

2 Cor 5:1-5 Be Confident About Your Heavenly Home

If you had the opportunity to speak at a funeral for a believer, and you didn't know what to say, today's passage would be a good place to start. When a believer dies, we can have confidence that he has gone to heaven and is enjoying his eternal rewards. Funerals/memorial services can actually be uplifting and encouraging when the deceased was a Christian. It's a blessing to know what awaits us when we go "through the valley of the shadow of death."

In the previous passage, Paul has been discussing "things which are not seen." He asserted that those who suffer because of their service for God are earning for themselves an "eternal weight of glory." And now in chapter 5, he assures us that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (vs. 8). Chapter 5 is a continuation of what he was talking about at the end of chapter 4.

These unseen things—the hope of heaven and eternal rewards—are what keeps Paul from being discouraged and quitting. He perseveres in the ministry without losing heart because of these unseen realities.

Paul says we can "know" (vs. 1) certain things about our heavenly home; we can be confident about such things. And the main point he's making here is that we'll enjoy a glorious existence in heaven after we die.

Strictly speaking, what Paul is talking about here is the intermediate state. It's "intermediate" in the sense that it's after physical death but before the resurrection. The resurrection happens when Jesus returns—the dead in Christ will rise. After that, we'll have a resurrection body, and we'll have that body for all eternity. But what about *before* the resurrection? What will be our condition *after* death and *before* Christ's return? That's what Paul is talking about here.

One other thing to note before we get into the text: Some might complain that the study of these "unseen things"—heaven and our future experience there—has no practical value for today; it doesn't really change the way we live here and now. But that is exactly wrong. Knowing these things *does* change how we live here and now. We can handle our "light afflictions" (4:17) now because we know the future state of our souls. Even if serving God results in death, faithful service for Christ and his church is still worth it. We can persevere here and now because we have an eternal mindset. Confidence about eternity helps us face the trials and afflictions of today.

Paul tells us several things about what happens immediately upon death for the Christian. We should both *know* these things and *be confident* about them. These truths should give us strength to persevere in serving God in spite of difficulties.

What if serving God costs us our lives? What if it results in our deaths?

- I. We will receive a “building from God” when we get to heaven.
 - A. What is “our earthly house”? That’s referring to the physical body. Paul calls it a “tent.” The text says, literally, “our earthly house of the tent.”
 - B. The human body is a bit like a tent. It’s a tent-like house.

When Paul needed to work to make money, what did he do? He was a tent-maker. He knew a lot about tents, and he makes a comparison between the human body and a tent. How are they similar?

1. A tent is a temporary dwelling. Most people don’t live in a tent permanently. Likewise, the earthly body is temporary, not eternal.
2. A tent is rather flimsy; not very strong. Tents blow over; they fall down. Likewise, the human body is rather frail and flimsy. Eventually it’s going to fall over flat.
3. A tent is subject to wear and tear. Tents wear out. So does the human body.

The point of the comparison is the instability and weakness of the human body. The physical body is both fragile and temporary, like a tent.

- C. .1b Our earthly house is subject to destruction—“if it is destroyed.” The word “destroyed” (καταλυθῆ) (“dissolved” KJV) literally means “untied, loosed; to be dismantled or taken down.” What happens to a tent that is untied? It falls down. We would speak of “striking” a tent; those in Bible times would speak of “unloosing” a tent—to untie the ropes so the tent would collapse.
- D. To strike/unloose the tent is an imaginative way of describing death. At death, the physical body becomes untied; it falls apart; it fails. A tent may be “struck” or “unloosed” at any time and quite easily.
Maybe it will happen through old age, illness, accident, or even crime. But eventually it will happen. “The human mortality rate is 100%.”
- E. .1c If/when the earthly house falls apart, what is the promise here? “We have a building from God...”

1. He's not referring here to a dwelling place, a mansion, a home. Jesus promises us a dwelling place in heaven in Jn 14:2-3. But that's not what Paul is talking about here. The context here is the body, which he describes in terms of a house, a tent, and a building.
2. He's using the word "building" just like he used the words "house" and "tent." The earthly house and tent is our physical body. When that tent falls down, we have a building from God—that is, another body of a different kind.
3. God is going to supply this house/building—it's "from God." It's a supernatural house, not an earthly one.
4. And "we have" it; it is a certainty; we can be confident about it.

App: The Bible teaches that we can be certain about salvation and a home in heaven. The biblical writers use language of certainty—"we know... we have." We can have a strong sense of confidence that, if we are saved, we have a home in heaven.

If you are *not* saved, you should have a strong sense of confidence that you do *not* have a home in heaven. When your tent is struck, you will *not* be going to heaven; you can be confident about that.

F. What kind of a body is in view here? .1b

1. .1c It's a "house" – so it's similar to our earthly "house." In vs. 2, he calls it a "habitation." (οικητήριον)—a home, dwelling place, residence.
2. It's "not made with hands" (ἀχειροποίητον).
 - a) Things made by hand are by nature imperfect, temporary, and corruptible. They are by nature of this world. Paul had made tents with his hands.
 - b) Things "not made with hands" would describe just the opposite—things perfect, eternal, and incorruptible.
3. .1end It's "eternal"—not subject to death. The heavenly body will not fall apart or be untied or be dismantled. It will never experience decay or corruption. Time has no effect on this body.

4. .lend It's "in the heavens" – we receive it when we get to heaven. It's a supernatural body, a body "from God," a spiritual body that belongs in heaven.

Quote: Let one form of existence or life come to an end, be folded up and put away like a tent; we have the other waiting for us, an existence and life like an everlasting, great building, which were created for us by God himself in heaven.¹

5. .2 It's something put on like clothing—we are "clothed" with this new habitation. So just like we are, in a sense, wearing our bodies right now, in heaven we'll also wear a body. When you get to heaven, you will be clothed with a heavenly body.
6. One of the implications of this is that we will not be floating around like disembodied ghosts. We will have a physical existence in heaven.

Here's how one of my teachers, Rolland McCune put it:

The idea of a disembodied state is foreign to biblical (Hebrew) thought. ... In biblical thought, a soul or spirit does not have expression apart from a body as an instrument or vehicle. The unity of man as a whole person—body, soul, and spirit—would argue against a disembodied state. ... Since man continues as a person after death, it is strongly implied that he thus exists as body, soul, and spirit in the intermediate state. It is highly doubtful if Paul or others held the idea of a disembodied spirit that was capable of having personal relations in the afterlife.²

So my understanding is that, immediately upon death, believers enter the presence of God in heaven. We are clothed with a heavenly body of some kind, and we'll have that body until the resurrection. At the resurrection, we receive a physical, resurrected body, and that's what we'll have for the rest of eternity.

II. We have a natural desire for heaven. .2, 4

A. .2a We "groan" for it.

1. As we reside in this earthly tent, we naturally long for our heavenly home, especially as we endure afflictions.

¹ Lenski, 996-997.

² Systematic Theology III notes, DBTS, c. 1996.

Romans 8:23 ... *we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.*

2. He uses the word “groan” two times here—vss. 2 and 4. This groaning or sighing is an earnest longing to go to heaven. It’s a “burden” (.4). People often yearn for heaven because they are in pain or discomfort. They want to drop this earthly tent and be clothed with a heavenly habitation.
 3. It’s entirely natural to have a greater desire for heaven as we get older and as our physical body degrades and begins to fall apart. People experiencing great affliction often have a strong desire to depart from this world and go to their heavenly home.
- B. .4 We are “burdened” (βαρούμενοι) about it. Human life is full of affliction and anxiety, and we naturally want to experience eternal life in heaven.
- C. .2, 3, 4 We’ll be “clothed” with our new habitation when we get there.
1. The normal state of human existence is bodily life. That is, humanity is both body and soul. At death, the soul leaves the body, but it then receives a new body in heaven.

Quote: We will not be disembodied ghosts but will experience this complete salvation at death. ... Paul does not believe in nor value an immaterial existence.³

We don’t become angels when we die, nor are we reincarnated. The Bible does not teach that people haunt the earth as ghosts after their death. Even in Hades/Sheol, it does not seem that the dead are disembodied. Cf. Luke 16—the rich man is experiencing physical pain.

2. .3end Being “unclothed” or “naked” (γυμνοὶ) seems to describe a soul without a body. In fact, I read one commentator (M. J. Harris) who translated the term “naked” as “disembodied.”

³ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 259.

If the body is like clothing, then when the soul departs from the body in death, it is in a sense “naked.” Paul naturally wants to be clothed with something when he dies, and I believe he’s talking about the spiritual body of the intermediate state. To be “clothed” in this sense is to have a body. The believer will never lack a body.

3. When exactly do we receive this new clothing, this new body? It happens immediately upon death. You take off one suit and put on another. You vacate your physical “tent” and put on your “habitation from heaven.” You leave your old body on earth and assume a new one in heaven.

Some think that all of this pertains to the resurrection, and that happens when Jesus returns (cf. 1 Thes 4:13f). So they’d say that until Jesus returns, we will have no bodily existence; we’ll be disembodied spirits. I don’t think that is the case. Paul says that that would be like being naked or unclothed.

Further, he seems to be describing what happens immediately upon death, not a distant future event. As soon as the old tent is unloosed, we are clothed with a habitation from heaven.

.2end Notice that this habitation is “from heaven,” literally “the one out of heaven.” (τὸ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ). It would be odd to describe the resurrection body as “from/out of heaven” when it comes out of the earth.

- D. .4end We’ll no longer be subject to death; “mortality [will] be swallowed up by life.”

Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:54 *So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”*

1. “mortality” (θνητὸν) – death, being subject to death
2. “swallowed up” (καταποθῆ) – to gulp down. The word emphasizes the completeness of the action. Paul is probably quoting from Isaiah 25:8—“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

.4end And note the purpose statement here—“that...” The great aim or longing is that death would no longer have any power over us. Eternal life in heaven will overpower and exclude death. Life will swallow up death.

Quote: Although both death and grave insatiably devour mortal humanity, they will ultimately surrender to the power of Christ’s eternal life that swallows up mortality.⁴

III. .5 We have been prepared to live in heaven.

A. God has “prepared” us for heaven.

1. The word “prepared” (κατεργασάμενος) is based on the word “work.” It means “to achieve, to produce, to accomplish, to bring something about; to prepare, to equip.”

Cf. 4:17—“is working for us.”

2. And notice the object of this verb—“us.” The KJV has “he that hath wrought us.” The object of God’s work is “us.” He prepared/produced us “for this very thing.”

God’s intent all along was to bring us to heaven. He worked it out, he accomplished what was necessary to insure our home in heaven. To me, that speaks of God’s sovereign work in salvation. God gets all the credit and the glory for our salvation. He produced it; he accomplished it, he guarantees it.

Quote: This, the crowning experience of God’s work of grace in the believer, is entirely of God.... What confidence and certainty the assurance should give us that this work is altogether of God, and not in any measure of man! As it is *God’s* work, it will be done. There can be no place for failure or frustration.⁵

3. And we see a goal here as well—God worked/prepared us “for this very thing.” God’s object in accomplishing salvation was to bring us to heaven, to with himself. And since it’s God who is working on us for this very purpose, it’s a certainty. It doesn’t depend on us; it depends on God.

App: I wonder if you can say with certainty that God has prepared you for a home in heaven. In order to go to heaven, you must be saved....

⁴ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 175.

⁵ Huges, 174.

B. God has guaranteed (ἀρραβῶνα) us a place in heaven.

Paul said a similar thing in 2 Corinthians 1:22 – *who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*

1. This guarantee is like earnest money or a deposit that you pay up front to insure the sale. The earnest is a pledge or a promise that the full payment will happen.

E.g., an engagement ring is a pledge of a future transaction. Once you give the engagement ring, you are obligated to follow through on the contract.

God has made a promise/pledge that at death, we will be granted a place in heaven. It's guaranteed; we can be confident about it.

2. This guarantee is the HSp. The presence of the HSp in our lives is a guarantee that we'll eventually make it to heaven.

- a) The presence of the HSp may not be something you sense or feel. We take it by faith that the HSp is present with us because that's what the Bible teaches.

- b) One of the evidences of the work of the HSp in our lives is transformation. If you are maturing in the Christian life, then it's an evidence of the presence of the HSp.

2 Corinthians 3:18 we ... are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

- c) Likewise, if the fruit of the Spirit is evident in your life, then you have good reason to believe that the HSp is working within you. Cf. Gal 5:22-24

3. We have the Spirit of God now, and that guarantees that God will follow through on these promises.

Quote: God gives us his Spirit as a pledge guaranteeing that his hold on us is final, irrevocable, and virtually assured.⁶

⁶ Michael A. Cox, "Temporal and Eternal Bodies." A message on 2 Cor 5:1-5.
<https://drmichaelacox.wordpress.com/2020/02/18/2-corinthians/>

Notice the first part of vs. 1—“for we know...” Paul is confident about the things he’s saying here, and we can be confident about them as well. We can know for sure that, when our earthly tents—that is, our bodies—are untied and fall down, we have an eternal home in heaven. We can be assured of that; it’s guaranteed; we can be and should be confident about it.

And, when we consider the greater context of this passage, this confidence helps us persevere in Christian ministry. We work for God until our tent is struck/unloosed. When God cuts our tent ropes and the tent collapses, then our work on earth is done, and we are guaranteed a heavenly habitation. That certainty gives us the motivation we need to keep on serving the Lord while we live in this earthly tent.