

## 2 Corinthians 5

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 09 February 2017 10:17

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### **“...whether present or absent...”**

We hear it from pulpits and in prayer meetings. We hear it in other gatherings... but, is it truly meant? Many Christians say they would rather be with God and lose this earthly body. But, do they mean it? They claim it with zeal - yet they are still on this earth, enjoying its fruits! Let them come closer to death and see if they truly mean it.

Paul speaks of wanting to be free of his earthly body. Yet, he also acknowledged that we have a role to play in this world, and so we must embrace its opportunities (in and for Christ, that is). He does not treat our bodies as nothing. God gave us our bodies, and this earth to live in. Those who are saved must live here until our given life-span is over. NOT as people who hate the bodies we have, or the world we live in.

Whilst here we are to enjoy what God has given, but not rely on them as though they were forever. We are to have, but not to hold. We may have many things, some may even have riches – but whatever we gain on this earth is temporary and cannot go with us to Heaven. Once in Heaven we will receive riches and benefits beyond compare or imagination. We have no real idea about what exactly awaits us, but it must be fitting for the children of God.

To cling to earthly goods and sources is folly, for they can do nothing for us spiritually. And no matter how rich a man is, he dies a pauper. In my daily work I see many people die...hundreds in the past three years alone. Some of them are rich and some have led rich lifestyles. Yet, they become ill, just like poor folk. They suffer, just like them. And when they die, they are no different from those without means.

This is why we must all live life to the full, as directed by God. This may, or may not, include earthly riches. If they come our way, riches are to be used wisely and enjoyed, not despised or thought to be bad for us! Those who have more in this world must aid those in need. Riches are not to be hoarded or kept back for ones' self, when a fellow Believer is obviously in need.

Paul, though, is not really talking about material riches. He is talking about an attitude of mind that transcends earthly riches. It is true that few people with resources are saved. They put their faith in their wealth, or in their own ability to gain wealth and goods. They fail to understand that it is God Who gives them their riches, and He can (and does) take it off them again when they

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cling to them. Nothing we have is our own, so why fight to get them?

If we have an attitude that defers to neither riches nor poverty, then we are strong. If we can, like Paul, live with or without money and things, then we cannot be tempted by them. Often in this world, our motives for obtaining this job, or that income, are prompted not by Christ, but by a desire to have things, including riches and personal comfort. Our motive to have certain positions is often prompted by greed for power or status, rather than by Christ's commands.

As we go through this life we see only our mortgages, our incomes, our health, and so on. By concentrating on these earthly things we do not see the spiritual. Often, we try to get around difficulties to avoid them, for we only want what is pain-free and easy to obtain.

I was sent a lovely little story recently, about a butterfly. A man watched a chrysalis and saw a butterfly struggling to emerge. The man thought he would help the butterfly and so cut the end off the chrysalis, making the exit hole larger. The butterfly came out, but could not fly. Its body was large and bloated and the wings were just shrivelled.

God had designed the butterfly to struggle to get out of the chrysalis, because, by doing so, the fluid in its body is literally squeezed backward into its wings, giving them structure and strength. By cutting short its struggle, the well-intentioned man took away the butterfly's strength and life. Christians will have struggles and should not try to avoid them. When problems arise we must face them squarely and fight to gain the prize, which is eternal.

Fighting to gain earthly treasures is of no use in eternity. That is why every Christian must cast away their earthly desires for riches, fame, health, etc., and instead hand over their lives to God. We must live every day as though we were here forever, and yet also live as though every day is our last. In this way we will always be in our spiritual prime. Those who are always looking into the future will miss the opportunity coming up behind them! It will pass them at speed and so the present is lost as they wish for what is to come.

Yes, we must look forward to eternal bliss, but, in doing so, we must not avoid this life or our duties. We must work our way through what God has given us, whatever it is, with calm and a godly love. Relatively few are rich. Few are healthy. Few have power. This is not the point. We are travellers in this world and must enjoy it whilst we are here, yet always keep moving onward

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to eternity, seeing everything we have on this earth as part of our journey.

The traveller travels light, with no fixed abode. If the goal is Heaven, what use is it to be rich or powerful? We can use these earth-bound benefits for this earth alone and if they disappear, we must accept it and move on again. The main point is that we must not fix our hopes on earth, but in Heaven. Our attitude must be eternal, not earthly. The struggles we go through are for our betterment and strength, so we should neither look for them nor avoid them. We are frail creatures and, like the butterfly, we must struggle to emerge as true Believers, becoming stronger with every move.

### Verses 1-4

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 for life.”

We know that if the bodies we inhabit on this earth are dissolved, **kataluo** – destroyed or loosened (see next note), we can look forward to being in Heaven. This ‘dissolving’ refers to a traveller who, wanting rest for the night, removes the straps and packs from the beasts of burden, or, that he undoes the ties of his garments in order to rest. Partly from

**luo**

, it means to cut loose, to put off, to release from a bound state.

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Paul is here showing us that our time in this world is transient. The idea is reinforced by use of the word 'tabernacle', **skenos**, which speaks of a tent (the human body) in which the soul lives and which is removed once the tent is taken down (i.e. when we die). A very clever professor, an academic, recently announced foolishly that he had found the part of the brain that is the soul! He has deduced that the soul is nothing more than a group of brain cells and their activities. What a sad conclusion!

In this verse we see (as we do elsewhere) that the soul or/and spirit is placed in us by God and is removed again at death, to go either to Heaven or to hell. This temporary dwelling of our souls is akin to the temporary tent or tabernacle used by God, the **skene**. He is no longer to be found in a tent made by men. In the same way, when we die our souls are taken back by God and kept safe. It seems rational, then, to suggest that if all that remains alive at death is our soul, then why do we run after all the other things that will die with our bodies? Instead, we must run after whatever feeds our souls and goes with us... everything that is of God, spiritual.

This tells us that we must be good stewards of what we are given on this earth, but must be willing to hand them over or lose them at a moment's notice, without becoming depressed or anxious. This is because they are only for this earth and have no spiritual value. The eternal lasts forever! So why spend a human lifetime desiring after what is temporary? Why spend a blink of an eye on these things? Why hanker after a mere drop when the drop is consumed by a whole ocean? Never seek after what is less, but chase what is greater.

Paul is saying we live in a tent that will be taken down. But, so what? When this happens, we will be placed in a 'building' of God, eternal and built by God, not by human beings! This building is an **oikodome**, signifying growth in Christian wisdom, holiness, joy, etc. It is the **oikos**, or house of God, a palace fit for royal children; it is the eternal Church of Christ of which we are already a part, even when on this earth. It includes the **doma**, the house-top on which we may meditate and pray.

This dwelling place is **aiionios**, without beginning or end, because it is in **ouranos**, the place where God is, along with all who He has made to stay with Him. This Heaven is said by God to be beyond our wildest dreams and filled with delights and joys we have not yet envisaged. It is this **ouranos** that we should wish to live in... why settle for less when we are given more?

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Paul says that we groan, **stenazo**, sigh with desire, as if in difficulty, **stenos**, because we want to be in Heaven rather than on this earth. He does not say this as though what we have now is unworthy, because if God has given us this earth to live on and this life to live, it cannot be unworthy, just different. Heaven is superior in every way, because none of it is man-made. Even so, we must live lives of worth on this earth.

We **epipotheo** – long for, desire or yearn after, this new abode. The idea of our souls being in a tent that can be discarded is carried on in this verse, for Paul says we desire to be ‘clothed’ by ‘our house which is from heaven’. This has the meaning of **ependuomai**, to ‘put on over’. That is, to put the house over our souls (**oiketerion**). Not only does this refer to the tabernacle of God, a tent, but it also refers to the fact that God sees His Son, when He looks upon us, Christ Who ‘covers’ us with His own righteousness (also see last verse).

Paul says this is preferable to being “found naked”, which supports the above interpretation. That is, to be **heurisko** – discovered in a particular state after investigation; in this case, ‘naked’ **, gumnos**, stripped of our mortal body and so laid bare to scrutiny. In connection with salvation, God sees Christ before He sees us, and it is Christ’s righteousness that ‘covers’ us (like a house). If God looked directly at us, He would only see sin, for on this earth we are not yet perfect. Our acceptance is in Him, not in ourselves.

All our earthly woes cause us to “groan being burdened”, or **bareo**; weighed down by our lives and the troubles we know; **b**

**arus**

, often cruel, violent or unsparing. This verse shows us that Paul is

*not*

saying we should despise the body, but that we do not

**ekduo**

, deliberately

*want*

to die or put off the ‘clothing of our soul’, the body (based partly on

**duno**

, meaning the setting of the sun, or to sink). This desire for Heaven does not, then, mean we wish to die, but that we wish to see Heaven. Though to be in Heaven means we must

necessarily die first, it does not mean that we

*wish*

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to die to get there! To obtain release from the pain of a bad tooth we must have a small operation on our mouth that itself is traumatic and causes pain. Whilst we want the freedom from pain, we do not want to go through the trauma of an extraction, but we know that it is the path to take to obtain relief.

Thus, humanly, we want to stay on this earth, and still want to know the joy of Heaven, because our “mortality might be swallowed up of life”. Mortality, or **thnetos**, is the inevitability of death; which we want to have ‘swallowed up’,

**katapino**

, devoured or destroyed by, ‘life’,

**zoe**

– fullness of life in God. Right now we can only talk about this new life, so we must teach ourselves that death, though awful, is a necessary route to get to eternal life. The seed must die before it grows again and is

**zao**

– amongst the living, blessed, fresh, full of vigour, having living water within, given by God.

Note that this new life destroys death and what it brings. It swallows it up so that it no longer exists. Death is a door, not a blank wall. It is a door through which we must go to enter Heaven, but as soon as we get inside, the door itself is destroyed... and so the sting of death is gone, as Christ promised. With all this in store for us, why do we fear death? Sadly, most of us do, even though our life on earth is less than a blink of an eye in relation to eternity.

### Verses 5-10

1.

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

2.

Therefore we are always confident that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:

3.

(For we walk by faith, not by sight:)

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4.

We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

5.

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

6.

For we must all appear before the judgement 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.”

We are told God made us for this very purpose, He “wrought us for the selfsame thing”. It is not an afterthought but a planned act. Again, we see the truth of election and predestination in this fact. To accompany this fact, God gives us the “earnest of the Spirit”, the **arrhabon** or downpayment, in Christ. So, He has pledged His intention by accepting His Son’s sacrifice on the cross, and our future in Heaven is assured.

For this reason, says Paul, we are “always confident”. Are we always confident, **tharrheo**? No, we are not. If anything, our lives usually show a dependence on this life, not the next.

Confidence,

**tharsos**

, in our future life brings

**tharseo**

– courage and good cheer, comfort that leads to boldness in this life.

We dwell in our mortal bodies amongst other human beings, **endemeo**; right now we are **ekde meo** absent from God, or ‘living abroad’. We walk by faith not by sight. That is, we live our lives in trust, not by what we see or hear physically. Are we like this? Do we place trust in God rather than in what we can accrue or touch, of this world?

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It is Paul's opinion ("I say") that we are confident and bold, full of good cheer, and willing, **eudok**  
**eo**, to  
be "absent from the body". This is to have pleasure or to think it good, to die and to  
subsequently be  
**endemeo**  
, living with God. It does not mean, as we have already intimated, that we actively  
**want**  
to die, but that we accept that to reach Heaven we must firstly let go of this present life.

As Paul says, this is our 'labour', **philotimeomai** – it is what we do because of our love of  
honour; it is our aim. The aim is not to wish to remain in this world, but to pass through it in  
order to reach the goal of Heaven; it is a journey. Because we love honour we want to please  
God, whether we are on this earth or in Heaven, so that He accepts us,  
**euarestos**  
, and finds us 'well pleasing'.

We must 'labour' to be pleasing to Him, because we must all appear before the **bema** or  
judgment seat of Christ. This is Christ's official throne on which He will sit as Judge. When we  
all appear before this throne, everything we have done will be narrated before Him. Each of us  
will be given what is due for these acts, 'done in the body', whether it is good (   
**agathos**  
: useful and good in itself, honourable, excellent) or bad (   
**kakos**  
: evil, wicked, harmful, bad by nature, destructive and causing injury). This goes for everybody,  
saved or unsaved.

### Verses 11-15

1.

"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto  
God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

2.

For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf,  
that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.

3.

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For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.

4.

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

5.

And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”

“The Lord” in this text is ***kurios***, used to describe God as absolute Ruler and Master of all creation, Who can do whatever He wishes with us, with abundant terror,

***phobos***

– dread, fear. We must not forget that God is Almighty and is to be feared for His wrath and vengeance. Christians cannot escape this terror if they do wrong and refuse to obey. Because we know what God is capable of, we all the more ‘persuade’ men; we

***peitho***

– preach and teach so that they will believe. This persuasion does not mean that we can bring about salvation by our own words and make them decide for Christ. It simple means that we must preach because God says so. The elect amongst men will then respond.

This is made plain and visible to God, and Paul hopes that it is also plainly known to the consciences or souls of the Corinthians. Paul does not wish to show himself approved before them – he has already done that. Instead, he wishes they would give glory to God on their behalf before others, whose lives revolve around things of this world, rather than things of God.

It does not matter, says Paul, if he and his fellow apostles are ***existemi*** (“beside ourselves”), astounded and amazed or even insane, for whatever they do is for and by God. Or, they may be sober, ***sophroneo***, in their right minds and have self-control, because whatever they do, it is for the sake of the Corinthians.

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They do what they do because the **agape** or love of Christ “constraineth us”, **sunecho**, keeps them together, maintaining a serious effort. Why? Because the apostles judge,

**krino**

, or are determined and resolved, that if Christ died for everyone (the elect), then everyone is dead in their sins. This being so, the apostles had to preach to everyone God led them to.

Please note that this universal preaching does not support the heresy of Arminianism, where universal preaching is taken to lead to universal salvation. We must preach universally, because we do not know to whom the gospel will be applied by the Holy Spirit, but salvation is totally selective, based on God’s own choices made before the world was made. Thus, all may hear, but few will be saved.

Christ died for “all” (verse 15), **pas**. In the context of election *pas* means “all manner of”, or ‘everyone (who is elect)’. It cannot mean anything else, given the meaning of John 3:16 *et al*

. This is further proved by what follows: “they which live” and not “all men” regardless of election. This is supported by the Greek

**zao**

, meaning (in this text) endless life in the kingdom of God, because Christ was put to death violently by men (

**apothnesko**

). Christ rose again,

**egeiro**

, or recalled from death. Because of this, the Corinthians could no longer “live unto themselves” for their own ends.

### Verses 16-19

1.

“Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

2.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

3.

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And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation:

4.

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.”

From now on, then, says Paul, we know nobody after the flesh, **sarx**. We once met Christ, but not any more, because He is no longer with us. This is because if any man is saved he is a new creature... **kainos**, new

and superior to what went before;

**ktisis**

, a new creation or ordinance. To repeat an earlier argument – why go back to what is less, when we have something that is greater. Why want to recognise the ‘old man’ in the Corinthians when Paul wants to see the new life in Christ?

The original, old life, **archaios**, is **parerchomai** or perished. Therefore it no longer exists, so there is no need to go back to it. Now, for those who are saved, all things are

**kainos**

, fresh, new and superior to the old. The Corinthians had to now live as new creations under the new ordinances in Christ, because everything is brand new and of God, Who returned us to favour (reconciled us) to Himself,

**katallasso**

. He did this through Jesus Christ. And because the apostles were reconciled to God, so they passed on this task in their own ministry, which was to do with

**katallage**

– restoring God’s favour to those who repent and trust in Christ.

In other words, says Paul, God was in Christ, bringing people back into His favour – the ‘world’,

**kosmos**

, in this text referring to those who are to be saved. In doing this God did not impute their trespasses to them. That is, He did not

**logizomai**

, take into account, their

**paraptoma**

or sins. He could not, because they were now saved and safe in Christ. God had appointed the

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apostles to have the 'word of reconciliation' as the basis of their ministry to others.

### Verses 20&21

1.

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

2.

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

This all meant that the apostles were "ambassadors for Christ", **presbeuo** – coming on Christ's behalf. This is based on the word for elder,

**presbuteros**

, so the idea of the apostles being older men is inherent in the meaning. This is not to be mistranslated as 'mature in the faith'. It literally refers to a man being older in years.

Ambassadors act on behalf of their king and whatever the ambassador says is taken to be from the king. Therefore, says Paul, when we beseech, **parakaleo** – instruct – you, it is from God and has His authority. We

**i**

for you, for Christ's sake,

**huper**

, to be made acceptable to God.

**deoma**

, long

Paul tells the Corinthians why they ought to listen and play their parts as saved men and women – because God "made him to be sin for us". That is, God appointed Christ to 'be sin'. Christ was sinless, as we know, therefore He could not 'be sin' on His own account. This text means that Christ, as our sacrifice, was dealt with as One who had the sins of the entire world on His shoulders. He did this by being our substitute. The sinless One could never be sin – He could only take on our sin like a mantle, so that He was sacrificed instead of us. This meaning is reinforced by the phrase "who knew no sin". He did this so that He could appoint us to be righteous before God

*in Himself.*

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The commentator, Matthew Poole, puts it this way: *“Christ knew no sin, as he was guilty of no sin...He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; but God made him to be sin for us. Our sins were reckoned to him; so as though personally he was no sinner, yet by imputation he was, and God dealt with him as such... he was a... sin offering... that so his righteousness might be imputed to us, and we might be made righteous. As Christ was not made sin by any sin inherent in him, so neither are we made righteous by any righteousness inherent in us, but by the righteousness of Christ imputed to us; as he was a sinner by the sins of his people reckoned and imputed unto him.”*

In a bad way, when nations are at war, an invading army might shoot ten innocent people, if one incurs their wrath. The ten have done nothing wrong, but they must bear the wrath of their aggressors on behalf of the one who did do the perceived wrong. Thus, the ‘sin’ of the one is imputed to the ten and their deaths ‘wash away’ the wrong of that one who got away.

Christ took our sins upon Himself like clothing. The clothes did not make Him sinful, but because the clothes were worn by sinners, the wearer of the clothes (Christ) was treated as being equal to the ones who previously wore them. So, He was put to death instead of the ones whose clothes they were. He took the wrath on their behalf.

From this we can see that Christ could not be sinful and that being ‘made sin’ means to be made *accountable* for the sins of others. Because of this mighty gift, which gave us the benefits of salvation, we must live holy lives, whether or not we are on this earth.

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