

"A Building Of God"

Introduction. As he penned this letter, Paul was facing death on a daily basis. Hostility swirled around him, animosity was constant, and so was the reality and threat of opposition and persecution. Paul had been writing about the ministry which Christ gave him. He had described the message which he was commissioned to proclaim -- a message that brings new life to those who believe.

Death releases Christians from the relatively dilapidated slum in which they now live and ushers them into a room in the heavenly house of the eternal Father. Christians should long for heaven like a prisoner longs for freedom, like a sick man longs for health, like a hungry man longs for food, like a thirsty man longs for a drink, like a poor man longs for a payday, and like a soldier longs for peace. Hope and courage in facing death is the last opportunity Christians have to exhibit their faith in God.

I. *Hope After Death*

A. The next body is the best.

1. The thought is clearly related to the preceding discussion in 4:7-18. Paul's ministry was aggravated by many trials, including bodily weaknesses. But there was light at the end of the tunnel, and this kept him pressing on. Death would be no catastrophe!
2. As a Cilician tentmaker, Paul naturally likened his present body to an "earthly house" that might at any moment be dismantled or destroyed.
 - a) All of this would simply mark the termination of the process of weakness and decay already at work in his body (4:16).
 - b) A tent is an apt metaphor for the human body, which is a temporary home for the eternal souls who are aliens and strangers in this world.
3. The opposing thought is the "house not made with hands" (cf. Hebrews 9:11), which means not part of this physical creation (John 2:21). "House" or "building" suggests something on a solid foundation that is secure and permanent -- vastly superior!
4. Paul's faith was not blind trust; it was confidence in the word of God. The "building" was not a remote possibility or a vague wish. It was a fixed reality, based on the promise of God, not philosophical speculation or mystical fantasy.

B. The next life is perfect.

1. Paul was weary of the frustrations, disappointments, limitations, and weaknesses of this present life. We do not want to take this body into the next life, we want it "clothed upon" and transformed when Jesus comes.

2. We groan and are burdened because of our sufferings. What Paul longed for was the glorified body that will be ours when Christ returns (1 Corinthians 15:35-49; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2). There is no way to extrapolate from the plain, simple, ugly appearance of a seed the magnificent glory of the flower, tree, or plant that will grow out of its death.
 3. Eternity is worthy of our thoughts, and it should motivate us to serve Christ in hope (Colossians 3:1-4). Enjoy your life here, but desire the clothing of heaven (Ecclesiastes 2:24).
- C. The next existence fulfills God's purpose.
1. In the beginning of time, God chose those who would obey Him to be redeemed in Christ (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:9). God's glorious purpose for us stretches from eternity to eternity; time is but a fleeting moment in the middle.
 2. God has given Christians the Spirit as an "earnest" of that coming transformation (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:14). Denominationalists and some brethren have said that "earnest" means a "deposit" or "down payment." They then reason that the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit gives us a foretaste of the life to come, and has guaranteed that the rest of what is promised will follow.
 - a) However, "earnest" can also be defined simply as an "assurance." The "assurance" to the Gentiles of the same blessings of salvation as the Jews was the guarantee that had been stamped on the word of truth through the inspiration of the apostles (cf. "promise," Acts 2:39).
 - b) In fact, to translate it as a "down payment" places the Holy Spirit in debt to us, as though we cannot take His word for it!
- D. The next dwelling is with the Lord.
1. In this section, Paul reached the pinnacle of heavenly anticipation.
 - a) What is involved in being "present with the Lord"? It does mean a change of location, but the preposition translated "with" also implies an active fellowship between two persons (cf. Mark 6:3).
 - b) Being "present with the Lord" goes beyond simply Christians knowing the Lord (cf. Philippians 3:10); it is a higher form than what we experience on earth (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17).
 2. Paul did not have a morbid death wish, but a triumphant expression of faith that looked beyond his present sufferings. When we walk by faith in this life, we can have fellowship with and serve the invisible God. This kind of faith is not a wishful fantasy or a vague superstition, but confidence grounded in the Bible (Hebrews 11:1).
 3. This confidence was not a temporary feeling or a passing emotion; it was a constant state of mind. He faced death cheerfully, and it

was not that he did not love the people in his life, but he loved the Lord more. He saw no reason to cling to this life (Philippians 1:23-24).

II. ***The Noblest Ambition***

A. The highest goal.

1. The word for "labour" means "loving what is noble or honorable" (Romans 15:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:11). Paul's service was motivated by more than a hope for the future.
2. He sought to please Christ and be acceptable to Him while he was on earth (1 Corinthians 4:3-5). Man's opinion of Paul was not important to him, because he did not seek to please men, but God (Galatians 1:10).

B. The widest devotion.

1. Whether at home or absent, Paul's noble ambition to please God remain unchanged (Romans 14:7-8). This demonstrates his broad scope of devotion to the Lord.
2. Some might assume that Paul's longing for heaven implied a belief that it did not matter what one does with the sinful, physical body. This view would have agreed with the Greek philosophy of the day that the body was a worthless and inconsequential prison of the soul.
3. But Paul knew that he could serve God in his physical body in a way that would produce an eternal reward. Thus, his longing made him even more careful about how he lived in this world (1 Corinthians 9:27).

C. The deepest motive.

1. "Appear" means more than "stand" or "show up." It carries the idea of being revealed. There will be no pretending at the judgment; our character and works will be revealed as they are, and the suitable reward will be given.
2. "Judgment seat" describes a place reached by steps, or a platform. It was a place where judgment was dispensed (Pilate [Matthew 27:19; John 19:13]; Herod [Acts 12:21]; Gallio [Acts 18:12, 16-17]; Festus [Acts 25:6, 10, 17]).
3. Remember that everything you do in the body has potential eternal value (Matthew 6:19-24; Romans 12:1). At the end of his life, Paul believed that he had fulfilled his spiritual ambition (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Conclusion. There is too much on the table to fail to do the will of God (2 Corinthians 7:1). The same faith that assures glory to the faithful also assures judgment for all men (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Would you like to

have the assurance of a house and a building of God? Do you look forward to shedding this earthly tabernacle? If you do, would you respond today?