



Comfort While Living in a Dying Body

Our Dependence on the Triune God

How good and necessary it is to begin another year with our Triune God from whom all blessings flow. How dependent we are on the Three Persons of Trinity for everything, for life, health, strength, work and other physical and material needs – but especially for salvation, forgiveness of sins, peace with God, and the hope of eternal life.

When we look around us, we see change and decay everywhere and in everything. As far as the future is concerned, what can we look forward to but the same tensions in politics, both domestic and foreign; the same unrest at home and abroad; the same uncertainty with respect to the economy; fears of an imminent take-over of radical Islam in the Middle East and other parts of the world; the prospect of a nuclear armed Iran whose president has sworn to wipe Israel off the map and destroy her friends and protectors, the USA, Canada, Great Britain and a handful of other nations. But even within these western nations we see anti-Semitism and anti-Christian forces resurging and gaining momentum.

Christians Need not Fear

Confusion, fear, hopelessness and despair - these are the terms that accurately describe the life of millions in this world. But these words do not appropriately characterize the life and outlook of Christians; at least they should not because they need not. No matter how dark the future may look for the world, the Church of Jesus Christ has a bright and glorious future. Hasn't our Saviour promised, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you?"* Therefore:

Standing at the portal of the opening year, Words of comfort meet us, hushing every fear: I the Lord am with thee; be thou not afraid I will help and strengthen; be thou not dismayed.

Comfort Especially for the Sick and Afflicted

This time I don't want to focus so much on what is likely to happen in the world this year, but on how we who are Christians should react to whatever may happen to us as individuals and families. Particularly, I have in mind the sick and others who are undergoing heavy trials and afflictions. In most, if not all, our congregations, there are members, both young and old, who have been diagnosed with various diseases deemed incurable: ALS or Lou Gehrig disease, terminal cancer, muscular dystrophy, heart and kidney malfunctions, family members with special needs, etc. And there are the elderly who are experiencing the deterioration of body and mind.

All these church members suffer in varying degrees and so do their caregivers. For them, the question is not so much or not at all, what will happen to our economy or how can the problems in the Middle East be resolved, *but how will it go with me?* Will my condition deteriorate and how fast? How much time do I have left? Will my pain get worse? How much suffering can I endure? Could 2012 be the year of my death? Questions like these have always been asked by suffering people whether they are Christians or not, for *"all things come alike to all, there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked"* (Eccl.9:2).

The Hope of Eternal Life

Yet there is a vast difference between believers and unbelievers as far as their attitude towards suffering is concerned, what sustains them, and what gives them hope for the future. That difference can be summed up this way: Christians have the hope of eternal life. This hope is rooted in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. *"Because I live,"* Jesus said to His disciples, *"ye shall live also"* (John 14:19).

All who are united to Christ by true faith *have* eternal life (John 3:36). They enjoy that life now already in varying degrees and moments and they will enjoy it fully and permanently after death. Scripture speaks of two resurrections, the first one being the resurrection of the soul, which takes place at the new birth and the second at the Last Day when the bodies of the saints will be raised from the dead. As long as we are in this life we inhabit a body of death, i.e., a body that is destined to die. In Romans 8:10 Paul says, *"the body is dead because of sin."* The death sentence was passed upon all mankind long ago when God said to fallen man: *"Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return"* (Gen. 3:19). We come into the world with the seed of death in us. And why must we die? Because *"death is the wages of sin"* (Rom. 6:23).

Living in a Dying Body?

Christians must die also. Of their bodies too it must be said that they are dead because of sin. But are not their sins forgiven? Yes, but they still have to die, even though for them the sting of death has been removed (1 Cor. 15: 55, 56). Yet, although God's children are inhabiting a dying body, they are very much alive. In Paul's words, *"the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness,"* that is, the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 8:10).

Every Christian has the Spirit of Christ living in him or her and this guarantees that both soul and body will live forever. As Paul continues in verse 11, *"but if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."*

Christ Heals Soul and Body But not at the Same Time

We who believe in Christ are already saved in spirit because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in us. Our spirits or souls have been cleansed from sin. Christ's righteousness has been imputed to us so when we die our souls go to heaven. But what about our bodies? They will go into the grave. Every believer already shares in the salvation of his soul, but the body does not yet partake of the blessings of Christ's redemptive work. Our bodies will be redeemed, but not until the Last Day when Christ will raise us from the grave.

Some deluded Christians think that they can enjoy perfectly healthy bodies now already. They claim that Christ's atoning sacrifice covers all the evil consequences of sin, including sickness and pain. Christians, therefore, don't need to be sick. If only you believe, these people say, any disease may be healed because Christ does not want you to suffer. They base this on Isaiah 53:5, which says, *"with his stripes we are healed,"* and Psalm 103:3 where we read, *"He heals all our diseases."*

Complete Redemption Awaits Christ's Second Coming

But if all the effects of sin are dealt with here and now by the atonement of Christ, why should a believer still have to die? Because death is one of the consequences of the fall. Christ's death does bring salvation and healing for body and soul, but not at the same time. Christians receive spiritual blessings now: forgiveness, peace, joy, etc. But as far as our bodies are concerned, complete deliverance awaits Christ's second coming.

The Lord does indeed heal sicknesses at times, but not always. More often than not, people, including Christians, suffering from a terminal disease, die of that disease. The body *must* die!

Why? Not only because of sin, but also to make room for a much better body than we now inhabit. As long as we are in this body we cannot enjoy the blessed life in heaven. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:50, *“flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”* We must get rid of this natural body. That is why also those who will be alive at Jesus’ coming must be changed. At that time, Paul says, *“our vile (or lowly) bodies shall be made like unto his glorious body”* (Phil. 3:21). Our bodies will be transformed; they will undergo a complete metamorphosis. What a glorious day that will be, when the graves will be opened and all the saints will rise and meet the Lord in glorified bodies. Then no more sickness, no more disabilities, no more grief of any kind – and especially no more sin!

All this is still a matter of faith. With the Church of all ages and places we confess that we believe the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. The unbelieving world may mock us for believing in what they call this “pie-in-the sky” illusion, but we know that soon we will stand fully redeemed in body and in soul before the throne of God.

Maybe you are in a lot of pain right now, physically or mentally, or both. But this will not last. As the apostle Paul says in that same glorious chapter, Romans 8: *“The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”* The best is still to come, also for your body. But let us remember that this is only true of Christians who have been *“begotten again unto a lively (or living) hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”* (1 Peter 1:3).

The Crucial Question

Has this transformation taken place in you? Are you born again? If not, you need to ask the Lord to begin a good work in you by His Holy Spirit. But if the answer may be, yes, by the grace of God I am a new creature in Christ Jesus, you have a divine warrant to rejoice and look forward to the day of your complete redemption.

“Lord grant us thy grace that we may take up our cross cheerfully, deny ourselves, confess our Saviour, and in all tribulations, with uplifted heads expect our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, where he will make our mortal bodies like unto his most glorious body and take us unto him in eternity.”

Form for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper

*Jesus lives, and so shall I.
Death! thy sting is gone forever!
He who deigned for me to die,
Lives the bands of death to sever.*

*He shall raise me from the dust.
Jesus is my Hope and Trust.
Jesus lives and death is now,
But my entrance into glory.*

*Courage, then, my soul, for thou
Hast a crown of life before thee;
Thou shalt find thy hopes were just;
Jesus is the Christian’s Trust.*

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