

## DEATH AND AFTER

### Dying Grace

#### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The fact of death is inevitable for all men. Even Christian men must die physically, except they be among that last generation of believers who are alive at Christ's coming. God has the time of each person's death planned (Eccl. 3:1-2), and until that appointed time no person will die. John Wesley said, "I am immortal until my appointed hour."
- B. The Christian must die like all men but the way he dies is much different than that of the non-Christian. God provides dying grace for all true believers in Jesus Christ, and dying grace cannot be experienced until just before or at the hour of death. While it is true that mature, seasoned saints will experience more grace at death, even the babe in Christ will experience dying grace to some degree.

"Dying" may be a longer or a shorter period of time, depending upon the situation. For those who die suddenly, dying grace is but an instant. But for the believer, and for the believer only, God provides in almost every case I have ever known (and apparently this is the way dying grace works for those who die instantly) a time of happiness and peace just prior to death. Often when people are taken from this life, especially when they are young or in middle life, there is a time of great happiness just before their death, which is often expressed. This increases the tragedy for us, but in the light of Scripture it is not tragic at all. We say, "Oh, this person was so happy. I remember he said just yesterday how happy he was and how wonderful life was, and now he is gone. Isn't that a tragedy?" No, it is not. That happiness the day before, the wonderful expression of it, is simply dying grace which the Lord apparently gives to those believers whom He removes instantly.

However, dying grace works out a little differently for the one whose death is prolonged. Take someone, for example, who has cancer and is certain to die, apart from the intervention of the Lord. Let us say their predicted time of survival is about two years, during which time there will be alternate times of pain and problems, rest and happiness. Now for these two years God also provides dying grace, but in a different way. During that time the believer is given a wonderful testimony. The Lord helps the believer to have inner happiness and peace in the midst of pain. There is no fear of death, no concern of death, no falling apart in the midst of death. Thus there are two factors in dying grace. For the believer who dies instantly, there will be a period of happiness and the expression of it just prior to death. For the believer who dies over a prolonged period of time, God will provide in such a way that this time of dying is the most productive and actually the most wonderful part of death. (R.B. Thieme, Jr., Dying Grace)

- C. Dying grace obviously deals with the subjective side of life but it is based on the objective Bible and observable examples from life.

## II. DYING GRACE IN THE BIBLE

- A. Psalm 23:4: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil (harm of death).” King David did not fear death because he was a true believer in Christ and lived in the reality of dying grace. NOTE: Some Christians are so afraid of death that they die mentally many times before the act of physical death. These people will not get into an airplane or drive a car or do anything that might increase their chances of death. Death will come at God’s appointed hour and He will grant every true believer grace to go through it.
- B. Psalm 116:15: “Precious in the sight of the Lord in the death of His godly ones (saints).” This dying grace is not just for the famous believers like Abraham, Moses or the Apostle Paul, but is for all the saints because they belong to the Lord. NOTE: On occasion God may give a person a premonition of death or even a vision of heaven just prior to death.
- C. Job 5:20-28: God will deliver the believer from seven troubles and four of these troubles deal with the fear of death – the fear of death in famine, in war, in violence (destruction) and by wild beasts. NOTE: Verse 22 says that the Christian will be able “to laugh” at death, knowing full well that death has no hold on him. A Christian can relax and look death right in the face and laugh at it. Why? Because for the Christian death means he sees Christ and Christ will go through death with him, providing special dying grace (I Cor. 15:55).
- D. Hebrews 2:14-18: Christ took upon Himself a human nature and died, gaining victory over sin and death, that true believers in Christ might not fear death. Furthermore, Christ, being a true man, suffered death for all true believers and as their merciful and faithful High Priest, He knows what it means to be tempted (tested) with death. True believers must realize that Christ will come to the aid of those who are tested, even in death. At that final hour of life, Christ, our High Priest, will grant us dying grace.

## III. DYING GRACE FROM BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

- A. Stephen: Stephen in his last moments of physical life seemed to have great composure and inner peace as he was being martyred for Christ (Acts 7:59-60). We can only attribute this to dying grace that God gives His people.
- B. Old Testament Martyrs (Heb. 11:36-38): The Old Testament saints faced death with great courage because they believed in the realities of heaven and that God would grant them dying grace at their hour of departure.

## IV. DYING GRACE AS SEEN IN CHRISTIANS

- A. The Apostles: All the Apostles died as martyrs except John. It was during the reign of Nero that Peter refused to be crucified as the Lord was, so they crucified him upside down. Nero also had the Apostle Paul beheaded.
- B. The Early Christians: Many early Christians were crucified. Some were sewn up in skins of wild beasts, then big dogs were let loose on them and they were torn to shreds. Women were tied to mad bulls and dragged to death. After nightfall Christians were burned at the stake in Nero’s garden. The Roman people, who hated the Christians, were free to come into the garden and Nero drove around in a chariot wickedly enjoying the horrible scene. Christians were thrown to the lions and quietly walked to their deaths. Around 115 A.D., Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, was thrown to the wild beasts. He cried out, “May the wild beasts be eager to rush upon me. If they be unwilling, I will compel them. Come, crowds of wilds beasts;

come tearings and manglings, wracking of bones and hacking of limbs; come, cruel tortures of the devil; only let me attain unto Christ.” NOTE: Christian people are given dying grace, especially in martyrdom.

- C. John Calvin: Calvin, who was suffering miserably with consumption disease with much internal bleeding, worked right up to the day of his death. In excruciating pain, he would often whisper, “O Lord, how long?” Men begged him to rest, but he refused and would say, “Bear with me that God may find me watching and waiting and busy at His work until my last sigh.”