

ENGAGE

- This week we will be looking at death for the believer and death for the unbeliever.
- Focus on the New Building of the Church that is created when the Spirit indwells a believer.
- Spiritual eternity begins at salvation and that new Body is guaranteed.
- There will be a judgement of all peoples. No one will escape that day.
- We are fashioned for the purpose of living for Christ and sharing the Gospel to others that they may become alive through the Spirit as well

EXAMINE

The Christian's destiny.

1. (1) *Our existence in the world to come.*

For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

a. **For we know:** Paul has just contrasted *our light affliction* with *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, and things which are *seen* and *temporary* with things that are *not seen* and *eternal* ([2 Corinthians 4:17-18](#)). Now, Paul will write more about this contrast between the earthly and the eternal.

i. In this discussion, Paul is bold enough to say, “**We know.**” Christians can **know** what the world beyond this one is like because we **know** what God’s eternal word says.

ii. “Not we think, or hope only; this is the top-gallant of faith, the triumph of trust; this is, as Latimer calls it, the sweet-meats of the feast of a good conscience. There are other dainty dishes in this feast, but this is the banquet.” (Trapp)

b. **Our earthly house, this tent:** Paul thinks of our bodies as *tents* – temporary structures that cannot be thought of as the whole person. If the **tent** is **destroyed**, we still have an eternal hope: **a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.**

i. **Destroyed** is the very same word used for “striking down a tent.” One day, God will “strike the tent,” and we will each receive a new **building from God**, a place to live in through all eternity.

ii. “Many people are in a great fright about the future, yet here is Paul viewing the worst thing that could happen to him with such complacency that he likens it to nothing worse than the pulling down of tent in which he was making shift to reside for a little season.” (Spurgeon)

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iii. This means that we are more than our bodies and explains why Paul could consider all the pain and discomfort in his body a *light affliction* compared to the *eternal weight of glory* to come. It is a mistake to say, "My body isn't me." In truth, my body *is* me, but only *part* of me. There is much more to me than this body.

c. **A house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens:** Our future bodies are **not made with hands**. God specially makes them to suit the environment of eternity and heaven; they are **eternal in the heavens**.

i. Jesus said, "*In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you*" ([John 14:2](#)). According to the literal wording of the ancient Greek, the word for *mansions* is better translated "dwelling place" or "a place to stay." But in light of God's character, it is better translated *mansions*! This **building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens** will be a glorious place to stay, a mansion for all eternity. After all, Jesus has been preparing that place for us since He ascended into heaven.

ii. Salvation isn't just for the soul or spirit, but for the body also. *Resurrection* is how God saves our bodies. We have a glorious new body to come. "The righteous are put into their graves all weary and worn; but as such they will not rise. They go there with the furrowed brow, the hollowed cheek, the wrinkled skin; they shall wake up in beauty and glory." (Spurgeon)

2. (2-4) *Our longing for the heavenly body.*

For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

a. **For in this we groan:** Christians therefore **groan** because we see both the *limitations* of this body and *superiority* of the body to come. We are **earnestly desiring** our new bodies.

i. Many of us are not **earnestly desiring** heaven. Is it because we are so comfortable on earth? It isn't 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 saying "**we groan**."

b. **Earnestly desiring to be clothed... having been clothed, we shall not be naked:** Paul is simply saying that in eternity, we will be **clothed** and not be **naked** – that is, we will not be bodiless spirits.

i. The Greek philosophers thought that a bodiless spirit was the highest level of existence. They thought of the body as a prison for the soul, and saw no advantage in being resurrected in another body.

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ii. To God, the body itself is not a negative. The problem isn't in the body itself but in *these* sin-corrupted, fallen bodies that we live in. Jesus approved the essential goodness of the body by becoming a man. If there was something inherently evil in the body, Jesus could never have added humanity to His deity.

c. **Not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed:** As Christians, we have no earnest desire to be "pure spirit" and to escape the body. Instead, we are **earnestly desiring** to have a perfect, resurrected, body.

i. We really don't know all that much about the state of our resurrected bodies. "If after that you desire to know more concerning this house, I can but give you the advice which was given by John Bunyan in a similar case. One asked of honest John a question which he could not answer, for the matter was not opened up in God's word; and therefore honest John bade his friend live a godly life, and go to heaven, *and see for himself.*" (Spurgeon)

d. **That mortality may be swallowed up in life:** Our new bodies will not be subject to death (**mortality**). Instead, as Paul wrote in [1 Corinthians 15:54](#), *Death is swallowed up in victory.* When we receive our eternal bodies, life completely conquers death. If a snake **swallowed up** a mouse, the mouse is completely conquered; it is no more. Even so, death will **be swallowed up in life**.

e. **But further clothed:** In Medieval times, some Christians who had never been monks were buried in the clothing of a monk, hoping to do a little better on judgment day dressed like a monk. Jesus offers us a far better garment.

3. (5-8) *Our confidence.*

Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

a. **Now He who has prepared us:** God is preparing us *right now* for our eternal destiny. Here, Paul connects the ideas of *our light affliction* and the *eternal weight of glory* ([2 Corinthians 5:17-18](#)). *Our light affliction* is (in part) how God **has prepared us**.

i. A man in the middle of many painful trials took a walk in his neighborhood and saw a construction crew at work on a big church. He stood and watched a stone craftsman work a long time on a block but could not see where the block would fit, because the church appeared to be finished. He watched the man work on the block carefully and methodically, slowly shaping it into a precise pattern. Finally, he asked, "Why are you spending so much time chipping and shaping that block?" The craftsman pointed up to the top of the nearly completed steeple and said, "I'm shaping it down here so it will fit in up there." The man in the middle of the trials instantly knew that was God's message to him: He was being **prepared** down here so that he would fit in up in heaven.

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b. **Who has also given us the Spirit as a guarantee:** When the trials are hard on earth, it isn't always easy to take comfort in our heavenly destiny. God knew this, so He gave **us the Spirit as a guarantee**. He backs up the promise of heaven with a down payment right now, the Holy Spirit.

i. **Guarantee** is the ancient Greek word *arrhabon*, which described a pledge or a partial payment that required future payments but gave the one receiving the **guarantee** a legal claim to the goods in question. In the modern Greek language, *arrhabona* means "engagement ring."

ii. Many Christians experience great blessing from the Holy Spirit right now. When we consider how glorious the down payment is, we should consider how great the whole gift will be.

iii. "So the Holy Spirit is a part of heaven itself. The work of the Holy Spirit in the soul is the bud of heaven. Grace is not a thing which will be taken away from us when we enter glory, but will develop into glory. Grace will not be withdrawn as though it had answered its purpose, but will be matured into glory." (Spurgeon)

c. **Therefore we are always confident:** The presence of the Holy Spirit in Paul's life gave him confidence. It assured him that God was at work in him and would continue His work. If you cannot say of yourself that you **are always confident**, then ask God for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit in your life.

i. We can be **always confident**, even in hard times, if we keep [Colossians 3:2](#): *Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth*. "What, then, is the way to maintain peace when there are changes in the soul; when we are sometimes taken up to heaven and are anon cast down? Why, the only way is never to be unduly elated by prosperity without or within, and never to be unduly depressed by adversity or by doubts and fears, because you have learned to live neither upon the things without nor upon things within, but upon things above, which are the true food for a new-born spirit." (Spurgeon)

d. **While we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight:** Right now, the presence of God is a matter of faith. We are **at home in the body** so there is a sense in which we are **absent from the Lord**, at least in the sense of His immediate, glorious presence. So now, we must **walk by faith, not by sight**.

i. To **walk by faith, not by sight** is one of the great – and difficult – principles of Christian living. It must amaze the angels that we live for, serve, and are willing to die for a God we have never seen. Yet we love Him and live for Him, living **by faith, not by sight**.

ii. To **walk by faith** means to make faith part of every daily activity. *Walking* is nothing remarkable in itself; it is one of the more mundane aspects of life. But God wants us to **walk by faith**. "That man has not yet learned the true spirit of Christianity who is always saying, 'I can preach a sermon by faith.' Yes, sir, but can you make a coat by faith? 'I can distribute tracts, and visit the district by faith.' Can you cook a dinner by faith? I mean, can you perform

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the common actions of the household, and the daily duties which fall to your lot, in the spirit of faith?" (Spurgeon)

iii. The day will come when we will no longer be **absent from the Lord** in the sense Paul means it here. On that day, we will not have to **walk by faith**, but we will see the glory and the presence of God **by sight**.

e. **We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord:** Because Paul is **confident** (in part, based on the guarantee of the Holy Spirit) of his eternal destiny, he is not afraid of the world beyond. In fact, he would be **well pleased to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord**.

i. This text deals with a question on the minds of many: What happens to believers when they die? Christians will leave these bodies, be resurrected in new bodies, and be with the Lord. Plainly speaking, **to be absent from the body** means we will **be present with the Lord**.

ii. But will we live in heaven for a time in an intermediate, bodiless state awaiting resurrection? Some think so, based on passages like [Revelation 6:9-11](#) and [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#). But here, Paul seems to see such a bodiless state as undesirable. Either the present **dead in Christ** are with the Lord in a spiritual body, awaiting their final resurrection body; or, because of the nature of timeless eternity, they have received their resurrection bodies already because they live in the eternal "now."

iii. The truth that **to be absent from the body** means we will **be present with the Lord** proves two false doctrines to be false. It refutes the false doctrine of "soul sleep" (saying that the believing dead are held in some sort of suspended animation until the resurrection occurs) and the false doctrine of "purgatory" (saying that the believing dead must be "cleaned up" through their own suffering before coming into the presence of God).

iv. "He did not expect to be roasted alive for the next thousand years, and then to leap from purgatory to Paradise; but he did expect to go, as soon as ever his earthly house was dissolved, into his eternal house which is in the heavens. He had not even the thought of lying in a state of unconsciousness till the resurrection." (Spurgeon)

f. **To be present with the Lord:** This is what makes heaven really heaven, so we long **to be present with the Lord**. Heaven is precious to us for many reasons. We want to be with loved ones who have passed before us and whom we miss so dearly. We want to be with the great men and women of God who have passed before us in centuries past. We want to walk the streets of gold, see the pearly gates, and see the angels round the throne of God worshipping Him day and night. However, none of those things, precious as they are, make heaven really "heaven." What makes heaven really heaven is the unhindered, unrestricted presence of our Lord. The place of heaven would be like hell if we could not **be present with the Lord**.

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4. (9-10) *The aim of our life in light of our eternal destiny.*

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done in the body*, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

a. **Therefore we make it our aim... to be well pleasing to Him:** Since what we do right now has eternal consequences, our goal must persistently be to please God.

i. "You report to headquarters. Never mind what anybody else thinks of you. Your business is to please Christ, and the less you trouble yourselves about pleasing men the more you will succeed in doing it." (Maclaren)

b. **Whether present or absent:** We can't do anything right now about pleasing God when we are absent from these bodies and present with the Lord. That day has not yet come. Yet we can do something about pleasing the Lord when we are absent from His immediate presence and present in these bodies.

i. We must consider that as far as we know, there are some opportunities for pleasing God that we will only have while **present** in these bodies. When we get to heaven, there will be no more need for faith, no more need for endurance through trials, no more need for courage and boldness in telling others about Jesus. *Now*, while we are **present** in these bodies, is our only opportunity in all eternity to please God in these areas.

c. **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ:** When we pass from these bodies to the world beyond, we must each give account **according to what he has done, whether good or bad.**

i. This is not the Great White Throne judgment ([Revelation 20:11-15](#)). This describes a judgment of the works of believers (**the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad**).

ii. The phrase **judgment seat** is a single word in the ancient Greek language of the New Testament. *Bema* literally means "step," as in a raised platform or seat. This was where a Roman magistrate sat to act as a judge. The *bema* was "an object of reverence and fear to all the people." (Hodge)

d. **We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ:** What will be judged at **the judgment seat of Christ**? First, *what we have done* will be judged (**the things done**). Secondly, our *motives* for what we have done will be judged (**according to what he has done, whether good or bad**).

i. We must live understanding that *what we have done* will be judged. It is possible to have a saved soul and a wasted life, and that will be judged at the **judgment seat of Christ**. This should be an *encouragement* in our service to the Lord. It should remind us of the principle in

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[Hebrews 6:10](#): *For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.* Paul knows that the troubles of this life are worth it because he will be rewarded at the **judgment seat of Christ**.

ii. We must live understanding that *our motives* for what we do will be judged ([1 Corinthians 13:1-3](#) shares this idea). One can do the right things but with a wrong heart. God will often still use that person and even bring great blessing through them. Yet in the end, it is as if they did nothing for the Lord because their motives for service did not stand up at the **judgment seat of Christ**.

iii. Paul presents essentially the same idea in [1 Corinthians 3:12-15](#), where he speaks of a coming assessment of each one's work before the Lord. In that passage, he makes it clear that what we do and our motive for doing it will be tested by fire, and the purifying fire of God will burn up everything that was not of Him. We won't be *punished* for what was not done rightly unto the Lord; those things will simply be *burned up*, and it will be as if we never did them. We will simply be rewarded for what remains. Sadly, some will get to heaven *thinking* they have done great things for God and will find out at the **judgment seat of Christ** that they really did nothing.

iv. "Appearance before Christ's tribunal is the privilege of Christians. It is concerned with the assessment of works and, indirectly, of character, not with the determination of destiny; with reward, not status." (Harris)

QUESTIONS

1. What subject is dealt with in 5:1-9?
2. What will we still have even after our earthly tent or dwelling (our body) is destroyed (5:1)?
3. Why are we groaning while we have our earthly bodies? What do we really want (5:2-4)?
4. What should we desire more than being in our bodies (5:6-8)? Where is our true home?
5. What was said with regard to being present or absent from the body? (6,8)
6. How do we walk? (7)
7. Who must appear before the judgment seat of Christ? (10)
8. What will be the basis of our judgment before Christ (5:10)?
9. How are you different since you became a Christian?

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