

The Book of 2 Corinthians

Lesson 5: Our Heavenly Dwelling and the Ministry of Reconciliation -- 2 Corinthians 5:1-21

Paul has just been talking about the clay jar wasting away, and now he tells us what he is really looking forward to. He compares his body to a tent, a temporary, flimsy, easily folded thing, the kind of dwelling a traveler pitches for a night and then takes down. "For we know," he says, "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." Paul is not afraid of the tent coming down, because he knows what is waiting: a permanent home, a resurrection body, a dwelling that will never sag or leak or wear out. He groans in this tent, not because he wants to be unclothed, but because he longs to be further clothed, to have mortality swallowed up by life.

That hope changes the way Paul lives right now. "We walk by faith, not by sight," he writes. Because he is so sure of the unseen home, he makes it his aim, in the body or out of it, to please the Lord. And then he says something that should sober every one of us: "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." Even those who are saved by grace will give an account. The Christian life is not a casual stroll toward an automatic reward. It is a journey lived before the eyes of the One to whom we must answer.

But the engine that drives Paul is not fear. It is love. "For the love of Christ controls us," he says, "because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died." The death of Christ was so total, so all-encompassing, that it ended an old way of living. Those who belong to Him no longer live for themselves but for the One who died and rose for them. And the result is nothing less than a new creation: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." God does not merely improve us. In Christ He makes us new.

At the heart of the chapter is one of the most precious words in all of Scripture: reconciliation. We were estranged from God by our sin, and God Himself, in Christ, has done what was needed to bring us back. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them." And astonishingly, He has handed that message to us. We are "ambassadors for Christ," carrying His appeal to a world that does not yet know it is welcome home. The plea on Paul's lips, and on ours, is tender and urgent: "Be reconciled to God." Read this chapter and hear that appeal afresh, both as one who has come home and as one sent to call others.

Group Discussion: Paul says that in Christ, anyone is "a new creation," and that God has entrusted to His people "the ministry of reconciliation," making us "ambassadors for Christ" who plead, "Be reconciled to God" (vv. 17-20). If every Christian is an ambassador carrying

God's appeal to a estranged world, how should that shape the way a congregation thinks about the people around it? What makes us hesitant to carry that appeal, and what might embolden us?

Personal Reflection: Paul writes that "the love of Christ controls us," having concluded that One died for all so that those who live "might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (vv. 14–15). Where is your life still quietly organized around yourself, your comfort, your preferences, your plans? What would it look like this week to let the love of Christ, rather than self-interest, set the direction of your days?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1–21

Study Questions

1. Paul compares the body to a "tent" that can be destroyed, and looks ahead to "a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," given the Spirit "as a guarantee" (vv. 1–5). What does this passage teach about the Christian's hope beyond death, and how does the certainty of a heavenly, resurrection dwelling change the way a believer faces mortality?
2. How does the hope of an eternal home actually shape the way you face aging, illness, loss, or the prospect of your own death? Is that hope a living reality that steadies you, or a doctrine you affirm but rarely feel? What would help you live more in light of it?
3. Paul says, "We walk by faith, not by sight," and therefore "we make it our aim... to please him" (vv. 7–9). What does it mean to walk by faith rather than by sight, and how does making it our aim to please the Lord reorder the priorities of a Christian's life?
4. Where are you most tempted to live "by sight," letting what you can see and feel govern your decisions rather than what God has promised? What is one area where walking by faith would change a choice you are facing right now?
5. Paul says, "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" (v. 10). What does this teach about the accountability of every person, including believers, before Christ, and why does this truth stand against the idea that, once saved, a person's conduct no longer affects their standing with God?
6. How would living each day in clear awareness that you will give an account to Christ change the way you spend your time, treat people, and make decisions? Is there an area of your life you would handle differently if you truly believed He sees it all?
7. Paul says, "The love of Christ controls us," because "one has died for all, therefore all have died," so that the living "might no longer live for themselves but for him" (vv. 14–15). What does it mean that Christ's death was "for all" and that those who receive it have "died," and how does His love, rather than mere duty, become the controlling power of the Christian life?

8. Be honest about whose interests most often steer your daily choices. In what specific ways are you still living for yourself rather than for Christ, and what would change if His love, not your own comfort, held the steering wheel?
9. Paul announces that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation,” that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself,” and that He has given us “the ministry of reconciliation,” pleading through us, “Be reconciled to God,” for “he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (vv. 17–21). What does it mean to be reconciled to God and made a new creation, how does a person actually receive this reconciliation according to the gospel, and why does this passage rule out both a mere “faith only” response and the notion that, once reconciled, a person can live however they please?
10. Look back across the whole chapter, the heavenly home, the judgment seat, the controlling love of Christ, the new creation, the call to be reconciled. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this passage, and what is your first step toward that change this week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 5:10–11, reconciled to God through the death of His Son; Colossians 1:19–22, reconciled in Christ’s body to be presented holy before God; Romans 6:3–4, united with Christ’s death and raised to new life in baptism; Galatians 6:15, the new creation that counts for everything in Christ; Romans 14:10–12, each of us giving an account of himself to God