

# The Minister's Resurrection Hope

2 Corinthians 5:1-5

## Introduction

Well after a considerably long hiatus, we return this morning to our study of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. So turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 5. And because it's been several months since we've had a sermon in 2 Corinthians, I think it's helpful to remind ourselves as to why we're studying this Book in the first place. We have turned to this great letter from the pen of the Apostle Paul in order to better understand and to be better equipped for the Christian ministry. From the beginning, my aim in choosing to preach through 2 Corinthians has been to help you understand that if you are a *partaker* of the New Covenant, you are a *minister* of the New Covenant—that if you have been saved by the Gospel of Christ, you have been called to the ministry of that same Gospel.

And my prayer has been that through our study this letter, GraceLife would grow—that we would be increasingly better equipped to minister the Gospel of Christ to the lost who yet stand in need of the forgiveness of sins, and to minister that same Gospel to one another: to your brothers and sisters in the body of Christ at Grace Community Church. That is the twofold ministry to which each and every one of you as been called. And we have turned to 2 Corinthians in pursuit of that goal because 2 Corinthians contains the greatest treatise on the nature of Christian ministry anywhere in Scripture. As Paul comes under fire from false apostles in Corinth, seeking to undermine his apostleship, his influence, and his Gospel, he is driven to defend the legitimacy of his ministry against these attacks. And in the providence of God, that defense of apostolic ministry provides an excellent blueprint for Christians throughout all ages who desire to serve the Lord faithfully in ministry.

And in our study of this great manual of Christian ministry, we've discovered that the life of the true minister of the Gospel—which is to say, the life of a true Christian who is obediently following the Lord's command to lay his life down in ministry—that person's life is characterized by weakness, by conflict, and by suffering. Paul says in chapter 4, verses 8 and 9, that the true minister of the Gospel is in all things afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. This is who we are! We are not the polished, put-together, every-hair-in-place, universally-welcomed, rightful-heirs of the world's praises! We are those who always carry about in the body the dying of Jesus, verse 10. We who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, verse 11. "Christ crucified" is not only our *message*, but it is our *model* for ministry as well. And just as Jesus our Master laid down his life for the life and health of His Church, so also do we, as the true slaves of our Master, embrace that same weakness, and lay

down our lives—daily crucifying our own comforts and preferences—in the service of the life and health of the Church.

And so we are not the cultural elite, or ministerial fat-cats, for whom the world casts down its palm branches. We are the dying living—perpetual martyrs—who lay down our lives for the salvation of the lost and for the sanctification of the saints. In chapter 4 verse 12, Paul says, “So death works in us, but life in you.” The death of weakness and conflict and difficulty and suffering works in the minister of the Gospel, but the spiritual life of health and growth and edification and holiness works in the people of God as a result of those labors.

You see, we are to hold our lives loosely! Inside the church, we have been called to lay down our lives in sacrificial service of one another—to minister compassion to our brothers and sisters, and to labor alongside them as their servants for the sake of their growth and sanctification. And that can get messy! It can get difficult! It can get painful, even, as you pour your life into your brothers and sisters—giving of your time and energy and strength—to help them put off sin and put on righteousness, only to have them take one step forward and two steps back.

And outside the church, we have been called to be Christ’s ambassadors, heralding terms of peace from our King to His avowed enemies. And those enemies do not take kindly to the authoritative declaration that there is a God in heaven who created them and to whom they are accountable, that there is a set of moral absolutes consistent with God’s holy character to which they must conform or be punished, that they stand guilty before a holy God for failing to meet that standard every day of their lives, that there’s nothing they can do—no good works that are good enough—to pay the debt they’ve incurred or earn favor with the God they’ve been alienated from, and that the only way out of that horrible mess is to turn from their sin and trust in a crucified and resurrected rabbi who claims to be God in the flesh! And not only do those enemies not take kindly to that message, more and more, in our society, those enemies mock and ridicule and marginalize and ostracize and demoralize and heap shame upon those who preach that message. Paul spoke of afflictions, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, sleeplessness, and hunger (2 Cor 6:4–5). He exhorted Timothy both to “do the work of an evangelist,” *and* to endure hardship—because the one necessarily leads to the other.

GraceLife, if this is to be our life, as ministers of the Gospel of Christ, where are we going to draw the strength and the resolve to press forward in this kind of life-laid-down, cruciform service of the church? How are we going to stare obscurity in the face, stare conflict in the face, stare persecution in the face, stare death itself in the face, and press on in joyful, enduring ministry even in the midst of affliction?

Paul has been answering that question for us in 2 Corinthians. In chapter 4, verses 1 and 16, he says, “Therefore, we do not lose heart.” We do not give up. We do not decide that the tension,

and the discomfort, and the conflict that we experience as we preach the Gospel to this perverse and unbelieving generation is too much to bear. We do not decide that that laboring and pleading with our brothers and sisters to put off sin and put on righteousness is just too spiritually and emotionally taxing. We do not lose heart. We fulfill the ministry the Lord has entrusted to us. We go on speaking the Gospel, and we go on serving the saints, because we fix the eyes of our heart not on the momentary and light afflictions that this life brings us, but on the eternal weight of glory that awaits us in the next. We can lay down our lives, because we know that we will live *again*.

And as he wraps up chapter four and begins chapter 5, Paul develops that theme of how a sure and certain confidence in the resurrection fuels our joyful, enduring ministry, even in the midst of affliction. Let's read our text for this morning. And though we'll be focusing on the first five verses of chapter 5, let's begin reading in chapter 4, verse 16. 2 Corinthians 4:16 to 5:5:

“Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup>while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. <sup>5:1</sup>For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup>For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, <sup>3</sup>inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. <sup>4</sup>For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup>Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.”

In this text, Paul gives us **three components** of a Christian's view of life and death from which we can draw strength and resolve to persevere in the kind of life-sacrificing ministry to which we are called.

### **I. The Minister's Persuasion (v. 1)**

And that **first component**, I'm calling **the minister's persuasion**. We see this in verse 1: “For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Paul can persevere in faithful service to the body of Christ—even the kind of service that requires him to lay down his life—because he *knows* something, because he has been **persuaded** of something to be true. The word “For” at the beginning of verse 1 indicates that this thought is causally connected to Paul's previous thought in verses 16 to 18. And so if you connect verse 1 with verses 16 to 18, you get, “Therefore, we do not lose heart . . . *for we know*.”

This is reminiscent of the point that Paul made back in chapter 4, verses 13 and 14. There, he said that he goes on speaking the Gospel, even in the midst of great opposition and even the threat of death, because he sincerely believes the Gospel. He believes, therefore he speaks. But then he says that it is his knowing that fuels his believing: “We believe, therefore we speak, *knowing* that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.” “We speak because we believe, and we believe *because we know*.”

Strength, resolve, and perseverance in ministry, are not born of vague wishes, airy platitudes, or of the kind of faux-humility that is allergic to absolute truth claims and settled convictions. Strength for difficult ministry is born of conviction; it comes from a rock-solid confidence and certain knowledge of the truth. The pagan, secular-humanist redefinition of “faith” that thinks of faith as just a leap-in-the-dark, or a wish-upon-a-star, or “I don’t know I just believe,” or “Well, I know that’s what the text seems to say, but I just want to leave open the possibility that I might be wrong,”—that kind of knowledge-less faith will not fuel the kind of difficult, dangerous, sacrificial ministry to which you’re called. The only kind of faith that is going to put steel in your spine and pump the blood of compassion through your veins is the kind of faith that has its sure and solid foundation in the knowledge of the truth. The only kind of faith that will cause you to exclaim in triumph, “Therefore we do not lose heart!” is the faith that confidently asserts, “For we *know*!”

And what does Paul know—what particular truth is Paul **persuaded** of—that strengthens his resolve to go on ministering in the midst of affliction? Answer: He knows he will be resurrected from the dead. We’ve quoted these verses time after time to remind us of the difficulty that faces the true minister of the Gospel. Paul says in Romans 8:36, “We are being killed all day long, we are like sheep led to the slaughter.” 1 Corinthians 15:30–32: “We are in danger every hour. We die daily.” Again, in chapter 4 verse 11, he says that he’s constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake! And yet verse 16: “Therefore, we do not lose heart,” and chapter 5 verse 1, “. . . for we know.” “We know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Even if I should face death—even if the constant opposition, conflict, and persecution that results from my faithfully preaching the Gospel and ministering to the saints results in my losing my life—I know that God will raise me from the dead in a glorified body. The very worst that they can do to me is take my life, but I have a Savior who is Himself the resurrection and the life!”

You say, “Where do you get the doctrine of the resurrection from verse 1?” Well, Paul does use a lot of metaphorical language throughout this passage, so it might not be immediately obvious. You see him talk about an earthly “tent,” our “house,” a “building” from God, and then a “house” not made with hands. But it’s not terribly difficult to understand if we take a patient look. When he says, “If the earthly tent which is our house is torn town,” he’s talking about the possibility of dying as a result of his repeated conflicts in ministry. He pictures his present body

as a tent that houses his soul. The Apostle Peter uses this same word picture in 2 Peter 1:13–14, when he says, “I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.” And “earthly dwelling” in both verses is the NASB’s way of bringing out the sense of the word, but the Greek word is *skēnōma*, which literally is the word “tent.” The Holman Christian Standard Bible translates it “bodily tent.” So Peter is telling the churches under his care, “Since Christ has made clear to me that the laying aside of my bodily tent is coming soon—that is, since I’m going to die and leave this body in the ground and go to be with the Lord—I think it’s right, as long as I’m still *in* my body, to remind you of the truth that you’ve known and become convinced of.”

And Paul uses the same metaphor in our passage. The earthly tent that is our house is our present body. And it’s instructive for us to know that the Apostles thought of the body as a tent. The dominating concept in speaking of the body as a tent is the idea of temporariness, or transitoriness, or impermanence. A tent is not like a house that’s built on a foundation. As illustrated by the Tabernacle in Israel’s wilderness wanderings, a tent was for setting up camp for a short time, and then breaking camp and moving on to the next site after a brief stay. Israel wasn’t setting up their permanent home in the wilderness; like Abraham their father, they were pilgrims on a journey through a foreign land. And so they sojourned in their tents, setting them up and tearing them down day after day. Paul says: life in this present body is like that. This body that we have: it’s just a tent. It’s got no permanent foundations. We set it up, live in it for a little while, and before we know it it’s torn down. Now, we don’t abuse it; it’s the only tent we’ve got for the time we’ve got it! We need to be good stewards of our tent! But we recognize that no matter how good care we take of our tent, as Paul says in chapter 4 verse 16, this outer man is decaying.

And Paul’s point is: I am not going to live like my tent is my permanent home. I am not going to so cherish the things of this world, and this life, that I am going to let concern for what is temporary and passing away cause me to be unfaithful in matters that will last forever. I’m not going to get so comfortable, and so complacent, and so at home with this present world, that when my commitment to Christ, and to the ministry of the Gospel, and to the service of the church—when that starts to threaten my comforts, and my preferences, and my life in this tent, I’m not going to sacrifice my commitment to serving Christ and His Church just so I can preserve my tent. I’m going to recognize that I’m a sojourner in a foreign land, laying up treasure for myself not in this world but in heaven, and I’m going to live my life according to that maxim that Paul stated in Philippians 1:21: “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain!” “Christ is more precious to me than all this life can offer, and all that death can take!”

Why? Because rather than investing in my temporary, decaying, impermanent tent, I know that if my ministry requires that tent to be torn down—if I have to surrender my life in service to Christ

and His Church—I know that I have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. That phrase, “not made with hands,” is used throughout the New Testament to speak of that which is heavenly and spiritual in contrast to what is earthly. Colossians 2:11 says that in Christ believers were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands. There, Paul is contrasting the earthly circumcision that the Judaizers were prescribing with the true identifying mark of Christ’s people: the spiritual circumcision of the heart, regeneration. In Hebrews 9:11, the author says that in His high priestly ministry of atonement, Christ entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands—and then the author says what he means by that—“that is to say, not of this creation.” And at the trial of Jesus in Mark 14:58, the false witnesses said, “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.’” And of course, we learn from John 2:21 that Jesus was speaking of the temple of His body. And so when Scripture refers to the resurrection body as a building or a temple made without hands, it’s not saying that it’s immaterial or nonphysical—since, of course, Jesus’ resurrection body was physical. But the resurrection body’s not being made with hands points to the fact that it’s not of *this* creation, but of the *new* creation. It’s spiritual, not in the sense of nonphysical, but in the sense that it belongs to that realm in which everything is perfectly submitted to the will of the Holy Spirit.

So you see, the minister’s hope is not in the preservation of this present body—that is transient, and impermanent, and fading away—but in the reception of a resurrection body that will never fade away. In contrast to our earthly tent, we hope in the building from God—a body that is fixed, and secure, and indestructible, and eternal, free from the decay and the corruption and the deterioration of our present body. That is our permanent home, not this one!

Paul’s said it before and here he says it again: Friends, the worst that this world can do to us is kill us. And we serve a God who will raise us from the dead! And may it be that we live in such a way that only makes sense if we’re going to be raised from the dead! GraceLife, let us live so boldly in our proclamation and ministry of the Gospel that we need a God who can raise the dead! Let’s be willing to hold our lives loosely. Let’s look for ways to lay our lives down in the name of love for God and neighbor rather than seeking only what’s safe, and comfortable, and easy, and convenient!

You say, “Mike, you’re being melodramatic. I mean, I know the Republican Party just nominated Donald Trump, but I’m not threatened with death for my evangelism. At least not yet!” And my response is: You may not be called to be killed for Christ’s sake, but you *have* been called to lay down your life—to die to self every day, and be one of the dying living that gives your life to see real, life-on-life discipleship happening in our church! We’re tempted to think that with all we do—five days of work, seven days of running after the kids; fellowship group, main service, and evening service on Sundays; Bible study and men’s and women’s group

during the week—with all that going on, we're tempted to think that the bit of time that's left over is to spend on ourselves.

But there is work to be done, friends! People need a hospital visit! Others need rides to church! Others need help cleaning up around the house! And still others need you roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty as you labor with them to put off their sin and pursue holiness! You say, "If I do all that, my whole *life* is going to pass me by!" And God looks you in the eye and promises you that if your earthly tent which is your house is torn down, you have a building from God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! You can be free to wear this tent out in the service of Christ's Church, because it is not your home. Your home is your resurrection body—fit for the new earth, free from sin and corruption, and perfectly suited by the Triune God for unfettered fellowship and communion with Him! The strength and the resolve to faithfully persevere in life-sacrificing ministry—even in the face of death—comes from **the minister's persuasion**—his rock-solid confidence and certain knowledge—of his bodily resurrection.

## II. The Minister's Priorities (vv. 2–4)

There's a **second component** of the Christian's view of life and death in this text that strengthens us to minister sacrificially. Not only do we see the minister's persuasion in verse 1; we also see **the minister's priorities** in verses 2 through 4. Paul writes, "For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life."

Now, the first thing I want you to notice about these verses is that verse 4 is essentially a restatement of verses 2 and 3. Look at the two of them side by side: Verse 2: "For indeed." Verse 4: "For indeed." Verse 2: "In this house." Verse 4: "While we are in this tent." Verse 2: "We groan, longing." Verse 4: "We groan, being burdened." Verse 2: "Longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven." Verse 4: "Because we . . . want to be . . . clothed." Verse 3: "Inasmuch as we . . . will not be found naked." Verse 4: "Because we don't want to be unclothed." And so as we treat these three verses, we're not going to repeat everything we say in verses 2 and 3 again in verse 4. We're just going to treat them as a whole, because verse 4 really is just a summary and re-statement of verses 2 and 3.

And really what's instructive for us in these verses is the view we get of Paul's perspective on life and death—**the minister's priorities**, as I've said. The first thing you notice about Paul's priorities in life and death is that he prefers the next life over this one. He has a holy dissatisfaction with this life, and a holy longing and yearning for the next. He says, "While we are in the tent of this body, we groan"—present continuous: "We are always groaning,

continuously being burdened with the longing to be rid of this body, and to be clothed with the resurrection body.” You see, the minister of the Gospel has not formed an adulterous attachment to the present life and the present world. He is not at home in this body, such that his life is marked by comfort and ease. He is a stranger, a sojourner in a foreign land, and so life in this present body is marked by groaning.

Why does he groan? Well, as he said just back in verse 16, the outer man is decaying. Paul uses a word there that describes a process of debilitation—of something being spoiled, or gradually destroyed through a kind of corrosion. Jesus uses this word when He speaks of moths destroying clothing. Paul is saying, little by little, the moths of this world eat holes into our tent until it’s eventually destroyed. Our bodies break down; we can’t do the things we used to. As time passes, our muscles weaken, we don’t see as well, we don’t hear as well; so often our organs stop working properly and we need medical attention, and pharmacy prescriptions, and surgeries. Because the cancer of sin has infected every part of this existence, our bodies are characterized by weakness, physical decay, indignity, sickness, suffering, and eventually, no matter what we do to prevent it, our bodies wear out and succumb to death.

But more than just longing for freedom from physical weakness and suffering, Paul groaned with longing for a body that would be free from sin. The body is not inherently sinful in itself; Adam and Eve were created as body-soul entities, which God described as “very good.” And we’ll see more about the goodness of physical existence in a moment. But while the body is not inherently sinful, it is too often the instrument of our sinful acts—the vehicle through which we gratify our sinful desires. Our bodies, which Scripture describes as members of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:15) and as temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), have been given to us so that we might, 1 Corinthians 6:20, “glorify God in our body.” And yet that very body which we ought to set apart and consecrate to the service of the Lord, we yield to sin as an instrument of unrighteousness (Rom 6:12). We were given our bodies to make much of Christ and to serve Him and His people, and yet too often we prostitute our bodies to fulfill the desires of the flesh!

Dear friends, if you have been acquainted with these thoughts—if you know anything of the repentant sorrow of having grieved the Holy Spirit of God who is in you, if you know anything of the pain of knowing you’ve dishonored God again as you confess your sin and ask for forgiveness—you know what it is to groan in this body! You know what it is to cry with Paul, “O wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” GraceLife, do you know what that is? Have you been experimentally acquainted with the grief and the mourning over your sin? Are you wearied by the war against sin that is waged between your flesh and the Spirit? Do you long to be free from the body of this death, and serve and worship Christ in perfect purity and holiness? Dear people, do you groan? Or have you become so at home in the body of your sinful flesh—so at home in this world, so complacent in your battle against sin—



that you breathe the restful sighs of comfort and ease in this body, and groan only at the prospect of leaving this body?

Paul yearned to be in his heavenly dwelling. In Philippians 1:23, Paul says that he has the earnest desire—the *epithumia*, the intense longing and yearning—to depart from this life “and be with Christ, for that is *very much better*,” he says! to be in the presence of the Savior he loved and cherished above all else! He was homesick for heaven! He says in our chapter, just a few verses later in 2 Corinthians 5:8, “We are of good courage, I say, and prefer to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”

And if we are going to be endowed with the strength to persevere in difficult, sacrificial ministry to the body of Christ, we must have this same **priority**. We must prefer the next life to this one. Because as long as we prefer to be present in the body and absent from the Lord, we are going to cling to this body, and this life; we are going to treasure the false pleasures of this world. And when the commands of Christ and the needs of the body of Christ demand that we lay aside the comforts of this life to serve Christ’s people, we’re going to be so idolatrously attached to our worldly comforts that we refuse to lay our lives down in sacrificial ministry. It is only when we prefer to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord—when we experience the groaning that is proper to this temporary body, and the longing for eternity with Christ—that we can be free to lay down our lives, to surrender our bodies, to spend and be spent for the body of Christ (2 Cor 12:15), to endure all things, as Paul says, for the sake of the elect (2 Tim 2:10).

But notice: it’s not just that Paul prefers the next life over this one. These verses also teach us that **the minister prioritizes** eternal life in the resurrection body over against the intermediate state in which the soul is separate from the body. Paul’s longing is not to escape the body, as if the body is just some sort of prison from which the soul longs to be free. The fact that he groans in his present body doesn’t mean that he wants to ultimately be bodiless. No, verse 2: he groans and longs for his *dwelling* from heaven—his resurrection *body*. And verse 4: He doesn’t want to be unclothed—that is to say, he doesn’t want to be a soul without a body; he wants to be clothed, so that what is mortal—the decaying tent of our earthly body—will—not “be taken off and thrown away”—but will be *swallowed up* by life.

It’s necessary to follow Paul’s metaphors, because they provide great insight into our doctrine of eschatology. He says in verse 3 that he doesn’t want to be found naked, and in verse 4, that he doesn’t want to be unclothed but clothed. And in the context where “houses” and “tents” and “dwelling places” refer to our physical bodies—whether the present body in this life or the resurrection body on the new earth—the idea of being clothed must refer to the same thing. So if being clothed speaks of having a body, being naked, or being unclothed, refers to a state of existence in which the soul is without a body. And what state of existence is that? It’s what we call “the intermediate state.”

The intermediate state is the time in between our present life on earth and the eternal state on the new earth. When a Christian dies, passing from this life, he leaves his body in the ground, but his soul goes immediately to be with the Lord in the present heaven. That's what we saw in 2 Corinthians 5:8: to be absent from the body means that we are present with the Lord. So if you're present with the Lord in heaven, you are absent from the body. That's why Hebrews 12:23 calls the saints who are already in heaven "the *spirits* of the righteous made perfect." They're spirits; they have been separated from their bodies. But that is not our final destiny. We are not going to spend eternity as disembodied spirits in the present heaven. Jesus says in John 5:28–29, "An hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; [the righteous] to a resurrection of life, [and the unrighteous] to a resurrection of judgment." So after Christ returns, all people will be raised and fitted with a resurrected body. Those who die in their sins will be raised at the Great White Throne judgment, and will be given a resurrection body fit to suffer God's eternal judgment in the lake of fire (Rev 20:15). But those who die in Christ will be raised when Christ returns, and will be given a resurrection body fit to serve Him forever on the new earth. Revelation 21:1 tells us that after Christ's millennial kingdom, God will create "a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth [will pass] away." So the time in between our present state on earth and the eternal state on the new earth is called "the intermediate state." And because it's a time when our soul is separated from our body, Paul calls that time a time of nakedness, or a time of being unclothed.

And what's interesting is that we see **the minister's priorities**, in that Paul says his hope is not ultimately set on dying and going to the intermediate heaven without his body, but rather his hope is set on surviving until the return of Christ, and going straight from this body into his resurrection body. And to see this, I want you to turn back to 1 Corinthians 15. The Corinthians had always had some trouble embracing the doctrine of the bodily resurrection, and so 1 Corinthians 15 is Paul's great treatise on this doctrine. And in verse 51, Paul tells us what will happen to those who are alive when Christ comes for His Church. He says, "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep,"—which is to say, not all of us will die before the Lord returns—"but we will all be changed,<sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.<sup>53</sup> For this perishable must put on"—there's the same clothing language he uses in our passage—"53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality."

So what he's teaching there is that not all Christians will die before the rapture; some will be alive at the Lord's coming. But even those who are alive will be changed in a moment; in the twinkling of an eye, they will "put on" over their perishable and mortal bodies their imperishable, immortal resurrection bodies. For those who are alive at Christ's coming, there is no intermediate state where the soul is separated from the body for a time. Your present body is immediately glorified into your resurrection body. And he underlines that point in our passage by

using a special form of the verb “to put on.” In 1 Corinthians 15 it’s the verb *enduō*. But in 2 Corinthians 5:4, he says we want to be clothed, *ependuō*. By adding that preposition to the beginning of the verb, he gives it the nuance of not just being clothed, but being *over*clothed. It has the idea not just of putting on a garment, but putting on a garment *over* another. Commentator Philip Edgcumbe Hughes explains it helpfully: “The picture conveyed is that of the heavenly body being put on like an outer vesture, over the earthly body, with which the Apostle is as it were clad, so as not only to cover it but to absorb and transfigure it” (168–69). That’s also why he says at the end of verse 4, “so that what is mortal will be *swallowed up* by life.” It’s not that you lay aside one body and get another one, it’s that the very body you presently have will be transformed into the resurrection body, which Paul pictures as being swallowed up or engulfed by life itself. And so he says, back in 1 Corinthians 15:54, “But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up’ in victory.” So glorious!

So let’s survey **the minister’s priorities** concerning life and death. Paul says, (1) Look, it is good for me to remain alive on this earth, because it means that I’ll continue to serve Christ and His Church in sacrificial, life-laid-down ministry. Philippians 1:25: “I know that I will remain and continue with you all *for your progress and joy in the faith*.” So, life in this body is good if it means fruitful labor in service to the Church. (2) But it’s better to depart and be with Christ, Philippians 1:23—to be absent from this body and to be present with the Lord, 2 Corinthians 5:8. I have no adulterous attachment to the comforts of this life. In fact, I groan in this body, and if this earthly tent is torn down, I look forward to my glorified body at the time of the resurrection. (3) But it is far and away best for me to continue on in this present life, serving Christ right up until He returns. In that case, I’ll avoid death—that the unnatural separation of soul and body that exists only because of the curse of sin—and will go straight from this present body into my resurrected and glorified body.

And so the brief word of application I have for you here, is that you ought to set your affections not merely on a disembodied, immaterial existence in the present heaven, as if it was heaven just to escape your body. Rather, cultivate a taste for physical life on the new earth in your resurrection body—when you’ll not only have a heart undistracted and un-tempted by the deceitful lusts of sin; when you’ll not only have fully sanctified ambitions and truly godly aspirations; but when, along with those things, you’ll have a physical body that is able to carry out all of those holy impulses without a moment’s distraction or weariness! A body that will be entirely submitted to the will of the Holy Spirit, and able to enjoy the bounties of a sin-free physical creation—taking in fresh apprehensions of the glory of Christ from all perfectly-functioning five senses! That is the content of the hope that fuels a life of joyful, enduring ministry even in the midst of affliction! That is the reservoir from which we can draw the strength necessary to press on in the kind of life-sacrificing ministry to which we are called!

### III. The Father's Promises (v. 5)

And finally—we've seen the minister's persuasion, and just now the minister's priorities. A **third component** of the Christian's view of life and death that fuels sacrificial ministry is, number three, **the Father's promises**. And we see that in verse 5: "Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge." The strength for life-giving sacrificial ministry is grounded upon the minister's confidence that we will one day be glorified in our resurrection bodies. And as that strength flows from our confidence, our confidence is grounded upon God's **promises**. In verse 5, Paul gives a twofold assurance that the glorious destiny we just meditated upon is sure to be ours. The certainty of glorification is rooted in the purpose of God and in the pledge of the Spirit.

Can there be any doubt that you who are in Christ will be raised from the dead into a body like His own? Paul says this glorification is the very purpose for which God has prepared us! From the beginning of God's plan of salvation, his intention has always been to save whole persons in the integrity of body and soul. Paul tells us in Romans 8:29 and 30 that those whom God foreknew—that is, those on whom God determined to set His electing love—"these He predestined to become conformed to the image of Christ. And these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also *glorified*." You see, God's saving purpose does not stop at conversion and *justification*. He has never been concerned to save us only from the *penalty* of sin. Neither does God's saving purpose stop at *sanctification*; He will save us from even more than the *power* of sin! God's purpose extends all the way to *glorification*—to saving His people from the very *presence* of *all* sin, *even* in our flesh!

Jesus Himself said this in John 6:38 to 40. He announced, "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." And then He tells us what God's will is. "This is the will of Him who sent me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but *raise it up on the last day*. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself *will raise him up on the last day*." This has always been God's saving will! And Jesus knew it when He came to accomplish our salvation in His earthly ministry. From our election by the Father in eternity past, to our redemption in Christ at the fullness of time—God's saving purpose was always to bring the blessings of His saving grace to consummation in our glorification! And remember! God always finishes what He starts! That's why Paul says in Philippians 1:6: "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you"—which is to say, God—He "will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." God has begun salvation in you, and He will complete salvation in you.

And as if that wasn't enough—if the Spirit-inspired promise of the saving purpose of Almighty God was too much of an *external* promise for you—God guarantees that He will bring this

promise to pass by putting the Holy Spirit *in our hearts* as a pledge of His faithfulness. Paul says, God gave us His Spirit as a pledge. And this word *arrabōn* that gets translated “pledge,” or “earnest,” is just *packed* with significance. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, “This is surely one of the most glorious things anywhere in the Scripture” (*Great Doctrines*, 259). It’s a commercial term that refers to an earnest or down payment. It was the first installment of a payment that served as the guarantee that the rest would follow. If the purchase wasn’t completed, the down payment was lost, and so as an earnest, it bound the one who gave it to make good on his promise.

By using this terminology of God’s promise, Scripture teaches us that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s heart is God’s pledged guarantee that the believer will receive all the promised future blessings of his salvation. In giving the earnest of the Spirit, God has bound Himself to bring to full completion the salvation He has begun in every believer (Ryrie, *Holy Spirit*, 32). And God is not a welshe! He does not go back on His promises! If there’s anything the entire Old Testament teaches it’s that God is faithful to His covenant promises! So you want a guarantee of God’s faithfulness? He has made the Third Member of the Trinity—eternal God Himself!—to permanently dwell inside of you! And this Spirit was Himself the efficient cause of Christ’s resurrection! The One who raised your forerunner and head, the Lord Jesus Christ, from the dead, is the same One who dwells in you! And as Paul says in Romans 8:11, “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”

But not only that! It’s not just that the Spirit is the surest guarantee of God’s faithfulness. But the permanent indwelling of the Spirit *is* the firstfruits of the consummation of saving blessings that we will experience in the New Earth! Part of what glorification *is* is that the believer will be filled with the Spirit without measure! By giving us the Holy Spirit Himself, God has given us a small portion of the very thing that will characterize our resurrected life! In the person of the Spirit, we have, as one commentator said, a little bit of heaven in us already! He Himself is the first installment of the inheritance which is now being guarded in heaven for us, ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet 1:4–5)!

### **Conclusion**

And on the strength of this pledge, believer, you can be absolutely certain that if your earthly tent is torn down in service to Christ—if you give your life to the ministry of the Gospel both to the lost and to the Church—you will live again! You have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! And if that’s true, let the unshakeable assurance of your glorification drive you to radically sacrificial ministry—to lay down your life taking the Gospel to the lost and serving the body of Christ.

{Refer to audio for the final Gospel presentation}