Given victory through Christ. What we have through him, we have by faith in him.

Directions. 1. That you may live and die in the faith of Christ, in the faith once delivered to the saints, *i. e.*, in the truths of Christ; that you may be constant and immoveable, not tossed to and fro, not carried away with the error of the wicked, the prevailing delusions of the times; that you may not be carried down the stream of error, the waters which the dragon vomits, Rev. xii. 15; take this golden rule: 'Receive the truth in the love of it,' 2 Thes. ii. 10. If you would continue in the truth, and have the Lord establish you in it, love the truth for itself, and love it above all inferior respects whatsoever. He that loves, espouses the truth only for some sinister advantages, out of custom, for applause, to avoid censure, &c., when these cease, will divorce the truth, and embrace any error that will comport with these respects. This is the great reason of the unfaithfulness of these times; why do many relinquish, disclaim those truths, which they formerly held, maintained, professed? Why, they did not love the truth for itself, but for some base respects; they never were in love with the beauty of truth, but only its garb, its dowry; and therefore when error comes in a garb more pleasing to carnal minds, with a dowry more advantageous to their base hearts, these wantons will entertain the truth no longer, but embrace error, a strumpet in room thereof. He that loves truth only for applause will embrace error when it is more plausible. He that loves carnal pleasures more than truth, will be ready to entertain those errors that will grant a toleration. He that receives the truth only, or principally, because it is generally received, will change his opinion when the times change. Nay, if a man's carnal heart were not apt to fall out with truth, yet the Lord is so much in love with it as he will not suffer those to be blessed with it, who will not love it for itself, who prostitute it to base respects. He gives such up to strong delusions, &c.

2. That you may live and die in the state of faith, get into that happy state. Get faith rooted and grounded in your hearts, and then you are sure: 'Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.' You can neither live nor die without faith. While ye live without faith you are under the sentence of condemnation, and if ye die without faith, death will lead you to execution. Be not deceived, think not that to be faith which is not; think not you have faith, because you believe the word of God is truth, and what it reveals concerning God, and Christ, and holiness, and happiness, is true. This is faith indeed, but such a faith as the devils have; such a faith will be no advantage either in life or death; it will distinguish thee from an infidel, but not from an unbeliever. That faith which is saving, which receives testimony from God, &c., is such a faith as will make you willing to embrace Christ both as prince and Saviour; willing to obey him, as to be saved by him; to be sanctified as well as justified; that worketh by love, purifieth the heart, brings forth the fruits of the Spirit. This is the faith by which ye must live, in which ye must die, if ye will die happily, comfortably, &c. That you may attain this faith, be diligent in attending upon the word. This direction is the apostle's, Rom. x. 14, 17. It is the word that both begets faith, and nourishes it. Those that neglect the word (it is evident to me) care not how they live, nor how they die.

8. That you may live and die in the expression of faith; *i. e.*, that you may not deal unfaithfully in the covenant; consider how horribly wretched such unfaithfulness is. Those that use to deal unfaithfully with men, lie,

or forswear, to get some advantage, there may be some temptation to this; but he that deals unfaithfully with God, deals unfaithfully with God to undo, to ruin himself. There is no advantage in the world to be got hereby, to tempt a man to it; the sin is desperately wicked and inexcusable. He that deals unfaithfully in the covenant does God a high displeasure, that he may damn himself. What do ye, when you neglect faith, repentance, &c.? what tempts you to it? what advantage expect ye?

4. That ye may die in the exercise of faith, (1.) learn to live in the exercise of it. The more faith is acted, the easier it will be to exercise. Those who are strangers to the life of faith while they live, will find it a strange work to act it when they die. If you exercise it not now, it will in an ordinary way be impossible to act it then. The way to die in faith is to live by it. Learn now to live in a continual dependence upon God, to trust him with all you have, for all you want, to rely on him for supply of wants, assistance in duties, success of endeavours, strength to resist temptations, subdue lusts, bear afflictions, a blessing on your enjoyments. Walk always leaning upon God; so the word **Π** imports; depend on him, as the child upon the mother's breast; by the attractive power of faith, draw out of his all-sufficiency whatever you want. The life that you live, let it be by faith, &c., and then your death will be like these worthies'; and this may be writ upon your monument, at least it will be writ in heaven, 'These all died in the faith.'

(2.) Treasure up the promises in your hearts, in your memories. No such treasure as this. You will find riches a vain thing in that hour, they cannot deliver from death; but faith acted on the promises will both support in it, and deliver from it. These you will find the best cordials, sweeter than manna, the bread of life. That soul can never faint that feeds on them. Faith supports the soul when death assails, and these support faith; they are the staff of bread; if faith feed on them, they will nourish it into strength, such strength as will break through the terrors and pangs of death in a triumph. Let not the promises lie neglected, as though of no use. Choose out those that are most pertinent, those that will support in the conflict, and raise your expectation of approaching glory.

(3.) Clear up your evidences for heaven. While your title is dark, faith will be weak. How can ye be confident of the eternal blessings of the covenant, while ye have no assurance that you are in covenant? How can ye with confidence go out to meet the bridegroom, when ye know not whether ye have oil in your lamps? Oh then give all diligence to make your calling and election sure. Till that be sure, faith will scarce find any firm footing, and so stagger and waver. Examine yourselves whether in the faith; give no rest to yourselves till ye know ye have interest in him, who through death has destroyed him that had the power of death, Heb. ii. 14, 15. You can never be confident ye shall depart in peace, till ye be assured that Christ is your salvation.

When you have cleared this evidence, endeavour to keep it clear. Sin blots it, guilt is a blur in the evidence. If you avoid not these in your lives, you will scarce read your evidence at death, and then faith may be non-plussed and to seek, when most [you] need it. Endeavour to keep a good conscience always, in all things, towards God and man, that so you may have the testimony of God and of your conscience on your deathbeds: as 2 Cor. i. 12, 'That in simplicity and godly sincerity you have had your

conversation.' Oh, such a testimony will be a great encouragement to faith, when all outward encouragements fail.

(4.) Lay up experiences. The remembrance of experiments of God's mercy and faithfulness in your lives will be a sweet support to faith in death. God's people have made good use of experiences to this purpose; David, Paul, 2 Tim. iv. 18. Faith from such promises* will draw sweet conclusions. The Lord has delivered me from the dominion of sin, and the cruelty of Satan, therefore he will deliver me from the power of death. The Lord has given me the first fruits of heaven while I lived, he will give me a full harvest of glory after death.

* Qu. 'promises' ?—Ed.