



I COR. XV. 56.

*The Sting of Death is Sin.*



**I**N the foregoing Verse, we have a Christian's Triumph over Death and the Grave, in the Expectation of a blessed and glorious Resurrection. *O Death! where is thy Sting? O Grave! where is thy Victory?* Shall our scatter'd Dust and Ashes be rallied again into the same Body? Shall that which was infirm, dishonourable, and mortal, be raised up powerful, and active, bright, and glorious, impassible as Spirits, and deathless as Eternity? Shall we everlastingly survive our Funerals? shall we again receive these Bodies out of the Earth, purify'd from all earthy, dreggy Mixtures and Concretions? There can be no Consequence more naturally drawn from these Premisses, than what our Apostle infers, to condemn Death, as

a feeble and impotent Adversary; to trample upon this disarm'd Worm without Fear of Hurt; and to disdain the Weakness of its Malice, whose greatest Spight turns only to our inconceivable Advantage.

IN the Words now before us, and the ensuing Verse, the Apostle makes use of another Medium to prove the same Assertion, That to a Believer there is nothing formidable, nor dreadful, even in Death itself. Now, because in this Argument there are many Ellipses, many Propositions which are silenc'd, and yet very necessary to be understood, before we can find out the full Force of it; I shall endeavour briefly to unfold it, and shew wherein the Strength and Sinews of the Apostle's Reasoning doth consist. The great Truth which he would prove, is, That a Christian may well triumph over Death: And this he doth by Two Heads of Arguments. The one drawn from the Consideration of the exceeding great Advantage and Glory that shall redound even to their very Bodies, by the Resurrection. And this he at large prosecutes, in a great Part of this Chapter; especially Verses 42, 43, 44. *It is sown in Corruption, it is raised in Incorruption; It is sown in Dishonour, it is raised in Glory;*

Glory ; It is sown in Weakness, it is raised in Power ; It is sown a Natural Body, it is raised a Spiritual Body. The other Head of Arguments, is that which now lies before us to be consider'd ; which, if it be drawn out at length, contains in it many Propositions.

*First.* The First is, That all the pernicious and baneful Effects of Death proceed from Sin ; which, therefore, is here called, *The Sting of Death* ; because, as venomous Creatures transmit their Poison by their Sting, so likewise that which serves to convey into us all the Mischief and Harm that Death can do us, is only Sin. And hence it is well represented unto us, under that metaphorical Expression of a Sting. *The Sting of Death is Sin.*

*Secondly,* That to Believers this Sting is taken out of Death, and the Venom taken out of that Sting. They may take this cold and frozen Snake into their Bosoms ; and, though it hisses against them, yet it cannot wound them. And to prove this, he asserts,

*Thirdly,* That all the Malignity that Sin contains in it, it receives from the Law. *The Strength of Sin is the Law.* For it is the Law only that gives Sin its Being : For the Scripture gives us this

Definition of Sin, *That it is a Transgression of the Law*, 1 Joh. iii. 4. And expressly tells us, *That where there is no Law, there is no Transgression*, Rom. iv. 14. And it is the Law that gives Sin its condemning Power, by vertue of that Threatning of Death and eternal Destruction, which GOD hath denounced against all that shall dare to violate and transgress it. *In the Day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die*, Gen. ii. 17. *And the Soul that sinneth, it shall die*, Ezek. xviii. 4. And therefore it necessarily followeth,

*Fourthly.* In the Fourth Place, That if the Law, which gives Power and Malignity to Sin, be abolish'd, we may then confidently triumph over Death, whose Sting, and all whose Power, consists in Sin. And,

*Fifthly,* The Apostle concludes, ver. 57. *That GOD hath given us the Victory through CHRIST*; for He hath abrogated the Law so far as it gave Strength to Sin to condemn us: He hath taken away the damning, and the cursing Power of the Law, by bearing its Punishments, and being made a Curse for us. *Thanks be unto GOD which giveth us the Victory, through our Lord JESUS CHRIST.* So that the whole Sum of the Argument lies

lies in this, that CHRIST hath taken away the Sting of Death, which is Sin, because He hath abolished the Law, whence Sin receiv'd all its Power and Virulency.

THESE Words offer up to us these Two Propositions.

I. THAT there is a Sting in Death.

II. THAT this Sting is Sin.

BUT before I can treat of either of these, I must somewhat more fully explain what is meant by that Metaphor, *The Sting of Death*. It is in Allusion to venomous and noxious Creatures, whose Power to do Mischief lies in their Stings: There usually lies the Stock and Treasure of their Poison, which they diffuse into those, into whom they dart their Stings; thereby inflaming their Blood, corrupting the whole Mass of their Humours, causing inexpressible Anguish and Dolours, and sometimes Death, and Destruction itself: So that, because the Sting is the Instrument that conveys so much Pain, and so much Mischief; because it is that which makes those Creatures so formidable and dreadful unto us that are thus naturally armed: Therefore the Apostle elegantly transfers this to Death, and affirms, That there is something in Death that makes it terrible, painful, and destructive to us;

and this he calls the *Sting of Death*. So that, in brief, whatsoever makes Death frightful and grievous to us, that is this Sting of it. Now,

I. THAT there is such a Sting in Death, that it is thus formidable and pernicious, appears from these following Particulars.

1. IN the Horrors of wicked and ungodly Men, when they come to die. Indeed, some, who, by long Custom, and Continuance in Sin, have utterly spent and wasted their Consciences, go out of the World in a desperate Stupidity; senseless of what they are, and careless of what they are like to be; and, with a mad Rashness, daringly leap out of Life, without ever considering how infinitely deep that dismal Precipice is, down which they throw themselves; and that nothing is under them to receive them, but only the Lake of Fire and Brimstone. But take a Man that hath his Sense about him, his Reason awake, and can exercise his Consideration and Reflexion upon his present and future State; stand by the Sick-Bed of such a one, who hath worn out his Life in the Service of the Devil; whose Luxury, Riot, Drunkenness, and Uncleaness, have been the only grand Business of his Life, and the Diseases that these have brought upon him, the Causes

Causes of his Death; what a sad Scene of Misery will be there represented to thee! How dreadfully doth he exclaim against himself! What Estuations, what Outcries, what Despair and Blackness of Horror then seizeth upon him, when Death is haling and rending his Soul out of his Body! How doth he pull and struggle, and cannot yield to that, which, wretched Creature, he cannot avoid! Certainly, Death must needs be very terrible to those, who have so soak'd and soften'd themselves by Sensuality, that its Sting enters deep into them; and, as Poison operates most banefully upon them, whose Blood and Spirits were before heated and inflam'd; so, when Death comes to diffuse its Venom into those who are set on fire, and inflam'd with Lust and Intemperance, the Rage and Pain, the Horror and Despair that it will work in such, will be unspeakably hideous and dreadful.

2. It appears likewise, in the Unwillingness even of the dearest of God's Children, to undergo this last, rude, and violent Shock of Death: Yea, and tho' they have not only comfortable Hopes and Persuasions, but the clearest Evidence, and the fullest Assurance, that CHRIST JESUS shall be unto them  
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both in Life and Death inconceivable Gain and Advantage; yet, there is such an Aversion in humane Nature itself against this last and dreadful Enemy, that it startles at its Approach, and would willingly be excused from entering into the Lists, and engaging in that sore Conflict. Who ever enjoyed a greater Pleophory than *S. Paul*, who was, even in his Life-time, caught up into the Third Heaven, and admitted as a Spy into the Heavenly *Canaan*, the Land of Promise; who there saw, and tasted the ineffable Glory and Joy, which was prepared for him? And yet, tho' he knew the full Fruition of them could not otherwise be obtain'd than by dying; yet he tells us, *2 Cor. v. 4. We that are in this Tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that Mortality might be swallowed up of Life.* As we find a strong Antipathy working in us, and Nature itself recoiling, when we are to take some bitter Portion, tho' we be well assur'd the Effects of it will be salutary, that it will conduce to our Health afterwards: So, even in those who are fully assur'd that Death will be to them an Inlet into everlasting Life, and Bliss; yet there is such a natural Antipathy against it, that though the

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Consideration of that eternal Happiness they are entering into, makes them submit to it with Patience, yet they cannot but abhor and shrink from so bitter a Medicine, even when it is tempered with the strong Consolations of the Spirit of G O D. Yea,

3. To give the highest Instance that can be, of the Dreadfulness of Death, we find, that even our Lord J E S U S C H R I S T Himself, in whom there were no disorder'd Passions, no sinful Fears; none of those Weaknesses and Follies, which in us do too often serve only to increase and enhance the Dreadfulness of Death; yet even He loaths and nauseates to drink of that Cup, and prays, with all Fervency and Importunity, that it might pass from Him; *Matth. xxvi. 39. O, my Father! if it be possible, let this Cup pass from me.* And, nothing but His Father's Will was of Power enough to reconcile Him to it; *Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.* Certainly, that must needs be a very direful Composition, that should make Him, who was G O D as well as Man, so averse from taking it. That must needs be a very formidable Enemy, that should make Him loth to conflict, though He were sure to conquer it, and not only restore Life to Himself, but to all

all the World. Indeed, that which made this Cup so exceeding bitter to our Lord CHRIST, was the Wrath of GOD, and the Curse of the Law, that were temper'd in it; but yet, the very Vehicle of these, Death itself, and the Separation of His Body and Soul, was in itself very unpleasant and irksome, even unto Him whose Person was Divine, and whose Nature Innocent. And, therefore, it must needs be, that Death hath in it a great deal of Dread and Terror. Thus we see it demonstrated, that Death is a very dreadful and tremendous Enemy to humane Nature.

LET us next consider, what there is in Death, that should make it thus dreadful; that should make its Sting so sharp and poignant, and cause such a natural Abhorrency and Antipathy against it in us. And this I shall shew, in three or four Particulars.

I. THE Harbingers that go before it, to prepare its way: And these are usually languishing Diseases, or racking Pains, which, as the *Avant-couriers* of an hostile Army, commonly commit little less Spoil than the whole Body of it; these spend the Strength, and waste the Comfort of Life, and scarce leave any thing besides a consumed Carcass for Death to prey upon,

upon. And, must it not needs be terrible and irksome to Nature, to conflict with these Scouts of Death? To be cast upon the Bed of Languishing, restlessly tossing to and fro in the Night-Season, watching for the Morning; and in the Day, wishing for Night, and finding no Ease, no Refreshment in either? When a Fever shall burn us to Ashes; a Dropsy deluge us; and, it may be, with those Floods which our own Intemperance hath let in, quench the vital Flame, and Lamp of our Life. And, while we are struggling for Life, and gasping for Breath, our Assisting-Friends, with their officious Mournings, increase, but cannot help our Grief, by theirs.

2. DEATH is likewise dreadful, as it deprives us of all the Comforts and Enjoyments of Life. If GOD hath blessed thee with Plenty and Affluence of these temporal good things; if thou enjoyest Riches, Honour, Friends, and whatsoever thine Heart can here desire to make thy Life sweet and comfortable to thee; will it not grate upon thee, to think, that shortly all these must be sequestred? Thou must be haled from the Embraces of thy dearest Friends, degraded of thy Titles, divested of thy Robes, turn'd out of thy Possessions, and must take up thy  
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Abode in the silent Chambers of Darkness and Corruption. These are the things that make Men loth to die. And, indeed, those who have made them their Treasures, and their Good Things, will find it a very hard Task, to be willing to leave all behind them at the Mouth of the Grave. They can wait upon thee no farther. And, O! what a sad Parting Hour will it be to the poor Soul, when it must be compell'd to remove into another World, and leave all its good things behind in this! How will it protract and linger! How loth will it be to enter upon so great a Journey, and have nothing left to defray the Charge of it? How wistly will it look back upon all those dear Vanities, that it had hoarded up together! What! cannot I carry this Possession, and those Riches, this Estate, and that Treasure, out of the World with me? Must we then part for ever? Yes, O Soul, for ever. None of these things canst thou carry with thee. And, Oh! think, what a sad thing it will be for thy poor Soul to be set on Shoar in a vast and dismal Eternity, all naked and destitute, having nothing of all the Superfluities, and Abundance of Comforts, which here it made its chiefest Good, to relieve and support it! Or, if Mens

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Esteem be low and mean in the World, exposed to many Wants and Miseries; yet even to such, Death is terrible; nor can they be willingly brought to part with their Share of Enjoyments, though it be nothing but the common Air, and dear Light, and their own flattering Hopes, that yet they may live to possess more. For Hope of Better for the future, is a most tenacious thing; and those who have nothing else to live upon, yet cannot look upon Death with content, because, although it put an End and Period to their present Miseries, yet it likewise cuts off their Hopes, in which, at least, they are as Rich and Happy, as the Greatest.

3. ANOTHER thing, which is dreadful and stinging in Death, is that which truly and properly is Death itself: I mean, the Separation of those dear Companions, the Soul and Body. They are ~~in~~ knit together by an unintelligible Bond of Union and Friendship. There is a most secret and powerful Sympathy between them; and that which is the very Life of Friendship, a Communication of Passions and Affections, They have spent many Years together in perfect Amity and Concord; and, therefore,

it may well be dreadful to think of parting at the last. And,

4. THE Consideration of those Dishonours, and Disgraces, that shall befall the Body upon this Separation, is likewise very stinging, and irksome unto Nature. That there it must lie, a sad, wan, and ghastly Spectacle to thy Friends, and afterwards be lodged in the Bed of Silence; and Putrefaction. There, whole Heaps of Worms shall crawl upon thee, and devour thee : And, the next Corps that wants room, may, perhaps, disturb thy Bones, and not allow thee so much as the Quiet of Death, and the peaceable Possession of thy Grave. Thy few Remains may lie scattered about the Mouth of it : And thou, who art now respected and honoured, mayst have thy only visible Relicks rudely and irreverently dealt with. And, certainly, there is in us all such a natural Love to our Bodies, that we, who think all our Care and Pains too little in pampering and indulging them, cannot but look upon Death as a most dreadful Enemy, that shall bring upon them so many Contumelies and Dishonours. And,

5. THE most sharp and stinging Consideration of all, is, That Death delivers us over into Eternity, which we have ten thousand

thousand times deserved, should be infinitely wretched and miserable to us. Our Consciences do misgive, and presage very dreadful things against us; and often represent to our View all the Woes and Plagues that are stor'd up in Hell, the Treasury and Magazine of all Plagues. And, though the former Considerations render Death very frightful; as it is inflicted upon us by Pains and Diseases; as it deprives us of all the Comforts of Life; as it is the Separation of Soul and Body; as it leaves the Body under the Dishonours and ghastly Deformities of Rottenness and Putrefaction: Yet, had Death nothing in it more dreadful than these, it might be supportable. Yea, and we know, that many, who have been borne up by the Consolations of the Holy Spirit, have opened their Arms to it, and embraced it, though with natural Reluctance, as it is Death, yet with Joy and Exultation, as it is to them an Admission into eternal Life. But when Death shall summon us to appear before the dreadful Tribunal of God, and suggest to us horrid Apprehensions of Wo and Torments, that we shall by Him be adjudged unto; this is that Sting which is most sharp and piercing; that Sting, the Poi-  
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son of which affects the Soul with most inexpressible Anguish and Agonies.

II. AND this brings me to the Second Proposition, which is the very Words of the Text, *The Sting of Death is Sin.* For,

1. IT was only Sin that brought Death into the World. So the Apostle expressly, *Rom. v. 12. By one Man Sin entered into the World, and Death by Sin: And so Death passed upon all Men; for that all have sinned.* This Serpent owes his Biting, as well as his Sting and Poison, unto Man's Transgression. Indeed, *Adam* was no more created immortal by Nature, than he was impeccable; but as he had *Potentiam non peccandi*, so he had likewise *Potentiam non moriendi*, a Power neither to have sinned, nor died; but might have prolonged his Days, either to a happy Eternity here upon Earth, or to a blessed Translation into Heaven. But as soon as Sin had gotten Possession of his Soul, Death lays in Claim to his Body, and sends a numerous Train of grim Attendants, Fear, Sadness, Decays, Troubles, Pains, and Diseases, to secure him from making his Escape: And by these, we must all sooner or later fall into his Hands.



2. **DEATH** receives its Sting and Terrors from Sin. It is the Consciousness of Sin and Guilt, that makes Death so bitter and intolerable to us. And, therefore, the Apostle, *Heb. ii. 15.* speaks of some, *who, through Fear of Death, were all their Life-time subject unto Bondage.* And this Bondage of Fear and Terrors, under which they were held, it was from the scorching Apprehensions of that Hell, and everlasting Wrath, which were to follow after Death. And, tho' now possibly, in the Jollity of thy Youth and Health, thou puttest far from thee all such dreadful and disturbing Thoughts; though, it may be, when Conscience begins to recal them, thou desperately choakest it, either by the Cares of the World, or Intemperance; or by wicked and lewd Company, or some such hellish Artifice; yet, know for certain, that it will watch its Advantages to return upon thee; and, it may be, represent all the Horrors and Dread of these things to thee, when thou art just entring into thy eternal State, to feel them. When our Souls, in the very Agonies of Death, are just loosening themselves from those Bands that tied them to the Body, they will, doubtless, then make strange Discoveries of those terrible things, which now in

our Health, when we are any thing serious, make our Hearts ake, and our Consciences tremble; but then, the Terrors of them will be such, as will even cramp and confound the Soul, when it shall see them all come rolling upon him, and no Possibility left to escape, or defer them. Now they are upon the very Borders and Confines of that Region, where Ghosts and Spirits are the only Inhabitants. Here, an Holy and just G O D is summoning them to His Bar, and passing an irreverfible Doom upon them: There, they see Hell casting up black and footy Flames, and thousands of wretched Souls wallowing in them. All these dreadful things, Conscience will represent to convinced Sinners; and make them infinitely more dreadful, by fuggesting, that they all make against them, and are the Preparations of divine Wrath and Vengeance, to punish them. Now, O Sinner! how canst thou encourage thyself? how wilt thou bear up thy Heart against the Thoughts and Fears of Death? Doth it not almost kill thee, only to think, that thou must die, and then have all the Wrath of the Great G O D executed upon thee, to Eternity? Death is still waiting for the Forfeiture of your Lives; and after Death, Hell, and eternal

nal Torments; Torments, which shall never have End or Ease: Under the sharpest Tortures we can suffer here, we comfort ourselves, that they will shortly wear off; but there your Tortures shall be most exquisite, and yet have no End. It is in vain to cry, as here we do, when we are under Pains or Diseases, Would to GOD it were Day! or Would to GOD it were Night! for they have no Rest Day nor Night, and none they can expect. But the Smoke of their Torments riseth up for ever and ever. Thus, it is the Apprehension of future Wrath and Vengeance, as the due Desert of our Sins, that makes Death so exceedingly terrible and stinging to a guilty Soul.

I SHALL close up all with Two or Three brief Inferences.

1. IF Sin and Guilt be the *Sting of Death*, let us beware, that we add not more Poison to this Sting, by adding more Sins and Iniquities to our past Crimes. Remember, every Sin thou committest, will make thee more afraid to die. And, in what dreadful Perplexitys and Agonys of Soul wilt thou be, when thy Guilt shall stare thee ruthfully in the Face, and thy Conscience exclaim against thee; and yet, inexorable Death will wait no longer, but cut thee off in

the midst of all thy Fears and Horrors, and thrust thee down to Hell, there to undergo more than ever thou couldst fear or imagine.

2. IF Sin be the *Sting of Death*, then, certainly, the only way to *disarm Death*, it is, by cleansing thyself from Sin. Wash thy polluted Soul in the Tears of an unfeigned Repentance. Sprinkle thy guilty Conscience with that Blood of Sprinkling, which speaketh better Things than the Blood of *Abel*. Then mayst thou breathe out thy Soul with Comfort, when all that Death can do unto thee, is to change thy Hopes into full Fruition and Enjoyment.

3. How unspeakably happy are those, to whom the *Sting of Death* is taken out by the Death of CHRIST? In His Body Death struck his Sting so deep, that he left and lost it there; and like some venomous Creatures, that die as soon as they have stung, *Animamq; in vulnere ponunt*, that mortally wound themselves, whenever they do less wound others; so, Death darting its whole Sting into JESUS CHRIST, to wit, the Sins of all the World that believe, which were all imputed unto Him, when He Himself bare our Sins in His own Body on the Tree, Death hath ever since been a harmless disarm'd Thing,

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not able to hurt them, how grim soever its Aspect be. Yea, this last Enemy is reconciled unto them, and become one of their Party; and they may, with Triumph, say, as the Apostle doth, *Whether Life or Death, or Things present, or Things to come, all are theirs.* Death shall do them the greatest and most real Kindness they can receive; for, as Death was brought into the World by Sin, so Sin shall be abolish'd out of the World by Death; yea, Death itself shall abolish Death, and bring us into that State where our Life shall be deathless, and our Holiness sinless.

AND this brings me to speak of the Resurrection, by which this Victory over Death is completed; which will, therefore, be the Subject of the ensuing Discourse.

