

FPFWC Christian Development



Faith Gives Us Hope

August 2021

Summer Quarter

August 28, 2021

Lesson #4 – An Eternal Hope

SCRIPTURE TEXT –2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10

Key Verse - *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 Corinthians 5:1*

ICE BREAKERS –

1. *What does it mean to live by faith and not by sight?*
2. *What is the single most important change you should make to have more of the kind of confidence of which Paul speaks?*

LESSON BACKGROUND

As Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in AD 57, his contemplation of death was more than a spiritual exercise. Paul admitted to his readers that adverse circumstances resulted in being “pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life” (2 Corinthians 1:8; compare 11:24–27).

This expectation of the potential end of his life forms the background for almost everything he writes in the initial chapters of 2 Corinthians. However, he emerges from this contemplation with a triumphant note, proclaiming in 4:8–9: “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.”

Paul did not allow the prospect of death to deter him from his mission to bring the gospel to Gentiles in cities like Corinth. Some of Paul’s anguish may have been caused by false teachers who had come to Corinth to undermine his teachings and his authority. These are the sarcastically designated “very chiefest apostles” referred to in 2 Corinthians 11:5; 12:11. Whether their opposition included death threats is uncertain. But we know that Paul’s opponents were not above resorting to such intimidation (example: Acts 18:12–17).

Even so, Paul did not fear dying, for he knew that Jesus had defeated death (1 Corinthians 15:12–32; 2 Corinthians 4:14). Paul also knew that in his day there were many theories of what happened to people after death. The Greeks generally believed in an underworld place, the realm of the dead ruled over by the god Hades. It was a place of residence for souls released from their bodies, resulting in a shadowy spiritual existence. This place, also called Hades, was thought to be filled with gloom and despair, with no hope of ever being released (compare Acts 17:32).

Some Jews and Greeks believed there was no existence after death. The party of the Sadducees was known for teaching there was no resurrection (Matthew 22:23). This was a minority opinion, though, for most Jews believed in a future resurrection of all the dead, who would receive reconstituted bodies in order to

stand before God for judgment (examples: John 11:24; Acts 23:8). Being a Pharisee, this had been the general mind-set of Paul as well (Acts 23:6). But the resurrection of Jesus from the dead on the third day (rather than at the end, at the general resurrection) brought everything into sharper focus.

LESSON COMMENTARY –

4:16. Paul wasn't giving up on ministry. Instead he experienced that even **though** his **outer man** (that aspect of his current humanity that others saw) was being destroyed by suffering, his **inner man** (that aspect of his humanity that was planted at conversion and unseen by others) was constantly growing through the nourishment of the Holy Spirit.

4:17–18. This process of growth is further explained by contrasting the current suffering with the unimaginable production of **glory** that the suffering produces. The glory refers to the future blessings that culminate in the resurrection body but are experienced in part during this age. When a Christian understands this **eternal** and abundant glory, the present suffering is viewed as **momentary** and minimal in comparison. Paul can say this because he has a spiritual perspective on life: his focus is not on the **temporal** suffering and decay of the physical body (**the things** clearly **seen** with the physical senses); his focus is on the **eternal** glory (**the things** **not seen** with the physical senses).

5:1. The physical difficulties Paul faced in ministry and the ever-increasing possibility of his death did not lead to despair. He knew that in physical death—when the **house** is **torn down**—believers would have the certainty of a resurrection body (the future **building**) that comes **from God** and lasts forever. Paul reflected on three human states throughout this section: (1) the physical state of present existence illustrated as an **earthly tent**, (2) the intermediate state between death and the second coming when a believer is present with the Lord without a resurrection body (a state referred to as nakedness), and (3) the resurrection state that begins at the rapture of the Church when believers receive their resurrection body.

5:2–4. State 1 is characterized by the groaning that accompanies suffering. Paul was longing to be alive for the rapture, which ushers in state 3 without the experience of death (1Co 15:50–55). Believers at that time will be transformed from their mortal bodies to their resurrection bodies without the experience of death and state 2.

5:5. God gives the **Spirit** to believers at conversion. This Spirit is a guarantee that God works through suffering to prepare Christians for their resurrection body.

5:6–8. To be **at home in the body** (an idiom for being alive) is to be absent from the Lord. Paul was courageous in this state although at the time his relationship with the Lord was characterized by **faith** rather than **sight** (v. 7). But because he knew that **to be absent from the body** (an idiom for physical death) ushers one into the presence of the Lord in the intermediate state, he preferred to be with the Lord (v. 8). Paul was not suicidal or disparaging concerning the physical body; Paul remained hopeful in the face of death because it would inaugurate a new phase in his relationship with the Lord.

5:9–10. In anticipation of his future relationship with the Lord, Paul desired to please Christ in his present state. For Paul, this meant a continuation in ministry even through suffering. Paul was also motivated by the expectation that he and all Christians will **appear before** and be evaluated by **Christ**. This happens at the **judgment seat** (Gk. *bema*)—a word that referred to a raised platform where a judicial authority pronounced a verdict on the one standing before him (Jesus “stood before” Pilate while Pilate was “sitting on the judgment seat” [Mt 27:11–19], and Paul stood “before the judgment seat” of Gallio in Corinth [Ac 18:12–17]). The purpose of the evaluation is not to determine eternal destiny; the purpose is to identify the actions of the physical **body** and to evaluate them as **good** or **bad**. The reward for **good** works is praise (1Co 4:5); the reward for evil works is lack of praise (1Co 3:15).

LESSON NUGGET – God’s Word gives us the truth about death and beyond, and God’s Spirit guarantees that God’s children will go to heaven. We claim this by faith and walk with confidence, and what peace it gives!

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary and Wiersbe Expository Outlines on the New Testament*