

2 Corinthians

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Chapter Five

This “chapter” is a continuation of the previous material in which Paul had discussed how hard life was serving His Lord here but that God always upheld him. He now goes on to discuss how there is hope in this world for what lies afterward. We serve Him here, not for worldly gain, but for the reward that is waiting for us in Heaven. He has three main points regarding the divine comfort for the believer facing imminent death in this “chapter”: 1.) the certainty of the spiritual body awaiting us (verse 1), 2.) the present possession of the Holy Spirit as the pledge of the ultimate transfiguration (verses 4b, 5), 3.) the knowledge that death merely begins the walk in reality (verse 7).

2Cor 5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Paul knew that his citizenship was in heaven, as he wrote to the church at Philippi:

Phil 3:20 “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

Phil 3:21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”

But now he was sensing that his death was imminent and so he was focusing on that life after the physical death. He also knew that he needed to encourage this church regarding the same concepts since they were undergoing persecution also. God also knew that His children in this area of the world were going to face horrible persecutions and death so the purpose of this writing goes beyond those at this particular church. Of course it also applies to us 2000 years later. As a tentmaker, the analogy of our body with a tent was natural for Paul. He had previously in this letter also referred to the decay of the earthly body and the building of the inner body:

2Cor 4:16 “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.”

It is very meaningful that the word “tent” is compared to the word “building”. A tent is a temporary dwelling that is taken down and moved from place to place until it is destroyed in some manner. The word “building” refers to something that is fixed, secure, and permanent. Since this building will replace the earthly tent (our present physical body); it must be our resurrected, glorified body that is made by God and that will exist forever in heaven.

2Cor 5:2 For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven;

2Cor 5:3 inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked.

2Cor 5:4 For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

He continued to lament his problems in the physical body and his longing to be in his new body. His longing was not just for the physical suffering but mainly for his struggling with the sin nature on a daily basis (Rom 7). The “proto-Gnostics” denied any future physical resurrection but taught that one’s spiritual “self” was created at either the resurrection of Christ or at the baptism of the believer. Understanding this background is essential for understanding these three verses. Paul taught against such a concept and indeed we owe our understanding of the spiritual body from his earlier teaching:

1Cor 15:35 “But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?”

1Cor 15:36 You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies;

1Cor 15:37 and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else.

1Cor 15:38 But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.

1Cor 15:39 All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish.

1Cor 15:40 There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another.

1Cor 15:41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

1Cor 15:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body;

1Cor 15:43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;

1Cor 15:44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

1Cor 15:45 So also it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living soul.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

1Cor 15:46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.

1Cor 15:47 The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.

1Cor 15:48 As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly.

1Cor 15:49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”

These verses can be simplified to say that the spiritual body exists within every person but it does not manifest itself until after the death of the physical body. Furthermore, those who have believed in Jesus as the Christ will also bear the image of Him when their spiritual body appears separate from the physical body. In 1 Cor 4:16 we read that this inner body is being renewed daily as we live and are sanctified. Thus the spiritual body, when released, will have the development gained during the life of the physical body. However Paul also knew that there would be a bodily resurrection later as stated many times like the following:

1Cor 15:42 "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body;"

Phil 3:10 "that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;"

Phil 3:11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

Now I said all of that so that I could exegete 2 Cor 5:2-4. Knowing what the false teachers were saying allows us to understand what Paul meant regarding being naked and unclothed when he said:

2Cor 5:2 For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven;

2Cor 5:3 inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked.

2Cor 5:4 For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

The proto-Gnostics taught a spirit life without a body and such would then be "naked" and "unclothed", but Paul knew that a resurrected body would await all after their spiritual body had separated from the dead physical body. The dwelling from heaven would be the redeemed glorified body for which he longed:

Rom 8:23 "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body."

2Cor 5:5 Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

It is a tremendous blessing to know that our purpose is to live forever with God in a glorified body prepared by God. Just to let us know of the certainty of that purpose, He gave us the Holy Spirit to live within us as a pledge. People today give pledge money for purchases and it means that the person is obligated to finalize the purchase. The pledge from God is similar in that the glorification will be completed. It is perhaps significant that, in modern Greek, the Greek word translated "pledge" means "engagement ring". The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian is not just present but is very active. He is involved in the renewing of the inner man referred to by Paul in 2 Cor 4:16. Paul also referred to such a transforming work in the following:

2Cor 3:18 "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

Eph 3:16 "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man;"

Phil 1:6 "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."

2Cor 5:6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord--

2Cor 5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight--

2Cor 5:8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

The word “therefore” means that what follows is based upon what he had just argued. These verses should be constantly in the mind of the child of God. Since we have all of the guarantees stated, we can be of good courage in any circumstance. A Christian who has a decent understanding of the sovereignty and awesomeness of God will not ever be down cast by any of the circumstances of life. A true child of God longs to be with His Lord and so every day when he is not with Him is a loss. It is not that he does not love his present family and friends but he loves Jesus Christ much more. Because the true Christian loves Jesus and longs to be with Him, he loves to be with fellow Christians who are also in Christ. Fellowship with fellow Christians is a foreshadow of life with Christ and should be unions that the believer gives high priority. The walking by faith and not by sight is a reference to our understanding of functional and positional reality. No Christian will have a death wish but certainly our preference is to be absent from this body and to be at home with the Lord. But we all serve Jesus here and live a life of service to Him as the Holy Spirit is renewing our inner self.

2Cor 5:9 Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

2Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

We now have another “therefore”. Based upon all that Paul has said we have our ambition. Ambition is only bad if it has a wrong focus. James tells us about sinful ambition:

James 3:14 “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

James 3:15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

James 3:16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”

The prophet Jeremiah also told people not to be involved in selfish ambition:

Jer 45:5 'But you, are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I am going to bring disaster on all flesh,' declares the Lord, 'but I will give your life to you as booty in all the places where you may go.' ”

Paul tells us about Godly ambition in verse 9 above and in another letter:

1Thess 4:11 “and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you;”

Paul also gives us the reason for our Godly ambition in verse 10 that begins with the word “for”. Every person will appear before a judgment seat. The non-Christian will be judged based upon his status before God and will be found totally wanting and will be cast ultimately into the lake of fire:

Rev 20:15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Rev 21:8 "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Praise the Lord the judgment of Christians will not be based on our standing before God because Jesus has already assured us of a life forever with God. Each Christian has already had his sins judged at the Cross but our other actions will receive further judgment as each Christian will also face a tribunal (“bema”) and this is what Paul relates in verse 10. Paul also referred to this tribunal in his earlier letter to this church:

1Cor 3:12 “Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

1Cor 3:13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

1Cor 3:14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward.

1Cor 3:15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.”

The word “bema” means a platform or raised surface so the picture is of us standing alone on a raised surface before Holy God to be judged according to our works in the world. We do many things in the world: get married, choose a profession, seek a degree, make friends, join a church, participate in sports, have a family, climb a professional ladder, etc. Those things which are done for the glory of the Lord will be judged good and those done otherwise will be judged bad. The Greek word translated “bad” does not mean morally or ethically wrong but useless and the use is determined as to whether it is done furthest for the Kingdom of God.

2Cor 5:11 Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.

2Cor 5:12 We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, that you may have an answer for those who take pride in appearance, and not in heart.

Since Paul knew that he would be facing a tribunal, he wanted all of his actions here to be worthwhile in God’s perspective. In the instance of the writing of this letter, Paul wants the people to favorably judge his integrity. It is the defense of his integrity and all of his works for Christ that he wants the church at Corinth to correctly understand. Of course he knows that God favorably judges his integrity (made manifest to God) but he also wants these people to know that his actions are all for their benefit and that he is not guilty as the false teachers had accused him. Paul was not bragging on himself but giving them information so that they could be proud

of him. The false teachers accused Paul falsely and their conduct was based only on external appearance and not on a good heart. God sees us “real”:

1Sam 16:7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

2Cor 5:13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you.

To the Jewish leaders, Paul’s conversion to Christianity was insanity and so some judged him to be unstable (beside ourselves). Others thought that he was really strange in his actions and a king had said that he was mad:

Acts 26:24 And while Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad."

The Jews said that John the Baptist had a demon (Matt 11:18) as well as Jesus (John 8:48). Paul says that even if his zeal and passion for Christ seems excessive he is serving God. He also says that when he speaks clearly so that they can readily understand him he is serving their best interests.

2Cor 5:14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;

2Cor 5:15 and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

Here he is not referring to his love for Christ but the love that Christ has for him. Because Jesus Christ loved him so much, He would make certain that Paul’s work for Him would be judged worthwhile and that he would walk in the path leading to the continued establishment of the Kingdom of God. Paul knew the great love of Christ for him and he had concluded that the death of Jesus Christ led to the death of all those for whom Jesus died.

Gal 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.

Rom 6:4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Rom 6:5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection,

Rom 6:6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin;

Rom 6:7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

Rom 6:8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

Rom 6:9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.

After we have been born again, we no longer just live for ourselves. We now have a grander goal in life and we serve our Lord Jesus Christ. We no longer serve ourselves. The result of a life-changing experience with Jesus is that we desire to live a Christ-centered life.

Eph 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Titus 2:14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

1Peter 2:24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

2Cor 5:16 Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.

Since he was born again, Paul recognized only two categories of people: those who have been saved by Christ and those who have not been saved. There are no longer Jews and Gentiles or free and slave or man and woman, but only lost and saved. Paul once knew Jesus only as a man who was an enemy of the Jews and he had dedicated himself to the destruction of the heresy he proclaimed and his followers. But after his transformation he no longer knew Jesus as a mere man but as the Son of God.

2Cor 5:17 Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Just as Paul was made into a new creature by being put in Christ, any who are also in Christ are also new creatures. We are born again as a child of God. The old is gone. The new has come. We should never look back longingly at the sin from which we have been removed. It will still have a draw on us, but we who are really born again will resist its pull.

Rom 6:5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection,

Rom 6:6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin;

Rom 6:7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

Col 3:9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,

Col 3:10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him

Col 3:11 --a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

2Cor 5:18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,

2Cor 5:19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

All these things include the new attitudes and new creation to which Paul has been referring. He says that all these things are from God who created the universe. He then gives a succinct statement of the Gospel: God has prepared a way for people to be reconciled to Him and it is only through Christ. Reconciliation is not ignoring the hostility but the complete removal of the hostility. In this case the hostility is between a sinful man and a sinless God. Man cannot reconcile himself for he is totally in sin. Only God can remove sin, give holiness, and transform man into a new creature acceptable to Him. Paul also says that our purpose is in the ministry to carrying forth the Word of the Gospel (evangelism). In this passage the message is primarily that Paul and his co-workers are in the ministry of reconciliation. However we also have been reconciled so we also have an obligation to continue the ministry. We are not all given a gift of evangelism but we are all to witness to others what God has done to us. The “world” in verse 19 is the stage upon which Jesus worked and this verse does not mean that the entire world was reconciled. It means that there is no distinction between types of people in the world but all of His children will be reconciled. The Gospel is freely offered to all men but only those who would believe have actually been reconciled through the work of Christ. Those to be reconciled have been chosen before the foundation of the world:

Eph 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love

Eph 1:5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

Eph 1:6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

2Cor 5:20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

2Cor 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

He then concludes this section with a “therefore” that refers back to all concepts in this chapter. Because we have been transformed and reconciled with God we are all ambassadors for Christ. God works through His children to reach out to other potential children of God. We then beg people on behalf of Christ to enter into His reconciliation process. Of course only God can cause someone to be born again but He uses us to carry forth His Word. He then finishes with the great message of the ministry of Jesus Christ. This is also a statement of double imputation in that our sin was put upon Jesus and His righteousness was put onto us. The statement that we are “in Christ” is foundational for the difference between Christianity and religion. By being “in Christ”, the children of God share the attributes of Jesus Christ and our salvation is not dependent upon anything that we do.

In conclusion, I see six major concepts from this chapter. I have included verses from other books pertaining to the same topics.

1. We have a spiritual body.
1 Peter 1:3, 1 Peter 1:23
2. We die physically and we go spiritually to be with the Lord.
2 Cor 5:6-8
3. The Holy Spirit is given to us when we are born again as a pledge.
2 Cor 5:5
4. The Holy Spirit is involved in our sanctification as He is developing our spiritual self.
2 Cor 4:16, 2 Cor 3:18, Eph 3:16, Phil 1:6
5. We will be judged for worthy acts (not moral for that judgment was taken on our behalf by Jesus).
2 Cor 5:10 and 1 Cor 3:12-15
Tears from losses will be wiped away: Rev 7:17, Rev 21:4
6. We will be given a glorified physical body.
Rom 6:5; 1 Cor 15:51-53; 1 Cor 15:42-44; 1 Cor 15:20, 22-23; Luke 20:34-36; Rom 8:28-30; John 5:25-29; 1 Thess 4:16-17; Job 19:25-26; Dan 12:2