

**Hope Today Because of Our
Resurrection Tomorrow**

~2 Corinthians 5:1-10

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One of my former teachers said “You learn more by reading people you disagree with.” When asked why, he said when reading a dissenting view from yours, you’re forced to consider the alternative and think through your own position. Ultimately this may change your view or strengthen your own convictions.

I followed this advice in reading “*A Brief History of Thought*” by Philosopher Luc Ferry of the University of Paris VII, Sorbonne. Ferry is a secular humanist but, he’s one person outside of Christianity who portrays it in a somewhat fair and charitable way.

Ferry summarizes the primary question facing humankind like this: *“As distinct from animals - a human being is the only creature who is aware of his limits. He knows that he will die, and that his near ones, those he loves, will also die. Consequently, he cannot prevent himself from thinking about this state of affairs, which is disturbing and absurd, almost unimaginable. And naturally enough he is inclined first of all to those religions which promise ‘salvation.’”*

Ferry then goes on to discuss humankind’s pursuit to find salvation from death and the death of loved ones. He claims all religions basically “work” through faith. Each one promises something beyond death or a way to escape the death cycle. But as a firmly convinced secular philosopher, he cannot bring himself to believe in a God who offers salvation from death. He recognizes that secular philosophy does not deliver salvation from physical death. So he redefines salvation as “freedom from anxiety concerning death.” He then goes on to pursue such salvation apart from God.

So, why does he reject the religious pursuit of salvation from death? *“First and foremost, because the promise of religions – that we are immortal and will encounter our loved ones after our own biological demise – is too good to be true.”* (Later he writes *“You might object that compared to the doctrine of Christianity – whose promise of the resurrection of the body means that we shall be reunited with those we love after death – a humanism without an afterlife pales in comparison. I grant you that amongst available doctrines of salvation, nothing can compete with Christianity – provided that you are a believer.”* (261) Then he writes *“I find the Christian proposition infinitely more tempting – except for the fact that I do not believe in it. But were it to be true I would certainly be a taker.”* (263) So he pursues salvation from anxiety about death, but to be clear; Christianity claims salvation from death by receiving an actual resurrection body.

What about you? Does the promise of the resurrection of our bodies affect your life in any way today?

Last week, we started with the question – “Would you be willing to die for your faith in Christ?” This week our text answers the question “What happens to those who die with faith in Christ?” But it doesn’t raise this issue just to satisfy our curiosity. The discussion aims to encourage believers with hope and courage for life today because of our coming resurrection sometime in the future. I would summarize the main thrust of this passage like this - **God’s promise of our future resurrection can give us courage and hope for life today.** But why? What is it about this promise that specifically helps us today? That’s what we will discover as we work our way through the next passage in our 2nd Corinthians study. I pray that at least one of the reasons given for hope in this passage will encourage you today with whatever you’re facing.

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 (ESV)

5 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. **2** For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, **3** if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. **4** For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. **5** He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, **7** for we walk by faith, not by sight. **8** Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. **9** So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. **10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

We left off last week with the apostle Paul saying that though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. Now he goes on to talk about what happens to us when our outer self finishes our wasting way process or dies. Verse 1 sets the stage for this whole section. “For we know that if the tent that is our earthly house is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Paul uses the image of the tent to describe our earthly body. Tents serve as temporary shelters. Paul made tents while living in Corinth. He says if the tent, our bodies, are destroyed, or die, we need not worry. Why?

We will receive a building from God, a house not made with human hands, eternal in the heavens. Now some think that house refers to God’s temple in heaven. But as the passage proceeds, it will become clearer that this actually refers to the resurrection body. Unlike the temporary and destructible nature of a tent, the resurrection body is like an eternal building. Instead of a tent, we receive a house. This house will not wear down.

Paul specifically discussed the nature of our resurrection bodies compared to our earthly bodies in 1 Corinthians 15:43-44. Our earthly bodies perish. Our resurrection bodies will be imperishable. Our earthly bodies die in dishonor. We will be raised in glory. Our earthly bodies die in weakness. They will be raised with power. They will die as natural bodies. We will be raised in a spiritual body similar to Jesus' body after His resurrection. So back in 2 Corinthians 5, Paul knows they already have this information. So he reminds them of this promise using the tent compared to house/building image. From here, he talks about reasons why this gives hope today because of his coming resurrection.

Why can we live with hope today because of our future resurrection? Reason 1 - God will completely satisfy our groaning for our resurrection bodies. (5:2-4a). Verse 2 – “For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling.” The older one gets, the more we have to deal with the wearing out of our bodies. Some of us have to deal with limitations to our earthly bodies from a young age. We have hearing impaired among us; some are in wheelchairs; some have trouble seeing; some have great pain in their joints, bones or muscles. Some live with a brain limitation or a birth malformation. Yet God will completely resolve all of these issues in our resurrection bodies. God will satisfy our growing longing to be whole when He raises us from the dead.

Notice that he repeats this reality of groaning later on in verse 4. “For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened.” I think this refers to the groaning that comes from life's burdens and our earthly body's limitations. Sometimes, life throws so much at us that we groan under its weight. We struggle to process everything or deal with the complex problems in our lives. Such groaning is expected when we live in perishable, ever weakening, natural body. Yet when we receive our resurrection bodies, the groaning from life's burdens will cease. So though life today contains limitations because of our bodies, we can look forward to the day when we will roam freely in our resurrection bodies through the new heaven and earth.

But then there's that strange verse 3 – “If indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked.” What is this all about? Well, I take the word “it” to refer to our resurrection bodies. So he's saying that when we “put on” our resurrection bodies, we will not be found naked. But who said anything about being naked? It seems like he's assumed that before we get our resurrection bodies we live in this naked state. What could that mean and why insert this phrase?

Well if we only had verse 2. You could interpret that verse to say “when we die we put off our earthly body and then enter some sort of heavenly building or house made by God. As if you throw your body and live forever as a spirit. In the time of Paul’s writing, Greek philosophy reigned supreme. The writings of Plato influenced many people. They believed the soul needed to shed, or get rid of the burdensome body. So death delivered the soul from the body. But that was not Paul’s, or the Jewish understanding. He recognized that according to God, a human had a body. He saw the resurrection of the body as our ultimate hope. But in between the death of our earthly body and our resurrection, we are without a body. Our souls are in Christ’s presence. So Paul calls this the naked state – the time without a body. He doesn’t want readers to interpret him with Greek philosophy. So he inserts verse 3 to assert that a body is indispensable to being human. But, the main point is that God will completely satisfy our longing for resurrection bodies.

Why else can we live with hope today because our coming resurrection? **2 - God will transform our earthly bodies into resurrection bodies. (5:4)** We see this in two ways in verse 4. “For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened – not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed by up life. Paul uses 2 images to show that God will transform our earthly bodies into resurrection bodies , not replace our earthly bodies with resurrection bodies. First he says, “not that we would be unclothed but further clothed.” So it’s not like we throw away the clothes of our earthly bodies and then remain unclothed or without a body. That is Greek Philosophy. We have our earthly “clothes” and will be “further clothed” with our transformed bodies. That means we will be recognizable to others. They will see a transformed us.

The second image is found in the phrase “swallowing up.” You may have heard the phrase “swallowed up” at a graveside when the minister read 1 Corinthians 15:54 – “When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory.” Back in 2 Corinthians 5, the mortal is swallowed up by life. The resurrection body of life somehow swallows up the mortal body. Just as food in some way becomes part of us when we swallow it, the mortal body will somehow be part of the resurrection body. So, our current bodies will be transformed into resurrection bodies. Novelist Wendal Berry puts it like this: “Imagine the dead waking, dazed, into a shadowless light in which they know themselves all together for the first time. In it, they are loved completely, even as they have been, and so are changed into what they could not have been, but what, if they could have imagined it, they would have wished

to be.” Imagine yourself completely whole; no pain; no anxieties; no bodily limitations; no weakness; no mental fog or confusion; no sin. That’s what you will be like in your resurrection body.

Yet all this seems a little far removed from life today. Many of us still imagine having several decades of life ahead of us. This resurrection body talk seems kinds of abstract and distant. It can be easy to disbelieve when we get immersed in life here on earth. That’s where the third reason comes in. Why can we live with hope today because of our resurrection tomorrow? **3 - God demonstrates His determination to resurrect us tomorrow by giving us the Holy Spirit today. (5:5)** “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” “This very thing” is our mortal bodies being swallowed up by life. God assures us that He will fulfill this promise tomorrow by giving us the Holy Spirit today. Paul uses the word guarantee or down payment. It brings to mind a buyer giving the seller a portion of the selling price to demonstrate the buyer’s intention to pay the whole price. It’s similar to buying a house. As the buyer, you show the seller your intention to buy by paying a small but significant down payment. Then on the day the sale closes you have to pay the full amount owed – whether that we fully with your own cash or with your cash and the mortgage funds provided by the bank.

God’s down payment on His promise to resurrect us is the Holy Spirit. We receive the Spirit when we become Christians. “We experience the power and presence of God now through the Spirit. We will see the fullness of God’s power and presence in the age to come through the resurrection.” (George Guthrie – 2 Corinthians – Baker Exegetical). So when we sense the Spirit, when we are filled with the Spirit, it is a reminder of God’s promise to resurrect you one day.

Yet what happens between our death and resurrection? The Apostle Paul, who wrote 2nd Corinthians in the mid 50’s of the first century, has lived in the intermediate state for almost 2000 years. It seems that early in his ministry, Paul believed Christ would return before the end of Paul’s life. But as he neared death, he had to come to grips with the possibility of this gap between his death and resurrection. What would life be like during that gap? As Paul addresses this, we find another reason for hope today.

4 – Between our death and resurrection, the Lord will bring us into His joy filled presence. Verse 6 – “So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” Life on earth involves absence from our exalted Lord. We are away from His

resurrection body presence. The relationship we have with him now is partial, obscured and shadowed by our fallen world. So our pattern of life here must be to walk by faith and not by sight. This faith is not a blind leap into the dark. It is a step into the light because of God's trustworthiness and all He has revealed about Himself.

But notice in verse 8 he says, "We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord." So the intermediate state between death and resurrection is not some spooky unappealing disembodied thing floating on clouds. We are with the Lord in paradise as Jesus promised the thief on the cross. We will be conscious and experience Jesus' glorious presence. Our loved ones who have died in Christ, experience this joyful reality right now. Should our death come before Christ's return and our resurrection, we also can look forward to being with Christ.

But until then, we carry on with our lives here. Yet Paul gives us one final reason for hope in this passage. Why can we live with hope and courage today in light of our resurrection tomorrow? **5 - Jesus will reward those who please Him when we appear at His judgment seat in our resurrection bodies. (5:9-10).** In verse 9, Paul states this aim. "So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him." Why? Verse 10 – For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."

Now this verse raises all kinds of questions. Haven't we been taught that salvation is by faith alone? Yet, here it talks about rewards as if our works determine our salvation. Does this mean that unbelievers also get rewards on their way to Hell? Doesn't that seem cruel?

So we need to carefully unpack this. First, who is the "we" in the "we must all appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ." I agree with those who say that "we" must be believers. He writes to the Corinthian Christians. He doesn't say all humanity. He says "we all." We Christians. Second, this is not a judgment for salvation but a judgment for how Christians lived. In Matthew 25, Jesus talks about the judgment when he will say to some "enter in my rest" and others "depart from me, I never knew you." So first there will be a judgment of salvation. Then believers will come before the judgment seat of Christ.

We will receive our due for what we have done in the body whether good or evil. Paul introduced heavenly rewards in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. I would encourage you to go there and read that for a fuller explanation. But there will be accounting for our life and the path we followed. The primary purpose of this appearance is for evaluation and not salvation.

The rewards motivate us who have been saved to please Christ with our lives. It reminds us that God saved us to participate in the advancement of His cause in the world. Christ's judgment is specific to each individual. We all must appear – to receive what he, not we, or she has done while in our earthly bodies, whether good or evil. I know this can be somewhat daunting.

But I think Paul includes this mainly as positive encouragement. Since we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ and since it is possible to receive reward for the good we do, suddenly everything we do in life matters. Everything has eternal implications. All that behind the scenes good work you do that no one notices is noted by Jesus. On that day, He will commend and reward those quiet acts of kindness, faithful prayer or those moments when you said no to temptation to honor Him. So looking forward to life in our resurrection body can give us purpose for everything in life today, because of the judgment seat of Christ.

So God's promise of our future resurrection can give us courage and hope for life today.

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1 - God will completely satisfy our groaning for our resurrection bodies. (5:2-4a).

2 - God will transform our earthly bodies into resurrection bodies. (5:4)

3 - God demonstrates His determination to resurrect us tomorrow by giving us the Holy Spirit today. (5:5)

4 – Between our death and resurrection, the Lord will bring us into His joy filled presence.

5 - Jesus will reward those who please Him when we appear at His judgment seat in our resurrection bodies. (5:9-10).

We will one day be released from our groans. We can forward to new resurrection bodies. We have a trustworthy God who keeps His Word and gives the Spirit as a guarantee. Should we die before Christ returns, He will bring us to paradise in Christ's presence. But until then we gain purpose for all we do in life today. I pray that at least one of these reasons will strengthen your courage today and for as long as God give us life on earth. Then we will see Him face to face.