

“To be ABSENT From the Body and to be PRESENT With the Lord!”

A Well Known Passage in Second Corinthians 5 Has Become almost a Cliché for Those Who Anticipate Being Taken To Heaven After This Life is Over. What Does This Potent Passage Actually Establish?

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Despite the admitted lack of direct scriptures referring to one's transport to Heaven immediately upon one's decease, yet the fundamental premise remains in most religious persuasions of that very certainty. No scripture on the subject enjoys the degree of familiarity as does the mention, in 2nd Corinthians 5:8, that, “To be absent from the body IS to be present with the Lord!” This statement alone is sufficient proof, of and by itself, with most people that the deceased go immediately to Heaven.

At a recent funeral, the minister once again reminded the audience of this comforting thought, largely on the strength of this adage: That, “To be absent from the body IS to be present with the Lord!”

Though abundantly familiar, few, it seems, have taken the time to examine this passage, and to note what it reveals. As with most of Christianity, a casual perusal seems sufficient. Except, in this case, there is much more revealed than meets the casual eye! We do need to be more attentive!

Often, the Context Matters

What so many miss in the underlying context of Paul's statement is the matter of the extreme stresses the ministry has to go thru on behalf of the Saints. Paul introduces his general subject in Chapter 3:3, declaring the obvious, that the Saints are the ‘Epistle of Christ’, to whom he and his counterparts minister with the Spirit: The ministry of the New Testament (v.6), a ministry even more glorious (impressive) than that of the Old, in fact, beyond comparison (v.7-11). What makes it so is the Life which we live, when we express Christ's Character.

Both 2nd Corinthians 3:7 and 4:6 refer to God's Gloriousness, He being another Moses, to us, when God's Law becomes written in our hearts, as the New Covenant provides, (Heb. 8:8-10), by Christ. But, it's the ministry and its burden in service to the Saints that is Paul's contextual point. Chapter 4:1, “*Therefore, seeing we have this ministry...*” and in verse 5: “*For we preach not (about) ourselves...*” Verse 7: “*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*”

Then in verse 8 he begins to lay out the matter: “*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; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always **delivered unto death** for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.*”

Now, here he makes his point: “*So then, **death works in us, but life in you.***” It's important to notice here the “**we**” and the “**you**” references. He is not talking about all Christians unilaterally being distressed, but more specifically, those extreme trials that ‘go with the territory’ of the ministry. Verse 14: “*Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present **us with you.** For **all things are for your sakes**, that the abundant grace might thru the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For **our** light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*”

The Vision of Hope.

The ministry, bearing every affliction, in order to serve and enhance the state of the Saints in general, had little to look forward to in this life, other than more of the same, and perhaps even paying the extreme price. So many did!

It is from within this context that Paul lamented about facing death. Continuing on, he states: *“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. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:”* Paul here refers to that new **spirit** body, which we anticipate, to replace this physical body.

Consistent with his lengthy narrative in 1st Corinthians 15, Paul acknowledges there IS a physical existence and there is to be a Spiritual existence. The way most people understand Paul’s reference to this in 2nd Corinthians 5 is that one existence is immediately eclipsed into the other! That’s why they are confident to re-word what Paul actually wrote, by saying: “IS to be present...”, instead of: “AND to be present...” Their common quote is as stated above: “To be absent from the body **IS** to be present with the Lord!”, where Paul actually wrote: “...to be absent from the body **AND** to be present with the Lord!” So, what’s the big difference?

What So Many Have Missed!

By extracting just the proverbial ‘sound bite’, the overall point becomes lost. It’s lost on the vast majority of believers. You see, Paul clearly acknowledges three states of being, not just two! And, he does so more than once here in this chapter.

2nd Corinthians 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.”* Notice: he acknowledges such a state!

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.”*¹ Here expressing a preference of being changed **directly** into that new existence, without having to experience the interim state: death. This ‘unclothed’ state he refers to occupies that interval BETWEEN this physical existence and the one to be invested upon us in the future! Here is what so many have overlooked. Paul acknowledges not **two** conditions, but **three!** 1. Clothed, 2. un-clothed and 3. re-clothed! In both verses 3 and 4 he acknowledges that undesirable state, of being ‘naked’, in other words, having put off this body, **but not yet having received** that new living form!

You see, he acknowledges an intermediate state, in between this life and the next. He does not state what many have taken one passage to be saying, that we pass directly from one state into the other, thus bypassing any ‘unclothed’ state and any real need for the resurrection from the dead. There **is** an intermediate condition. The interval of death: being ‘absent’ of this form, (unclothed), but not yet having been ‘presented’ into our Spirit manifestation, an essential prerequisite to being accepted into the presence of the Lord!

This is what happens when the word ‘**and**’ is exchanged to read: ‘**is**’!

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, 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, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”*** That renewed state being preferable to this one! (Paul did not yet realize how long it was going to be before Christ’s Return!)

¹ Here Paul alludes to his earlier affirmations, that we receive our Spiritual bodies AT the Last Trump, at the resurrection that occurs concurrently with Christ’s return. That some will be ‘alive and remain’ at that time, and will enter into their Spirit manifestation directly, without experiencing death! See 1st Corinthians 15:49-54 and 1st Thessalonians 4:14-17.

Admittedly, it would be preferable to be found in that 'present' state, but we must first receive our presentable Spirit bodies in order for that to be possible! When that occurs, by Paul's own words, is at the time of Christ's return! Not at the moment of our personal deaths. The time when we become 'changed' is at the moment of Christ's second coming. (1st Thessalonians 4:14-18 and v. 10 below!)

9. *"Wherefore we labor, 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."*

You see, it is at this event, the 'sentencing' to Life, which occurs at the resurrection, at Christ's return,² that we are awarded this new body!

Paul didn't omit that essential fact of our receiving our Spirit Bodies AT Christ's Return, at the resurrection, (or being changed instantly, if still living) nor did he disregard that intermediate condition, between this existence and that one. We shouldn't either!

Being Unclothed?

Now, to suggest an intermediate state, referred to as 'unclothed' or 'naked', (terms Paul uses), we are faced with another theological position that many find unacceptable. Having put off this body, but not yet having received the one created of God for us: is that intermediate state when we are basically nowhere! It suggests a period of time during which we remain unconscious. Despite numerous Scriptures to that effect, and particularly among them, those referring to the resurrection, most believers find the more prevalent belief system, of going directly 'to be with the Lord' at the moment of death, to be the preferable belief. After all, there's another theological premise dependent on it also:

² Revelation 20:6 & 5 *"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished."*

Question: Why is there any need for a 'second death'?

That of the Immortal Soul. If we have a conscious immortal soul, it needs to be somewhere after death. This of course, presumes that our 'soul' is the ever conscious component of our existence: An idea that warrants separate consideration!

The idea of going to Heaven at death is not a minor issue, nor is it an isolated one. To embrace that view, it's necessary to accept certain other beliefs, and to disregard a number of clear scriptures.

We Shall Not All Sleep.

Paul says in 1st Corinthians 15:51 that *"We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed."* He calls this statement a 'mystery'. He refers to that period between death and the resurrection as being 'sleep'. Not only here, but in other places, such as 1st Thessalonians 3:14-18, defining 'sleep' as those who are '**dead** in Christ'! (v.16) Now, earlier, we realized that it was those "*in Christ*" who would be made alive! (Why would that be necessary if we never were **not** alive, only transferred over into another ever-conscious state of being?)

Though it would be **preferable** to be immediately 'present with the Lord', Paul's statement of the obvious, that we all will, at some point become 'absent from this body', does not, by itself, indicate that we transfer from one state over to the other immediately, without any intermediate 'waiting period'. That period he refers to in these same passages as being 'unclothed'! A period that ends abruptly at the resurrection from the dead. The 'dead in Christ' will be raised incorruptible'! (1st Cor. 15:52) Then, in what state were they prior to being raised? In what state do those who are NOT "in Christ" remain, '*the rest of the dead*', who are assigned to the post-millennial resurrection? (Re. 20:5)

Obviously, the casual approach to this revealing passage leaves the reader under-informed. Don't accept casual conclusions. Pursue this Truth! The assumption that at death we transfer immediately in to the new "Spirit Form" disregards other essential doctrines, such as the resurrection from the dead. It also presumes we can remain conscious at death without first being 'quicken' (resurrected) in the manner and at the time described. **Ω**