



Living to Please God

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Rev. Fred Greco

I'd like to draw your attention once again to the book of 2 Corinthians. We'll be looking this morning once again at chapter 5, specifically at verses 6-10. So, if you have your Bibles with you, please turn to 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, as we look together at God's Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative, and the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient. Second Corinthians, chapter 5, beginning at verse 6:

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. O Lord our God, we ask this morning that you would attend your Word, even as you have promised, that by your Holy Spirit you would illuminate our minds, you would renew our wills, and that as we study your Word we would see the Lord Jesus Christ in his glory and his finished work in it. Lord, bless us as we study your Word. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

The Bible is a book of truth, but how does knowing the truth help us to live now? For example, Paul has been telling us about the future that awaits the believer, a future that is far superior to our present. Does that mean Paul doesn't care about life now or does that mean Paul thinks anyone who does is somehow unspiritual? I don't think so.

What we come to this morning is Paul moving on to the "So what?" of truth. He has laid out the truth for us, and now he's going to give us the application, if you will, the outworking of the truth. What I would like us to see this morning from our text are two main things. First, Paul shows us *our life*, and then Paul shows us *how we ought to live*. Our life and how we are to live.

Our Life

Let's begin, then, by looking at Paul's description of our life. Paul has been unfavorably, as it were, comparing the life we have now with the life to come in the last two chapters. He has referred to how hard our life is now in chapter 4, verses 7-12, and then he emphasized the blessedness of the life to come in chapter 4, verses 13-18. This led us to the truth at the beginning of chapter 5 that we are groaning in this present life and body. We are waiting for our heavenly dwelling.

If we are not careful, what we will hear Paul saying is that this life is unimportant and that he cannot wait to be sent into eternity, perhaps even as a martyr. If we have that attitude, we will see our lives now, at best, as a hindrance and, at worst, as a waste of time. We will be no good to others who are around us because we will see no purpose to this life.

As the old saying goes, we will be so heavenly minded as to be no earthly good. But Paul gives us an honest and hopeful picture of reality. This doesn't change the fact that our ultimate hope and destiny are beyond this life, but it does show us the value of this life and how we are to live it. He tells us to do things and to keep in mind certain things as we live in the body.

First, we are to have confidence and courage. That's how he begins verse 6. "So we are always of good courage." This is a favorite word of Paul's. He uses it often, and others in the Scriptures do not. It means to be of good courage or to have confidence. Now, if Barnabas was the son of encouragement, Paul certainly also knew how to encourage others. He does this over and over again, and here is another example of it. Even though we are away from the Lord, Paul says (that is, we are not in his immediate presence), we are to be confident, we are to be bold.

Now when are we to do this? Paul says, "Always." Not just when we're feeling good, not just when things are going well, not just when our circumstances around us are positive. No. Paul says that at all times, always, we are to be confident and bold. Why is that? Didn't Paul just tell us earlier in this chapter that this life now is not the good part? Isn't this time of waiting difficult and full of hardship? Isn't what we are doing now waiting for the reward?

Well, the answer is found in the little word at the beginning of verse 6: *so...* that is, *therefore*. Whenever we see this transition word, we know to look back to see what this verse is relying upon. What verse 6 does is it points us back to verse 5 to the gift of the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. It shows us that because we have a guarantee in this life of what God has prepared for us, we can be confident and bold. Our confidence rests on what God has already done in giving us his Spirit.

Secondly, Paul points us to what we know. He says, "We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight." Do you see how Paul keeps doing this? He keeps pointing us back to what we know. He wants us to understand the truth we have. He told us, for example, in chapter 5, verse 1, that we know we have a heavenly body and we have a heavenly home, and because of that, we don't fear death. We don't fear the loss of our earthly body that is grounded in our knowledge of what is to come.

Now what Paul says is that we know the life here and now is to be at home in the body but to be away from the Lord. We'll take a look at what that means in just a moment...to be at home in the body and away from the Lord. But to go on to verse 7, Paul tells us in a parenthetical between verses 6 and 8 that "We walk by faith, not by sight." This is an explanation of what he's telling us in verse 6. It's not a criticism. That's what the little word *for* means at the beginning of verse 7.

As we live this present life in the body, we walk with the Lord, but it is by faith, not by sight. Now what does that mean? Well, here *sight* likely means what will be seen rather than the act of seeing. That means that we will now live without actually seeing our Lord. To be away from the Lord does not mean to be out of his presence completely,

to be without the Lord. What it means is that our relationship with the Lord is by faith. We do not see him face-to-face. That will come but is not now. Now is not the time for sight. Now is the time to live by faith.

So, your present life is significant. You should be of good courage even when difficulties arise, even when you wish to be with Jesus face-to-face, because you have the presence of Jesus right now. Not as you will for all eternity, but you are not alone now. Jesus is with you today. He has given you his Spirit to make sure you know this in your present life.

Now, part of the reason the present life is so hard is that it is compared to our future life. The present with all its weakness cannot compare to the future and all of its glory. The present life is transitional. Now is not the end. This life is not our home. Paul makes this clear with the way he writes about it. He has used a series of pictures to describe the difference between now and the future. He talks about clay jars, houses, clothing, and now he is more direct.

He talks about being at home and away, and he uses two words that are only used here in the whole Bible. They are two verbs from the same root, which means to be with your people. The first, translated *at home*, means to be in a familiar place with your people, to be at home in the truest sense. The second, *to be away*, means to be in a strange land, to be away from your people, to be somewhere you know is not your home. It is often translated in literature as *to be in exile*. The idea here is whether you are among your people or not, whether you are comfortable or not, whether you are at home.

Paul explains the contrast of our present life with our future life. When we are at home in the body, we are here in this present life. To be in this present or earthly life means necessarily to be away from the Lord. Now, we know we are not ultimately meant for this life, and we know our true meaning is found in our future life, but that does not mean our present life is unimportant. It *is* important. *We do* have the presence of Jesus by faith, but we also look forward to more.

It is the difference, if you will, between being in a hotel and being home. Have you ever been in a nice hotel? Not a rundown Motel 6 but a really nice hotel that has chocolates on the pillow, and the sheets are crisp and clean, and the shower pressure is great, and there's a coffeepot in the room. You look around, and you say, "This is so comfortable and so nice. I could stay here a very long time."

But have you ever stayed even in a nice hotel for more than a few days? Have you ever had to stay in a nice hotel for a week or two weeks? You quickly begin to realize that it's not home, and even though there are nice things, the chocolate doesn't taste as good after a few days. You begin wishing you had your own home shower and your own things and your own devices. You want to be home where everything is familiar. That's the idea we should have of our lives.

This present life can have usefulness. We can be blessed, but it's not our home. It's not what we long for. That's why Paul repeats himself in verse 8. The translation helps to make it clear for us. It begins, "Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord." He's picking up once again this

idea from verse 6 that we are to be of good courage even though we are away from the Lord because we are at home in the body.

What he's telling us is we should be of good courage in this present life, but also, we should long for our future life. He's very direct about that. He uses a rather emphatic phrase: "...and we would rather..." The idea here is that Paul has chosen to prefer his future life, that he has a passion for his future life. It is his determination. It is his choice. It is his delight.

Now wait a minute. Instead of being at home in the body, Paul is saying he would prefer to be away from the body. What does that mean? Didn't Paul just tell us earlier in this chapter that he didn't want to be bodiless, that he didn't want to be unclothed? Didn't we discuss that last week? Yes, we did, but there is another consideration. To be away from the body means that Paul will be at home with the Lord. The body is important to Paul. He did say that, but what is more important to him is Jesus.

He would rather be away from the body if that means he will be home with the Lord. To be absent from the body means to be immediately in the presence of Jesus, to have sight where once was only faith. Is that the most important thing to you? More important than immortality, more important than blessings, more important than release from pain and sorrow? Do you long to be with Jesus more than anything else? That's what Paul is saying. We should always have our eyes fixed on him.

How We Live

That brings us to our second point. Paul tells us how we are to live. Now, we've seen our lives in both aspects here: the present and the future. Now we see how we are to live both now and forever. Again, verse 9 begins with the transitional word *so*. Do you see how logical Paul is in his writing, how he is always connecting what we know with how we are to act? To put it another way, our ethics are always a result of our theology. What we do is always a result of who we are in Christ.

So, because these things are true, the result is *this*: whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. Paul says, "We make it our aim." We don't just wander through life. Are you someone who never makes a list, who never has a plan, who's just constantly winging it? Well, Paul is saying that's not how we are to live our Christian lives with Jesus. No, instead, the Christian knows that this life is temporary and that there will come a day when he will face Jesus face-to-face.

The believer lives purposefully. The believer aspires, Paul says, to live in a certain way. We make it our aim. This is a marvelous word. Its basic meaning is to love honor or to strive after fame, but it has come to mean to strive after or to secure the approval of a superior. Notice that Paul applies this to both the present and the future. We are to live a way, both now and then, striving for the approval of Jesus, whether we are at home or we are away.

That means you are to live now the same way as you would live in the presence of Jesus. Do you hear that? I mean, really hear that. Far too often, we live like Jesus isn't watching or that he doesn't care what we're doing. We say to ourselves, "There will be time for holiness later in our lives. There will be time for growing in the knowledge of

God and his Word later. Now is the time for us. Now is 'me' time. Later, somewhere down the road, I can live for Jesus."

This is a temptation that comes to us regardless of age. It comes to us in our youngest years. It grips those who are in their teen and college years, but once you're married and have children, you still are busy and trying to put off the things of God. This is not a biblical view. The Bible teaches us that we are always to live with Jesus as our aim, and our aim is very specific. Paul is not fuzzy about what our aim is. He doesn't leave us to figure it out. There's no relativism here. Nobody grows in fuzzy land.

So, Paul gives us clear direction as to what our aim should be. Our aim is to please Jesus. Your aim must be to please Jesus. The verb here is very direct and clear. It's the same word that's used in Romans 12:2 where we are told to present our bodies as a living sacrifice acceptable to God. Your life is to be lived with a view of being well thought of by Jesus, to give satisfaction to Jesus as to how you have lived.

It's simple. What we are to live is to hear "Well done, good and faithful servant." That is what you should aspire to hear. That is the goal of your life. Nothing else...not money, not fame, not even your own happiness. What you should aspire to is to hear that you have pleased Jesus.

Paul then concludes with a further encouragement for us about how we should live. He makes very real the idea of living to please Christ in verse 10. He says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." Again, we have that little word *for*. The reason we make it our aim is because we must appear before Christ.

Notice that the idea here is comprehensive. Paul is writing on behalf of himself, on behalf of the Corinthians, on behalf of you, on behalf of me. We all must appear before Christ. The end of our pilgrimage will be to come before Christ. This is different from Christ's final judgment on a sinful world as Judge. Paul doesn't explain that difference in detail here, but the Bible is actually clear about it. One of those places is in Matthew, chapter 25. We read in verse 31 and following:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' [But then later] he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

What we have Paul describing here is the continuation of the judgment after this separation has occurred. You see, Paul is writing to Christians. He's writing to the church, to believers. He's telling them, "This is a judgment that will come to you." It's not a judgment of salvation or damnation or of life or death. It is a continuing judgment as Jesus judges the people he has already given life and called to himself. The Judge will be none other than Christ himself, because he has been appointed the Judge of all.

To appear before Christ, as Paul says, to appear before the judgment seat of Christ is to have all pretense stripped away. There is no deceiving this Judge. There is no trying to come up with a story to explain what you've done. There is no fast talking to be done here. No. Jesus judges with perfect judgment and perfect equity. That makes this judgment itself sound fearful. "...so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."

Can you imagine standing in front of Jesus and giving account for every action of your life, all that you have done in the body? Think about all of the things your eyes have seen. I don't mean think about the things you have seen that your parents or your spouse or your friends know you've seen. I mean the things you have seen that no one knows about but Jesus. Think about all of the things you have heard with your ears that no one knows about, but Jesus knows.

Think about all of the things you have said with your mouth, all of the sins you have committed, all the gossip you have spread, all the tearing down you have done with your mouth. Jesus knows all of it. The Scripture tells us that every idle word we speak will in that day be shouted from the rooftops. I often think that as we contemplate our lives and the things we are ashamed of or wish we could undo, we become terrified by the thought, "What if someone else knew? What if my spouse knew? What if the people at work knew? What if somehow this was put on the Internet?"

I tell you today that's the least of your worries, because Jesus, the Judge of all, already knows. Think about, just for a moment, those times in your life that when memories come back to you, you shudder. You wish you could undo that action or that event. You wish you could even blot it out of your memory so it would not come back when you hear a certain sound or see a certain person. You wish it had never happened at all. All of that will be revealed, Paul tells us.

The good news of the gospel is that those who trust in Christ will never receive justice but, instead, grace. The judgment Paul is talking about here is not one of life and death but one of reward. It's what we see in the parable of the talents or when Paul talks about treasures that are being laid up in heaven. You recall it says that some build with wood, hay, and stubble and others build with gold, silver, or precious stones. Our works are tried by fire. Some of our works are burned away and lost because they are unworthy, but, Paul says, you will be saved as if from fire.

Believers are judged as righteous because of the work of Jesus, not their own works. So, Paul can have great confidence here, even though...think about it...Paul's earlier life was filled with sin and rebellion. Paul had plenty of regrets in his life. At the same time, however, we have to understand that what we do now is important for eternity.

How do you spend your time now? Are you wasting it? Are you acting like your time now doesn't matter? Or instead, are you laying up treasure in heaven? That is the "So what?" If you believe in Jesus, if you are a child of God, you are to live like one. How you live matters. Your actions now do not earn or lose your salvation, but that doesn't mean they're unimportant. They are eternally important.

So, ask yourself today, "Am I living to please God?" If you're not sure, then ask a foundational question. "Do I trust Jesus Christ to save me? Is he my only hope in life and death?" If the answer to that is "No" or "I'm not sure," then you need to begin there. You can't live for Christ unless you know Christ. Go to him. He will not cast you out. But if the answer to that question is "Yes, I am trusting Jesus," then you need to examine your life. If you trust him, you must make it your aim to please him in every aspect of your life. Right now counts forever.