

The Resurrection of the Body and The Judgment Seat of Christ

2 Corinthians 5:1-13

2 Corinthians 5:1-13: For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, 3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. 6 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. 7 For we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. 9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. 12 For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you.

Background Notes

In the last section of chapter 4, the apostle Paul looked by faith beyond this present scene to eternity, and said that our present afflictions are light compared to the “weight” or importance of eternal glory. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*

The transition between the present state of light afflictions and weight of eternal glory involves death and resurrection. In chapter 5, Paul elaborated on the death and resurrection of believers, including the coming “judgment seat” of Christ. *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”(v10).*

Paul had already written to the Corinthian Christians about the rapture of believers when the Lord returns for His church. 1 Corinthians 15:51-54: *“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we*

shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 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."

Notice that at the time of the Rapture, believers who have died in Christ will be resurrected. In 2 Corinthians 4:14, Paul wrote, *"knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus and will present us with you."* So the Corinthian believers certainly knew that there would be a resurrection of believers out from among the dead. Further details are given in 2 Corinthians 5.

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers should live their lives in view of the resurrection of the body.

Verse 1 says that the proper view of the believer's body is that it is a tent - a *temporary* dwelling. The body should not be viewed as a tomb, like many ancients believed. Neither should it be viewed as the Taj Mahal - as many Americans seem to believe (at least in the way they pamper their bodies!) No, the proper view of the believer's body is that it is a tent - simply a temporary dwelling place.

Of course we should take proper care of our tents, but let's make sure that we recognize that our present bodies are only tents! As believers, we look forward to folding up the temporary tent and receiving a resurrected body. In contrast to a tent, the resurrected body is a building from God that is eternal and designed for Heaven. Right now we groan, because our tents are frail - getting older, more painful, and less efficient.

"For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life." We don't look forward to being free from these groaning bodies and thus without bodies (v4) - we look forward to our new resurrected bodies that will be immortal and fit for our eternal lives in Heaven! The Holy Spirit, who indwells our present bodies, has been given to us as a pledge of what's to come. Verse 5: *"Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee."*

In the meantime, we are at home in our present bodies and absent from the Lord. *"So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord"*(v6). It is a far better state to be absent from our present bodies and at home with the Lord! *"We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord"*(v8). The best state, of course, will be to be with the Lord, clothed with our resurrected and glorified bodies!

Verse 8 certainly refutes the idea of “soul sleep,” doesn’t it? *“We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”* When believers die, their bodies go into the grave awaiting resurrection, but their souls and spirits go immediately into the presence of the Lord. They don’t hibernate, or “soul sleep,” until the resurrection. The Bible does not teach “soul sleep.”

According to 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection of the bodies of Christians who have died will occur at the same time as the Rapture of believers who are alive. Thus all Christians, those living and those who have died, will receive their glorified bodies at the same time.

Until then, we walk by faith, not by sight, and live to please the Lord: *“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him”(v9).*

Believers should live their lives in view of the resurrection of the body.

2. Believers should live their lives in view of the judgment seat of Christ.

Verses 10-12: *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.”*

The Corinthian Christians were very familiar with a judgment seat, or “*bema*” in the Greek language. A *bema* was a raised platform, usually located in the outdoor *agora* (marketplace), with a bench on which the judge would sit and review the cases of people who were gathered below him. The *bema* of ancient Corinth is still in existence. It can be seen today in the archaeological findings. This *bema* may also have served as a reviewing stand for judges when athletic races were run in the open square.

Paul likened the *bema* in Corinth to the judgment seat of Christ. All Christians will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and answer for how we have lived our lives as believers. Romans 14:10-12 says that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of our lives to God. Do you have your account ready?

The good news is that this judgment does not determine whether we go to Heaven or hell. That was decided when we put our trust in Christ, when we were saved from the penalty of our sins through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus said, *“Most assuredly I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life and shall not come into judgment but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24).*

So the judgment seat of Christ does not determine our destiny. Rather, it is a review of our lives as believers. There will be rewards for faithful servants, but there will be little reward or a loss of reward for unfaithful servants. This is an awesome future moment, and that is the concept in verse 11: *“Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.”* Knowing the terror (or fear) of the Lord means understanding that the awesome moment of the judgment seat of Christ is in our future. We should serve the Lord with a reverential fear. Knowledge of the judgment seat of Christ should certainly motivate us to persuade people to be reconciled to God.

In verses 11-13, Paul urged the Corinthian believers not to judge him and his ministry based on what the false apostles were saying. Rather, they should judge him and his ministry based on his obvious concern to communicate these grave and important matters to them. Believers should live their lives in view of the judgment seat of Christ.

Practical Application

Are we willing to be called fanatics?

Verse 13: *“For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you.”* Because Paul was so zealous to get the message of Christ out to unbelievers, and intent on seeing believers grow in the truth and not get sucked into false doctrine, his critics accused him of being out of his mind - a fanatic! Remember, people thought the Lord was out of His mind, too. Mark 3:21: *“His own people... went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, “He is out of His mind.”*

Have you ever been called a fanatic? In our culture, it's OK to be a sports fanatic, or a fishing fanatic, or a fanatic of a hobby or special interest - but it's not OK to be a fanatic of Jesus Christ and the Word of God! It's not OK because the world has rejected Christ. Thus committed and zealous Christians are labeled as religious fanatics, or out of their minds, or dismissed as “out of it.” Unfortunately, some nominal Christians take the same attitude towards truly committed Christians. That's the culture we live in. Sad, but true.

Are we willing to be called fanatics?