

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,
7 for we walk by faith, not by sight.***

8 Yes, we are of good courage,

and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

10 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.***

Introduction: We return this week to our series in 2 Corinthians, and rather than moving on to the next section, I would like to go back to these last several verses that I initially covered in our last time together. After returning from some time off, my fellow pastors made the observation that I wasn't able to cover these verses in the same depth as I had the previous ones, so suggested I give it a deeper dive. After going back to review, and realizing I only gave 3 minutes to these verses, I certainly agree with them that they are worthy of our return visit.

The focus of my sermon two weeks ago was on this great divide Paul speaks about that is separated by the event of death. On the one side is **this present age**, the life we are now living. On the other side is the **age to come**, the life that we enter into starting at our death.

In the introduction I sought to press the point that we are fully aware that we are to **die**, and before death ordinarily comes our **decline**, a **wasting away** of our physical and mental powers. But Paul points out that at the same time, in Christ our inner person is being **renewed day by day**. This is what gave him strength to endure the difficulties he faced with hope.

So likewise, the sustaining reality that enables us to press forward is knowing that death is not the end, but rather the beginning of a new chapter in which we will be reborn with a glorified body in a new heavens and earth, and we and they will be filled with glory. Until then we groan, like a woman with child in labor, for the coming of Jesus Christ.

So in verse 6a we read...

6 So we are always of good courage.

Paul is repeating an idea with a different phrase of what this knowledge does in him in and through his trials. In 4:16 he wrote “So we do not lose heart.” In 5:6 he writes “So

we are always of good courage." Having heart is equated to having good courage. This is a statement of fact for Paul. He is always of good courage.

Now it is easy to take a verse like this and create a kind of **idealism** that isn't realistic or experienced by most Christians. And we can imagine someone with this kind of idealism, perhaps a **well-meaning friend**, responding to our honest confession to them of our anxiety, fear, despair, or feeling crushed because of life's difficulties. They quote this verse (or one like it), saying "Well you know, if we believe the Word of God like Paul, we will *always* be of good courage."

Being addressed in this way can add **guilt or shame** to our already long-list of felt failures. We may question the wisdom of our being so honest with our friend, or perhaps wonder if there is use to our even trying.

But notice that this statement is written and lived out by the person who, in this very letter, **confesses** his anxiety, fear, being burdened, crushed, and despairing of life. Yet, he says, despite these feeling, "we are always of good courage."

So Paul speaks of a courage that he has as he has all these other feelings. He has not learned, as the Stoics taught, to learn to bypass these weaknesses and live untouched by the difficulties. Rather, this courage is lived simultaneous to these trials and heartaches.

6b We know that while we are at home in the body we are away [from home] from the Lord,

Returning in the second half of verse 6, Paul gives a specific reason for this courage in the here and now. The word here, as translated by the ESV, can carry the idea of being at home. This is more than a house, but conveys the idea of our true place, people, or country. With a little word play (using prepositional prefixes), he says "we know that while we are in our place in the body, we are away from our place from the Lord." (not translated fully in ESV)

Both of these places are our place. But to be in one of these two places (in body -or- with the Lord) in our present experience are mutually exclusive. We can't presently be in both places at the same time. To be in our body is to be in our place in this world, with the people we know, the places we live, the jobs we do.

Now this is an interesting concept if we think about what Scriptures reveals about God's presence, in theological terms known as His omnipresence (present everywhere). As we read in Psalm 139:

***7 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
9 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.***

So in beautiful language, the Psalmist concludes that no matter where he is in the world, God is present with him.

Jeremiah 23 says this:

24 Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.

The presence of the Lord fills all the places of the creation. Again, there is no where we can go in this world where God is not with us.

From these passages we can conclude that God is always with us, always present, and He is always present with us. He has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. Yet, in another sense Pauls points out that while we are present in this body (in our whole experience) we are away from the Lord.

This is a paradox, both of which are true at the same time. So are we with the Lord now? Yes, and no.

Yes, in that God fills heaven and earth. Nothing is hidden from His sight. Nothing escapes His knowledge. Nothing you or I go through escapes His awareness. He is always available for protection and comfort. And also, **no**. We are away from Him. How is this so?

One way to sort this is to think of **God as the perfection of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness**. He is the source of all **Life and Light**. Yes we live in a world with falsehood, ugliness, evil, death, and darkness. Our present embodied experience is spoiled by the effects of the fall as long as the creation is left in its current cursed condition. It is in this cursed world and broken relationships with others that we feel the weight of sin. In this world we feel the face of God often hidden and obscured. We don't feel the fullness of God and His original good creation.

To be fully present with the Lord, to be at home with Him, is to dwell in a place where there is un-mingled and uninterrupted experience of Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Life, and Light. That is what is to be in the age to come.

In this world, we have experiences of this glory of the Lord that breaks through, like a sunbeam piercing the dark clouds of a brooding storm. It is in these “shafts of joy” that C.S. Lewis tells us about, where Truth, Beauty, and Goodness break through. These experiences, known in thousands of ways, evoke in us love, admiration, joy, pleasure, and cause us to long for something else, someone else, somewhere else.

Which then brings us into the life of faith, where we believe, because of the glory that breaks through, that the darkness will one day disappear, and unclouded day will dawn and never set again.

Because of this...

7 for we walk by faith, not by sight.

Walking is a common metaphor, in all kinds of literature, for our conduct of life, our daily habits, the “ways” in which we live. Paul uses this metaphor to contrast two ways of living.

One is **walking by sight**. This “sight” is also a metaphor, but also includes the physical sight. Philosophically, this is known as empiricism. **Empiricism** in its most simple form is that we can know about the world is primarily through our senses. What we can see, hear, taste, touch, and smell for ourselves is the way to know anything. If anything can’t be personally experienced in these ways, then there is no reason to believe it, much less live by it. It is to make what we empirically experience be the ultimate definition of reality

The other way is **walking by faith**. Paul is not discounting the importance of the senses. We cannot escape our senses, for we are embodied beings. But he is talking about our ultimate commitment of what defines our way of life. What is most foundational and fundamental way we interpret the world.

Take, for instance, an ordinary woman in this life. What conclusions might she draw by merely walking by sight? She may conclude, because of her chronic health problems, God is angry with her. She may conclude that, because marriage is difficult, she married the wrong man. She may conclude that, because she can’t have children, God is punishing her for some unknown sin. She may conclude that, because she has never seen anyone raised from the dead, after death nothing follows. She may conclude, because she has never seen God directly, that there is in fact no God. She may in fact conclude that, because of the profound depth and breadth of evil in this world, that if a God exists who could stop it and He doesn’t, then He is unworthy of worship.

Take another woman who walks by faith. She has these same experiences and thoughts, but lives her life differently. Because of what God has revealed in His Word, that He is a good, wise, and sovereign God, though she doesn't understand, she has a trusting faith in His promise to work all things for her good as she love Him. She believes, though she has not seen it, that Jesus died for her sins, was raised from the dead, and so God loves her with an everlasting love. Because He loves her, nothing she experiences is from His pure wrath. She believes that, though she is aware of her continued sins, the re are consequences, but those consequences are the wise discipline of a loving heavenly Father. And that that discipline is to wean her from sin as well as trusting in the things that are passing away.

These are some of the differences between walking by faith and by sight. While at home in the body, we are those who walk, despite our now experiences, with God who has has been reveled in His Word and through Jesus.

Paul repeats Himself, giving a kind of Yes, and Amen of affirmation to his own statement. He and his companions are of good courage despite their trials, but then he makes another statement about his preference.

⁸ Yes, we are of good courage,

Now if you said to him, “Paul, if it was up to you, and you could make the choice of where to be, where would it be? Would it be in this present, fallen, broken, difficult, suffering, afflicted world or would it be in the place of perfect Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Life, and Light in the presence of Your Lord?” He answers here

^{8b} and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

While only a passing statement in this verse, he expands this more explicitly in Philippians1:

²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.

Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.

²³ I am hard pressed between the two.

My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Paul admits that his desire is to part and to be with Christ, which is far better than remaining in this world for him. (As a side note, it could it be that many of us don't long to depart because we can't imagine that what awaits us is better than what we have here? Yet, others of you know exactly the feeling Paul is talking about)

As clear as it is for Paul that his life is one of such incredible difficulty, and that it is far better to escape into the presence of God, there is something that weighs the scale in the other direction so that the choice is no longer and easy one.

Imagine all of Paul's physical suffering, criticism, and struggles, caused primary by people he was trying to love; what is it that would make him want to stay in it. It is **Paul's love for the church (and the lost), because of the love of Christ.**

It is like a man who has been found in the ocean floating after a shipwreck. He is starving, dehydrated, stung by jellyfish, nibbled on by sharks, freezing, exhausted, nearly drowned, clinging for life. A boat comes along and offers to pull him out where all his wounds will be healed, his strength restored, and never will he have to swim in that ocean again. A no brainer, right? Yet he says "I can't leave, for there are people in here I love and must be a part in their rescue." His remaining is not for himself, but for those he loves.

Now Paul transitions to how he wants to live out this life of faith while in the body.

⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

Regardless of his location, whether here in the body or present with the Lord, his aim is to please the Lord.

This might cause us to **pause and ask** whether Paul has somehow slipped into his old ideas about salvation and the law? Has he forgotten that Christ died for his sins, and because of Jesus he is completely accepted by God and loved without limitation? Is his mind slipping in the fact that he has a righteousness that is not his own, but is by faith in Jesus Christ? Why is Paul trying to please Him?

He is not making it his aim to please the Lord to be **accepted** by Him, but rather because Paul has **been so loved**, that love compels him to want to have the smile of Jesus on what he does. He wants to please him in the here and now.

He also realizes that before this very Jesus he will one day stand to give an account for this life in the body, and wants Him to be pleased.

¹⁰ 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.

He looks forward to being at home with the Lord, and knows that there awaits an event on the other side: a judgement with Jesus on the judgment seat.

Judgment, in the simplest terms, is the ability to look at something and **make a distinction**. It can be a judgment of taste, like sweet, sour, salty, spicy. It can be a judgment of temperature between hot and cold. It can be a judgement of sight, like darkness and light. It can be a judgement about sound, loud and soft. Judgment is about distinctions.

Judgment throughout the Bible is most often associated with distinction between **good and evil**. And God is the ultimate discerner of the two. We are told that every human being that lives will be judged by God, brought before Him to give an account of everyone one of our thoughts, words, and deeds. And God will make a distinction between them, whether good or evil.

Who is the “**we all**” in this verse? Does it mean only all Christians, or all people?

In one particular **theological system**, there are actually multiple judgments. One at death, called the bema seat judgment (here) which is only for Christians. There is another judgment, the “throne of glory” (Matthew 25) which is for the nations. Then the great white throne judgment (Rev20) for the wicked.

Without getting into the details, my understanding is that all these passages all a reference **to one and the same event and include all people who will ever live**.

One of the reasons I think this is all people, is because if we limit it to only Christians, Paul would be saying that all Christians will receive what is “**due**” (Gk. komidzo) of both good and evil done they have done in the body. **Reward** is what is due for doing good, and **punishment** is what is due evil. Paul would seem to be saying that all Christians will be given at the judgment seat, **simultaneously** both rewards and punishments for everything they have done in this life. **In light of Jesus** receiving what is our “due” punishment for all our sins on the cross, I find it difficult to understand how we will also receive all that is due for our sins at judgment.

So I believe this is a judgment of **two categories of people**, and are put in the terms of the sum total of one’s life. Those who **walked by faith** (truly but not perfectly) and those who **walked by sight**. The one kind of life is pleasing to the Lord because it is lived in a relationship with Him and His Word. The other is displeasing because it is lived with one’s back turned to God and rejection of His Word.

This judgment is that “**we must all appear**.” This word means more than a mandated showing to an event, but to be exposed, revealed, and shown for what we are. This is not something we do ourselves, but something that God does. There is no cross-

examination, no opportunity for rebuttal. The Lord Himself is the one who declares the nature of our life.

Then, based in His declaration, He **rewards or punishes**. And the one who makes such a judgment is Jesus Christ's, for this is His judgment seat. This isn't a generic God, but the God-man raised from the dead.

Conclusion

So we have seen that suffering and decline and death is inevitable. **How is it** he can maintain good courage in the midst of this universal reality as we leave here this morning?

We remember that whatever happens in this body, **the change to come will take us into the full and unfettered presence of the Lord**. So we look now and cherish those shafts of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness that pierce this present darkness. We celebrate, because the world that is to come is represented not by today's bad news stories and headlines, but those shafts of light pointing us to a greater reality.

We labor in this life knowing that what is far better is to be with the Lord, but **we are presently swimming about in this dark ocean with a mission**. It is a mission of rescue for those who are drowning and who will soon be swallowed up in judgment. It is a mission of encouragement for our fellow Christians who are trying to keep their head afloat with so much struggle. We then choose to stay in it and fight against the darkness by faith as we are buoyed by the hope of the judgment to come.

We remember our call is **to aim to please Jesus**, not others, not even ourselves. We do this by living a Spirit-enabled life of faith. This won't eliminate the things that plague us like fear, anxiety, despair, and weakness, but it will enable us to continue in this long obedience in the same direction with courage.

Finally, we live knowing that the day will come when everyone, including ourselves, **will be revealed**. Those with a life of faith in what is unseen and eternal will be distinguished from those who live a life of unbelief.

And for those who are **not yet followers of Jesus**, there is this great news that God has sent His son to be a sacrifice for sin, for all that separates you from God. He is offered to you to live a new life in this world by faith, which will conclude with your standing before the judgment seat. You then can, based on Jesus works, sacrifice, and resurrection, not only experience Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, and also become a very part of it forever.

This is God's offer to you, and I urge you to receive it today.