

THE STORY OF MANS DESTINY #15

“ABSENT FROM THE BODY - PRESENT WITH THE LORD”!

II COR. 5:1-9

1. INTRODUCTION.

Our last lesson came from Paul’s letter to the Phillipian Christians, written while he was a prisoner at Rome awaiting his sentence for faithfully preaching Christ to the world. In the first chapter of Phillipians, Paul used the expression: “To me to live is Christ and to die is gain”. This expression was the subject of our last lesson. By reviewing, not only this statement, but also the other information surrounding and connected to it, we concluded that the over-riding thought he was discussing was the furtherance of the gospel, whether it be by his life or by his death. Through an entire life of suffering for Christ, now about to consummate in his execution at Rome, Paul abundantly demonstrated that it was through the suffering of the saints empowered by divine grace, that the gospel has “gained” a greater forum for its spread to the world. There is a great truth here that has echoed through the ages of Christianity: “The blood of the saints was the seed of the church and the gospel”.

This expression, “to die is gain”, we learned, has absolutely nothing to do with the theology that “death is a friend, and a door to a better world”. If Paul was referring to some personal gain accruing to him by dying, then it would have been far better for him to have died when he was stoned at Lystra. That is not his message. In all of his writings and faith, Paul never wavered from a steadfast belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and through him, a resurrection for all who belong to Christ at his coming. This was Paul’s doctrine and hope. So much so, that to see this so abundantly established in the express statements, as well as the sense and spirit of all he writes on the subject of eternal life, in effect forces you to find an application of “to die is gain”, other than the modern theological use of it. Paul’s subject and related expressions (context) do not allow such an unreasonable and unscriptural concept as to say that death is our friend and that death is God’s means of bringing us to our eternal reward. Preposterous! Death is our enemy! A resurrection through Christ is the (only) means of our obtaining eternal life.

2. ABSENT FROM THE BODY AND PRESENT WITH THE LORD.

This lesson which we have entitled as written above, comes from II Cor. 5:1-9. It falls in a similar category as the previous lesson. In verses 6-8, of this chapter, we have an expression that has been construed by theologians so as to effectively and singularly form the basis of modern thought concerning the destiny of man at death. Let us quote those 2 verses here. “THEREFORE WE ARE ALWAYS CONFIDENT, KNOWING THAT, WHILST WE ARE AT HOME IN THE BODY, WE ARE ABSENT FROM THE LORD: --- WE ARE CONFIDENT, I SAY, AND WILLING RATHER TO BE ABSENT FROM THE BODY AND TO BE PRESENT WITH THE LORD”.

We readily acknowledge that, to the carnal eye, and a casual reading of the verses, that there is a condition proposed here wherein something can exit the body and (be) in the presence of the Lord. (Note that death is not mentioned nor is there any distinction made between saint and sinner). Throughout the scriptures, just to read and interpret what you see (with the carnal mind) always leads to problems. The majority of theologians interpret this to mean that when you die, as they say, you go directly to be in the presence of the Lord. That is (as they say) the soul exits the body and immediately is in a mansion with streets of gold, looking down on we who are less fortunate. Hardly a funeral is ever preached without quoting or referring to: “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord”. If you will stop and think, you will realize that you have probably never heard a scriptural analysis of this thought, using these scriptures and those connected and related to it. Dr. John McArthur offers a CD entitled: “What Happens At Death”. He quotes this expression rather matter - of - fact, numerous times, and not once undertakes to elaborate on the associated text (and context). He describes this time of being “absent from the body”, as the soul exiting and going directly to eternal bliss, while the body corrupts in the earth. Then he says, when Jesus returns, the

body will be resurrected and the soul will re-enter it, and go back to doing whatever you do in the mansions. Then he says there will be 7 years of tribulation. This will be followed, he says, with the resurrection of O.T. saints, followed by 1000 years of a peaceful reign. He continues that, during the 1000 years, all the saints that die then, won't experience this "absent from the body" interlude. Instead, he proclaims that these will (bodily) go straight to their mansion. He also says that the sinners also would be given "glorified" bodies, so they would not die in the torments of eternal fire. John McArthur is not alone in his theology regarding this subject. The majority would, more or less, concur with his line of teaching.

Did you ever ask the question as to where is the scripture that teaches that, after the "soul" has left the body and gone to its "mansion" that then it must return to be re-united with the body, maybe thousands of years later? Are you aware that there is no such scripture? The idea is only a fabrication to accommodate a resurrection for the wicked or otherwise the resurrection is a nullity. The resurrection surely does get in the way of a lot of orthodox theology doesn't it? While we are speaking of fabrications, how about the idea that Christians who die during the 1000 years go bodily to the glory world? If you remember in previous lessons about the soul, we noted the fact that no scripture ever applies immortality to the soul until after the resurrection. Further, without inherent soul immortality, all of the theology about going direct to the glory world at death, without a resurrection is impossible. Therefore, the very first requirement in substantiating that something physically leaves the body at death and goes directly to another world is that you must scripturally prove that there is something in you to leave. Until or unless this can be done, orthodox theology about II Cor. 5:6-8, cannot possibly be scripturally substantiated.

3. THE SUFFERINGS AND TRIALS OF THIS EARTHLY LIFE. II COR.4:1-18.

In the study of any scripture text, it is always essential to remember that the writers did not put the chapter and verse divisions in the Bible. As useful and convenient as they are, many times it is necessary to look beyond them to get the full context of the message they may contain. This is certainly an example of this principal. By looking back, briefly, into II Cor. 4, we will find helpful information in our search for an understanding of II Cor. 5:6-8. We will not dwell at length on the content of ch. 4; just draw some obvious thoughts and facts that stand out that can help us later.

In ch. 4:1, Paul says that "we faint not", an obvious reference to the difficulties of his journey and labors in the gospel. In V6, he describes how the light of the gospel has shined in our own hearts, giving us understanding of the glory of God. Then, in V7, we pick up a thought that will carry over into ch. 5. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels". That is, the great treasure of the gospel of our salvation, we have in our own mortal flesh, the indwelling Christ, by whose grace we are saved. We must still contend with the weaknesses, temptations and lusts of our human nature. We can only deal with this as Paul describes in I Cor. 15:22, by dying daily to the "old man" or as he describes in Rom. 8:13 and Col. 3:5, by mortifying the deeds of the flesh (that Christ might be alive in us). In II Cor. 4:8-9, Paul describes a constant bombardment of the hardships he bore as a result of living for Christ and believing in the gospel. He used such terms as: troubled, perplexed, persecuted, cast down, and yet maintaining victory through Christ.

In V10, he speaks of bearing in his daily human existence the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life of Jesus might be manifest in his body.

In V11, we are delivered unto death (of our lusts) that the life of Jesus might be manifest in our "mortal" flesh.

In V16, we faint not (in all of this mortal, fleshly, human troubles and trials). Now carefully notice the rest of this verse which says that "though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day". Generally, theologians have no problem recognizing this "outward man", as our fleshly, mortal, carnal existence. But when they come to the "inward man", they want to explain this as an inward soul or spirit entity. This just will not fit the text. Paul has written about an inward treasure; inward light; an inward life of Jesus and a manifestation of "the life of Jesus "in" our mortal flesh. See also, Gal. 2:20 and Eph. 3:17. Clearly, the inward man is Christ Jesus who dwells in our hearts by faith in him.

Next, in V17, he describes all of the troubles (of this earthly, fleshly life) as light afflictions, because

through faith and endurance of the never - ending conflicts and trials that life in Christ brings about, there is at work in us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

V18, This verse declares that we don't focus on the things that are a part of this visible, troublesome life. Instead, our focus is on things that we have not yet seen, but by faith in Christ, we have hope in them.

The trend, therefore, in this portion of Paul's letter, is about the trials, sufferings and hardships we experience in our mortal life; our outward man and about the treasure, blessing, hope and daily renewal of the inward dwelling Christ. We mortify the deeds of the flesh as we also endure the (fleshly) sufferings for Christ's sake, because we have hope through faith in that promise, which we have not yet seen, but patiently hope for.

4. MORTALITY SWALLOWED UP BY ETERNAL LIFE. II COR. 5:1-9.

Remember what we have said about the chapters and verses not being in the original letters. When Paul wrote the letter his thoughts did not change at the end of ch.4; instead in ch. 5:1 and following is a continuation of the theme he was emphasizing in ch. 4. Having described our focus and hope on things eternal, he continues with the following thoughts.

II Cor. 5:1. For we know (based upon our hope in things eternal) that if our "earthly house" of this tabernacle were dissolved ----. Our earthly house: what is it? Is it the brick dwelling at 5030 Willard Rd., where I live? Hardly! It is our current, carnal, fleshly, human dwelling or life. It cannot possibly be referring to a house of wood and bricks. It is referring to the outward (natural) man. Paul describes this as being dissolved. It is mortal, corruptible and will come to total decay, including all our members, faculties, organs and all we are made of. When it does, Paul continues, we have another "house". This other house is not a carnal one, produced by human begettal, but is a house not made with hands. What is this other house and where is it? First of all, it is constructed by God and it is eternal. It is not made of wood and bricks (or gold or jewels or pearls or any other earthly material). A glimpse of it is seen in I Cor. 15:44, where Paul says: "there is a natural body and there is a spiritual body (A body by the natural process of begettal and a body by the spiritual process of spiritual begettal). One is produced by man and the other is built by God. Further, in I Cor. 15:48-49, Paul describes one as earthly and one as heavenly. That is, one has an earthly carnal origin; the other has a spiritual or heavenly origin.

Many will describe this "house" built by God, eternal in the heavens, as a golden, diamond studded mansion, on Glory Avenue in the skies. But the text or the context will not allow this kind of a carnal description of a very spiritual product. The very next verse should help with this.

V2. For in this we groan. In what? In our earthly house of this tabernacle (see V1). Also, look back now at ch. 4. Recall all the expressions Paul used about "earthen vessels", trouble, perplexity, and persecution. Indeed, in this (earthly, carnal) life we groan. Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. They that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Paul's entire life was one of travail, peril and suffering. So we do groan throughout this life, and being a Christian does not eliminate that, but very likely adds to it.

Further in V2, he says: earnestly desiring to be "clothed upon" with our house which is from heaven. If you give this a literal interpretation, you would have to believe that a "literal" house of natural materials would come down out of the sky and "clothe" you. That would be preposterous, wouldn't it? So what does it mean? Already in V1, we have discussed the earthly house of human origin and the eternal house that God built. We saw this as the natural life and the spiritual life. The life we live in the flesh is an earthly, carnal, fleshly product. The life we hope to obtain from the Lord is spiritual, eternal and heavenly.

V3. If so being clothed (by an eternal, heavenly house) we won't be found naked. This clothing and nakedness of V2-3, refers directly to our ultimate change from a mortal, fleshly existence, to an immortal, eternal, spiritual existence. To interpret this thought in some literal fashion would present

a very abnormal and impossible situation. To be clothed with a “house” demands a figurative, spiritual application.

V4. For we that are in this “tabernacle” do groan. Already we have seen this “groaning” as a part of this earthly, troubled, persecuted life. We groan because we are not clothed upon (yet) with our house from the Lord. That is, we are still living in and enduring the many troubles, limitations, weaknesses and heart aches that are a part of being the offspring of Adam and his sins. Until the Lord comes and confers eternal life upon us, this groaning will continue. Until then, we long for and desire to be “clothed” upon with our eternal, heavenly, “house”. The question is: exactly what is this heavenly “house” of which he speaks? “THAT MORTALITY MIGHT BE SWALLOWED UP OF LIFE”! (V4)

This is the central statement and focus of chapters 4 & 5. That mortality --- our earthly, carnal, groaning, troubled existence --- might be swallowed up --- dissolved, changed, translated, clothed upon with life (everlasting). A clear picture of this is given in I Cor. 15:53-54. *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.* The essence of this then is: the coming of the Lord and the resurrection, which is the process that confers eternal life upon the (suffering, groaning) saints of God. This is what we long for; this is our treasure in earthen vessels; this is our house built by God. Immortality, eternal life, conferred upon us at the return of Christ.

V5. It is God who has prepared an eternal existence for us through Christ Jesus and he has sealed and guaranteed that he will bring it to pass by the gift of the Holy Spirit which he has given us.

V6. Therefore --- That is to say: based on all of the above and since God has promised to his people this blessed gift of eternal life, we are very confident in this hope. Why? Because we know that, whilst we are at home in the body ----. While we live this life in our mortal, fleshly, earthen dwelling, ---- we are absent from the Lord.

It would be helpful just here if we just pause, back away and then focus on the overall theme of Paul’s letter at this point. It is never good policy to let your focus be narrowly confined to a single verse or 2 within a broader context. Most of the time, this broader context will offer a compelling influence and insight for the verses in question. In this case, it is abundantly true. Paul has been discussing two issues. (1) The troubles, hardships, groaning and cares of all we know in this life of human carnal existence. (2) The other predominant thought in his letter, is the Christian hope of eternal life that will surely provide a grand deliverance from the toils, trials and troubles of this earthly life. He describes this in V4 as: “mortality being swallowed up of life”. He further describes these two opposites in terms of an “earthly house” and a “heavenly house”. The contrast is clear: the troubles of this earthly life as opposed to the glory of the life that is to come.

Then he likens it to 2 analogies. (1) Whilst we are at home in the body. That is, while we dwell in this earthly existence, with daily trials, troubles and heartaches; at home in the body of carnal endurance. (2) We are absent from the Lord. The Lord has not come and conferred eternal life upon us and in that sense we are absent from the Lord.

Be careful with this “absent” expression, because we are everywhere told that we are ever in the presence of the Lord. So this absence/presence expression has to do with our mortal conflicts now (in the body of human conditions and circumstances) and the day when the Lord will come and confer eternal life upon us. It does not have any reference to any exiting of any invisible, immortal entity out of our bodies. As it was described earlier in this chapter, “in this tabernacle we do groan” desiring to be clothed with our house which is from heaven. Our house from heaven cannot possibly be a physical house which we will put on, but, as is described in V4, it is “mortality being swallowed up of life”.

In V7 we have a parenthetical statement which says: “For we walk by faith, not by sight”. Why did

Paul insert this explanation of our relationship with God right between the two statements about being home in the body and absent from the Lord? I think that it is there to emphasize that our current status is one of “faith” and not one of reality. It says to us, that we live in this present tabernacle with all of its groaning, believing in that day when faith will become reality by way of this mortal life being swallowed up by immortal life. It is not a present possession. We have nothing now that is immortal that could exit our body except our hope that is based on our faith. To confirm this you only need to ask yourself if faith in God is still an essential requirement in your life.

This thought continues in V8: “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord”. Absent from the body is a reference to the same “body” of trials, groaning, persecutions, and such like that are a part of this natural existence that Paul has described in chapters 4 & 5. His thought in V8, is the expression of a desire for the troubles and cares of this life to come to an end by mortality being swallowed up of life. Should not the Christians of Paul’s day, and every age since then, earnestly desire the day of the coming of the Lord? Peter, in describing the day of the Lord, says that we should be looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God. Everyone will grant that all Christians look in anticipation of the day of God when eternal life shall be conferred upon us. The difference is that some expect that day will occur by way of our death while others of us believe it will occur by the coming of the Lord and the resurrection.

In V6-8, Paul expresses an unshakable confidence. That confidence is his certain and sure hope (based on his walk of faith, V7) (and the guarantee of the Holy Spirit, V5), that in spite of the groaning and troubles and perplexities in this life, there is a day when all earthly distractions, troubles and persecutions will be replaced with perfect, eternal immortal life. That was Paul’s confidence and it is also ours even today.

5. OTHER SCRIPTURES ON BEING ABSENT AND PRESENT.

It is no secret that orthodox theology relies heavily on the “support” that is presumed to be found in the expression: “absent from the body and present with the Lord”, as a major help in establishing the theory that there is an immortal soul “within” us, which departs at death and goes to be with the Lord in that “brighter world above”. They just do not bother to examine or explain the rest of the text (of II Cor.5) as well as II Cor. 4, also. It’s like it doesn’t really matter what other related verses say, since the verses in question say what they want them to say. But it does matter, a lot. Moreover these are not the only verses that talk about this enigma of being absent and present, as though there was some kind of out-of-the- body event taking place. We might find such other verses very helpful.

The first one we will look at is II Cor. 13:2. Paul says: “I told you before, and foretell you, *as if I were present*, the second time”. Here Paul speaks to the Corinthians in a written letter, as though he was personally present with them, which, of course, he was not.

Next, in Col. 2:5, Paul writes: “For though I be absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ”. Is Paul saying that his body is in one place and his spirit in another, miles apart? Of course not! Is not this expression very similar in concept to those in II Cor. 5:6 & 8, that speak of the body being in one place and the spirit another? Before answering these questions, let’s look at one other verse.

In I Cor. 5:3. In the first two verses of this chapter Paul writes about gross sins being carried on at Corinth. In V2, he is very upset about this gross sinfulness right in the Corinthian church. Then in V3, he says: “For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed”. What a commentary and enlightenment on this concept of being absent from the body and present with the Lord. Paul was not physically in Corinth. He had not dispatched some inward, immortal entity to go down to the sin - infested church of Corinth, and communicate in a rational, intelligent, discernible presence about their wrong doing. So, just what is this “absent in body and present in spirit” event that he is writing about?

Just this! If we will put aside for a moment the impossible concept of some intelligent, immortal being, with all faculties and organs of emotion and communication, exiting our body (no one knows how) and traveling to some other geographic or other-world destination, then we will find these

expressions to be every day, household terms we have all used many times. How often have you said: I'll be with you in spirit; or you are in my thoughts. You may plan to be away from church next Sunday, and you tell the pastor, I won't be with you in body, but I will be with you in spirit. You may say: I was in Australia, but my heart and mind were at home in N.C. (And so on). And this was Paul's meaning to the Colossians (2:5), and Corinthians (5:3). Being in a distant city, yet his heart and mind (spirit) was with them in both the difficult times and also the times of joy.

It should be easy to see that this is the sense of the scriptures in II Cor. 5:1-9. We are (presently) in a state of human existence, with all of its woe, groaning, trouble and perplexities. All the while, in our "spirit", we are absent from these groaning, while we look not on the things that are seen (troubles and trials) but to that which is not seen, even eternal life.

And you and I, sometimes discouraged; sometimes disappointed; sometimes so unfairly treated; sometimes cut off from people and ostracized because of our faith in Christ; and sometimes under such burden we don't have the strength to go on. It is then that we are --- "absent from the body and present with the Lord", from whom we draw all of our strength and to whom we look for the ultimate fulfillment of the great promise of life everlasting, when mortality will be swallowed up of life. When we can say with Paul, that while we groan in this "tabernacle" of a carnal, fleshly life, we desire rather to see the Lord come and confer upon the saints of God the resurrection and the reality of eternal life. Meanwhile, we look to those things which are eternal and not to the weak and beggarly things of this life. Another example would be a closer expression of these thoughts. When we are going through a spiritual famine; or howling storms of temptations, all the while praying for a great spiritual stirring in our lives that will bring us into such a divine presence, that the famine breaks and the winds cease and we bask in his holy presence. (Absent from the body of hardships and present in the uplifting power of the Lord's deliverance).

We will close this lesson with a reaffirmation of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that assures us, that even though we may have to endure a great flight of afflictions, burdens and trials in this (earthly) life, yet all the while we look for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us. That is Paul's message in II Cor. 5:1-9.

THE STORY OF MAN'S DESTINY
LESSON #11 -- SERMON NOTES
II COR. 5:1-9

1. INTRODUCTION & REVIEW.

- a. To live is Christ; to die is gain.
- b. Reflects the fact of suffering for the gospel as the catalyst for evangelism.
- c. It does not teach death as a transition to another world.

2. ABSENT FROM THE BODY AND PRESENT WITH THE LORD.

- a. Read the scripture lesson.
- b. Note orthodox theology on these scriptures.
- c. What scripture (or is it tradition) that requires this return of the soul.

3. II COR. 4:1-18. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE SUFFERINGS AND TRIALS ASSOCIATED WITH OUR NATURAL LIFE.

- a. V1. We faint not.
- b. V6. We have come to the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.
- c. V7. A treasure in earthen vessels. (I Cor. 15:22; Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5).
- d. V8-9. Bombarded with hardships in this life.
- e. V10-11. Bearing "death" in our body, so as to manifest the life of Jesus in us.
- f. V16. The outward man and the inward man. (See Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17).
- g. V17. Light afflictions now; eternal glory later.
- h. V18. Because in the midst of these natural hardships, we focus on the eternal reward when Jesus comes.

4. MORTALITY WILL BE SWALLOWED UP BY ETERNAL LIFE.

- a. II Cor. 5, continues the theme of II Cor. 4.
- b. V1. Our earthly house of this tabernacle.
- c. V1. Our building of God, eternal and heavenly.
- d. V2. In this (earthly house) we groan.
- e. V2. Desiring to be "clothed" with our house which (comes) from heaven.
- f. V3. So we won't be naked: changed from a fleshly dwelling to an eternal one.
- g. V4. We groan in our mortal being; desiring to be clothed with immortality.
- h. The central focus of Ch. 4 & 5 = that mortality might be swallowed up of life.
- i. V5. This is God's purpose in salvation and the guarantee of the Holy Spirit.
- j. V6. Therefore --- based on this confidence in God.
- k. V6. While we are at home (living in this present, earthly, afflicted state).
- l. We are absent from the Lord --- and all he has prepared for us in eternal life.
- m. The two issues of all these scriptures: (1) the groanings of this present life; (2) the glory of

eternal life.

- n. V7. We walk (now) by faith; then by sight, (reality).
- o. V8. We desire deliverance from our body (of sin, troubles, persecutions, etc.)
- p. V8. We desire the clothing of immortality.
- q. Summary. While we endure the hardships of this life, we look beyond them to our eternal hope in Christ.

5. OTHER SCRIPTURES ON BEING ABSENT OR PRESENT.

- a. The total reliance of orthodox theology on their interpretation of absent/pres.
- b. II Cor. 13:2. Paul writes Corinth as though he was present with them.
- c. Col. 2:5. Absent in body, but present in spirit, in the joy of their fellowship.
- d. Compare this expression to II Cor. 5:6 & 8.
- e. I Cor. 5:3. Absent in body but present in spirit, he had already judged them.
- f. What a commentary on II Cor. 5:6-8.
- g. Absent in body -- present in spirit, is a regular household expression.
- h. This is the sense and meaning of these scriptures about absent/present.

6. WE ARE SOMETIMES: DISCOURAGED; DISAPPOINTED; MISTREATED; OSTRACIZED; BURDENED BEYOND STRENGTH. WHAT CAN WE DO?

- a. We mortify the deeds of the flesh; endure with faith, patience, and grace the trials of this life.
- b. Because our focus is on the coming of the Lord; the resurrection of the saints; and the crown of life that fadeth not away.

7. HALLELUJAH!