

*the fading of the flesh
and the
flourishing of faith*



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George Swinnock

Edited by
J. Stephen Yuille



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Table of Contents

Preface	vii
1 Psalm 73 in Context.....	1
2 Psalm 73:26 Explained	6
3 Man's Flesh Will Fail Him.....	12
4 The Folly of Living for the Flesh	20
5 Be Prepared to Die!	27
6 Further Reasons to Be Prepared to Die	40
7 How to Be Prepared to Die	57
8 Seek to Die Well.....	79
9 God Is Man's True Happiness	87
10 God Alone Is Sufficient for Man's Soul	90
11 God Alone Is Suitable to Man's Soul	98
12 God Alone Is Immortal Like Man's Soul.....	101
13 The Condition of Distressed Sinners and Saints	105
14 The Portion of Distressed Sinners and Saints	109
15 The Portion of Sinners and Saints in the World to Come.....	116

16	Is God Your Joy?.....	122
17	Choose God as Your Treasure	130
18	Satisfied and Sanctified	141
19	Joy in Full and Forever.....	152
20	Take Comfort	163

Preface

Several decades ago, John Piper coined a phrase that has become the impetus for countless individuals, ministries, organizations, and churches throughout the world. It is simply this: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”¹ According to Piper, our problem is not that we desire pleasure, but that we do not desire it enough. The Psalmist declares, “In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11). In other words, God is our greatest pleasure. When we delight in Him, we demonstrate His excellence and, in so doing, declare His glory.

By his own admission, Piper drinks from a stream that extends all the way back to Augustine:

How sweet did it suddenly become to be without the delights of trifles! And what at one time

1. John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters: Multnomah Press, 1996).

I feared to lose, it was now a joy to me to put away. For Thou didst cast them away from me, Thou true and highest sweetness [some translate this *sovereign joy*]. Thou didst cast them away, and instead of them didst enter in Thyself,—sweeter than all pleasure, though not to flesh and blood; brighter than all light, but more veiled than all mysteries; more exalted than all honour, but not to the exalted in their own conceits.²

Over the centuries, many others have stooped to drink from this same stream. Among them, the English Puritans are particularly noteworthy, for they embraced Augustine's "sovereign joy" in a fashion unlike any group in the history of the church. The father of English Puritanism, William Perkins, set the tone by defining theology as "the science of living blessedly forever."³ His conviction was given creedal sanction in the first question of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*: "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." Subsequent Puritans continued to

2. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. J. G. Pilkington, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1:129 (IX:1).

3. William Perkins, *A Golden Chain; or, The description of theology containing the order and causes of salvation and damnation, according to God's Word*, in *The Works of William Perkins* (London, 1608), I:11.

express this same conviction. “God enjoyed is man’s happiness.”⁴ “God is that supreme good, in the enjoyment of whom all true happiness lies.”⁵ “It is not every good that makes man blessed, but it must be the supreme good, and that is God.”⁶ “Man’s happiness stands in his likeness to God, and his fruition of God.”⁷ “Every soul that hath a title to this rest, doth place his chief happiness in God. This rest consisteth in the full and glorious enjoyment of God.”⁸

To a man, the Puritans believed that God designed us for a specific *end*—namely, to find pleasure in Him. They found the framework for their view in Aristotle, who penned, “There is some end (*telos*) of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake.” This “end” is “the chief good” (happiness), which is “always desirable

4. Robert Harris, *The Way of True Happiness, Delivered in Twenty-four Sermons upon the Beatitudes* (1653; rpt., Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria, 1998), 18.

5. John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel* (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1820; rpt., London: Banner of Truth, 1968), V:210.

6. Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes: An Exposition of Matthew 5:1–12* (1660; rpt., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 29.

7. William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour: A Treatise of the Saints’ War against the Devil* (1662–1665; London: Blackie & Son, 1864; rpt., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1995), I:415.

8. Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter: Select Treatises* (London: Blackie & Son, 1863; rpt., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 54.

in itself and never for the sake of something else.”⁹ For Aristotle, the conclusion was primarily ethical; that is, the happy man is the virtuous man—virtue being the mean between two extremes. The Puritans, however, while embracing Aristotle’s teleological framework, rejected his view of the virtuous man. They made it abundantly clear that man’s “chief good” is God!

The Puritan George Swinnock stood firmly in this tradition. He was born in 1627 at Maidstone, Kent. He was a graduate of Cambridge (B.A.) and Oxford (M.A.). He was a pastor at St. Mary’s chapel in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire; then at St. Nicholas’ chapel in Great Kimble, Buckinghamshire. Upon his ejection from the Church of England for nonconformity in 1662,¹⁰ he entered the household of Richard Hampden to minister as family chaplain.¹¹ With the easing of political restrictions in 1672, he returned to his home of Maidstone to

9. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics in The Works of Aristotle: Vol. IX*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), I:2, 4, 7.

10. In 1662, Parliament passed an Act of Uniformity according to which all who had not received Episcopal ordination had to be re-ordained by bishops. Ministers had to declare their consent to the entire Book of Common Prayer and their rejection of the Solemn League and Covenant. As a result, approximately 2,000 ministers left the Church of England.

11. Richard Hampden was the father of John Hampden—famous for his support of the parliamentary forces during the English Civil War.

become pastor. He occupied this position for less than a year, dying at the age of forty-six.¹² Other than these few details, very little is known of him. Thankfully, however, his collected works are available to us.¹³

In the treatise before you, *The Fading of the Flesh and the Flourishing of Faith*, Swinnock affirms that man can only be satisfied by that which is accommodated to his nature. This necessarily means that man can only be satisfied by God. Why? First, God is perfect: "That which makes man happy must not have any want or weakness in it. It must be able to protect him against all evil and provide him with all good" (p. 90). Second, God is suitable: "It is an unquestionable truth that nothing can give true comfort to man except that which has a relation and bears a proportion to his highest and noblest part—his immortal soul" (p. 99). Third, God is eternal: "The soul cannot enjoy any perfection of happiness unless it is proportionate to its own duration" (p. 101). In a word, man can only find happiness in that which is suited to his soul. This means that he can only find happiness in God. Swinnock declares, "The excellence of the object

12. See *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. S. Lee (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1909).

13. You will find them in *The Works of George Swinnock*, 5 vols., ed. James Nichol (London, 1868; rpt., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992). Nichol's edition contains all of Swinnock's treatises except *The Life and Death of Mr. Thomas Wilson, Minister of Maidstone, in the County of Kent, M.A.* (London, 1672).

that we embrace in our hearts determines the degree of our happiness. The saint's choice is right—God alone is the soul's center and rest" (pp. 88–89). Having identified God as man's satisfaction, Swinnock reminds us: "your happiness depends entirely upon your taking the blessed God for your utmost end and chiefest good" (p. 122). Here, he clearly demonstrates his affinity with Augustine, whom he quotes as saying, "Lord, Thou hast made our heart for Thee, and it will never rest till it come to Thee; and when I shall wholly cleave to Thee, then my life will be lively" (p. 146).

It is important to note that this "cleaving" to God as our "utmost end" and "chief good" is not some empty philosophical speculation on Swinnock's part. In his "Epistle Dedicatory," addressed to "the courteous Mrs. Jane Swinnock," he mentions that the "substantial part" of this treatise was originally preached at the funeral for Jane's husband, Caleb (Swinnock's cousin). He informs her that God is teaching her "two lessons" through her loss. First, "That your affections be taken off from earthly possessions. Dying relations call for dying affections." Second, "That you choose the good part that shall never be taken from you. Man's heart will be fixed on somewhat as its hope and happiness. God therefore puts out our candles, takes away relations, that we may look up to the Sun, and esteem him our chiefest portion."¹⁴

14. Swinnock, *Works*, III:404–405.

This context is extremely significant, for it confirms that Swinnock's "sovereign joy" is not some idle speculation, but a personal and pastoral reality. In good and bad, prosperity and adversity, life and death, God alone is our portion!

With all that said, I unreservedly commend *The Fading of the Flesh and the Flourishing of the Faith* to you as rich food for the soul. Here, Swinnock is at his best, as he exhorts saint and sinner alike to delight in the One, who is "the sweetest love, the richest mercy, the surest friend, the chiefest good, the greatest beauty, the highest honour, and fullest happiness" (pp. 131–132).

J. Stephen Yuille
Glen Rose, Texas
September 2009

CHAPTER 1

Psalm 73 in Context

Holy Scripture is more famous than all other writings, because of its truthfulness. The books of men are like their bodies, prone to many weaknesses. After careful editing, they still contain errors. However, Holy Scripture is like God: full (without imperfection) and faithful (without corruption). Its author is the God of truth, for whom it is impossible to lie. Therefore, its matter must be the word of truth (Ps. 119:142; Titus 1:2; 2 Peter 1:21).

Among all the books of Scripture, the Psalms are most famous for their variety. Other books are historical, doctrinal, or prophetic, but the book of Psalms is all of these. It describes the history of the church, foretells the passion and resurrection of Christ, and declares the duty of a Christian. The Psalms, says one commentator, are a jewel, consisting of the gold of doctrine, the pearl of comfort, and the gem of prayer.

Psalm 73 is entitled *A Psalm of Asaph* or *A Psalm for Asaph*. Asaph was a prophet (2 Chron. 29:30) and musician (1 Chron. 15:19). As for its content, Psalm 73

consists of two parts. The first describes the godly man's trial: the grievous conflict between the Spirit and the flesh (vv. 1–15). The second describes the godly man's triumph: the glorious conquest of the Spirit over the flesh (vv. 16–28).

At the root of this conflict is envy. "I was," declares the psalmist, "envious at the foolish" (Ps. 73:3).

1. The Cause of the Psalmist's Envy

The psalmist's heart is troubled, because he sees the prosperity of the wicked (Ps. 73:3). Their prosperity is like weeds that infest the ground, are watered plentifully, and grow exceedingly, while good corn is thin and lean. It is like the lion and raven, unclean creatures that are spared, while the innocent lamb and dove are sacrificed. It is inconceivable to the psalmist that the wicked should flourish like the bay-tree, enjoy a constant spring and summer, and be fresh and green all year round, while the saints, like good apple trees, have their autumn and winter. This grieves him deeply. His sore eyes cannot behold the glorious sunshine of the wicked's prosperity.

2. The Cure for the Psalmist's Envy

In simple terms, the psalmist's disease is poor eyesight. An envious eye is an evil eye (Matt. 20:15). The remedy for such an ailment is a glimpse of the wicked's end: eternal misery. It is to see that they climb the ladder,

like criminals, to the gallows for execution. This realization satisfies the psalmist.

Unbelievers ascribe envy to many causes. Some naturalists ascribe it to the principles of generation and corruption. The stoics ascribe it to the necessary connection of second causes. The astrologers ascribe it to the motion and influence of the stars, trying to show us the very houses of prosperity and adversity. The wiser among them, although their foolish hearts are still darkened, ascribe it to the will of Jupiter, who has vessels of good and bad things from which he gives to all people according to his pleasure. As for the removal of envy, unbelievers prescribe many cures. However, their medicines only serve to stir this disease. Their remedies are all kitchen medicine, such as grows in nature's garden. The real remedy must be fetched from afar.

I confess that the master of moral philosophy (Seneca), whom I most admire from among all the moralists, seems to touch on the same theme as the psalmist. Those says he, whom God approves and loves, are afflicted. Those, whom God seems to spare, are reserved for future suffering. Although there are many excellent insights in the moralist's work, he falls well short of Christianity. His sight is not good enough to look into the other world to behold the eternal pain of the wicked and the eternal pleasure of the good. However, it is this very vision that calms the storm in the psalmist's heart.

He sees that the wicked are not spared; their punishment is simply delayed.

The remedy that calms the boisterous waves, which threatens to swallow up the soul of the psalmist, is the different destinies of the saint and sinner. By faith, he foresees that the wicked man's whole life is but a tragedy. Although its start might be cheerful, its end is sorrowful. Although his power on earth is great for a time, yet his portion is in the lowest hell for all eternity. "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: Thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors" (Ps. 73:17–19). The wicked are exalted, as the shellfish by the eagle, to be thrown down on some rock and devoured. Their most glorious prosperity is like a rainbow, which shows itself for a little time in all its flashy colors, and then vanishes. The Turks, considering the unhappy end of their officials, use this proverb, "He who is in the greatest office, is but a statue of glass." Wicked men walk on glass or ice. "Thou didst set them in slippery places." Suddenly, their feet slip. They fall, and break their necks. Oh, the sad reckoning that awaits them after all their merry meetings! Although their expensive food goes down pleasantly here, yet it rises in their stomachs later.

The psalmist also sees that the saints, after their short storm, enjoy an everlasting calm. "Thou shalt

guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Ps. 73:24). Like the pillar of fire by night and cloud by day, Thou, my God, wilt march before me and direct me through the wilderness of this world, until I come to Canaan!

3. The Psalmist's Response

The above remedy leads the psalmist to declare to God, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Ps. 73:25). Ungodly people may abound in sensual pleasures, but I have an infinitely better portion. They have the streams, which run pleasantly for a season, but will soon dry up. On the other hand, I have the fountain, which runs over and runs forever. They, like grasshoppers, skipping up and down on the earth, have their songs. Nevertheless, what tune may I sing? I am mounting up to heaven to enjoy God, who is unspeakably more desirable than anything is in either heaven or earth!

CHAPTER 2

Psalm 73:26 Explained

The psalmist declares, “My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever” (Ps. 73:26). As for this text, I will explain its terms and declare its doctrinal truths.

1. The Terms

“My flesh and my heart faileth me...”

1. Spiritual Sense

Some expositors interpret this statement in a spiritual sense. Among those who do, there is a difference of opinion.

First, some interpret it in an evil sense. They think the statement is a confession of the psalmist’s former sin, and is related to the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit, mentioned at the beginning of the Psalm. It is as if the psalmist said, “I was so overwhelmed by self-conceit that I presumed to judge divine actions according to

human reason, and to judge the stick under the water to be crooked, by the eye of my sense, when indeed it was straight. However, I now see that my flesh is not fit to judge in matters of faith, that neither my flesh nor my heart can grasp God's ways with men, and that I cannot hold out under Satan's temptations. If God had not supported me, my flesh would have utterly supplanted me." "My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart" (Ps. 73:26). At times, the term *flesh* refers to corrupt human nature (Gal. 5:13). Why? (1) It is propagated by the flesh (John 3:6). (2) It is executed by the flesh (Rom. 7:25). (3) It is nourished, strengthened, and increased by the flesh (1 John 2:16).

Second, some interpret the statement in a good sense. They do not think it refers back to the beginning of the Psalm, but to the preceding verse: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Ps. 73:25). These expositors affirm that the psalmist, having passionately fixed his heart on God as the most pleasant object in heaven and earth, was so overcome with vehement longing that he was ready to fade away. His spirit was ready to expire, because of the exuberance of his love to, and longing after, the blessed God. The weak cask of his body was ready to break, for it was not able to hold that strong and spiritual wine. "My flesh and my heart faileth." It is as if he says, "I am so ravished with delight in, and so enlarged in desire for, this infinitely beautiful object, that there is no more

spirit left in me. I am sick! If God does not appear, then the strength of my heart will die out of love for Him!"

2. *Civil Sense*

Some expositors interpret the statement—"my flesh and my heart faileth me"—in a civil sense. They affirm that it refers to the psalmist's sufferings. He had a good rod instead of a good piece of bread for his breakfast every morning. The table was covered with sackcloth, and furnished with bitter herbs both at lunch and at supper. "For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning" (Ps. 73:14). The weight of this burden was so great, crushing his body and oppressing his mind, that—apart from God's almighty power—it would have broken his back; his flesh and his heart would have failed him.

3. *Natural Sense*

Some expositors interpret the statement in a natural sense. According to this view, the psalmist is neither referring to his fault (spiritual sense) nor his fear (civil sense), but his frailty. It is as if he says, "My moisture consumes, my strength abates, my flesh falls, and my heart fails. Before long, my breath will be corrupt, my days extinct, and the grave ready for me. How happy am I, therefore, in having God for the strength of my heart!" I take the words in this sense, as being most suitable to the context.

“But God is the strength of my heart...”

These words mean that, although my flesh fails me, the Father of spirits does not fail me. When I am sinking, He will place His everlasting arm under me to save me. The Hebrew expresses it like this: “But God is the rock of my heart.” In other words, He is a sure, strong, and immovable foundation to build upon. Although the winds may blow and the waves may beat, when the storm of death comes, I have no reason to fear that the house of my heart will fall, for it stands upon a sure foundation: “God is the rock of my heart.”

The strongest child of God is unable to stand alone. Like ivy, he needs something to support him, or else he falls to the ground. Of all seasons, the Christian has most need of support at his dying hour. At that time, he takes his leave of all his comforts on earth, and he encounters the sharpest conflicts from hell. Therefore, it is impossible for him to hold out without extraordinary help from heaven. The psalmist had armor ready to encounter his last enemy. He was a weak and fearful child, yet he was able to walk through the dark entrance of death, taking his Father by the hand. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me” (Ps. 23:4). Although my heart is ready to fail me through the troubles of my life and at the trial of my death, I have a strong remedy that will cheer me in my saddest condition: “God is the strength of my heart.”

“And my portion...”

This expression is a metaphor, taken from the ancient Jewish custom of dividing inheritances, whereby every one received his allotted portion. It is as if the psalmist says, “God is not only my rock to defend me from those storms that assault me, but He is my portion to meet all my needs and give me the fruition of all good.” Some people have their portion on this side of the land of promise, but the author of all portions is the substance of my portion. My portion does not lie in the rubbish, as it does for those whose portion is in this life. My portion contains Him whom the heavens, and heaven of heavens, can never contain. God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever—not for a year, or an age, or a million ages, but for eternity!

Earthly portions are like roses, in that the fuller they blossom, the sooner they shed. They are often misused through pride and wasted through carelessness. Death always rends people and their portions asunder. However, my portion will always be full (without diminution) and first (without alteration). This God will be my God forever. He will be my guide and help until death. Even death, which dissolves so many bonds and unties close knots, will never separate me from my portion. On the contrary, it will give me a perfect and everlasting possession of it.

2. The Doctrines

Psalm 73:26 branches into two parts. First, there is the psalmist's complaint: "My flesh and my heart faileth." Second, there is the psalmist's comfort: "but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." We may express it as follows: (1) there is the fading of his flesh—"My flesh and my heart faileth"; and (2) there is the flourishing of his faith—"but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

From these two parts of the text, I will draw out two doctrinal truths. (1) Man's flesh will fail him. The highest and holiest man's heart will not hold out forever. The psalmist was great and gracious, yet his flesh failed him. (2) It is the comfort of a Christian, in his saddest condition, that God is his portion. This strong water kept the psalmist from fainting when his flesh and heart failed him.

CHAPTER 3

Man's Flesh Will Fail Him

I begin with the first doctrine: man's flesh will fail him. Those whose spirits are noble, will find their flesh to be brittle. The psalmist was great, but death made little of him. This cannon hits the great commanders as well as the common soldiers. Like a violent wind, it plucks up by the roots, not only low trees, but also tall cedars. Those who lie in beds of ivory must lie down in beds of earth. Some letters are made with large flourishes, but they are still ink like all the others. Some men have great titles—worshipful or honorable—but they are meaningless to death. They are moving earth and dying dust, just like ordinary men. Worship, honor, excellency, highness, and majesty, must all do homage to the scepter of this king of terrors.

When Constantius had entered Rome in triumph, and had stood a long time admiring the gates, arches, turrets, temples, theaters, and other magnificent buildings, at last he asked Hormisda what he thought of the place. "I take no pleasure in it at all," said Hormisda, "for

I see the end of this city will be the same as all her predecessors." What he said of places is as true of persons. Although men may admire them for a while, the stately and greatest buildings of their bodies will fall to the ground as their ancestors' bodies did before them (Job 3:15). This storm will beat on the prince's court as much as on the peasant's cottage. "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah" (Ps. 89:48). The psalmist challenges the whole world to find a person that can procure protection against death's arrest.

The psalmist was gracious, but grace gave way to nature. Death will, like hail and rain, fall on the best gardens as well as the wide wilderness. The wheat is cut down and carried into the barn; so are the tares. A godly man is free from the sting, but not from the stroke; from the curse, but not from the cross of death. Holy Hezekiah was able to extend his life for a few years (2 Kings 20:1-6). He obtained a reprieve for fifteen years, but not a pardon. The best fruit will perish, because it is worm-eaten. Both the gold and dross (the good and bad) go into this fire—the former to be refined, and the latter to be consumed.

"The voice said, 'Cry.' And he said, 'What shall I cry?' All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: Surely the people is grass" (Isa. 40:6-7). (1) These verses

point to man's mortality. He is grass, withering grass—a flower, a fading flower. (2) These verses point to the certainty of death. "The voice said, 'Cry.'" In other words, the prophet received a charge from God to proclaim, "The people are grass!" (3) These verses point to the universality of death. The flesh of kings and counselors, the flesh of saints and martyrs, the flesh of high and low, the flesh of rich and poor—"All flesh is grass." Man is sometimes compared to the flower for its beauty, but here for its frailty. A flower will quickly fade. If it is not picked by the hand or cut down by an instrument of iron, the gentle breeze will quickly blow its beauty away.

Naturalists tell us of a flower called *ephemeron*, because it lasts but a day. Man is such a flower. His life is but a day, whether longer or shorter—a summer's or winter's day. How quickly the shadows of the evening stretch themselves upon him, and make it night! Pliny speaks of a golden vine that never withers. One day, the bodies of saints will be like that. However, at present, the best herbs, along with the worst weeds, wither. Neither the dignity of a prince nor the piety of a prophet can dissuade this enemy. Against this arrest, there is no bail.

By way of further explanation, I will lay down two or three reasons for the doctrine. Then, I will proceed to that which is practical.

1. Man's Corruptibility

The first reason for the doctrine is man's corruptibil-

ity. His body is called a house of clay (Job 4:19) and an earthly tabernacle (2 Cor. 5:1). The body of man is at best a clod of clay, curiously made and molded. The Greek proverb has a truth in it: "Man is but an earthen vessel." Some are more painted than others are in regard to dignity and place. Some are stronger vessels than the rest in regard of purity of constitution. However, all are earthen! "Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity" (Ps. 39:5). All *Adam* is all *Abel*. Every man, when most high in regard of his hopes and most firm in regard of his foundation, is even then next door to corruption.

What the great apostle says in a proper sense, everyone may say in a common sense, "I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31). We carry our curse around with us every moment. Against some people, it appears in the open field, often skirmishing with them. Against other people, it lies in ambush, waiting for an opportunity to fall on them and destroy them. In the healthiest bodies, it is as fire raked under the ashes, reserved for another day when it will ignite and burn.

God does not need to bring out His great artillery to knock down the building of man's body. A small touch will suffice. It is decaying all the time, and will eventually fall by itself. There is rottenness at the core of the fairest fruits. Our flesh is no match for the Father of spirits. An ordinary broom will sweep away the spider's web, because it has no stability despite its intricate weav-

ings. As it was with the gourd of Jonah, so it is with the children of men: we breed and feed those worms that will devour and destroy us (Jonah 4:6–7). Every man's death toll hangs in his own steeple.

2. God's Fidelity

The second reason for the doctrine is God's fidelity. The righteous and gracious God has threatened eternal pains to the wicked as the wages of their sins, and He has promised endless pleasures to the godly as the reward of Christ's sufferings. Now, the place of payment, where these threats and promises will be accomplished, is the other world, to which death is the passage. Man dies, so that God's word may live. Man falls to the earth, so that God's truth may stand.

Sin is finite in regard of its subject, because it is the act of a limited creature. However, it is infinite in regard of its object, because it is committed against a boundless Creator. For this reason, it is punished with the absence of all good (which is an infinite loss) and with the presence of all evil (which is infinite in duration). The infernal pit is the place of those punishments, into which men descend by the ladder of death (Matt. 7:23; 25:41; Mark 9:49). Death is but the sinner's trap-door into hell. In England, criminals, guilty of a capital offense, are carried into a dungeon, and from there to the gallows. Similarly, ungodly men, who fail to plead for their pardon through the gospel, pass through the

dungeon of death to the place of their dreadful and everlasting execution.

God has also determined to bestow an incomparable and unchangeable crown on the members of Christ. It is their Father's pleasure to give them a kingdom. Death is but the young prophet that anoints them for it, and gives them actual possession of it. They must put off their rags of mortality, so that they may put on their robes of glory. It is in the night of death that saints go to their blessed and eternal rest. The corn must first die before it can spring up fresh and green. Israel must die in Egypt before she can be carried into Canaan. There is no entrance into paradise but through the flaming sword of this angel, death, that stands at the gate. The soul must be delivered from the prison of the body, so that it may enjoy the glorious liberty of the sons of God. This bird of paradise will never sing merrily, nor sing the praises of its Maker perfectly, until it is freed from this cage.

The sinner dies, so that, according to God's Word, he may receive the bitter fruit of his evil ways. Death is to him as the gate through which condemned criminals pass to their deserved destruction. The saint dies, so that, according to God's promise, he may enjoy the purchased possession. Death to him is as the dirty lane through which Chrysostom passed to a feast—a dark, short way by which he goes to the marriage supper of the Lamb. His body is mortal, so that his sins and sufferings may not be immortal.

3. Man's Apostasy

The third reason for the doctrine is man's apostasy. Death broke in upon man by virtue of the fact that man broke God's commands. We would never have fallen to dust, if we had not first fallen from our duties. Sickness would never have seized our bodies, if sin had not first seized our souls.

The Pelagians and Socinians say that death is not a consequence of sin, but a condition of nature. However, the God of truth ascribes the origin of death to Adam's desire to be like Him (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 5:12). As insensibility in the head diffuses malignity throughout the whole body, thereby corrupting and destroying it, even so the fruit, that Adam ate, contained poison that entered into his being. Its venom is transmitted, like Gehazi's leprosy, to his seed (2 Kings 5:27). Some tell us that Adam would often turn his face toward the Garden of Eden and weep, reflecting upon what he had done. I am certain he had reason to do so, for we all received the infection from him. It is through him that the whole world is tainted and turned into a pest house. Whatever delight he derived from the act was nothing in comparison to the result: death.

It seems unquestionable that man, in his state of innocence, had a conditional, although not absolute, immortality. He was mortal, in that he was made of corruptible elements. However, he was immortal, in that he was free from the law of death by virtue of the covenant.

Before the Fall, he had a possibility of not sinning. After the Fall, he has a necessity of sinning. Likewise, in his state of innocence, he had a possibility of not dying, and, in his state of apostasy, he has a necessity of dying. If he had stood, he would have been translated, like Enoch, without seeing death (Gen. 5:21–24). He would have entered his Father's house without walking through the dark doorway of death.

The flesh fails us, because sin has defiled it. Man's flesh was overcome with pride. Since then, it has been liable to putrefaction (Ps. 90:7). Sin is called "a body of death," because it causes the death of the body (Rom. 7:24). When asked who set up the stately buildings in Rome, it was answered, "the sins of Germany," meaning the money that the pope's agents received for pardons granted to the Germans. If you ask, "Who tears down the building of man's body," I answer, "the sins of man." Sin turns such costly, beautiful houses into confused, ruinous heaps.

Draco, the lawgiver, appointed death as the punishment for every offense. For this reason, his laws are said to be written in blood. When asked why, he explained that, although it seemed unjust to make all crimes equal in punishment, it was actually a great demonstration of justice, for the least breach of the law deserves death. The light of nature teaches that sinners are worthy of death (Rom. 1:23). The condition of all sinners lies in the valley of the shadow of death.

CHAPTER 9

God Is Man's True Happiness

I now proceed to the second doctrine: the saint's comfort. It is taken from the second part of the text: "But God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:26). The comfort of a Christian in his saddest condition is this: God is his portion. The psalmist's condition was very sad: his flesh failed him. Man's soul often decays with his body. The two are let out together. The psalmist's heart fell with his flesh. But what was the strong medicine that kept him from fainting at such a season? Truly, it was this: "But God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Ps. 73:26).

In winter, the sap retreats to the root of the tree, in order to be preserved. Likewise, in crosses such as death, the saint retreats to God, the fountain of his life, to be comforted. When his wives were captured, his wealth plundered, and his life threatened (for the soldiers talked of stoning him), David was in a dreadful state. One might think that such a heavy burden would break his back. However, the joy of the Lord was his strength!

“David encouraged himself in the Lord his God” (1 Sam. 30:6). When the table of earthly comforts (which had been spread so generously before him) was empty, David fetched sweetmeats out of his heavenly closet. He encouraged his heart in the Lord his God.

Christians, like the salamander, may live in the greatest fire of affliction. They may sing when the whole world is in a flame at the last day. The Spirit of God compares them to palm trees (Ps. 92:12), which (according to some naturalists) are never weighed down or dried up even though many weights are placed at the top of them and much drought is experienced at the bottom.

The only reason I will give for this doctrine is as follows: a godly man places his happiness in God. All things have a propensity (or inclination) towards that in which they place their felicity. A suitable and unchangeable rest is the only satisfaction of the rational creature. All the agitations of the soul are wings to carry man here and there, so that he may find a place to rest. When the eagle discovers and fastens on a carcass, it is content. The needle, pointing to the north, is quiet, although formerly it was in motion. In one place, the philosopher tells us that delight consists in motion, but elsewhere he tells us that it actually consists in rest.

Happiness is nothing but the Sabbath of our thoughts and the satisfaction of our hearts in the fruition of the chiefest good. The excellence of the object that we embrace in our hearts determines the degree of

our happiness. The saint's choice is right—God alone is the soul's center and rest. Let a sinner have what he regards as his treasure and, although he is under many troubles, he is content. Give a covetous man wealth, and he will say, as Esau, "I have enough" (Gen. 33:9). When an ambitious man mounts up to a chair of state, he sits down at ease. If a lustful person can bathe himself in the streams of carnal pleasures, he is as a fish in his element. So, let a godly man enjoy his God, in whom he places all his joy and delight, in whom is all his happiness and heaven, he is well. He has all. "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us" (John 14:8). No more is desired.

No man thinks he is miserable until he has lost his happiness. A godly man is blessed when afflicted and buffeted, because he still has his God (Job 5:17). When a few leaves blow off, his comfort is that he still has the tree and its fruit. Like a man who is worth millions, he can rejoice even though he loses a few dollars. There is mention of a lake in the Salentine country called *Brimful*. You can put in what you like; it never runs over. You can draw out what you can; it never runs low. Such is the condition of a Christian. He never has too much. Moreover, take away what you will; he is still full, because he has God. Augustine affirms that there are two-hundred and eighty-eight opinions about happiness, but the philosophers were vain in their imaginations. I will clearly prove that the strength of man's happiness flows from an entirely different spring.