

## **2 Cor 5:6-10 Being Confident, Either Here or in Heaven, part 1**

If I were to ask you, “What is your goal in life?” how would you respond? Perhaps your goal is to be happy, or to make your spouse happy, or to make your kids happy, or to make your employer happy. Maybe your goal is to achieve the American dream—a good job, decent car, nice home, good health, nice things to enjoy.

In vs. 9, Paul suggests what one of our goals ought to be—“to be well pleasing to [God].”

We should remember how this statement fits into the context. In the previous section, Paul has explained what to expect when we die. This temporary tent will be dismantled, and we will be clothed with “a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (vs. 1). Upon our death, when we are “absent from the body,” we’ll immediately be “present with the Lord.” We will be clothed upon with an eternal house in the heavens, a building “not made by hands.”

I hope that you are looking forward to that heavenly home, but most of us will not get there for a few years yet. We are living here on earth while we continue to pursue God’s will for our lives.

In vss. 6-10, Paul tells us how to live before we get to heaven. While we are waiting for our heavenly home—while we are “at home in the body”—how are we supposed to live? Here’s the advice that Paul gives us.

### **I. Be confident, whether in the body or out of it. .6, 8**

He uses the word “confident” (Θαποῦντες) here twice, so that seems to be a theme of this section.

The word means “firmness of purpose, boldness, courage.” The verse says, literally, “therefore, always being confident and knowing...” We can have certainty and confidence about things.

And notice that he is “always” confident. In spite of all the suffering and trials that we may experience in his ministry, we still retain our confidence in God’s good purposes for us. Our confidence does not depend on how we feel or what we experience.

We can be confident about two things:

#### **A. .6 While we are in the body, we are “absent from the Lord.”**

1. It seems like a fairly obvious statement: if we are at home in the body, we are not in heaven. But notice the language here.
2. He says “at home (ἐνδημοῦντες) in the body.” The word literally means “among one’s own people; in one’s own country.” The body is a dwelling place or a home. While we are here on earth, we are dwelling in our “tent,” our physical body. It’s our home.

**App:** God gave us our physical bodies, and we should strive to be “at home” in them. People today tell us that our bodies might not align with our true selves. But the body is our home, and we should live consistently with the kind of body God gave us.

3. While we are in this “tent,” we are “absent from the Lord.” I.e., we are not in the Lord’s presence in heaven. Jesus is in heaven; we are not. So in that sense, we are absent from the Lord.
4. Our true and ultimate residence will be in heaven with the Lord. But until we get there, we remain at home in the body. One day we’ll have a spiritual body and we’ll be at home with the Lord. Right now we have a physical body and it is our home.
5. While we are still in the body—still in this tent—we have work to do. This whole section of the book is all about Christian ministry. While we are still here on this earth and not with the Lord in heaven, we should be engaged in Christian ministry. We should be striving to be good servants, good stewards.
6. We have all of eternity to enjoy being with the Lord—RIP. Right now, while we still inhabit this earthly “tent,” we should be doing the work God has called us to do.

B. .8 When we are “absent from the body,” we’ll be “present with the Lord.”

1. The word “absent” (ἐκδημοῦμεν) means “away from home.” It’s the opposite of “at home.”
2. At some point, the body/tent is going to be dismantled. The cord will be untied and the tent will fall down. And when that happens, we have a “building from God...” (vs. 1).
3. As soon as one residence ends, another residence begins. I.e., when you leave your earthly tent (i.e., body), you immediately go into the presence of the Lord.

**Quote:** The same moment of death that marks the destruction of the transitory earthly tent-dwelling (v. 1) also marks the taking up of permanent residence “with the Lord” (v. 8).<sup>1</sup>

**We don’t become ghosts;** we don’t haunt our old houses; we are not reincarnated. We go immediately to our heavenly home.

4. .8b To be at home with the Lord is far better. Paul would be “well pleased” to be absent from his earthly body and present with the Lord.

Philippians 1:21, 23 *For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.... [I have] a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.*

Heaven is a far better place than earth is. In fact, the greatness of heaven boggles the imagination (cf. 1 Cor 2:9—“eye hath not seen...”).

Many people feel the same way Paul did; they would be “well pleased” to be absent from the body and at home with the Lord. When people get old and infirm, they often long for heaven. When trials and tribulations hit, we often long for heaven.

I wouldn’t mind if the Lord returned today.

Remember that this confidence pertains only to those who are saved. If you are not saved, this is not a promise you can claim for yourself. Going to be with the Lord is not automatic; many people—the majority—will not be present with the Lord upon their absence from the body. You can have no confidence about a heavenly home until you are saved....

5. .8 The word “present” (ἐνδημῆσαι) is from the same root word translated as “at home” in vs. 6 (ἐνδημοῦντες).

It is totally appropriate to describe the deceased believer as “going home” or “at home with the Lord.” Heaven is the eternal home for those who are saved. Our citizenship is in heaven; it’s our true home. We may spend 100 years in this physical body, but we’ll spend eternity in heaven.

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<sup>1</sup> Murray J. Harris, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 348.

C. Paul suggests here that faithful Christians can be confident about having a heavenly home.

1. Many people today *hope* that they'll make it to heaven, but they often lack confidence about that. They would never claim that they knew for sure that they were going to heaven.
2. Why do they lack confidence? One reason might be that they think getting to heaven is based on their own performance, i.e., their own contribution to salvation. They don't know whether they've done enough to merit or earn salvation.

That's one of the big problems with works-based salvation—how do you ever know if you've done enough?

**E.g.,** Mormons claim that they are saved by faith *after doing all that they can do*. Does anyone actually do “all” they can do?

3. What do we contribute to our own salvation? Zero—nothing. All we do is accept the gift, and we can't even take credit for that. Our confidence is not in ourselves or in anything we have done.
4. Our confidence in salvation rests *entirely* with Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection for us. Our confidence rests in the truth of God's word that promises us a place in heaven if we repent of sin and trust in Jesus.
5. If we are confident in God's Word, and if we are confident that we have done what God has required for salvation—i.e., repentance and faith—then we should be confident that we will go to heaven when we die. That's not arrogance or assumption; it's just being confident in the promises of God.

**Trans:** We can have confidence about what God wants from us while we are in this body, and we can have confidence that our home is in heaven if we are saved.

The next thing to do while we await our heavenly home is to ...

## II. .7 Walk by faith, not by sight.

- A. By “walk,” Paul of course means “live.” Our lives must be characterized by faith. This is a present-tense reality—“we are walking.”
- B. Faith, of course, is belief or trust. The biblical words convey the idea of firmness, surety, establishment, belief, or faithfulness.

Faith means primarily confident trust based on God's promise as understood through his Word (Luke 24:25).<sup>2</sup>

- C. When Paul tells us to walk by faith, he is advocating a life committed to God and his Word. This kind of faith has a profound effect on the believer's life. Walking by faith is believing what God has said and living in the way God has commanded in spite of any obstacles. We look to the eternal things of God, not the temporal things of the world (Col 3:1-3), and allow eternal values to govern our lives.

**E.g.,** Caleb and Joshua believed God's promises in spite of the apparent obstacles and were ready to obey God's commands (Num 13).

- D. .7b "not by sight" – "sight" = something seen, the form or appearance of things. Walking "by sight" implies living according to appearances and trusting in your own powers instead of in God.

**E.g.,** the other ten spies sent into Canaan brought back an "evil" report and did not believe that they could conquer the Promised Land in spite of what God had promised. They were captivated by what they saw—giants in the land. From all appearances, there would be no way for the Israelites to capture the Promised Land. That's how it looked.

We often do the same thing—we live by what we see—appearances. The physical outweighs the spiritual. We live by what we see and how we feel instead of living by faith in God and in his word.

The challenge of the Christian life is to live according to eternal values and God's promises instead of temporary, physical problems. The challenge is to look upon Jesus and fix our minds on him instead of looking at things around us and worrying about the physical problems of life.

John 20:29 *Jesus said ... "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

We fit into that category—we believe without seeing.

**Trans:** We live in light of eternity, trusting in the promises of God rather than in our own human perceptions.

Another thing to do while we await our heavenly home is to ...

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<sup>2</sup> Walter A. Elwell *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker reference library; Logos Library System (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996).

### III. .9 Strive to please God.

#### A. “We make it our aim” – our goal or purpose in life is to please God.

This phrase “make it our aim” (φιλοτιμέομαι) means, “to earnestly aspire to something,” implying strong ambition for some goal;<sup>3</sup> to strive after eagerly.

#### B. What is the aim/goal/aspiration? “to please God.”

The word “pleasing” here is literally “well-pleasing” (KJV “accepted”) (εὐάρεστοι). Our goal/aim/purpose is to be well-pleasing to God.

1. To please God is to “do all to the glory of God.” To please God is to bring honor and glory to his name. We strive to live in such a way that God would approve of. There is no higher goal than bringing glory and honor to God.
2. We please God through actions and attitudes. We try to adopt godly attitudes, and we try to behave in a way that is consistent with God’s word and God’s character.
3. If we consult just the book of 2 Cor, we find that we please God by<sup>4</sup>
  - a) We please God by speaking the gospel boldly (3:12; 4:1, 13; 5:20; 5:19–21; 6:7, 11),
  - b) We please God by persevering through suffering with good courage (4:7–12, 16–17; 6:4–5, 8–10),
  - c) We please God by living by faith in anticipation of the resurrection (4:13–14, 17–18; 5:7),
  - d) We please God by avoiding the taint of idolatry (6:14–7:1),
  - e) We please God by seeking to glorify God (4:15).

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<sup>3</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 297.

<sup>4</sup> David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 267.

4. I think there is a difference between seeking to live in a way that God tolerates, and to live in a way that God finds well-pleasing.

**Illus.:** Like children with parents. Children sometimes seek to get away with as much as possible without getting into trouble. They are not trying to please their parents; they are trying to avoid punishment. Parents often tolerate behavior that they are not pleased with. Parents would be well-pleased with children who obey and honor them instead of seeking merely to be tolerable to them.

Many professing Christians are not really striving to be well-pleasing to God; they're trying to be well-tolerated. They are seeking to avoid discipline from God. They want to get away with as much as possible without stirring up God's displeasure.

5. Our goal should be to please God, not to get away with as much as possible. Our goal is not merely to be tolerable to God, but to be well-pleasing.

**App:** Would you say that a primary ambition in life—your highest goal—is to be well-pleasing to God? That should be your highest goal. That's what you should aspire toward and strive after. Our motivation should be that we want to hear God say to us, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." We don't want to be among those who are saved "yet so as by fire." We should be seeking God's approval, aiming for it, striving for it. God's approval is really the only approval that should matter to us.

Of course, our ultimate approval in God's sight comes because we are saved. God approves of us because we are united to Christ by faith; we are "accepted in the beloved" (Eph 1:16). The only way that we can be well-pleasing in God sight is through faith in Christ. Otherwise, there is nothing we can do that is acceptable to God.

Is anyone always well-pleasing to God? No, not consistently or continually, not perfectly. We all fall short of the glory of God. In fact, sometimes we incur God's "fatherly displeasure." We all stumble in many ways. We deserve chastisement or discipline because we have displeased God.

There is an error or false teaching very common among evangelicals that asserts that nothing we can do displeases God. God is so loving and merciful and so happy that we are saved that nothing we do displeases God. We don't have to worry about being displeasing to God; we can't displease God.

I believe that idea is an error, a false teaching. Obviously, if God chastises or disciplines his people, it's because he is displeased with them. E.g., like a father—he loves his children, but sometimes he is displeased/upset with them. Paul wouldn't tell us to strive to please God if there were no possibility that we could displease God.

We can avoid God's "fatherly displeasure" and discipline by living in a way that pleases God. That's what we ought to be striving to do; that ought to be our aim, our goal.

Mt 5:6 *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, ...*

Paul has given us some advice regarding what to do while we await our heavenly home:

- ✓ Be confident of our eternal home in heave. When we become absent from the body, we'll be present with the Lord. God has promised us an eternal home in heaven, and we can be certain about that.
- ✓ Walk confidently by faith and not by sight. We look at the world through the eyes of faith and through the lens of God's Word. Our focus is on Christ, not on our afflictions or the problems of this world.
- ✓ Live in a way that pleases God. Our aim/goal is to be well-pleasing to God. Our desire should be to live in a way that is not merely tolerable to God, but that brings honor and glory to God.

The last thing Paul says we can be confident about is future judgment, and we'll get to that next week, DV.