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“EUTHANASIA” — Is it really a ‘good’ death??”



Based upon a sermon preached by Rev. Ivan Foster in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church, Lord’s Day evening, May 14th, 2006.

“And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them,”
Revelation 14:13.

Once more, euthanasia (the word means 'good death') has been in the news. A member of the House of Lords, Lord Joffe, has again sought to have the present law changed, which forbids doctors prescribing drugs that would end the life of terminally ill patients who request that their life be ended.

Suicide

Suicide is an act usually associated with those, the balance of whose mind was affected when they took their own lives. In like manner, a request for assistance to end one’s life is a request coming from someone who is not in his right mind! We say this kindly. A full consideration of ALL the facts regarding death, irrespective of what suffering a person is enduring, would prevent such a request being made.

christian

The Christian, living in the conscious light of God’s truth, will not consider such a thing since, however they die, their death will come in God’s time and will glorify God. “And as it is appointed unto men once to die,” Hebrews 9:27.

The unbeliever, were he but to know what lies beyond this scene of time, would prefer to remain amidst his sufferings and avail himself of that glorious opportunity to repent and believe the gospel of Christ, which he enjoys presently, but which will end forever upon death!

ignorance

Behind the cry and the campaigning for euthanasia there is ignorance and rejection of God and His eternal purpose in Christ.

Euthanasia is the foolish man’s final and most foolish act of defiance of God. He cries in the face of the Almighty that he will decide for himself when he will die and unwittingly leaps into the damnation of everlasting fire.

In our text we have certain truths set forth.



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I. IRRESPECTIVE OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT IS BLESSED TO DIE AS A CHRISTIAN

These words were primarily directed toward those suffering unspeakable deaths. This chapter deals with the times of the Antichrist and his persecution of the saints, as verses 9-11 indicate. During his reign, many of the saints of God will suffer terribly for the sake of the gospel. Chapter 13, where we have the fullest description of Antichrist and his activities given us in the Bible, makes that plain. "And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations," 13:5-7; "And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed," 13:15. This is the time spoken of by Daniel in chapter 7 of his prophecy. "I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them," Daniel 7:21. "And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time," verse 25.

Of course, the persecuting spirit that will fill the Antichrist has been at work throughout the ages of time. It was at work when Cain murdered Abel and in every wicked attack upon the righteous ever since.

Persecution

In the times of the apostolic church, the times of persecution under the Roman Caesars, the dark days in Europe's Middle Ages when Papal Rome held sway, and in the terrible persecutions of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, countless multitudes of the people of God were done to death in the most horrible ways evil minds could invent, and multitudes more were exiled.

During those truly awful days, few, if any of the subjects of persecution, though facing death — death by the sword, by fire or by fierce beast — ever sought to escape by suicide. The truth of these words stayed them up in that dark hour. It enabled them to exercise that patience spoken of in verse 12. The word means "steadfastness, constancy, endurance."

The prospect of "dying in the Lord" stayed them up and gave them courage to face the terrible deaths that wicked men planned for them.

This verse is speaking of the very grace that those who resort to suicide are so much in need of. The whole case for euthanasia is built on the inability of the sufferer to go on. But God gives to those who are His, the grace to face cheerfully the most horrific of deaths. The burning fires of martyrdom were cheerfully embraced by the elderly and the youth as they were supported by the grace of God.

It is access to this grace that sufferers should seek and not to the death-dealing drugs that Lord Joffe would have our physicians dispense.



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The Christian's death, irrespective of its circumstances, should bring honour and glory to God. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me," John 21: 18-19.

Upside down

It is believed that Peter was crucified upside down. That was a terrible death and yet Peter lived all his days in the full knowledge of how he would die in this manner, and it did not sit as a dark cloud upon his mind and heart but rather he spoke of it with joyful anticipation. "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me," 2 Peter 1: 12-14.

He was able to speak to those saints who were facing the prospect of persecution and urge joyfulness upon them.

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified," 1 Peter 4: 12-14.

It is a blessed thing to die as a Christian no matter what form that death will take.

II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO DIE IN THE LORD?

1. Let it be stated plainly that not everyone does die in the Lord. By nature we are "out of Christ". "That at that time ye were without (outside of) Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world," Ephesians 2: 12.

Common lie

Telling people that they are in Christ by virtue of their baptism, their church membership, their rituals and attendances at worship and other such carnal observances and activities, is the most common of lies propagated within church circles. Millions throughout Christendom are committed to the grave in the hope of eternal life in heaven whose souls are at the moment of such a commitment, enduring the beginnings of everlasting damnation! Oh! that men and women would realise that the external observances of religion do not place a sinner in Christ. There must be the work of regeneration, wrought by the power and grace of the Holy Ghost, experienced by the sinner before they are placed within



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Christ.

2. To die in the Lord requires a uniting to Him in life. This requires a spiritual operation called regeneration. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new," 2 Corinthians 5:17. Union with Christ is not the fruit of baptism but of the workings of the Holy Ghost. "All saints . . . are united to Jesus Christ their head, by his Spirit and by faith," (Westminster Confession of Faith, 26:1.)

Thus we become partakers of His grace and life. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)," Ephesians 2:4-5.

3. It means a resting back on Him at the hour of death. It is to fall asleep in Jesus, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him," 1 Thessalonians 4:14. This presents us with the sweetest of images. Most live and die at war with Christ and His Word! The true Christian dies at peace with God, sleeping in the arms of Christ.

In the death of a Christian faith is at work. Heb 11:13. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

As a babe is fully trusting in the one in whose arms it sleeps, so the picture presented to us in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 is of a calm and a peacefulness born of faith.

In the death of a Christian love is at work. Paul spoke of his death and expressed a love, a longing for its approach. "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better," Philippians 1:23. The word "desire" means "a longing or craving." He knew that he would likely die as a martyr and yet, despite the circumstances of his death, he longed for its approach that he might be brought into the presence of the One he loved.

In the death of a Christian zeal is at work. Death is the last act by which any Christian may serve Christ on this earth. "And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth . . . as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD," Joshua 23:14; 24:15. Joshua was soon to die but still the determination to serve the Lord lived.

III. THE BLESSEDNESS REFERRED TO

1. They are blessed in their departure. This evil world is left behind. In Philippians 1:23, Paul speaks of death as a departure. The word he employs signifies the untying of a ship from its moorings in readiness for departure. Death is the leaving of the quay of this world to sail for the "land that is fairer than day." What a happy and blessed prospect!

2. They are blessed in the cessation of labour. The word "labour" in our text means "trouble and weariness." Heaven is a place of service but not labour! Our service for God in this world is beset by our failures and shortcomings; the oppositions and derision of wicked men and an abiding sense of imperfection. But in heaven no such consequences of sin will torment the people of God as they serve the Lord. Oh the blessing and joy of perfect service!

3. They are blessed in their abode. Heaven is where the Lord's presence is known in all its fulness and there is no sin.



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4. They are blessed in their company. Heaven is beyond our imaginings, it is so glorious. The hymnwriter, Elizabeth Mills, put it well:

We speak of the land of the blest,
That country so bright and so fair;
And oft are its glories confessed —
But what must it be to be there!

*To be there! to be there!
O what must it be to be there!
To be there! to be there!
O what must it be to be there!*

We speak of its pathways of gold,
Its walls decked with jewels so rare,
Its wonders and pleasures untold —
But what must it be to be there!

We speak of its peace and its love,
The robes which the glorified wear,
The church of the first-born above —
But what must it be to be there!

We speak of its freedom from sin,
From sorrow, temptation and care,
From trials without and within —
But what must it be to be there!

Do Thou, Lord, midst pleasure and woe,
For heaven our spirits prepare;
Then shortly we also shall know,
And feel what it is to be there!

Your only hope of being there is to be "in Christ."

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Matthew 11:28.

The rest of heaven must be our experience here before we may hope to enjoy it eternally. That rest is experienced by obeying the invitation of the Saviour to come unto Him. Obey His call today and be ready for that call that will one day be heard by all — the call of death.

Obedience of Christ's call means the blessed hope of heaven is yours.

We then may say "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord," 2 Corinthians 5:8.