

CHAPTER 5

The apostle proceeds in showing the reasons why they did not faint under their afflictions, namely, their expectation, desire, and assurance of happiness after death (v. 1-5), and deduces an inference for the comfort of believers in their present state (v. 6-8), and another to quicken them in their duty (v. 9-11). Then he makes an apology for seeming to commend himself, and gives a good reason for his zeal and diligence (v. 12-15), and mentions two things that are necessary in order to our living to Christ, regeneration and reconciliation (v. 16 to the end).

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-11

THE BELIEVER'S PROSPECT BEYOND DEATH

The apostle in these verses pursues the argument of the former chapter, concerning the grounds of their courage and patience under afflictions. And,

I. He mentions their expectation, and desire, and assurance, of eternal happiness after death, v. 15. Observe particularly,

1. The believer's expectation of eternal happiness after death, v. 1. He does not only know, or is well assured by faith of the truth and reality of the thing itself that there is another and a happy life after this present life is ended, but he has good hope through grace of his interest in that everlasting blessedness of the unseen world: "We know that we have a building of God, we have a firm and well-grounded expectation of the future felicity." Let us take notice,

(1.) What heaven is in the eye and hope of a believer. He looks upon it as a house, or habitation, a dwelling-place, a resting-place, a hiding-place, our Father's house, where there are many mansions, and our everlasting home. It is a house in the heavens, in that high and holy place which as far excels all the palaces of this earth as the heavens are high above the earth. It is a building of God, whose builder and maker is God, and therefore is worthy of its author; the happiness of the future state is what God hath prepared

for those that love him. It is eternal in the heavens, everlasting habitations, not like the earthly tabernacles, the poor cottages of clay in which our souls now dwell, which are mouldering and decaying, and *whose foundations are in the dust*.

(2.) When it is expected this happiness shall be enjoyed immediately after death, so soon as *our house of this earthly tabernacle is dissolved*. Note,

[1.] That the body, this earthly house, is but a tabernacle, that must be dissolved shortly; the nails or pins will be drawn, and the cords be loosed, and then the body will return to dust as it was.

[2.] When this comes to pass, then comes the house not made with hands. The spirit returns to God who gave it; and such as have walked with God here shall dwell with God for ever.

2. The believer's earnest desire after this future blessedness, which is expressed by this word, *stenazomen we groan*, which denotes,

(1.) A groaning of sorrow under a heavy load; so believers groan under the burden of life: *In this we groan earnestly*, v. 2. *We that are in this tabernacle groan, being burdened*, v. 4. The body of flesh is a heavy burden, the calamities of life are a heavy load. But believers groan because burdened with a body of sin, and the many corruptions that are still remaining and raging in them. This makes them complain, *O wretched man that I am!* ⁴¹²⁴Romans 7:24.

(2.) There is a groaning of desire after the happiness of another life; and thus believers groan: *Earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven* (v. 2), to obtain a blessed immortality, *that mortality might be swallowed up of life* (v. 4), *that being found clothed, we may not be naked* (v. 3), that, if it were the will of God, we might not sleep, but be changed; for it is not desirable in itself to be unclothed. Death considered merely as a separation of soul and body is not to be desired, but rather dreaded; but, considered as a passage to glory, the believer is *willing rather to die than live, to be absent from the body, that he may be present with the Lord* (v. 1), to leave this body that he may go to Christ, and to put off these rags of mortality that he may put on the robes of glory. Note,

[1.] Death will strip us of the clothing of flesh, and all the comforts of life, as well as put an end to all our troubles here below. Naked we came into this world, and naked shall we go out of it. But,

[2.] Gracious souls are not found naked in the other world; no, they are clothed with garments of praise, with robes of righteousness and glory. They shall be delivered out of all their troubles, and shall have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, ~~6714~~ Revelation 7:14.

3. The believer's assurance of his interest in this future blessedness, on a double account:

(1.) From the experience of the grace of God, in preparing and making him meet for this blessedness. He that hath *wrought us for the self-same thing is God*, v. 5. Note, All who are designed for heaven hereafter are wrought or prepared for heaven while they are here; the stones of that spiritual building and temple above are squared and fashioned here below. And he that hath wrought us for this is God, because nothing less than a divine power can make a soul partaker of a divine nature; no hand less than the hand of God can work us for this thing. A great deal is to be done to prepare our souls for heaven, and that preparation of the heart is from the Lord.

(2.) The *earnest of the Spirit* gave them this assurance: for an earnest is part of payment, and secures the full payment. The present graces and comforts of the Spirit are earnestings of everlasting grace and comfort.

II. The apostle deduces an inference for the comfort of believers in their present state and condition in this world, v. 68. Here observe,

1. What their present state or condition is: *they are absent from the Lord* (v. 6); they are pilgrims and strangers in this world; they do but sojourn here in their earthly home, or in this tabernacle; and though God is with us here, by his Spirit, and in his ordinances, yet we are not with him as we hope to be: we cannot see his face while we live: *For we walk by faith, not by sight*, v. 7. We have not the vision and fruition of God, as of an object that is present with us, and as we hope for hereafter, when we *shall see as we are seen*. Note, Faith is for this world, and sight is reserved for the other world: and it is our duty, and will be our interest, to walk by faith, till we come to live by sight.

2. How comfortable and courageous we ought to be in all the troubles of life, and in the hour of death: *Therefore we are*, or ought to be, *always confident* (v. 6), and again (v. 8), *We are confident, and willing rather to*

be absent from the body. True Christians, if they duly considered the prospect faith gives them of another world, and the good reasons of their hope of blessedness after death, would be comforted under the troubles of life, and supported in the hour of death: they should take courage, when they are encountering the last enemy, and be willing rather to die than live, when it is the will of God that they should *put off this tabernacle*. Note, As those who are born from above long to be there, so it is but being absent from the body, and we shall very soon be present with the Lord but to die, and be with Christ but to close our eyes to all things in this world, and we shall open them in a world of glory. Faith will be turned into sight.

III. He proceeds to deduce an inference to excite and quicken himself and others to duty, v. 911. So it is that well-grounded hopes of heaven will be far from giving the least encouragement to sloth and sinful security; on the contrary, they should stir us up to use the greatest care and diligence in religion: *Wherefore*, or because we hope to be present with the Lord, *we labour* and take pains, v. 9. *Philomoumetha* *We are ambitious*, and labour as industriously as the most ambitious men do to obtain what they aim at. Here observe,

1. What it was that the apostle was thus ambitious of *acceptance with God*. We labour that, living and dying, whether present in the body or absent from the body, *we may be accepted of him*, the Lord (v. 9), that *we may please him who hath chosen us*, that our great Lord may say to us, *Well done*. This they coveted as the greatest favour and the highest honour: it was the summit of their ambition.

2. What further quickening motives they had to excite their diligence, from the consideration of the judgment to come, v. 10, 11. There are many things relating to this great matter that should awe the best of men into the utmost care and diligence in religion; for example, the certainty of this judgment, for we must appear; the universality of it, for we must all appear; the great Judge before whose judgment-seat we must appear, the Lord Jesus Christ, who himself will appear in flaming fire; the recompence to be then received, for things done in the body, which will be very particular (unto every one), and very just, according to what we have done, whether good or bad. The apostle calls this awful judgment *the terror of the Lord* (v. 11), and, by the consideration thereof, was excited to persuade men to repent, and live a holy life, that, when Christ shall appear terribly, they may appear before him comfortably. And, concerning his

fidelity and diligence, he comfortably appeals unto God, and the consciences of those he wrote to: *We are made manifest unto God, and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.*

2 CORINTHIANS 5:12-15

THE BELIEVER'S PROSPECT BEYOND DEATH

Here observe,

I. The apostle makes an apology for seeming to commend himself and his fellow-labourers (v. 13), and tells them,

1. It was not to commend themselves, nor for their own sakes, that he had spoken of their fidelity and diligence in the former verses; nor was he willing to suspect their good opinion of him. But,

2. The true reason was this, to put an argument in their mouths wherewith to answer his accusers, who made vain boastings, and gloried in appearances only; that he might give them *an occasion to glory on their behalf*, or to defend them against the reproaches of their adversaries. And if the people can say that the word has been manifested to their consciences, and been effectual to their conversion and edification, this is the best defence they can make for the ministry of the word, when they are vilified and reproached.

II. He gives good reasons for their great zeal and diligence. Some of Paul's adversaries had, it is likely, reproached him for his zeal and fervour, as if he had been a madman, or, in the language of our days, a fanatic; they imputed all to enthusiasm, as the Roman governor told him, *Much learning has made thee mad*, Acts 26:24. But the apostle tells them,

1. It was for the glory of God, and the good of the church, that he was thus zealous and industrious: "*Whether we be beside ourselves, or whether we be sober* (whether you or others do think the one or the other), it is *to God*, and for his glory: and it is *for your cause*, or to promote your good," v. 13. If they manifested the greatest ardour and vehemency at some times, and used the greatest calmness in strong reasonings at other times, it was for the best ends; and in both methods they had good reason for what they did. For,

2. *The love of Christ constrained them*, v. 14. They were under the sweetest and strongest constraints to do what they did. Love has a constraining virtue to excite ministers and private Christians in their duty. Our love to Christ will have this virtue; and Christ's love to us, which was manifested in this great instance of his dying for us, will have this effect upon us, if it be duly considered and rightly judged of. For observe how the apostle argues for the reasonableness of love's constraints, and declares,

(1.) What we were before, and must have continued to be, had not Christ died for us: *We were dead*, v. 14. *If one died for all, then were all dead*; dead in law, under sentence of death; dead in sins and trespasses, spiritually dead. Note, This was the deplorable condition of all those for whom Christ died: they were lost and undone, dead and ruined, and must have remained thus miserable for ever if Christ had not died for them.

(2.) What such should do, for whom Christ died; namely, that they should live to him. This is what Christ designed, that *those who live*, who are made alive unto God by means of his death, *should live to him that died for them, and rose again* for their sakes also, and that they should not live *to themselves*, v. 15. Note, We should not make ourselves, but Christ, the end of our living and actions: and it was one end of Christ's death to cure us of this self-love, and to excite us always to act under the commanding influence of his love. A Christian's life should be consecrated to Christ; and then do we live as we ought to live when we live to Christ, who died for us.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21

MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLES

In these verses the apostle mentions two things that are necessary in order to our living to Christ, both of which are the consequences of Christ's dying for us; namely, regeneration and reconciliation.

I. Regeneration, which consists of two things; namely,

1. Weanedness from the world: "*Henceforth we know no man after the flesh*", v. 16. We do not own nor affect any person or thing in this world for

carnal ends and outward advantage: we are enabled, by divine grace, not to mind nor regard this world, nor the things of this world, but to live above it. The love of Christ is in our hearts, and the world is under our feet.” Note, Good Christians must enjoy the comforts of this life, and their relations in this world, with a holy indifference. *Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet, says the apostle, we know him no more.* It is questioned whether Paul had seen Christ in the flesh. However, the rest of the apostles had, and so might some among those he was now writing to. However, he would not have them value themselves upon that account; for even the bodily presence of Christ is not to be desired nor doted upon by his disciples. We must live upon his spiritual presence, and the comfort it affords. Note, Those who make images of Christ, and use them in their worship, do not take the way that God has appointed for strengthening their faith and quickening their affections; for it is the will of God that we should not know Christ any more after the flesh.

2. A thorough change of the heart: *For if any man be in Christ, if any man be a Christian indeed, and will approve himself such, he is, or he must be, a new creature, v. 17.* Some read it, *Let him be a new creature.* This ought to be the care of all who profess the Christian faith, that they be new creatures; not only that they have a new name, and wear a new livery, but that they have a new heart and new nature. And so great is the change the grace of God makes in the soul, that, as it follows, *old things are passed away* old thoughts, old principles, and old practices, are passed away; and *all these things must become new.* Note, Regenerating grace creates a new world in the soul; all things are new. The renewed man acts from new principles, by new rules, with new ends, and in new company.

II. Reconciliation, which is here spoken of under a double notion:

1. As an unquestionable privilege, v. 18, 19. Reconciliation supposes a quarrel, or breach of friendship; and sin has made a breach, it has broken the friendship between God and man. The heart of the sinner is filled with enmity against God, and God is justly offended with the sinner. Yet, behold, there may be a reconciliation; the offended Majesty of heaven is willing to be reconciled. And observe,

1. He has appointed the Mediator of reconciliation. He has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, v. 18. God is to be owned from first to last in the undertaking and performance of the Mediator. All things relating to our

reconciliation by Jesus Christ are of God, who by the mediation of Jesus Christ has reconciled the world to himself, and put himself into a capacity of being actually reconciled to offenders, without any wrong or injury to his justice or holiness, and does not impute to men their trespasses, but recedes from the rigour of the first covenant, which was broken, and does not insist upon the advantage he might justly take against us for the breach of that covenant, but is willing to enter into a new treaty, and into a new covenant of grace, and, according to the tenour thereof, freely to forgive us all our sins, and justify freely by his grace all those who do believe.

2. He has appointed the *ministry of reconciliation*, v. 18. By the inspiration of God the scriptures were written, which contain the word of reconciliation, showing us that peace was made by the blood of the cross, that reconciliation is wrought, and directing us how we may be interested therein. And he has appointed the office of the ministry, which is a *ministry of reconciliation*: ministers are to open and proclaim to sinners the terms of mercy and reconciliation, and persuade them to comply therewith. For,

3. Reconciliation is here spoken of as our indispensable duty, v. 20. As God is willing to be reconciled to us, we ought to be reconciled to God. And it is the great end and design of the gospel, that word of reconciliation, to prevail upon sinners to lay aside their enmity against God. Faithful ministers are Christ's ambassadors, sent to treat with sinners on peace and reconciliation: they come in God's name, with his entreaties, and act in Christ's stead, doing the very thing he did when he was upon this earth, and what he wills to be done now that he is in heaven. Wonderful condescension! Though God can be no loser by the quarrel, nor gainer by the peace, yet by his ministers he beseeches sinners to lay aside their enmity, and accept of the terms he offers, that they would be reconciled to him, to all his attributes, to all his laws, and to all his providences, to believe in the Mediator, to accept the atonement, and comply with his gospel, in all the parts of it and in the whole design of it. And for our encouragement so to do the apostle subjoins what should be well known and duly considered by us (v. 21), namely,

(1.) The purity of the Mediator: *He knew no sin.*

(2.) The sacrifice he offered: *He was made sin*; not a sinner, but *sin*, that is, a sin-offering, a sacrifice for sin.

(3.) The end and design of all this: that *we might be made the righteousness of God in him*, might be justified freely by the grace of God through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Note,

[1.] As Christ, who knew no sin of his own, was made sin for us, so we, who have no righteousness of our own, are made the righteousness of God in him.

[2.] Our reconciliation to God is only through Jesus Christ, and for the sake of his merit: on him therefore we must rely, and make mention of his righteousness and his only.