

# *The Death of Christ*

by Dr. William Ames (1576-1633)

1. The death of Christ is the last act of his humiliation in which he underwent extreme, horrible, and most acute pain for the sins of men.
2. It was an act of Christ and not a mere matter of enduring because he met and endured it purposely. John 10:11, *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep*; and 10:18, *No man takes it from me, but I lay it down myself*. For the same reason it was also voluntary and not compelled. The act arose out of power and not merely out of weakness - out of obedience to his father and love for us, not out of his own guilt or deserving. It was designed to satisfy through victory and not to ruin through surrender.
3. It contained the greatest punishment because it equaled all the misery which the sins of men deserved. Therefore, there is an abundance of words and phrases describing this death in the Scriptures. For it is not simply called a death but a cutting off, a casting away, a treading under feet, a curse, a heaping up of sorrows, and the like, Isa. 53; Ps. 22.
4. However, it contained the punishments in such a way that their continuance, their ordination to the uttermost [*deordinatio*] and other circumstances accompanying the punishments of the sins of the lost were removed from his death. Acts 2:24, *It could not be that he would be retained by death*. There are reasons for this. First, such circumstances do not belong to the essence of the punishment itself, but are adjuncts which follow and accompany those who cannot suffer punishment so as to effect satisfaction by it. Second, there was in Christ both a worthiness and a power to overcome, as it were, the punishment imposed. 1 Cor. 15:54, 57, *Death is swallowed up in victory. Thanks be given to God, who has given us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*.
5. This death was the consummation of all humiliation. It was by far the greatest part of that humiliation. So Christ's death itself is often spoken of in the Scriptures by a synecdoche of the member as the full satisfaction of his whole humiliation.
6. Within these boundaries, the death of Christ was the same in kind and proportion as the death justly due for the sins of men. It corresponded in degree, parts, and kind.

7. The beginning of Christ's spiritual death in point of loss was the passing of the joy and delight which the enjoyment of God and the fullness of grace were accustomed to bring. He lost this spiritual joy not in principle, not basically, but rather in the act and awareness of it.

8. The beginning of spiritual death in point of conscious realization was the tasting of the wrath of God and a certain subjection to the power of darkness. The wrath of God was most properly signified in the cup which was given to Christ to drink. Matt. 26:39, *My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*

9. The object of this wrath was not Christ as such. It was connected only with that punishment which he underwent as our surety.

10. Subjection to the power of darkness was not servitude, but lay in the distress which Christ felt in his mind.

11. Because of these the soul of Christ was affected with sadness, grief, fear, and dread in, agony, Matt. 26:39; John 12:27; Heb. 5:7; and Luke 22:44.

12. The soul of Christ was affected not only in the part sometimes called lower, but also in the higher; not only nor especially through its sympathy, with the body, but directly and intimately, not principally by the compassion which it had for others, but by true suffering which it underwent in our name; not from a horror of bodily death (which many of Christ's servants have also overcome by his power), but from a certain sense of spiritual and supernatural death.

13. There were two effects of this agony. First, a strong prayer showing a mind astonished and a nature fleeing from the bitterness of death — yet always conditioned by and subject to the Father's will. Mark 14:35, *He prayed that...it might be that this hour would pass from him.* John 12:27, *My soul is troubled. And what shall I say, "Father free me from this hour?" No, for this purpose I have come to this hour.* Second, there was a watery sweat mixed with drops of blood dripping to the ground. Luke 22:44, *Being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

14. In this beginning of Christ's spiritual death there was a certain moderation and mitigation in that there was time for those duties which were to be done before his death, namely, prayers, discourses, admonitions, and responses.

15. The moderation was both inward and outward.

16. The inward occurred in the momentary abatements of the pressure and distress he felt in his soul. Thus he thought of the meaning of the office he had undertaken, the glory that would arise to his Father and to himself, and the salvation of those whom his Father had given him. He consciously chose to embrace all the miseries of death in order to obtain these ends.

17. The outward mitigation in this death came through the angel who strengthened him by speaking to him, Luke 22:43, *an angel from heaven appeared to him, comforting him.*

18. There was no inward beginning of Christ's bodily death except that natural weakening and dying which was caused from outside.

19. The external beginning was shown in phases of loss and conscious realization.

20. In the realm of loss he was rejected by his own people and counted worse than a murderer; he was forsaken, denied, and betrayed by his most intimate disciples. By all kinds of men, especially the leaders and those who were considered wise, he was called a madman, a deceiver, a blasphemer, a demoniac, a sorcerer, and a usurper of another's kingdom. He was stripped of his garments and denied necessary food.

21. In point of conscious realization, he was aware of the shameful arrest, the violent hauling away, the denial of ecclesiastical and civil justice, the mocking, whipping, and crucifixion with reproach and injury of all kinds. Yet there was some mitigation in this death: first, in the manifestation of divine majesty through certain miracles, such as the falling of soldiers to the ground at sight of him and at sound of his voice, and the healing of Malchus' ear; second, in the working of divine providence whereby it happened that he was justified by the judge before he was condemned. Matt. 27:24, *I am innocent of the blood of this just man.*

22. The consummation of Christ's death was the highest degree of the appointed punishment; and in this connection are to be considered the death itself and the continuance of it.

23. The consummation of his spiritual punishment as loss was the forsaking of him by his Father, as a result of which he was deprived of all sense of consolation. Matt. 27:46, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

24. The consummation of his death in conscious realization was the curse whereby he endured the full consciousness of God's judgment on man's sins. Cal. 3:13, *He*

*was made a curse for us.* The hanging on the cross was not a cause of or reason for this curse, but only a sign and symbol of it, *Ibid.*

25. The consummation of bodily death was the expiration of his soul in greatest torment and pain of body.

26. In this death there was a separation of the soul from the body, but the union of both with the divine nature remained so that a dissolution of the person did not occur.

27. This death of Christ was true and not feigned. It was natural, or from causes naturally working to bring it about, and not supernatural. It was voluntary and not at all compelled; yet it was violent and not from internal principles. It was also in a certain way supernatural and miraculous, because Christ kept his life and strength as long as he would and when he desired he laid it down, John 10:18.

28. The continuance of this death was a continuance of the state of lowest humiliation and not of the punishment of affliction, for when Christ said, *It is finished*, it applied to the latter punishment.

29. The continuance was the remaining under the reign of death for three days, Acts 2:24. This state is usually and properly described as existence in Hell.

30. The burial of Christ for three days was a testimony and representation of this state.