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2 Corinthians

We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:8

This verse finishes the interrupted verse which began at 5:6. If taken together without the insert, they would say -

"So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. ... We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."

However, verse 7 was inserted as a very appropriate thought before coming to the words of verse 8. This verse literally reads, "...to be away from the home of the body, but to be at home with the Lord" (Pulpit Commentary). The change from "at home" to "present" in the translation began with William Tyndale and has been used since then.

The thought here is almost identical to that found in Philippians 1:21-25 (and particularly verse 23) with the exception that here he desires not to "depart" but rather to be done with the body without the need for dying. In other words, it is a strong case in and of itself for both the imminence of Christ's return (which Paul thought may even happen in his life), and for the doctrine of the rapture, which he clearly speaks of on several occasions in his epistles.

The idea conveyed in this verse is described by Charles Ellicott quite well -

“We are content,” he says, “if death comes before the Coming of the Lord, to accept death; for even though it does not bring with it the glory of the resurrection body, it does make us at home with Christ among the souls who wait for the resurrection.”

What this tells us is that if we die before the rapture, we will be "at home" with the Lord, but not in a glorified body. It is the resurrection which brings that about. Until then, our souls will be kept safely by the Lord as we await the glorious day when the trumpet sounds and we are changed.

Arguments for an "interim body" are not sound and there is nothing written by Paul to indicate such a state. The order is

- 1) This present life;
- 2) Either death in this life or rapture; 3a)
- 3)
 - a) If death, then our soul is "present with Christ awaiting the resurrection body, or
 - b) If rapture, we translate directly from this life to the next in the twinkling of an eye.

Life application: The doctrine of the rapture is so clearly stated in Scripture that if you dismiss it, you have been misapplying Scripture. Remedy: Stop misapplying Scripture.

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 2 Corinthians 5:9

"Therefore" is given as a summary of his thoughts from the beginning of the chapter. He has been speaking of being alive in this earthly body and also of dying - at which time we will receive our eternal, heavenly body. In order to describe

either state he says, "...whether present or absent." The Greek here literally reads, "...whether at home or away from home." To be "at home" means to be with Christ, to be "away from home" means to be separated from Him, as we currently are.

Regardless of our state, he says that "we make it our aim ... to be well pleasing to Him." The idea is that we should strive with all diligence to be pleasing to the Lord. It should be our one and only ambition. This was the life of the apostle and it should be our desire as well. In our current existence, we have to really work at this. Trials, fatigue, stress, and so much more gets in our way of accomplishing this, but through constant prayer and the fixing of our eyes on Him, we are enabled to do so.

Life application: What is it that motivates you? We tend to exert the majority of our energy and our time on that which we find most important. If it is the Lord, then you will exert these things in order to be pleasing to Him. This doesn't mean that this is done at the expense of other things, such as work. Rather, it means that we will incorporate Jesus into our other tasks. Our life will become a "living sacrifice" to Him as we earnestly strive to be pleasing to Him.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10

The words here should be perfectly understandable on their surface. The verse is not speaking to unbelievers at all. They will receive a different judgment, one of condemnation. The judgment of this verse is one of salvation.

Paul notes that "we must all," meaning all believers, "appear before the judgment seat of Christ." This is the Bema Seat of Christ. In Greek *bema* indicates "an elevated place ascended by steps, a throne, tribunal." Charles Ellicott notes that -

It "is the tribunal of the Roman magistrate, raised high above the level of the basilica, or hall, at the end of which it stood. The word was transferred, when basilicas were turned into churches, to the throne of the bishop, and in classical Greek had been used, not for the judge's seat, but for the orator's pulpit."

At the time of Paul's writing though, it had the original Roman sense of being the place of a tribunal. This is what each Christian will face. And the reason is "that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." As noted, this is not a judgment for either salvation or condemnation. That was determined when the individual received Jesus by faith. As Paul notes about every person who is in Christ -

"And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." Romans 8:10, 11

The judgment which Paul speaks of here is one of works, done in the body, while in Christ. He speaks of this same judgment in 1 Corinthians 3 -

"Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

At that time we shall stand before the Lord and He will search us out. This will be a complete evaluation, right down to the motives of the heart. Nothing will be overlooked and the thought of divine reckoning is an appropriate way of explaining what will occur. He has saved us; we will be evaluated based on what we have done with that salvation; and we will be judged according to how we responded to it in our Christian life.

The same word translated as "appear" in this verse is translated as "reveal" in 1 Corinthians 4:5 -

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God."

In other words, the secret things of the heart will not be unknown to the Lord. His evaluation will search us out completely and it is with this judgment that we will receive our eternal rewards or losses. And with all certainty, there will be a standard by which we will be judged. It will not be arbitrary or unfair, but it will be perfectly just and righteous. For those who have adhered to His word, there will be reward; for those who have disobeyed it, there will be loss.

Nobody will be able to complain that their judgment was unfair. And all will be satisfied with the results of the judgment they receive.

Life application: Oh how shallow we are to trade heaven's riches for temporary gain. The word has been given and we have been asked to pursue it and adhere to it. How many stand in disobedience to it, supposing that their dismissal of what He has spoken will be ignored. Let us not be so small-minded when we contemplate the Lord who judges.

Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

2 Corinthians 5:11

In the previous verse Paul noted that all believers will "appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." This is judgment for the saved, not the lost. Understanding this, the word *phobos* which is translated here as "terror" is not what Paul is conveying.

Rather, the word should be rendered as "fear." *Phobos* "is commonly used in Scripture – sometimes positively (in relation to God) but more often negatively of *withdrawing from* the Lord (His will)" (HELPS Word Studies). Christians, knowing that their judgment lies ahead, are to have a reverential fear and awe at the strictness by which they will be judged. However, "terror" is not a part of this judgment. In Christ, there is no condemnation.

With that in mind, we should each know that we will, in fact, be judged according to what we have done and we should be therefore be on guard to act in a right and proper manner at all times. It is because of this coming judgment that Paul and the other apostles "persuade men." It was their desire that those who had called on Christ not let their guard down as if there were no judgment at all coming upon them.

And this lesson needs to be conveyed now by all who preach and teach the word. In many ways, the Christian world has come to believe that "getting saved" means that judgment is behind us and all is peachy between us and the Lord. Concerning salvation or condemnation that is true, but that is not the end of matter.

To finish this thought, he writes that "we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences." Paul is not telling the Corinthians anything which contradicts their own status as apostles. They are not "saying one thing and doing another." Rather, what they have been imploring in others, they have lived out among themselves. This is confirmed by his words from the previous chapter -

"But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." 2 Corinthians 4:2

Life application: Getting saved is not the end of our responsibilities before the Lord. Rather, it is the beginning. We will all be judged when we stand before Him, and that judgment will be based on our adherence to His word (our instruction

manual) from the time that we were saved. Are the losses of eternal rewards worth ignoring His guidelines?

For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have *an answer* for those who boast in appearance and not in heart. 2 Corinthians 5:12

Based on his words of the previous verse, his detractors could say, "There he goes again, boasting about himself as one of the apostles!" But this isn't the case. It is a continuation of the defense he made all the way back in Chapter 3 -

"Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you or *letters* of commendation from you? ²You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; ³clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart." 2 Corinthians 3:1-3

There was no need for self-commendation because those in Corinth who came to Christ and who were then schooled in Christ testified to their apostolic ministry. Now he takes that thought and offers it to them to "give you opportunity to boast on our behalf." If the Corinthians are their "epistle" then they should feel free to make a boasting of them. Thus, there was no need for Paul and the others to commend themselves. Again, this is something he already addressed to them at the beginning of the letter -

"For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you. ¹³For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end ¹⁴(as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also *are* ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus." 2 Corinthians 1:12-14

To complete the thought of this verse, he says that their boasting is so "that you may have *an answer* for those who boast in appearance and not in heart." The term "in appearance" is literally "in face." The work of Paul and the other apostles was written on the heart, whereas the work of the others was external. They boasted of their eloquence, superior knowledge, the names of their schools, or whatever other external signs of their greatness. Paul will speak of these people directly later in the epistle. They were superficial and they were false teachers.

Life application: Paul had personal defects, he wasn't known as an eloquent speaker, and he certainly wasn't flashy. Instead he made tents to support himself and shared the gospel freely to all. Those who opposed him may have been visually appealing and very well-spoken, but they missed what was important - holding fast to God's word. Now think of those in the world today - whom would you rather trust with the message of your eternal destiny? Does a flashy presentation really matter all that much when put in this perspective?

For if we are beside ourselves, *it is for God*; or if we are of sound mind, *it is for you*. 2 Corinthians 5:13

This continues Paul's thought of the previous verse. To the Corinthians, he said that he wanted to "give you opportunity to boast on our behalf." How could they do this? Paul explains that when charges are leveled against him as an apostle, they could use the argument in this verse.

It appears that some had said that he and the other apostles were either nuts or at least on their way to the funny farm. This is what he means by "beside ourselves." It is a charge that was made against Paul in Acts 26 -

"Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!'" Acts 26:24

Even more, it is a charge that was levied against the Lord. Two such examples follow -

"Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings.²⁰ And many of them said, 'He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?'"
John 10:19, 20

&

"Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.²¹ But when His own people heard *about this*, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind.'" Mark 3:20, 21

Paul says now that if they were beside themselves, it was "for God." In other words, their zeal was so strong for upholding the truth of God that others may say they were out of their minds.

On the other hand, for those who understood their position and their zeal, they knew that they were of "sound mind." And if of sound mind, it was for the sake of those they ministered to. Therefore, they could easily defend Paul and the other apostles, being given this opportunity to boast on their behalf - "He isn't nuts, except about Jesus! He isn't crazy, but if he is, it is about the gospel. He is as right as rain."

Life application: Do you know someone who is a bit eccentric and yet is totally sold out to the Lord? Let the eccentric be overlooked; there is genius behind the zeal for Christ.

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 2 Corinthians 5:14

There is an ambiguity in the first portion of this verse so that it could read, "For the love of Christ compels us," or "For our love for Christ compels us." However,

on numerous occasions in Paul's writings, he speaks of God's love for us, so the former is probably the correct rendering (e.g. see Romans 5:5; Romans 8:35; 1Corinthians 16:24; 2Corinthians 13:14).

As Paul notes, it is this great love which "compels us." It is the motivating factor which impelled him and the other apostles forward. And the reason why is because of understanding the significance of what Christ's love means, thus the words rendered as "because we judge this." They judged the importance of what Christ did and were therefore compelled forward, knowing that their ministry was the only thing between those they encountered and salvation or condemnation. This is reflected in the words, "...that if One died for all, then all died."

Christ died a substitutionary death. He did not die for His own sins, but for the sins of the world. However, in order for those sins to be forgiven, the message of Christ must be transmitted to people. When they hear and believe, then they are granted forgiveness through His death. The words "then all died" indicate that whoever (they are potential, not actual, until received) receives Christ "dies" with Him. This is reflected elsewhere in Paul's writings, such as -

"For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Galatians 2:19, 20

In Christ, we die to sin; it no longer has mastery over us. At that time, the life we live is lived to God and we are no longer held by the power of the devil. This is the message which so compelled the apostles, urging them forward in order to bring many to a saving knowledge of what God did in Christ for the people of the world.

Life application: How important are the souls of those you encounter to you? If you are the only person they will meet who could bring them to Christ and you fail to speak, they will face a vastly different fate than they may otherwise have faced if you had simply spoken. Don't withhold the wonderful message of reconciliation!

...and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. 2 Corinthians 5:15

This is a further explanation of the words, "For the love of Christ compels us..." As Jesus Christ "died for all," he now explains "that those who live should no longer live for themselves."

Jesus Christ "died for all" potentially, but He actually only died for the elect. Those who have received Jesus Christ are the elect according to God's foreknowledge. In other words, God knew that they would receive Him and therefore Jesus has saved them. While they live, they "should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again."

This explains why the apostles didn't go out making a lot of money off sharing the gospel. It explains why they were willing to suffer persecution and hardship. It explains why they were willing to give all for the sake of Christ. Paul is saying that all believers should have a like-attitude. We may have a job and a family, but we are to put Christ above all else. He isn't asking us to give up everything we have, but to live our lives in the proper, Christ-centered, perspective.

He gives this same sentiment elsewhere in his writings several times. One example is found in Romans 6 -

"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:8-11

The apostle Peter also shared this same sentiment -

"Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² that he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." 1 Peter 4:1, 2

Life application: Christ died and rose for us so that we could truly live. Therefore, let us truly live for Him!

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus no longer*. 2 Corinthians 5:16

"Therefore" is given to have us think on what has been stated thus far and as a lead in to a full explanation of that information. Paul has noted that "if One died for all, then all died." He then noted that "He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again."

These words give the basis for the "therefore." Because of our having died with Christ, we should, "from now on," have a different attitude towards others. Instead of seeing them as simply people whom we interact with by using normal human motives, we should "regard no one according to the flesh." We are to no longer make superficial judgments, but are rather to regard other believers as those for whom Christ died.

We have died with Him and we should live for Him. Our judgment of others is to be based on our spiritual relationship with Him. In other words, we shouldn't look at and regard a person because they are famous, because of their status in society, because of their amount of wealth, because of their color, or because of any other external reason. Instead, we should view all people based on their relationship to Christ. Our regard of others is not "according to the flesh" but according to who they are in a new, spiritual way.

To show us what he means, he next says, "Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer." There was a time when Paul saw Christ as a mere human. His idea of who Christ should be was a conquering king over an earthly kingdom. Others may have seen Christ as a great scientist or a man of great philosophical wisdom. Today, Jehovah's Witnesses see Christ as a created being and not the Lord God.

Whatever carnal, fleshly way we once saw Christ, if we are truly "in" Christ, we no longer know Him in this way. Instead, we see Him as our Lord. We regard Him as the One to whom we are to fix our hopes, our goals, our aspirations, and our eyes upon. Paul once viewed Christ as a dead person whose followers needed to be destroyed, but then he encountered the risen Christ and that all changed.

His words about Christ show that our attitude should also be different concerning His followers. We are to regard them first and foremost as saved believers, spiritually reborn and valued children of God because of the work of Jesus. This idea can be beautifully seen in the slave Onesimus. Paul writes these words about him in Philemon -

"For perhaps he departed for a while for this *purpose*, that you might receive him forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord."
Philemon 1:15, 16

Though he was still a slave in the flesh, Paul asked his master to regard him as "a beloved brother." In Christ, all things are new. This is what Paul is relaying to us in his words today.

Life application: Who do you show more regard for in your congregation - the handsome, wealthy, or powerful? Rather than looking at externals, let us regard other believers first and foremost from their position in Christ. Let us look at them as valued brothers and sisters with whom we will spend eternity.

Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17

"Therefore" builds upon the thought (which was also a "therefore") from the previous verse. Paul continues to expand on the meaning of our new life in Christ. In order to do so, he says that "if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation." Being "in" Christ comes by faith in Him. This is the thought of Romans 10:9. When we believe, we are saved. At that moment, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit according to Ephesians 1:13, 14. This is our "baptism of the Holy Spirit." It is a one-time occurrence upon belief in Christ.

From that moment, we are "a new creation." God positionally sets us in the heavenly places at that moment (as noted in Ephesians 2:6) showing that salvation is a "done deal." The concept of eternal salvation permeates Scripture. Verses such as 2 Corinthians 5:17, when looked at objectively, can mean nothing other than this. To assume that we are a "new creation" and yet could suddenly become unsaved is unfathomable.

From the moment we are saved "old things have passed away." In the Greek, there is an article in front of "old things" and so it should be rendered, "the old things." The things that we were once identified with are no longer applicable to us. This does not mean that we have attained perfection or that many saved people won't choose enormously bad paths to follow. Rather, this is speaking of how we are considered from God's perspective.

In Him, "all things have become new." This is a shadowy mirror of the words of Isaiah 43 -

"Do not remember the former things,
Nor consider the things of old.
¹⁹ Behold, I will do a new thing,
Now it shall spring forth;
Shall you not know it?" Isaiah 43:18, 19

Because Paul says here that we are "a new creation," it is an act of God, not of man. Only God can create. Thus, what man does after this moment is irrelevant to the status of the person. He is created anew by God and therefore what man does no longer has any bearing on the new creation. Paul alludes to this in Galatians 6 -

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation." Galatians 6:15

It is God who makes new; it is God who seals His redeemed; and it is God who will continue to save them until they are brought into His presence. The finality of the decision is His and, once again, it shows quite clearly the doctrine of eternal salvation. As Solomon notes in Ecclesiastes 3 -

"I know that whatever God does,
It shall be forever.
Nothing can be added to it,
And nothing taken from it.
God does *it*, that men should fear before Him." Ecclesiastes 3:14

Life application: By a simple act of faith in Jesus Christ, a person moves from Adam to Christ. We are saved by God and become a new creation. Concerning salvation, we cannot add to what He has done, nor will what He has done be taken from us. Therefore, let us live our lives for Him, knowing that our eternal rewards and losses are based on the lives we live from the moment of our salvation.