

Eternal Hope

Printed Text · 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:1-10

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: ACKNOWLEDGE the hope Paul, faced with death, manifested in God's eternal promise; EXPERIENCE awe in the faith of family and friends who are facing their mortality; and DEVELOP a growing trust in God's promise of eternal life through faith.

In Focus

Selena knew that if she didn't hurry, she would be late for the funeral at the church this morning. As the lead usher, she was responsible for ensuring the other ushers were in place, handing out funeral programs, and seating guests.

Her hands were shaking as she combed out her hair. Fred, the 24-year-old son of one of the church's long-time members, had been killed in a car wreck on Saturday night. The two passengers in Fred's car were still hospitalized, both in critical condition. Fred had been thrown from the car and died at the scene. He came from a large family and had been a popular young man in high school and at the local community college.

Although Fred's parents were faithful church members, Selena had only seen Fred in church on Mother's Day. She ran into him several times outside of the church and had even invited him to come and visit more often. Fred always laughed and teased that he was too young for that "church stuff."

Selena had ushered at enough funerals to know that there would be a lot of crying; she didn't mind that part. It was the screaming and having to restrain guests from throwing themselves into the casket that bothered her. While Selena understood that grief was natural, the funerals of young people were always chaotic. She wondered what Pastor Bob Jenkins would say during the eulogy to provide hope and comfort for Fred's family and friends, because Pastor couldn't possibly have known Fred that well.

How do you offer hope and comfort to others in the face of death? How does knowing Christ change how we understand death?

Keep In Mind

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Corinthians 5:1, KJV)

Words You Should Know

- A. Earnest** (2 Corinthians 5:5) arrhabon (Gk.) — A pledge, guarantee, or down payment towards fulfilling a future promise
- B. Accepted** (v. 9) euarestos (Gk.) — Well pleasing, good and virtuous

Say It Correctly

Paradox. PAIR-uh-docks

Platonist. PLAY-ton-ist

Pythagoreans. Apuh-THAH-gure-EE-ans

KJV

2 Corinthians 4:16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

5:1 For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:

3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

5 Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:

7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:)

8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

NLT

2 Corinthians 4:16 That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day.

17 For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!

18 So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

5:1 For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.

2 We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing.

3 For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies.

4 While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life.

5 God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit.

6 So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord.

7 For we live by believing and not by seeing.

8 Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord.

9 So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him.

10 For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.

The People, Places, and Times

Heavenly Bodies. Today, we spend so much time and money on our physical bodies while trying to ignore the fact that the aging process is an inevitable part of life. That is not to say that we shouldn't take care of our bodies by developing healthy eating habits and getting proper rest and exercise. But we must realize that the bodies we now possess are not going to function forever. Still, Christians can rejoice that one day we will receive a heavenly body that is specifically designed for heaven. Our earthly bodies are contrasted with that which is spiritual, which can exist in the heavenly realm. There is a realm for physical (natural) existence and there is another for spiritual existence. Each realm has a distinct body fashioned for it, just like each season has its own clothing.

Judgment Seat. The judgment seat was found in a palace or tent where court proceedings were held. The emperor or general would sit in this highly elevated, throne-like chair to conduct trials and make pronouncements of extreme importance. Pontius Pilate and King Herod conducted business from such a seat. In the great halls, all eyes could easily find this focal point as the chair's importance was obvious.

Background

Paul founded the church at Corinth and reminded the young assembly of believers that, because he was their organizer, he had a right to speak regarding their management. The big issue rampant in the church was whether Paul was a genuine apostle. Paul asserted that he was and sent Titus to deliver that message. Titus was well received and Paul rejoiced at the happy news when he met his messenger in Macedonia.

In addition to this issue of apostolic authority, the Corinthians wondered about how they were to deal with persecution and death. Shouldn't God protect them from these harsh realities since they are faithfully following Him? Paul turns the question on its side, saying that these harsh realities are nothing compared to the glory that awaits the Christian in heaven after death. Chapter 5 begins with Paul comparing the earthly body with the heavenly body as the difference between a tent and a building. The tent is a temporary dwelling while the building is solid. Paul hoped to be transformed into his heavenly body rather than go through the nakedness of death. The Platonists, Pythagoreans, and Gnostics during the time of Paul's writings saw the body as a prison for the soul and yearned to be rid of it. Paul saw the new body as a desirable garment which would cover the soul.

At-A-Glance

1. Light Suffering (2 Corinthians 4:16–18)
2. New Clothing (5:1–5)
3. Confident Living (vv. 6–10)

In Depth

1. Light Suffering (2 Corinthians 4:16–18)

Part of the means used by God in this transforming, renewing process is suffering (cf. 1 Peter 4:1, 13–14). Paul compared the sufferings he had experienced, severe as they were, to light and momentary troubles, pressures, and hardships. They were nothing in view of the eternal glory that would be his when he would be in Jesus' presence and would be like Him (1 Corinthians 15:49). Paul is here weighing his sufferings on God's scales. He discovers that his sufferings are light when compared to the weight of glory God has stored up for him. These verses bring wonderful assurance to the believer in times of suffering. How important it is for us to live with eternity's values in view. Life takes on new meaning when we see things through God's eyes.

Paul introduces a paradox to the unbeliever, but a precious truth to the Christian. We live by faith, not by sight; this faith enables the Christian to see things that cannot be seen (Hebrew 11:1–3). The world thinks we are crazy because we dare to believe God's Word and live according to His will. We pass up the things that people covet because our hearts are set on higher values.

How are Christians supposed to "look" at "things which are not seen"?

2. New Clothing (5:1–5)

The human body is the vehicle of expression for the soul, the inner man. It is referred to as an earthly tabernacle, a temporary tent. In this body, we "groan," indicating both physical and mental expressions. The body, wonderful though it is, has a built-in mortality factor, and will be torn down and dissolved. When it is dismantled, we call it death.

In stark contrast to the temporal scene, is Paul's emphasis upon the future—our heavenly, eternal abode. In heaven, we will be at home with the Lord. Paul voiced his strong desire for this state of permanence (Philippians 1:21–23). Our heavenly, or eternal, body is compared to fresh, new clothing. In Paul's thought, clothes really did "make the man." The life that now is will be engulfed by the life that is real—life eternal.

How does the Spirit act as a guarantee of our new life in heaven?

3. Confident Living (vv. 6–10)

The Apostle Paul affirms that the tug toward heaven continues while we serve on earth. The brave continue to live as a testimony to the Lord. Even death is a testimony as we express confidence in what lies ahead. Death is not the worst thing that can happen to a Christian. He who created us has risen from the grave, and He will keep His promise to raise us also!

Paul also tells his readers, "to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" v. 8). We cannot live in both our temporary and our eternal, glorified bodies at the same time. Our temporary bodies are temples of the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:19) but more is yet to come.

Our incompleteness urges us to desire the permanent house Jesus is preparing for us.

Paul ties it all back together. They should not fear painful trials on this earth because it's all going to be worth it when we get our heavenly bodies and God judges our perseverance. One day believers will have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to be judged for what they have done. When God inspects us, He expects to find the fruit in our lives. In making choices, we should first ask whether God will be pleased with our choices.

Can others see Jesus Christ in you? Do you live to make a positive difference in the world?

Search the Scriptures

1. What do the afflictions that we face today actually do for us? (v. 17)
2. What are the things seen and the things which are not seen according to Paul? (v. 18)
3. What should be the aim of a believer? (5:9)
4. What will happen to a believing Christian at the judgment seat of Christ? (v. 10)?

Discuss The Meaning

1. Paul says that our temporary earthly dwelling is a tent, while our permanent heavenly dwelling is a house. Where else do we see this imagery in Scripture? What implications does that have for understanding Paul here?
2. Discuss the following phrase: We are not free to live until we aren't afraid to die. How would such an idea affect our living? How can this idea be blended with an attitude of safety and caution?

Liberating Lesson

Adversities can serve a definite purpose in our lives. C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Problem with Pain*, says, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Think of our society today. Most of the world's achievements have come through hardship and pain, including most professions, inventions, personal accomplishments, relationships, parenting, great leaders, and church ministries. Take time and talk about how pain has been a driving force even in your life. There is truth to the saying: "No pain no gain."

Application For Activation

While we still do not like pain in our lives, we must see the value that it plays. Think of someone who is going through tough times. Using the lesson today, think of ways you could encourage them. Spend time this week praying that God would give you the right words to uplift and motivate others.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

2 Corinthians 4:16–5:10

Paul continues to stress his courageous spirit as he begins to speak more directly about the future. He writes of present inner renewal accompanying his outer decay, and looks forward to a time without any decay, whether physical or spiritual.

16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

Beginning from this verse, Paul shifts his emphasis from a defense of the suffering he incurs in his ministry, to an expression of his confidence in the resurrection hope that sustains him in his suffering. Paul restates what he previously said in verse 1, “we faint not.” He both summarizes the preceding section and picks up the theme of verse 1. He proceeds to distinguish the outward and inner person. The “outward man” is a whole person as seen by others or that aspect of one’s humanity that is subject to various assaults and hardships of this world. The “inner man” is the unseen personality known only to God and self. The Corinthians need to understand that despite Paul’s bodily weakness, his inner person is being transformed daily. He then turns to the contrast between the present and the return of Christ, between this life and the life to come.

God’s mighty power is shown through human fragile vessels. Humanity that decays and the mortal labor on behalf of the Gospel is taking its toll on them. But “day by day” they are inwardly renewed. The experience of daily renewal or recycling, inspires the sure and certain hope of the resurrection life (vv. 10ff). Though the outer body may look weak, Christians are renewed by the power of God. The outer person can be equated with the sinful nature (Romans 6:6; Colossians 3:9; Ephesians 4:22). The inner person is being renewed day after day. The old wastes away but the new survives forever. The eternal weight of glory awaits a believer (cf. Romans 8:18–25). Paul connects suffering in this age and glory in the next life with Jesus. The end time is good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28). It is for us who believe to enter that glory. The purpose of God cannot be thwarted away by the present evil.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; 18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

To substantiate what is introduced by “for which cause” in v. 16, Paul explains his paradoxical affirmation with a series of startling contrasts. The life to come is a life of glory. Contrary to the position of his opponents, Paul can say that according to God’s surpassing gift his present momentary suffering will be followed by eternal glory. Paul neither minimized nor glorified his sufferings. Instead he had an eternal perspective. He

took his pain in stride, looking at everything in light of eternity. He fixes his gaze not upon the things that belong to this age but upon the things that belong to the coming age. As Christians, we must be careful not to base our hopes on the things we see. The unseen will endure when all else fails.

Our present troubles are real but shortlived. Trouble fades into insignificance, but eternal weight of glory awaits a believer (cf. Romans 8:18–25). Paul connects suffering in this age and the glory in the next life with Jesus. And that life is for us that believe. We, therefore, fix our eyes “not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.”

Christians see persecution, suffering, trouble, but look forward to the things unseen which have been prepared by God for those who love Him. So, Paul’s apostleship was authenticated by God’s act of power and glory. God has prepared the coming age for those who love Him. Therefore, Christians should not focus only on the present success but must fix their hope, indeed their gaze, to the glory that God has prepared for them. It is a hope based on Christ’s resurrection.

5:1 For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

In this chapter, Paul builds upon the conclusion in 4:17–18 and provides further details of his motivation for ministry. First, Paul was fully convinced of a future life that is devoid of suffering and pain. It is a life without change or death. He had an abounding hope of resurrection and heaven (5:1–8). Second, Paul was sure of future divine judgment (5:9–10). In the face of the coming judgment, he had incredible confidence, for his relation with God was already right. Third, Paul was persuaded that the reconciliation of humanity to God was God’s initiative, motivated by love and manifested in, and brought about by, Jesus Christ.

Paul starts on a note of confidence. “We know” implies that the Corinthians knew what Paul is about to say. It indicates Paul’s unwavering conviction and settled belief that the Christian will eventually be done with the frailty and suffering of their present existence. Paul does not say “we think,” “we hope,” or “we assume,” but “we know.” “We know” indicates the certainty of Paul’s future hope, which he shares with the other apostles, the Corinthians, and all Christian believers. His courage, as he faces failing faculties and the inevitability of suffering and death, is to be found in his assurance of the unseen and the eternal (4:18), that is, in the certainty of his eternal house in heaven (5:1). What a bold statement! As Paul has previously stated (4:1–15), believers can face any trial in this life because of the hope of future resurrection.

This verse shows that at least for the first time in Paul’s apostolic ministry and career, Paul reckons seriously with the possibility of his death before the return of Christ (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 1 Corinthians 15:51). This is probably because of his encounter with death spoken of earlier (1:8–11).

2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: 3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. 4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

Paul likens the present human body to a foldable tent that is to be replaced with a building, a clear allusion to the resurrection body that Paul mentioned previously in his previous letter to this church (1 Corinthians 15). The present tent-body that gradually ages

and wears out will be taken down and folded up when we die. At the return of Christ and the resurrection of the faithful, we will receive our new bodies, and our salvation will be complete. Paul uses the image of groaning here and in his letter to the Roman church, saying that our human mortal existence is limited (Romans 8:19–20). Paul sought liberation from the imperfection of our present embodiment. He has another home in view. The believer's present existence is punctuated with suffering and pain. The present age is characterized by groaning, and believers are not exempt from the groaning of the whole created order (Romans 8:22–27). Thus, Paul says, we groan.

But we do not groan as hopeless people. It is a groaning that is accompanied by a longing. It was not a longing for death. Paul's hope and groaning were not for death. Death is not the hope of the Christian.

Many of us are not earnestly longing for heaven. Perhaps it is because we are so comfortable on earth? It is not that we should seek out affliction, but neither should we dedicate our lives to the pursuit of comfort. There is nothing wrong with earnestly desiring heaven! There is something right about being able to agree with Paul and say we groan!

5 Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

While Paul speaks of the transformation of the mortal body in the last part of verse 4, it is the last part of verse 5 where he indicates how the preparation takes place. God has prepared the Christian believer for transformation by giving us the Spirit as a guarantee (Gk. arrhabon, are-rah-OWN), pledge or guarantee, which is different from the final payment. How can the Spirit be God's pledge? It is clearly through His empowering the Christian's daily re-creation or renewal. In other words, what the Spirit does in the present not only prefigures but also guarantees His future completion of that work which he began (cf. Philippians 1:6). The Spirit daily renews us on earth but will fully renew us in heaven.

6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: 7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) 8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

Paul's mood and style appear to change as he begins to conclude his certainty about the future. He becomes more positive. Because of the Spirit's presence, his longing for the future encourages him in the present: Therefore we are always confident. Paul abandons the metaphors that he has previously used for the body and here he refers explicitly to the term body itself. In view is the body as the sphere of one's physical life on earth with all of its frailties (see Romans 6:12; 12:1). For Paul, a mortal body is not incompatible with life "in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20)

Paul continues to use the architectural imagery of 5:1–2. The metaphors of being at home and "away from our home" are obviously related to the earlier terminology of "tent," "building," and "house." Earthly existence in the physical body means for Paul that "we are absent from the Lord." That is, although we are "in Christ" we are not yet "with Christ" (Philippians 1:23). So we walk by faith. The word translated "walk" (v. 7) is used metaphorically here to mean "conduct our total life." Paul is saying, "We conduct our lives based on faith, not by the appearance of things." While Paul (as is true of all Christians) was in the physical body, he was away from the Lord (v. 6). However, even in this life Christ lived in him, and he looked for the day when he could see the risen Lord face to face.

In verse 8, Paul talks about being away in the body and being with the Lord. This is still an idea of permanence. So you find a corollary— resident in the body is absent from the Lord, absence from the body is residence with the Lord. What did Paul understand to be involved in being at home with the Lord? It is more than location (cf. John 1:1 – ‘with God’; Mark 6:3 – ‘with us’). At home with the Lord depicts Christians’ eternal destiny. We will be at home with the Lord means that we will not only be where He is, but also there will be a higher form of intimate relationship with Christ that we will experience.

**9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.
10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.**

Unlike many who are people-pleasers, Paul considered nothing to be more important than pleasing the Lord Jesus Christ who has commissioned him. Paul’s letters frequently use the adjective *euarestos* (ew-ARE-ess-toce) to describe human behavior that is “acceptable” or “well-pleasing” to God (see Romans 12:2; Philippians 4:18; Colossians 3:20). Pleasing Christ was the all-consuming passion of Paul’s life (see v. 14) and the overall objective of his apostolic ministry. This was true whether he lived on in a vulnerable human frame or whether he died and was away from his bodily home on earth. The nature of the future, Paul’s destiny of residence with the Lord (v. 8) and the necessity of appearing before him for judgment (v. 10), all motivated him to please the Lord. Although Paul is not completely devoid of the hope of being honored by the Corinthians, his proclamation of the Gospel and his entire life were devoted to pleasing the Lord, rather than winning honor from people.

That was his supreme ambition. For him, to live is Christ and to die is gain (Philippians 1:21). At the heart of Paul’s desire to please the Lord is the awareness of an awaiting future judgment. While in the body we must act in such a way so that we will be pleasing to God at the judgment. We shall all be seen for what we are. All believers will be stripped of all disguises, masks, and pretensions before the judgment seat of Christ. What we do in the body has moral significance and eternal consequences. To be conformed to Christ’s glorious body in the next life, we must be conformed to His image and character in this life. What a sobering thought.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

From Death to Life in Christ
(1 Corinthians 15:16-23)

Tuesday

Strengthening the Inner Being
(Ephesians 3:14-21)

Wednesday

Every Deed, Good or Evil, Judges
(Ecclesiastes 12:9-14)

Thursday

God's Judgment of Human Behavior Impartial
(Romans 2:4-11)

Friday

Paul, Confident in the Ministry
(2 Corinthians 4:1-6)

Saturday

Entering the Presence of Jesus
(2 Corinthians 4:7-15)

Sunday

Live the Faith with Confidence
(2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10)