

HOPE ETERNAL

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 4:16–5:10

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

If the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Cor. 5:1)

Daily Bible Readings

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M	Aug. 23	1 Cor. 15:16–23	From Death to
T	Aug. 24	Eph. 3:14–21	Strengthening
W	Aug. 25	Eccl. 12:9–14	Every Deed, Go Judges
Th	Aug. 26	Rom. 2:4b–11	God's Judgment Behavior Imp
F	Aug. 27	2 Cor. 4:1–6	Paul, Confiden
Sa	Aug. 28	2 Cor. 4:7–15	Entering the Pr

STEPPING INTO THE WORD

Anyone who is or has been the caretaker with a chronic illness knows full well who powerfully and personally about hope and qualities are not something that are needed every single day. They are as necessary as food, sleep, good health, and a safe place to live. The Spirit supplies what is needed to carry on, “so heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16).

Every pastor also understands why the Spirit is necessary. Any minister who has been in a long time has run into painful conflicts in churches where people who complain about sermons, budgets, and emphases.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes as a caretaker who is worried about the health of the church in Corinth and to bring healing by openly naming unchristian behavior on the list in 12:19–21) and by meeting his opponents. Some people in the church have accused him of being disorganized (1:15–22). He attacked the false teaching being preached there, stating that he is not a huckster of the Word, like some of his opponents. These opponents are “unbelievers” (6:14), false apostles (11:1–6).

Paul also indicates that he personally needs the power of God to fulfill his ministry to the church (4:1). He has suffered greatly from false accusations and feels obliged to remind readers of the terrible things he has experienced while preaching the gospel (6:1–10; 11:16–33). He also suffers from “a thorn in the flesh,” a physical or mental handicap, which can only be tolerated with God’s help (12:7).

Dear God, give us the confidence to overcome challenges and the strength to fulfill our work in Jesus’ name. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 4:16–5:10

4:16 So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling—³if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. ⁴For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

⁶So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord—⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

OUR BODY IN TENTS?

Unless today’s readers of 2 Corinthians are campers or long-distance hikers they may have some trouble understanding Paul’s comparison to life as living in “an earthly tent” (5:1–3).

But Paul and his readers in Corinth were aware of the meaning of the metaphor. As Acts 18:1-4 shows, Paul was a tentmaker by occupation. When he met Aquila and Priscilla and stayed with them, he found men of the same trade . . . and they worked together. . . . They were tentmakers.” Although some of the churches were paid by churches for their teaching and ministry, Barnabas chose to support themselves (1 Cor. 9:7). Paul did not covet anyone’s silver or gold but worked with his hands to support the ministry (Acts 20:33-34).

Tents were commonly used by nomads and were usually made of cloth or leather. They also served as dwelling places,¹ so Paul can switch from “tent” to “house” in one verse (2 Cor. 5:1). Tents have both practical use and spiritual significance: the tent of meeting (Exod. 26:16), the tent of the upright (Prov. 15:1), and the tent of witness” (Rev. 15:5).

In 2 Corinthians 4-5, the metaphor of the tent is used in a discussion of the nature of death and resurrection. In his own handmade tents, Paul says that “our earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling—if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be naked” (5:1-3). As is often the case, Paul switches quickly, from tent, to house, to dwelling, to garment, and off like a piece of clothing. To make it even more poignant, he compares our situation to having the treasure in earthen vessels or “in clay jars” (4:7), “so that it may be evident that the extraordinary power belongs to God and not to us.”

The point being made is that we live in a temporary, physical bodies, although made by God as a potter or a tentmaker manufactures tents by hand. Our bodies are breakable and can be destroyed. If our outer covering goes away through age or illness, we will not disappear. We are actually naked before Christ after death. We have to look forward to and the Spirit as a guarantee that our imperishable will become imperishable.

1. See <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Tent>.



How does Paul’s language here compare physical and spiritual bodies in 1 Corinth

BOASTING OR NOT BOASTING: THAT IS THE QUESTION

Throughout 2 Corinthians, Paul often asks if he should boast about his ministry and personal conduct. He answers in both the affirmative and in the negative, but even when he says *no* he still lists his accomplishments and credentials. One Bible scholar outlines Paul's thinking this way:

Commending ourselves (4:2)
Not commending ourselves (5:12)
I too shall boast a little (chapters 11-12).²

In these passages Paul is defending himself against opponents who are damaging the Corinthian church. The words "boast" and "boasts" are used more than twenty times in the *NRSV*. In the first chapter of 2 Corinthians, for example, he writes, "Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience," (1:12) and continues the theme in 4:2 by commending himself "by the open statement of truth . . . to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God."

Boasting, he contends later, does have its limits, however. It only has legitimacy if it is done with the Lord's approval. He articulates the limit simply: "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (10:17). Those who boast falsely are "false apostles" of God (11:13). Using reverse psychology, he concludes by boasting, not just in his authority and preaching, but in his own weakness. "I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities . . . for whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (12:10). Maybe he does have some defects in ministry and in person, but he is strong in his afflictions and in the persecution he has suffered. "I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." (12:9).

What lessons are to be learned from Paul's boasting? Today when there are so many boasts and outright lies coming from those in political circles and false guarantees in advertising, his principles are very helpful. Boasting is legitimate (and necessary) when falsehood must be opposed and truth must be told to power. What is more, church members and outsiders should know what is good and right and true in the work of the church. Years ago, I started a column that continues to run in the magazine *Presbyterian Outlook* called "What's Right with Your Church?" to give congregations the opportunity to boast about good things that are being accomplished in their ministries. Paul's self-commendation does not call for idle bragging

but truth-telling, positive reporting, and reminds us that good things can be accomplished, weakness, suffering, and criticisms of truth and power all come from “the God who calls, the calling, authority, and commendation.”

? What can you boast about in your calling?

STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

If Paul ministered to church and community, had recently lost loved ones, what do you say to them? It is extremely unlikely that “I am sorry” would be his response. Generally speaking, he would avoid the other person’s pain and pass the subject. He also would not reply, “If they call me” if he really did not intend to offer any aftermath of grief. What is more, he would avoid how grandma died of the same cause and also avoid a semi-religious comment about living according to God’s will. This answer is for one whose loved one died from a painful overdose, suicide, or a terrible accident.

If these observations seem harsh, think of the times we have heard comments like that directed at them ourselves. For the most part, they are not criticism or true concern but are designed to avoid talking about a different subject. They demonstrate a reluctance about talking about death.

Paul knew a thing or two about death and the threat of death personally. In 2 Corinthians 1:8-9, he wrote in the past “we were so utterly, unbearably afflicted with death so that we had given up on life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had been raised to death so that we would rely not on our own strength but on God who raises the dead” (1:8-9). He knew what it was like to live in this life and the next (5:14-15).

Hoping that God would raise him from the painful troubles he experienced, Paul wrote about overcoming the enemy he called death (2:15:26). His focus on death and life is clear. He talks about being home in the Lord and compares resurrection to the growth of a seed.

the spring (1 Cor. 15). For Paul, death is not the destruction of a person but a new creation in which we continue and expand what we already have in this life (2 Cor. 5:17–21). In Thessalonians 4:13–14, he summarizes his certainty about the nature of death: “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.” For Paul, death is not something to be passed over with platitudes but a new level of life to be approached with expectation and wonder.³

1 When have you been guilty of responding with platitudes to the grief of someone who has lost a loved one? How would you like people to respond to you in such a situation?

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes provide additional information about today's scripture that may be helpful for your study.

When believers rise again, we leave all that is earthly behind. Our bodies are renewed as a spiritual body fashioned by God—permanent, indestructible, and celestial. Believers are guaranteed a glorious future because God has created us for this very purpose (Phil. 3:21), working in us to will and to do God's good pleasure in ways beyond our understanding (Phil. 2:13).

The Holy Spirit serves as our guarantee of a future promise, a foretaste of the glory that believers shall one day know.

The judgment seat is like the reward position at the Olympic games. Those who belong to the family of God shall receive the reward for good things done in the body and experience the sadness at reward lost because of the useless things, due to their failure at times to be fit enough. (Compare 1 Cor. 3:10–15; 4:4; Rom. 14:10–12.)