

BaptistWay Bible Series for Oct. 3: Live knowing you will have to give an account_92004

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Live knowing you will have to give an account

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10

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Some Christians have been (rightly) accused of being so heavenly minded they are no earthly good. Alternatively, other believers, perhaps unwittingly, have grown so accustomed to and comfortable with this life that they seldom, if ever, contemplate life after death. There is, to be sure, a rather delicate balance to be struck here.

Indeed, the desirable Christian course is neither wholesale rejection of “the world” nor indiscriminate adoption of “the world” (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 5:9-10). Arguably, the Apostle Paul points the Corinthians (and those of us who are privileged to read their “mail”) in the right direction when he indicates it is his ambition whether he lives or dies to please the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:9). It should be the Christian preoccupation to love

the Lord both in life and in death and to praise him as long as he lends us the breath (“My Jesus, I Love Thee,” second stanza).

In the text for this week's lesson, Paul's focus falls decidedly on eternity. Having reiterated in 2 Corinthians 4:16 that he does not lose heart despite affliction (4:1) due to his confidence in God's resurrection of the Christians (v. 14), Paul proceeds in 4:16-5:10 to offer personal reflections on his apostolic experience and expectations. These remarks, like the catalog of sufferings set forth in 4:8-10, are replete with contrasts.



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At the outset of this penetrating passage, Paul states that even though his physical body (literally “outer person”) is wasting away, his spiritual life (literally “inward person”) is being renewed day by day (4:16). Instead of viewing his various and sundry external trials as permanent and debilitating (for a specific, illustrative list of Paul's hardships, see 2 Corinthians 11:24-27), he regards them as preparatory for eternal glory (v. 17).

In Pauline thought, suffering with and for Christ was part and parcel of the Christian vocation (Romans 8:17). Furthermore, however severe his suffering might have been at any given time, Paul figures it pales in comparison to the surpassing value of being with Christ for all time.

What enabled Paul to embrace this seemingly “unrealistic” attitude? The apostle was able to view his afflictions as fleeting, and even profitable, because he believed reality should not be confused with physicality. On the surface level, Paul would have had every reason to yield to discouragement.

Through the eyes of faith, however, Paul could look beyond the seen to the unseen. There will indeed be a day, the apostle insists, where “faith will be

sight” and “the clouds be rolled back as a scroll” (“It Is Well with My Soul,” stanza four). Nonetheless, until that day, while it is still called today, in the time between Christ's first and second Advent, believers are to “walk by faith, not by sight” (5:7). “For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?” (Romans 8:24).

External circumstances should not serve as the barometer by which believers measure all matters. Christians are not to orient their lives around the temporal; they are to live their lives in light of the eternal. “For the form of this world is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:31).

Paul was not only able to keep heart because he viewed adversity as temporary and preparatory; he also was able to forge ahead in faith because he viewed death as a door that ultimately would open to eternal life. For the apostle, the sting of death would give way to victorious life through the Lord Jesus Christ at the time of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

For the Christian person, destruction (death) of the earthly body, which Paul likens unto a tent, does not mark the end. On the contrary, it serves as a passageway into life eternal. In conjunction with the resurrection, God will give to believers a body fit for eternity. Paul depicts this resurrection body as a “building from God, a house not made with hands” (5:1).

Although the apostle did not model detachment from the present world or advocate a disembodied state (5:4), he indicates he would rather be “at home with the Lord” (5:8). Or, as Paul puts it in Philippians 1:24, “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” Prior to the redemption of our bodies, Christians are to groan (5:2, 4) along with creation (Romans 8:19, 23).

For Paul, there was a persistent yearning and longing to be fully clothed in Christ, for the mortal, temporal tent to give way to the immortal, eternal

home. The apostle attributes a Christian's anticipation for an “eternal wardrobe” to God, and more specifically, to the Spirit who serves as a guarantee of divine, eternal promises (5:5; Romans 8:11; Galatians 5:5). Elsewhere in 2 Corinthians, Paul speaks of the Spirit as a seal and “down payment” for the Christian (1:21).

According to Paul, the Holy Spirit indwells and directs believers from the point of conversion (Galatians 3:2-3; 5:16, 25; Romans 8:1-17). It was the Spirit's presence that gave the apostle the confidence to remain faithful and hopeful. Although Paul desired to depart and be with Christ, to remain in the flesh afforded him the privilege to live for Christ (Philippians 1:21; 3:8 Galatians 2:20). What is more, the apostle lived his life with an awareness that he ultimately would have to give an account to Christ for that which he did (and failed to do) in the body (5:10). We would be wise to live likewise.

Discussion questions

- ◆ How would your actions be different if you were continually cognizant that you will give an account for your life before God?

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