

Confidence at the End of the Road

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Trusting someone is not a very easy thing to do especially when it is trusting that person to heal an incurable disease or a terminal illness, when it is trusting that person with your life. In fact, there is only one person we can completely trust with our life and that person is Jesus Christ. We actually need to trust Him for eternal life, a life that is meaningful and enjoyable life here on earth and hereafter. **Many Christians are not enjoying their lives because they have not been able to trust Christ completely.** Their behavior reminds me of a young man who signed on as a sailor on a ship under an experienced captain. After leaving the harbor a storm came up, the young sailor was terrified and convinced that the ship was going to sink. **The captain tried to assure him that the ship would not sink but the young man just could not believe it.** He spent nearly the whole trip in fear and although he reached his destination he did not enjoy the trip at all. As Christians we all find ourselves on a journey. **Christ has assured us of reaching our destination but do we believe Him and are we enjoying the journey?** We can only enjoy life's journey when we put our trust in Christ completely. We also have every reason to trust the One who died for us, Christ who accepted death in order that we might live.

In our studies of 2 Corinthians, we have seen some of the things that are involved in the commitment of our lives to Christ as revealed by Paul. Nobody, or certainly very few, has ever been persecuted so severely as was Paul, and similarly very few have had such blessing and have been so triumphant in the midst of their troubles. The reason was that Paul had learned to look away from those things that were temporal to things that were eternal. And this deep gaze brought conviction, enabling him to see that the light affliction is but trivial and temporary, and that it has a transforming power about it because it is working together for the glory of God.

One day, however, troubles will come to an end, and so will blessings, at least as they are experienced on this earth. Life has a terminus to it, sooner or later. This is the great certainty of the future amidst so much that is uncertain. Therefore, I am so glad that Paul, in logical sequence to what he has been saying, now opens his heart to us concerning his attitude toward what lies at the end of the journey. Because of this we find him living in absolute confidence. For instance, we are told in verse 6, “Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.” And then in verse 8, “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” For him, life down here meant being present with the body, but absent from his Lord and exiled from heaven. He anticipated a day when that situation would be reversed, when he would be *absent* from the body and *present* with the Lord, and concerning this event he had absolute confidence.

As we look at the testimony of Paul, we are constrained to ask whether we share the same confidence concerning the end of the journey. And if so, how has this affected our daily life? Does it make any difference as to how we live and our sense of responsibility toward *others* and toward the *Lord*?

Notice, first of all, that Paul introduces into the picture the possibility of catastrophe. He says in verse 1, “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved...” Notice the language he uses to describe his body: this earthly house, this tabernacle, this tent in which he lives.

There are two important things about that statement. In the first place, the word “if” indicates that Paul is not quite sure about something. In other words, it is just possible that he may never die at all because he is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ; and He just might rapture the church before Paul dies. Therefore, says Paul, he really

does not know for sure whether he will go through the valley of the shadow of death at all.

In the second place, he does *not* say, "...if I be dissolved;" he says, "...if the *earthly house* of this tabernacle be dissolved..." **In other words, either way (by death or by the rapture) he is going to come out of this thing victorious.** Notice his conclusion, "...if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands." So Paul says that the believer simply cannot lose in this matter. To make sure that he was not misunderstood in what he is saying right here, Paul says, "...if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved." The Greek word that Paul uses here for "dissolved" literally means "to destroy or demolish," and it is the same idea that Jesus used when He referred to the destruction of the Temple in Matthew 24:2, when He said, "Not one stone left but that would be thrown down..." **In other words, Paul is referring to the worst possible thing that could happen to him, the possibility that he would suffer a violent death.** And when you look back at Paul's life, it was very possible that such a thing just might happen to him. But Paul never allowed anything to stop him from fulfilling the ministry to which God had called him to do. **Why?** Because he knew that by death or by the rapture he was going to be victorious!

Notice that Paul immediately switches from *woeful catastrophe* to a *wonderful contrast*. He says in verse 1, "...we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Notice that there is no fear in Paul's heart, and he sound a lot like David in Psalm 23, "The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you *are* with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of

the Lord forever.” He just contemplates the moving out of one department of life into another, out of a tent into a home; out of a temporary building into a permanent one; out of one that was quite suited for earthly use into one that will be perfectly suited for use through all the ages in glory.

When I studied this passage of scripture and I sensed the absolute peace that Paul portrayed as the talked death, I had to stop and ask myself, do I really have that same kind of peace? Can we as believers, along with Paul, look death full in the face, can we really contemplate the worst possible thing that could happen, and yet face it without fear, without any sense of trembling? Have we really settled up in our heart of faith, that if Jesus does not come first, death, no matter how violent or painful, will simply be the moment when we lay aside this tent (this physical body) in which we live and move into a building which God has prepared for us.

As I thought about what Paul was saying, I ask myself, how can a person have that kind of confidence? What is the basis of such confidence?

The answer is found in verse 5, “Now he that wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.” The Greek reads like this, “Now He who has prepared us for this very thing (that is, death) is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” **As Paul thinks about the tremendous possibility that confronts him, the experience of leaving a tabernacle (this physical body) and entering into an eternal building, he has absolute confidence about the experience because he knows that God has made us for that purpose.** We are not made for this world. This is just a temporary experience, a training ground; this is the place where eternity is decided for all of us; this is the place where decisions are made and characters are formed which effect eternal destinies. **But it is only a temporary situation, and God has not made us for this earth.**

He made us for heaven. He made us for Himself. He has formed us for this very purpose. And in order to prove it, He has done a very wonderful thing. Because of His wonderful grace He sent Jesus to this earth to be with us in this tabernacle (in an earthly body) in order that we might be able to go to Him in an eternal tabernacle (that is, an eternal body), as seen in Philippians 2:6-8 where we are told that Jesus, "...who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." **And Paul says to make sure that that happens, God has given us the earnest of the Spirit.** Paul has the assurance in his heart because he has the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit Who is his guarantee, as seen in Ephesians 1:7-14, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."

Because of his assurance, he says in verses 2-3, "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." To explain what he means, he says in verse 4, "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 to

life.”

Do you see the argument? Paul says that he has the earnest of the Holy Spirit, and because of this he groans, *not* that one-day he will be stripped of everything and left spiritually naked, but that everything that is mortal within shall be swallowed up in life. Paul alluded to this very same truth in 1 Corinthians 15:51-57, “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

You see, although Paul could say in Romans 8:37 that “we are more than conquerors through him that loved us,” he also was very aware of the truth of Galatians 5:17 when he says, “...the flesh, lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh...so that you cannot do the things that you would.” **Therefore, when Paul thinks of problems and difficulties of this life, he longs to be set free!** In fact, he expressed this way in Philippians 1:23-24, “For I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.”

With all of that in mind, Paul presents this concern in verse 9, “Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.” **Let me stop right here to say the King James Translation is somewhat misleading right here, because it seems to be suggesting that Paul is working to make sure that one day he might be accepted before God, but nothing could be further from the truth.** The Greek reads like this, “So our aim is to please him

always, whether we are here in this body or away from this body.”

Paul’s concern is that his life- all of it – be lived in such a manner that God is pleased. Every other relationship and every other interest of life is to be motivated by this one goal: will God be pleased? Paul was absolutely sure about heaven and he really wanted to hear those words, “Well done, good and faithful servant...”