

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

II COR. 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:

3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

4 For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

5 Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing *is* God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst 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, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.

NOTES

Our Heavenly Dwelling

Lesson Text: II Corinthians 5:1-10

Related Scriptures: I Corinthians 15:3-54; II Corinthians 4:1-12

TIME: probably A.D. 56

PLACE: from Macedonia

GOLDEN TEXT—"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Corinthians 5:1).

Lesson Exposition

LONGING FOR IMMORTALITY— II Cor. 5:1-4

Hope in the face of death (II Cor. 5:1). Paul references the "earthly house of this tabernacle." A "tabernacle" is a tent and refers to our earthly body. Just as a tent is a temporary dwelling place, so are the bodies we live in here on earth. One day, our bodies will be "dissolved," that is, die.

At the moment of death, God is not taking anything away from us but is giving us something new and better. Paul was so sure of this promise from God that he speaks about it in the present tense. He states that we *have* a building of God, not that we *will have* a building of God. Eternal life does not begin when we get to heaven. Eternal life begins at the moment of conversion.

Hope amid groaning (II Cor. 5:2-3). Paul moves from the promise of eternity to acknowledge that presently we groan. What is he referring to? Certainly we groan as we feel the effects of sin in our bodies as we age and when we are in pain. But the groaning here likely extends even further, to a groaning and grieving over sin in the world.

Hope in new life (II Cor. 5:4). Paul does not run from the fact that the struggles of life are hard. He felt them too. While we are in these earthly bodies, we will experience painful and tragic situations.

Paul states again that while we are in this earthly body ("tabernacle"), we groan and are burdened. We long to be freed, but not merely to die and escape our present body. We long to be "clothed upon," to be given the eternal resurrected body that has been promised to us in Christ.

WALKING BY FAITH—II Cor. 5:5-8

Guarantee from God (II Cor. 5:5). The Word of God is a sufficient guarantee of our hope in heaven, but to take it even further, God has also given us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of His promise. God does not require us to live in this earthly body without divine assistance, so He gives us the Holy Spirit to help us.

An "earnest" is a pledge, usually money, that guarantees the terms of a contract. When making a large financial purchase, the buyer will often make an earnest payment, often

called a down payment. It guarantees the transaction and is also a good-faith measure.

Joy in God (II Cor. 5:6-7). Although Paul was familiar with suffering and persecution, he remains quite joyful in his tone. The reason for this joyful spirit is that his hope rested in the Lord. Because his hope was found in the Lord, he was always able to be confident.

The fact that we experience some sense of apartness right now does not mean that God is not with us. Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, which means “God with us” (cf. Matt. 1:23). When Christ ascended to heaven, He did not leave us alone. The indwelling Holy Spirit means that God lives in us. We are never apart from God in the sense of being separated from His presence or deprived of His provision or protection.

Being with God (II Cor. 5:8). The deepest desire of the child of God is to be with Him. There is nothing that can satisfy us like being in His presence. That is why we are able to be confident now as we go through personal tragedies and the hard times of life. We know that there is something much better that lies ahead if we persevere in faith.

Being a Christian does not mean we put on a phony smile, act spiritual around others, and pretend that we never hurt or cry. There is no comparison to being with the Lord. But because of His promises, we look forward to the day when we can shed this old tent we are living in and enter the eternal dwelling God has prepared for us.

PLEASING THE LORD— II Cor. 5:9-10

Aiming to please (II Cor. 5:9). No matter where we are, whether we are here on earth or living in heaven, our ambition remains the same: we want to please the Lord. We no longer seek to satisfy ourselves with whatever appeals to us; we would rather please the

Lord. We do not do these things in order to get saved or to stay saved, but because of the fact that we are saved.

The judgment seat of Christ (II Cor. 5:10). Paul reminds us that believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, which means we will be judged for the way we have lived. The way we live our lives is important.

What will be open for judgment is our conduct as Christians. We will be rewarded in heaven based on our works on earth. We will give account for how we served Christ.

How can we serve Him? By serving others. Jesus said that when we serve “the least of these,” we are also serving Him (Matt. 25:40). Likewise, if we fail to serve others, we fail to serve Him (vs. 45).

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

QUESTIONS

1. What does Paul mean by our earthly “tabernacle” (II Cor. 5:1)?
2. What does it mean that our bodies will be “dissolved”?
3. How does Paul show that he was sure of God’s promises?
4. What is Paul likely referring to when he talks about groaning (vs. 2)?
5. What longing does our groaning express?
6. Who does God give as a guarantee of our future hope?
7. What is an earnest payment?
8. What was the basis of Paul’s confidence?
9. Does being in our bodies mean that the Lord is not with us?
10. What is the judgment seat of Christ, and who will appear before it?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Everything associated with this earthly life is temporary (II Cor. 5:1).
2. The sufferings of this life cause God's people to long for their eternal home (vss. 2-4).
3. The Holy Spirit gives us hope for eternal life in heaven (vs. 5).
4. Our hope in Christ frees us from the fear of death (vss. 6-8)
5. Whether we live or die, our aim should be to glorify the Lord (vs. 9).
6. Our work for the Lord will be tested and rewarded (vs. 10).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Contrast the outlook of a person who has trusted in Christ with the outlook of one who rejects Him.
2. What challenges do believers face in witnessing to the current generation of young people?
3. How did the sufferings that Paul endured throughout his ministry serve to advance the gospel (cf. II Cor. 4:8-12; 5:9)?
4. How do Christians experience the presence of God in this life? How will this experience be different when we are in heaven?
5. Is the judgment described in II Corinthians 5:10 the same one as described in Revelation 20:11-14 (cf. Rom. 8:1)? Why or why not?

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

Golden Text Illuminated

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (II Corinthians 5:1).

In II Corinthians 4:7-18, Paul recounted the hardships he had endured in the preaching of the gospel. But far from complaining, he considered his troubles to be light and temporary compared to the immortal glory that is to come for those in Christ.

Paul continued this theme of hope in the fifth chapter. He opens by contrasting the earthly and the eternal. First, he compares the mortal body to a tabernacle. Paul may have had in mind the wilderness tabernacle of the Israelites, a large, portable tent. This was the tent of meeting, where God would commune with Moses and dwell in the Holy of Holies, the inner room that contained the ark of the covenant. The glory of God, taking the form of a pillar of cloud, hovered over the tabernacle for all the Israelites to see.

The human body is like the tabernacle—wonderfully made but transitory. Someday, we will break camp on this earth and move to an eternal destiny. Those who are in Christ will receive a new, everlasting place in which to dwell—a building of God. What was Paul's meaning here? He may have been referring to heaven itself, a place that He personally has prepared for them (John 14:2). More likely, Paul is writing about our resurrection bodies. Paul covered this extensively in I Corinthians 15:50-57, declaring that our perishable flesh must be exchanged for an imperishable body.

—Mark Winter.