

beholds in them the result of the travail of His soul, and He is satisfied. Then, in a voice that reaches the assembled multitudes of the righteous and the wicked, He declares: “Behold the purchase of My blood! For these I suffered, for these I died, that they might dwell in My presence throughout eternal ages.” And the song of praise ascends from the white-robed ones about the throne: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.” Revelation 5:12.

Fire comes down from God out of heaven. The earth is broken up. The weapons concealed in its depths are drawn forth. Devouring flames burst from every yawning chasm. The very rocks are on fire.

The sins of the righteous having been transferred to Satan, he is made to suffer not only for his own rebellion, but for all the sins which he has caused God’s people to commit. His punishment is to be far greater than that of those whom he has deceived. After all have perished who fell by his deceptions, he is still to live and suffer on. In the cleansing flames the wicked are at last destroyed, root and branch--Satan the root, his followers the branches. The full penalty of the law has been visited; the demands of justice have been met; and heaven and earth, beholding, declare the righteousness of Jehovah.

Satan’s work of ruin is forever ended. For six thousand years he has wrought his will, filling the earth with woe and causing grief throughout the universe. The whole creation has groaned and travailed together in pain. Now God’s creatures are forever delivered from his presence and temptations. “The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they [the righteous] break forth into singing.” Isaiah 14:7. And a shout of praise and triumph ascends from the whole loyal universe. “The voice of a great multitude,” “as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings,” is heard, saying: “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” Revelation 19:6. *{The Great Controversy}*

Changing Cleveland One By One

Bishop Stephen D. Lewis

Forever Immortal

We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:8

The apostle Paul appears to tell us here that something better than our current lives, namely being in the presence of God, awaits us after death, when we depart from our bodies. The language he uses seems to imply that life after death exists apart from our bodies and will continue on in spiritual form. To understand this passage, we must learn what the Bible says about the human body and also about Paul.

Bible students must be careful when using one or a handful of verses written by Paul to prove a point of doctrine, especially when the language used is ambiguous. The apostle Peter warns us in 2 Peter 3:15, 16,

As our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

If we aren’t careful, we might end up twisting Paul’s writings to our own destruction.

Instead, we must be critical about the text and examine it to see what it truly says. We see that the text in 2 Corinthians 5:8 does not say that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. One does not equal the other. Here is the entire passage in question so that we can understand the full context:

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: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. 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

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up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:1-8

Paul likens our existing mortal bodies with an “earthly tabernacle,” and says we should not worry if it is destroyed because we have a “building of God” that awaits us. The context does not support the claim that we will be in God’s presence without a body; rather, Paul simply says we will not have THIS body. He likens our bodies to clothing that we must wear. In verse 4, Paul specifically says he does not want to be unclothed (without a body), but rather clothed upon (different body). That’s quite a different picture than a disembodied spirit that lives on after death!

When we compare this language to 1 Corinthians 15:51–54, also written by Paul, it becomes even clearer. The passage reads:

Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

Here, as in his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul uses clothing imagery to describe our bodies. We currently wear a mortal body, but in God’s presence at the resurrection we “must put on” an immortal one.

So Paul makes a true statement when he says he prefers to be absent from the body and ... present with the Lord. When we stand in God’s presence, we will not be in the same body we have now. And the Bible tells us that this transformation will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. Although we all will die, we will sleep in death, and the next conscious thought we will have after death is when Jesus sounds the trumpet of God, when we are raised from the dead, when we put on immortality forever.

When we consider all of Paul’s writings as a whole representation of his theological position, we see that his position on life after death sup-

ports the notion that deceased people go to sleep at death and await their bodily resurrection at the return of Jesus Christ.

...

Satan seems paralyzed as he beholds the glory and majesty of Christ. He who was once a covering cherub remembers whence he has fallen. A shining seraph, “son of the morning;” how changed, how degraded! From the council where once he was honored, he is forever excluded. He sees another now standing near to the Father, veiling His glory. He has seen the crown placed upon the head of Christ by an angel of lofty stature and majestic presence, and he knows that the exalted position of this angel might have been his.

Memory recalls the home of his innocence and purity, the peace and content that were his until he indulged in murmuring against God, and envy of Christ. His accusations, his rebellion, his deceptions to gain the sympathy and support of the angels, his stubborn persistence in making no effort for self-recovery when God would have granted him forgiveness—all come vividly before him.

Notwithstanding that Satan has been constrained to acknowledge God’s justice and to bow to the supremacy of Christ, his character remains unchanged. The spirit of rebellion, like a mighty torrent, again bursts forth. Filled with frenzy, he determines not to yield the great controversy. The time has come for a last desperate struggle against the King of heaven. He rushes into the midst of his subjects and endeavors to inspire them with his own fury and arouse them to instant battle. But of all the countless millions whom he has allured into rebellion, there are none now to acknowledge his supremacy. His power is at an end. The wicked are filled with the same hatred of God that inspires Satan; but they see that their case is hopeless, that they cannot prevail against Jehovah. Their rage is kindled against Satan and those who have been his agents in deception, and with the fury of demons they turn upon them.

Before the universe has been clearly presented the great sacrifice made by the Father and the Son in man’s behalf. The hour has come when Christ occupies His rightful position and is glorified above principalities and powers and every name that is named. It was for the joy that was set before Him--that He might bring many sons unto glory--that He endured the cross and despised the shame. And inconceivably great as was the sorrow and the shame, yet greater is the joy and the glory. He looks upon the redeemed, renewed in His own image, every heart bearing the perfect impress of the divine, every face reflecting the likeness of their King. He