

Dear Friends,

What happens the moment after we die? I haven't had that experience, so I can't tell you with any kind of personal experience. Nor has anyone else living today. For the believer in Jesus, Paul outlines a comforting, brief, and simple explanation of the event for us in our study passage. He also closed his thoughts with the obvious reminder. Given that we have no personal experience with the after-life, we live with the conviction of its reality as a matter of faith. However, take note; Paul did not say in this context that we ponder that experience with a combination of faith and our private imagination. The right way to regard that event is "by faith."

No doubt, you have heard very sincere believers state a common idea that, when believers die, they become angels. Scripture does not provide a single verse that suggests this idea. It simply is not in the Bible; it grows out of human imagination alone. We so easily pick up imaginative ideas that we add to the straightforward teachings of Scripture, but wisdom and faith urge us to accept Scripture alone as our source for pondering that experience. Paul underscores this posture with his closing reminder; "For we walk by faith, not by sight." Biblical faith is not our unsanctified imagination gone wild. It is a carefully crafted gift from the Lord by which He reminds us of His truth, already recorded in His Book, our Bible. By faith, He reinforces and assures us of the truth of what we read there. If we follow Paul's teaching in our study passage, we may look past the trials and confusion of the day, ponder that amazing experience, and joyfully sing, "What a day that will be!"

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Ignored and Misunderstood Scriptures (2 Corinthians 5:1-7) When? This Building of God?

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) (2 Corinthians 5:1-7 KJV 1900)

In reading commentaries and hearing teaching on this passage, one time you are likely to hear it interpreted as the experience of death and our transition from this world into glory, and the next time you'll hear it explained as the Second Coming. Which is it? Both are glorious events that deserve to be cherished as a source of comfort and encouragement during our pilgrimage in an unfriendly world. It can't be both events. Our death experience is individual; we experience it one person at a time. The Second Coming is a global event that shall alter all humanity and all the creation. I am inclined to think that clarity on the passage holds potential to enhance our comfort in anticipation of the experience. Contextually, which experience does it explain?

Let's follow Paul's reasoning and see if we can find his—and the Holy Spirit's—intent with the lesson.

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

What is this “*earthly house of this tabernacle*”? Interestingly, regardless the end interpretation, most Bible students agree that Paul refers to our physical body by this term. If we view the passage as the Second Coming, logically most of the elect who are alive at that time shall wholly bypass any form of the intermediate state. The “We” who are alive and remain at that event shall go directly from this world, body, soul, and spirit, into glory. In this passage, Paul wrestles with the idea of our conscious existence with the Lord without our body. During this state of which he writes, we face the question of being naked, not “Clothed” with our physical body, but he concludes that the Lord shall not regard us as unclothed, despite being absent from our physical body.

In our present state, we cannot fathom conscious existence apart from our physical body. Clearly our present state involves intricate integration of both the body and the spirit and/or soul. Physical trauma to the brain has a powerful impact on a person's thinking, speech, or other physical functions. How much can we truly grasp of our future state in glory? Our human reasoning fails to understand it at all. As believers, we have one viable option. Go to Scripture and learn what God teaches us there regarding this future state between our death and the Second Coming. Consider just a few examples.

1. In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus taught that “**God is a Spirit.**” He is not material. However, He has no problem communicating or wielding His power.
2. The Holy Spirit likewise is “Spirit,” non-material, but He actively administers God's power and work among men. In 1 Corinthians 12:11, He is said to administer spiritual gifts “...*dividing to every man severally as he will.*” He has a will, and He administers the Lord's gracious riches to His family according to His will; all of this and more with no physical body.
3. Consider Jesus' lesson of Lazarus and the rich man, Luke 16:19-31. The rich man in hell after death (Obviously and logically with no body) sees Lazarus far away in Abraham's bosom. But he has no eyes. He communicates with Abraham. He has no mouth, but he expresses thirst. His memory is intact; he recalls his earthly family, and he reasons with Abraham. But he has no physical body.
4. In 2 Corinthians 12:1-5, Paul wrote of “visions and revelations of the Lord.” He describes this person, I believe himself, as caught up into the third heaven, paradise. As he perceived this experience, he could not fully understand all the details of the event, “*whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth.*” Being so caught up into paradise, Paul says that he “...*heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*” If he was not “in the body,” how did he hear these words?

Can we understand this state in our present world and its inherent limitations? No, not at all, but Scripture faithfully teaches us about it.

For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Few words have ever more beautifully captured the intense longing of the child of God for that glorious and intimate place in the Lord's presence. We groan under the burdens of our present brokenness. We can't grasp the full dimension of glory, but we have the Holy Spirit's (And Scripture's corroborating) testimony that intensifies our sense of it and our longing for it.

...that mortality might be swallowed up of life. I love this thought. It is one of my favorites. We presently live every moment of our lives with "Mortality." When we leave this world and find ourselves in glory with the Lord, we shall experience the reality of which Paul writes in this lesson. Our ultimate experience then shall be precisely this amazing truth. Our present mortality shall be wholly "*Swallowed up of life,*" the life of God. Think of all the things you struggle to keep balanced that relate to your present mortality. Can you truly imagine all of those struggles—every one of them—wholly eradicated? Replaced by that amazing reality of "Life," the life of God in us.

"Mortality" means we are subject to death. Thus, when Paul wrote these words, he encouraged us with the assurance. What this all means reverses our "Mortality." The endless eternal "Life" of God will envelop us at the moment of our physical death. That death is the last "Death" we shall ever experience. That "Life" shall "swallow up" our frail mortality in victory that cannot end. This word "eternal" which Scripture uses to refer to this life has broad meaning and comfort. We normally think only of duration, endless duration by the word. However, at least implied in its meaning is also an eternal "Quality" of life. We shall not experience endless existence in the same quality as our present existence. We shall not spend eternity taking medications, seeing doctors, and struggling with our present life's trials. The quality of life "Over there" as much transcends the present quality of life that we know as the idea of endless duration transcends our present life of seventy or eighty years.

Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Did we accomplish this future ideal for ourselves? No. God did it for us, all of it wholly. However, don't miss the point. He has also given us "*the earnest of the Spirit.*" The indwelling Holy Spirit in every child of grace raises thoughts, hopes, and even expectations of that glorious day. "Earnest" is a financial term. It may be used more broadly, but its common contemporary use relates to a real estate purchase. We don't normally carry around enough cash in our pockets to count out the price we might pay for a new home. We normally make some kind of formal written offer to purchase the home at a given price and under stated terms. To demonstrate to the present owner that we are making a genuine "Good faith" offer, we will give him a deposit. That deposit is known in real estate financial circles as "Earnest money." God has provided a new and glorious home for us that we shall begin to realize and enjoy at the moment of death. But He has also given us concrete assurances of that indescribable place that we may ponder today. That is God's "Earnest" deposit to us that assures us of the reality of the world which He has prepared for us.

For we walk by faith, not by sight. I've often heard this thought presented in sermons as a general principle of the Christian life. Study its context. Paul is not dealing with our everyday life in this context. He specifically reminds us of what happens when we die. We should contextually respect this teaching and apply that context to this thought as well. We have not visited that world of glory described in

Scripture. With only one exception, we have not heard from anyone who went there and returned to tell us about it. That exception is Jesus. He did live as a man. He did die and go there. And He directed Paul and other New Testament writers to include information about that world which we could not know otherwise. So how do we embrace this teaching as factual truth and apply its comfort to our present life? We can only so embrace its teaching and claim its comfort by faith. We believe in God. We believe He has given us a faithfully written and preserved testimony of what He has reserved for us when we die. We therefore “by faith” accept this teaching as true and live our present life with that conviction and its impact on how we deal with our present life and its varied trials and disappointments.

When Paul completed this teaching to the Thessalonians, he ended his thoughts with a rich reminder.

Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

Not only should we apply this truth to our own lives, but we should seek occasion to speak the words to our friends and loved ones to comfort them with the reminder. We shall spend a conscious eternity with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Knowing that truth, how should we treat them and interact with them today?

Elder Joe Holder