

# THE LETTER OF PAUL

## 2 CORINTHIANS

April 28, 2021

### 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

- This passage is often studied virtually in isolation from the rest of Second Corinthians because of its importance for understanding Paul's views about life after death.
- In verse 1, the word "tent" is figuratively referred to as the Human body.
  - Paul is concerned with the 'wasting away of the 'outer nature' through persecution and suffering which afflict the body.
  - In the first part of verse 1, we may conclude that he refers to the final outcome of such a process, i.e., the destruction of the body in death.
  - His afflictions could at any time so intensify that they would result in death.
- In 5:1b, the "building from God, a house not made with hands" is the resurrected body of Jesus himself or the resurrection body of the believer."
- While afflictions experienced by Paul may have caused him to groan and increased his strong desire for what God has promised (the promised heavenly body) rather than focusing on the afflictions themselves.
- It is not vain or empty hope that the apostle entertains; instead, it is based on the known fact that God himself has prepared him for such a future.
- Paul's hope rests not only upon the objective knowledge that it is God who is preparing him for a glorious future but also upon the subjective experience of the Spirit he enjoys.
  - The God who prepares is also the God who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.
  - It was by the Spirit that Christ was raised from the dead with his resurrection body. The same Spirit has been given to Christians to guarantee that they too shall be raised and clothed with a resurrection body.
- "for we walk by faith, not by sight" → suggests that to be at home in the body (and in a sense, away from the Lord) means that God is not accessible to our sight but is accessible to us only by faith.
- Paul realizes that he doesn't know how long he will be in his earthly body. Therefore it is important how he lives his life, which is to please God. We must please God in the way we live our lives because we must appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

*How might this verse impact your faith and how you live your life now?*
- Before people assume that Paul supports works righteousness, he reminds people that God has created a new way for us to be justified through Jesus. Therefore, why is it important for Jesus to judge whether we shall receive evil or good?
  - It is the recognition that God will evaluate the lives and ministries of his children and reward those who have acted faithfully, while those who have not will suffer the loss of any reward.
    - In a way, Luther uses this to explain why we should do good works, which allows us to be faithful to what God has done for us.

## **2 Corinthians 5:11-15**

- In this section, Paul responds to criticism regarding his system of ministry. He defends himself by relating it first to the judgement of God (v.11) and later to the love of Christ (vs. 14-15)
- Paul is not 'afraid of the Lord, but he does have a 'reverential awe' of him and recognizes that his whole life and ministry will come under God's scrutiny. It is with this awareness that he persuades everyone.
- The awareness of his accountability to God motivates him to be diligent in his efforts to persuade others, i.e., to bring about in them the obedience of faith, as he was commissioned to do.
- Paul sought to remove intellectual barriers, overcome prejudice and ignorance, to convince by argument and testimony, and the gospel's straightforward proclamation.

*Question: What are some barriers in the past or present of the church that prevented others from feeling connected? What can the church do instead?*

## **2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

- From the time Paul realized the significance of the death of Christ, the love of Christ for him expressed therein had been the motivating power of his life and changed his whole outlook. He could no longer regard others from a human point of view.
- He can no longer pride himself 'on a man's position,' only his standing before God, which is a gift of grace.
- Paul regarded Jesus Christ as a false Christ before Paul's conversion, whose followers ought to be stamped out. Afterward, he knew Jesus was God's Christ, the one who was to make all things new and to whom all must be called to respond in the obedience of faith.
- Therefore, when a person is in Christ, they are part of the new creation. God's plan of salvation, while primarily concerned with humanity, encompasses the whole created order.
- This participation in the new creation is reflected in the changed outlook of which v.16 spoke and in a new holiness of life and will culminate in the renewal of the whole person by resurrection to immortality in the newly created order.
- The amazing grace of God is revealed when he himself took the initiative in Christ to remove the obstacle to reconciliation existing on his part. It is only on this basis that there exists a gospel of reconciliation by which humanity can now be called to be reconciled to God.
- The preaching of reconciliation has to be carried out, and people must hear the call to be reconciled to God. Unless they respond to that call, they cannot actually experience the reconciliation.
- What is the obstacle that prevented us from being reconciled with God before Christ? It was to not count our sins against us. It reminds us of the Parable of the King and Unforgiving Debtor. At first, the King was willing to forgive the servant's debts, but the servant's treatment of the other servant made the King change his mind. Therefore, if we hesitate to forgive others the way God has forgiven us, we cannot experience reconciliation.
- When Paul calls us to be ambassadors for Christ, it is in relation to God's activity as the reconciler. The God who reconciled the world to himself through the death of his Son now actually appeals to the world, through his ambassadors, to be reconciled to him.

Based on these verses, what are some ways we can be ambassadors of Christ in Redeemer and other various communities we are part of?

## **2 Corinthians 6:1-13**

- Paul continues on the theme of reconciliation from the previous section (2 Corinthians 5:16-21)
- Paul's readers had accepted his gospel and experienced something of the grace of God of which it speaks. Now he urges them to make sure his acceptance is not in vain.
- It is more likely that he has in mind how easily these people are influenced by others, whether by the offender who made the personal attack against Paul or the critics of the apostle who were already lurking in the background in Corinth.
- He does not want the lives of those who made an excellent response to the gospel to be marred now by entertaining criticisms of that gospel and the one who brought it to them.
- Paul quotes from Isaiah 49:8, "At the acceptable time I have listened to you and helped you on the day of salvation. In their original context, these words are addressed to the Servant of the Lord and applied to the time of Israel's release from exile in Babylon.
- Paul now makes his own application: "Behold now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." If the time of the exile's return was a day of salvation, then the time when God has acted in Christ to reconcile the world to himself is the day of salvation par excellence.
- Paul and other New Testament writers looked forward to the parousia of Christ as the great day on which salvation would be consummated.
- Paul has encouraged his readers not to accept the grace of God in vain and insists that his conduct as God's messenger does not constitute a stumbling-block that might hinder the proper acceptance of God's grace by others.
  - Being a stumbling block in other's faith was also a huge concern for Paul in his first letter to Corinthians.
- If the fault could be found in his ministry, and there were those in Corinth too prepared to see it, then presumably that could be used as an excuse to reject his message. What is involved here is not personal commendation but a commendation of the ministry.
- "Through great endurance" appears to be the general heading for nine factors Paul uses to commend his ministry.
  - The first set, *afflictions, hardships, calamities*, are expressed in general terms.
  - The second represents particular examples, *beatings, imprisonments, riots*
  - The third speaks of hardships voluntary undertaken- *labors, sleepless nights, hunger*
- It may seem strange that Paul should appeal to such hardships to commend his ministry. But underlying the appeal is the recognition that the true servant of God is the Suffering Servant, and that he is who is the loyal follower of Christ will share his fate: 'A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.'
- Paul then speaks of moral integrity and the weapons employed.
  - Purity means sincerity
  - Knowledge, patience, kindness, the holiness of spirit → The dynamic of Paul's ministry is derived from the Spirit
  - Truthful speech is 'word of truth' or possibly the gospel
  - the power of God with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand for the left can mean the following

- A ministry that is ready for an attack from any quarter
    - A ministry armed with weapons of offense ( a sword for the right hand) and defense (a shield for the left)
    - A ministry is carried out both in prosperity (the right hand) and adversity (the left hand).
  - It's important to remember that when Paul uses the terms "weapons" or "warfare," he focuses on the spiritual dimension, not the physical one.
- Paul further commends his ministry by including nine antitheses (contrasts). In each case, one part of the antithesis represents an evaluation of his ministry from a human point of view, and the other part is the true view of one in Christ.
  - For example - Thus he commends his ministry in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute.
    - Those who judge from a human point of view (outsiders or his critics in Corinth) hold him in dishonor and ill repute.
    - Those who no longer view things from a human point of view hold Paul in honor and good repute.
- The purpose of Paul's long commendation is to show that no fault was to be found in his ministry and thereby to clear the ground for an appeal to the Corinthians for complete reconciliation with him.
- We might see the pastoral concern of a spiritual father in verse 13. First, he addresses the Corinthians as children, and second, he is appealing to his beloved children to respond to his open-heartedness towards them by showing the same to him. He desires their reciprocal affection.

## **2 Corinthians 6:14-18**

- Paul urges his readers not to enter into 'partnerships with unbelievers. But what sort of partnerships did he have in mind? Were they marriage partnerships that Paul mentioned in Corinthians 7? Was it the more general notion of partnership in pagan practices that we read in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22?
- The contrasts between righteousness and iniquity, light and darkness in the first two questions, are found frequently in the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- The word Belial, found in the third question, is also found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and intertestamental literature.
  - In these writings, Belial is a name given to the chief of demons or Satan.
- In these questions, we can see that Paul is discouraging Christians from involving in pagan worship.
- When Paul speaks here of the temple of God, the background imagery is that of the Jerusalem shrine, but in the foreground is the Christian community as God's temple. Ultimately, the Christian community must not become involved in pagan worship because its members constitute the temple of the living God.
- *How might we understand this encouragement of Paul in our interfaith relationships with other faith communities?*
- Paul's quotation from the Old Testament is drawn upon Leviticus 26:11-12 and Ezekiel 37:26-27. Paul uses these quotes to remind us of the promise from these two texts - to show how God welcomes those who turn to him.