

Sermon: A Building from God—2 Corinthians 5:1-10

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I grew up in the country about ten miles from Salem, Oregon. I always lived in the same house. In fact, my mom continued to live in that house until I was fifty-one years old. I was always excited to return home after leaving home. Usually we would go home once a year, traveling from Los Angeles, California, St. Paul, Minnesota, and Louisville, Kentucky respectively. There were 200 acres surrounding the house, so our children loved going there every summer for vacation. But over the years, as time rolls on, life has a stark way of reminding us where our true home is.

My dad died in 1982 and my mom in 2005 and as a result, we cannot go home anymore. Even if we could go home, it is not the same without my mom and dad there. By these events, God arranges and directs our lives so that we recognize our true home. The Lord wants us to know that our true home is not here on earth. Our loved ones die. Our bodies wear out. Our society changes. Time rolls on. Indeed, our own station in life changes and in one sense, everything is in flux. From our perspective, nothing on this earth is stable. For example, one minute you think Iraq is stable and then

along comes ISIS. Or, on one occasion you are bursting with joy, but then a great sadness or discouragement comes into our lives. Still our sovereign and gracious God has not abandoned us and he has promised that he will never leave us or forsake us. Throughout our lives, our triune God reminds us where our true home is, and as he does so, he wants us to walk by faith and not by sight. He wants us to look forward to the day of resurrection.

That does not mean we check out of present-day life. On the contrary, we are to be fully engaged in what God has for us today. Actually, the truth of the matter is that we will be of more earthly good if we are heavenly minded. If we make earth our heaven, it may turn into a prelude of hell. But if we make earth our way-station to the new creation, we thank God for every gift he gives us, live every day for God's glory, and look forward to the glorious future promised us. Since Jesus is risen and has conquered death, we too will conquer death given our faith union with him.

Our passage today continues the stream of thought from 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 which we looked at last week. Let us read those verses again to pick up where we were last week. Paul writes,

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

What is the connection between 2 Corinthians 4 and 5? It is this: the outer self wasting away stands for our bodies that are dying. And the unseen promise we look for is the resurrection of the body. Paul unpacks these truths for us in 5:1-10. We see three truths in these verses. Let us look at each of them in turn.

1. PAUL ADMONISHES US TO LOOK AT WHAT WE CANNOT SEE.

Let us read 2 Corinthians 5:1-5.

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.² For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling,³ if indeed by

putting it on we may not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

Paul begins by saying that *we know*, which means we can be certain that when our earthly tent, the weak bodies we have now, die, then we will have a new resurrection body. Three times in these verses Paul says our present body is a tent. And in verses 1 and 2 he describes our resurrection body as a building or as a house. The bodies we have now are like a tent.

Tents are great for camping but are terrible during storms, for they do not hold up when a storm comes crashing through. Our bodies are pretty good tents, but they last at the longest for a hundred years and then they completely break down, and sometimes they break down long before that. But our resurrection bodies are compared to stable and secure houses. In other words, our resurrection bodies are everlasting. Nothing will shake or destroy the bodies we will receive.

Incidentally, when Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:1 that we have a building from God, do not let the present tense confuse you. He is not talking about the present but the future. He uses the present tense because the future promise is so sure. We are guaranteed as Christians that we will be raised from the dead.

In addition, notice another contrast between our present and future bodies. He says that our bodies now are earthly (v. 1), which is another way of saying that they are mortal (v. 4). In other words, our bodies are dying; they are like tents wearing out, but our future bodies are heavenly. We will be clothed as v. 2 says with our bodies from heaven. A heavenly body is a body that is not corruptible. As Paul says in v. 4 what is mortal is swallowed up by life. So, our heavenly bodies will never die, never get sick, and never get old.

And notice that they are physical bodies! Being without a body as Paul says is like being naked. It is like being unclothed. The Bible does not view life as a spirit as a state of wholeness or completeness. When we die we are with Jesus in our spirits and we exist in a disembodied state until the day of resurrection. As v. 8 says when we are absent from the body we are present with the Lord. Philippians 1 says that if we depart this life, then we go to be with Christ immediately. But it is important to stress, the intermediate state, when we are with the

Lord in our spirits it is not what God intended for us. No, what it means to be complete is to be clothed with a physical body and not to live in spirit kind of condition. And Paul stresses, our bodies will be raised when Jesus comes again.

The Bible is not gnostic. The Bible does not view spiritual life as better than physical life. Our future life is life in the body, but thankfully, it is a body untouched by sin. It is a body that will be raised from the dead and clothed with power and beauty. The perfection of our bodies is implied in verse 1 when he says our future body is not made with hands. This stands in contrast with our present bodies. As verse 2 says, we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven. Verse 4 repeats the idea that we groan now in our bodies, because we are burdened.

Our bodies now are wonderful in so many ways, aren't they? But our bodies cannot match the aspirations of our spirits. They are weakened by disease, by allergies, by injuries, by old age, and finally by death. I still remember when I turned forty-six. Why? Because I could hold my own in basketball one on one against my boys until I turned forty-six. Then I started getting the rebound in my mind but my body was not there. Suddenly, those young guys darted in front of me and got the ball instead. Our present bodies are not immortal but are corruptible and temporary. Roger Federer is an amazing tennis player (my favorite to watch), but as he gets older he has a hard time beating younger players, as we recently witnessed.

Paul says in Romans 8:23 that "we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan, awaiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." God has promised that our longing for a new body will be fulfilled. The burdens we face in our present bodies will be lifted. God has prepared us, as verse 5 says, for this very thing, for this very purpose. What is the purpose in view here? What is the very thing Paul has in mind?

Well, verse 5 goes back to verse 4. The purpose is life, that is, that our mortality would be swallowed up by life. The gift of the Spirit functions as the guarantee, the downpayment, of our future resurrection. So, Paul concludes in verse 5 where he started in verse 1. We know that we will have a resurrection body in the future. We are assured of this because we have the Holy Spirit. No matter how happy your life is now, you still long for something better. We all naturally think how life could be better. There is a longing in us for perfection. There is a sense of incompleteness and an ache in our lives. We are not fully satisfied or fulfilled. We sense that there is more to life. Those desires are not a

bad thing. They remind us that we were made for another world. They remind us that this world is not our home. They point us forward to the resurrection. All of this now brings us to the second truth in these verses.

2. PAUL EXHORTS US TO BE CONFIDENT ABOUT OUR FUTURE.

We see this in 2 Corinthians 5:6-8.

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord,⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

The main truth is stated twice in verses 6 and 8. We are of good courage. We are confident. Right now we are at home in the body, but being at home in the body means that we are away from the Lord. When we are at home with the Lord, then we are really at home. As Christians we recognize that we are in exile in our present bodies. We are sojourners and strangers. We are not really home yet. As I said earlier we long for heaven on earth. We want the perfect job, the perfect spouse, the perfect family, and the perfect church. Those desires are not wrong in themselves, but we can respond to them in a wrong way. For we can begin to seek heaven on earth and fall into sin.

People say they are not looking for heaven on earth. People say that they know everything is flawed on earth. The problem is that we often live differently than we say; our actions often betray what we say with our words. Our heads say one thing but our hearts say something else, and we often follow our hearts, even when we deny it with our heads. What is an indication that we are falling into this trap? One indication is if you are committing sins forbidden in scripture. Another is if we are grumbling and unhappy and complaining. The truth is that if we are critical and negative about life, then we are looking for heaven on earth. The longings we have for perfection are not wrong, though what we do with those desires may be wrong. They may be wrong because we may end up living by sight instead of by faith.

Paul reminds us where our home is, and encourages us to be confident about our future. So, another temptation we face is discouragement. Discouragement is the opposite of confidence. Satan wants to bring us down, and he does so by getting us to live by sight instead of by faith. He wants us

to think things will not get better. He whispers to us: quit fighting against sin. You will never win. Just give up. You are a total failure. Peter failed too. And he repented and moved forward again. Satan tells us: you do not really help anyone. You are not of any use here. But when we think this we are not walking by faith but we are walking by sight. We face loneliness and discouragement because we are not home yet. And while we are away from home we walk by faith. We trust that God loves us and is working out his plan for us. We get discouraged because we cannot see how he is working out his plan.

Sometimes we feel that what is happening to us cannot be his plan and then we start to doubt him. But we do not walk by sight or by our feelings. We walk by faith. We are confident that God is working his purposes out in our lives. We are going to make it home. This brings us to the third truth in the passage.

3. PAUL ENCOURAGES US TO PLEASE THE LORD IN EVERYTHING SINCE OUR FUTURE HOME IS THE ULTIMATE REALITY AND WE WILL ALL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST.

This truth is clearly taught in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10.

So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

We need a reason to live. We need a vision to inspire us. We need a cause to give ourselves to. So many of our young people are bored and unhappy, for they do not have a purpose in life. They are not inspired by being told: be yourself. They are not helped when people say: do whatever makes you happy. They need something bigger than themselves. And it is crucial that they give themselves to the right cause.

Recently some young people from the west have joined ISIS in Iraq to devote themselves to a cause. How tragic and sad that they would give themselves over to murder and evil. We can understand that young people are weary of giving themselves to what is trivial. They want to do something great in their lives.

We are told here what God wants us to give ourselves to. We are to make it our goal to please the Lord. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, whether we

eat or drink or whatever we do, we are to do it for the glory of God. Or, as he says in Colossians 3:17, whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him. There is no greater cause than giving yourself to our great God and Savior.

How about you Christian? Have the hustle and bustle of life distracted you from your true goal in life? Have you forgotten your true purpose in life? Have other things inserted themselves so that you have lost your direction and focus? What a good reminder of why we were created. In my own life, I sometimes find myself going along and then the Spirit convicts me: what are you living for right now? What is your purpose in life? You have strayed from me. You are actually living for yourself!

Let us either for the first time or anew today, give ourselves afresh to the Lord. Let us make it our aim, make it our ambition in life to please him, to honor him, and to glorify him. Let us be God-centered instead of man-centered. May God give us a passion to please him instead of people.

Now in 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul gives us a reason as to why we should aim to please God always and everywhere. He tells us that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Yes, Christ is our Savior but he is also our judge. And on the last day he will assess our lives. He will pass judgment on the way we lived. There will be no plea bargains at that judgment. And there will not be any question about what we have done, for he knows everything about us. He knows our actions. He knows our motives. He knows our thoughts. This judgment will be thorough and it will be fair. So, here is a strong motivation to please God in everything. We are heading to a trial. We have a court date set.

Imagine you have a court appointment in the next thirty days and your actions for the next thirty days were going to be assessed. You would think about that all the time and conduct yourself accordingly. Well, in a far greater way, we have a court date coming, where everything we have done and said and thought will be assessed. Paul also tells us what the basis of the judgment will be. Each one of us individually and personally will be judged. And we will be judged by what we have done in our present bodies. We will be judged by what we have done, whether it is good or bad. Is Paul talking about works that are assessed for rewards here or works necessary for eternal life? Paul believes in differing rewards for believers, but there are two reasons which indicate that the thinks of works necessary for eternal life here.

First, the NT says over and over that good works are necessary for eternal life, and these verses fit that theme. For example in Romans 2:6-11 Paul says good works are required for eternal life and that those who do evil works will face God's wrath. In the same way, we see in Revelation 20:11-15, God will assess people according to their works at the Great White Throne judgment. Those who do evil works will be thrown into the Lake of Fire, and will experience the second death forever. We read in Galatians 5:21 that those who practice the works of the flesh will not enter the kingdom of God. In 1 Corinthians 6:9 we are told that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. In Colossians 3:24 those who do good will receive the inheritance, and the inheritance elsewhere in Paul is another way of entering the kingdom, of experiencing eternal life. In Galatians 6:8 we are told that those who sow to the Spirit will obtain eternal life but those who sow to the flesh will be destroyed and corrupted. So, on the basis of these texts, the NT says over and over that good works are necessary for eternal life. It does talk about rewards, but not nearly as often or as clearly. That should hardly surprise us, for the main issue is not what reward we get above eternal life, but whether we will enter life at all. Is it not amazing how some teachers spend much more time and energy talking about rewards than eternal life? That is what they get excited about. It is like people getting more excited about the millennium than heaven.

There is a second reason which supports a reference to eternal life. When Paul speaks of good and evil here, he describes them as a whole. Both good and evil are singular here. I take it from this that our works are examined as a whole. In other words, our works show the quality of person, whether we are good or evil. He is not assessing each individual work but the quality of our life as a whole. Those who are good will receive eternal life, while those who are evil will face final judgment.

So, I conclude from this that how we live is vital! We cannot just profess to believe in Jesus Christ and not show any fruit and expect to be with Christ forever. Remember the words of Jesus. Some who prophesy in his name and do miracles in his name and cast out demons in his name do not belong to him. Jesus will say to them on the last day: Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

Now here is the question. Does this emphasis on the necessity of good works violate the gospel of Jesus Christ? After all, Paul says repeatedly that

we are not justified by works of law or by works but through faith in Jesus Christ. How can he now say that our works are necessary for eternal life? As we conclude, let me say a few things quickly.

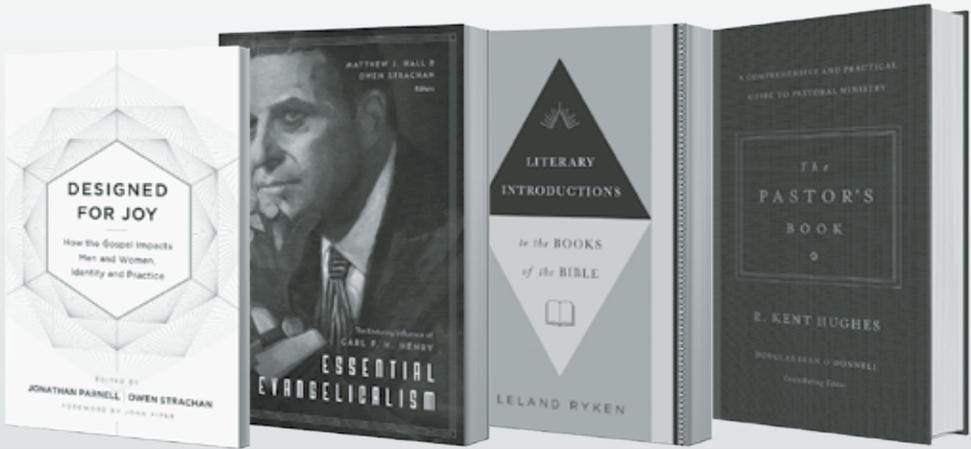
First, Paul says both that works do not justify us and that they are necessary for eternal life. He knew what he was saying. He was not contradicting himself. Scripture is not contradictory but is a coherent word.

Second, our good works cannot be the basis of our justification or eternal life. Scripture is clear. No one is righteous enough to meet God's standard of perfection. Our good works cannot merit God's favor since we fall far short of what God requires.

Third, that is why the Bible says that our only hope of eternal life is the atoning death of Jesus on the cross by which he paid for our sins. We receive such life through faith in what Jesus has done for us.

Fourth, so then what role do good works have? How can Paul say they are necessary for eternal life? The answer is that they are the necessary fruit and evidence of the life that is ours in Christ. They cannot be the basis of our new life since we still sin and we are still imperfect. But there is a change in us as Christians. There is a transformation that has taken place. Good works, then, show that we are really alive. If someone claims to be alive, but shows no evidence of being alive, then that claim is called into question. That is how works function. They are not the basis of our life. Our life comes by the grace of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, but our good works demonstrate that we are truly alive, that we have really been born again. And those who do such good works will be raised from the dead. We will go home to be with the Lord. And we will never wander from home again.

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