

PRESERVING HUMAN LIFE

Man is the pinnacle of God's work in the old creation and as such is the most precious to God of all His creatures (Zech. 12:1). This is because God created man in a unique way. Of all the creatures, only man was created as a vessel with a spirit to contact, contain, and be one with God (Rom. 9:23; John 4:24; 2 Tim. 4:22; 1 Cor. 6:17). God created man in this way with a twofold purpose. On the one hand, man was created in God's image, according to His likeness, to express Him. On the other hand, God intended that through man He would recover the earth from Satan's usurpation, so he gave man dominion over all the earth (Gen. 1:26). Our Brother Witness Lee said, "The human life was created for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. For this reason, nothing is more valuable and precious to God than human life. Therefore, God requires that we preserve human life as much as possible and in every way" (*Life-study of Exodus*, 824).

Satan knows that God will defeat him through man. After man's fall, God promised a seed to the woman, saying that Satan, the serpent, would bruise his heel but the seed would bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3:16). That seed was Christ, whose heel Satan bruised on the cross but who destroyed Satan and nullified his power there (Heb. 2:14). Though Christ judged Satan on the cross, God intends that the church execute this judgment. Knowing this, Satan does his best to damage humanity and even to destroy man, particularly those redeemed by the Lord to participate in His salvation (Dan. 7:25; Rev. 12:17). He uses many means to accomplish this end, such as luring men into sin, assailing them with various afflictions, causing them to neglect their health, and injecting fiery darts as thoughts into their minds that lead them to despair, mental instability, and even suicide (Eph. 6:16). Brother Watchman Nee said:

All thought of death is from Satan. Every notion of death as a means to escape from anything is from Satan. Satan made Job think of death. He did this not only to Job but also to every child of God. All notions of suicide, death wishes, and premature death are temptations from Satan. He tempts man to sin, and he also tempts man to die. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 50: Messages for Building Up New Believers*, 728)

Brother Lee, after commenting on statistics that showed an upward trend in suicide among young people, said:

In the earlier years of my ministry, I hardly ever heard someone tell me that he wanted to end his life. But in these last few years a number of young believers have come to me and expressed such an intention. Where did this kind of thinking originate? Undoubtedly, Satan has indoctrinated the mentality of the young people with this concept. We all must pray and stand against such subtlety of the enemy. Satan's whole purpose is to damage humanity so that man cannot be used for God's purpose. (*Christ as the Reality*, 134)

Death does not resolve any problems in our relationship with God. This is true of the death of unbelievers as well as believers. For unbelievers death terminates their opportunity to receive God's salvation, while for believers it puts an end to their opportunity in this age to turn their hearts back to God and so advance in their experience of God's salvation. As long as we are alive in this age, there is hope for us. Our hope for every man is that the riches and kindness and longsuffering of our Savior God would lead all to repentance (Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; Luke 15:17-19). We are living in the age of grace in which the blood Christ shed for our redemption affords us a way to have our sins washed away, no matter how shameful they are, and to return to God (1 John 1:7, 9; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). Once we die, that chance is lost, as is the opportunity to be reconciled to those against whom we have committed an offense (Matt. 5:23-26). Brother Lee said:

I must tell you that death does not solve any problem. Death does not automatically make everything all right. If your problem with the Lord has been solved before death, it has been solved; if your problem with the Lord has not been solved before death, it remains to be solved. Whether you live or die, the unsolved problem is still there. (*The Kingdom*, 166)

As those who know God's Word, we know that God's salvation goes far beyond being forgiven of our sins and being reconciled to God (Eph. 1:7; Rom. 5:10). God's intent is to save us to the uttermost in the power of His indestructible and overcoming life (Heb. 7:25, 16). We also know that we as believers will stand before the judgment seat of God and of His Christ (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). According to Matthew 25, we will be judged on two things—how much we have gained of Christ as the oil in our vessel (vv. 1-13) and how faithful we have been in our service to the Lord (vv. 14-30). Hebrews 9:27 says emphatically, "It is reserved for men to die once, and after this comes judgment." With death the opportunity to advance in our growth in life and to make up our lack in service to the Lord are gone.

Circumstances change. No circumstance lasts forever. Every suffering is temporary and works for us if we love God and care for His purpose (2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Pet. 1:6; Rom. 8:28). For example, the apostle Paul's circumstances pressed upon him to the point that he despaired of living, but it was in those circumstances that He learned to know God as the God of resurrection (2 Cor 1:8-9). To believers who were suffering persecution from their countrymen the apostle Peter wrote:

Therefore be humbled under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your anxiety on Him because it matters to Him concerning you. Be sober; watch. Your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking someone to devour. Him withstand, being firm in your faith, knowing that the same sufferings are being accomplished among your brotherhood in the world. But the God of all grace, He who has called you into His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground you. (1 Pet. 5:6-10)

Peter's words here show us that two things happen simultaneously. In His government God uses situations of suffering to deal with our pride, which has many manifestations, including self-reliance and self-exaltation. Therefore, we need to be humbled under His mighty hand. However, these dealings may cause us to have anxiety. If we have truly been humbled, that is, if our pride has been dealt with, we will be able to cast our anxieties upon Him. At the same time Satan is seeking to devour those who are proud as well as those who are anxious. We should withstand him and turn our hearts fully to the God of all grace, who is able to perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground us. This will propel us forward toward the goal of His calling.

Premature death is a waste because it cuts short the time in which God can work upon us and work Himself into us and the time in which we can render service to Him. This means not only that we should not willfully terminate our lives or put our lives in peril but also that we should positively take care of our health to afford God the opportunity to do His work in us and through us. Usefulness in the Lord's hand does not come quickly. Rather, a person's usefulness in God's service increases as God works on him over an extended period of time. We all know that our spirit is the part of our being that has been regenerated with the divine life and that it is by our spirit that we can have fellowship with God and He can dwell in us (John 3:6; Eph. 2:22), but because we are tripartite beings, the three parts of our being—our spirit, soul, and body—while being distinct, greatly affect one another. Brother Lee put it succinctly: "A person must take care of his health because his body supports his soul. Then his spirit can be enlivened" (*Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord's Recovery, Book 3: The Future of the Lord's Recovery and the Building Up of the Organic Service*, 29). Brother Lee also recounted that:

Brother Nee used to tell us that because it takes years for the Lord to gain one who has been constituted of Himself, we need to take care of our health in a proper way. This means that we should do everything possible to prevent an early death. If we are truly spiritual, we shall learn how to take care of our health in order to have a long life. (*Life-study of 2 Corinthians*, 37)

Beyond our personal perspective and God's perspective, we must also consider those around us. On the one hand, premature death can have a devastating effect on those around us. On the other hand, whatever positive effect we could have had on others' lives if we had lived longer is forfeited.

May the Lord preserve us all and give us many years to love Him and to serve Him faithfully that we may be those who love His appearing and participate in the preparation of the Bride for His return (2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 19:7).