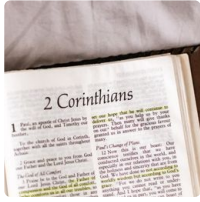


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2 Corinthians 5



2 Corinthians - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses 2 Corinthians 5 and its implications for eternal destiny. He argues against the concept of perpetual disembodiment and calls for a renewed understanding of the resurrection, which involves the reunification of body and spirit. He also challenges the traditional view of eternal torment and advocates for a perspective centered on repentance and the terror of the Lord. Throughout his talk, Gregg emphasizes the importance of a zealous and fanatical devotion to God.

Transcript

I don't know that the chapter division is all that natural. In some ways, it's not a bad place to put a chapter, because Paul begins to talk about a bit of a different subject. However, it follows quite naturally on the thought of the previous verses at the end of chapter 4. In chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians, the last three verses are about the resurrection of the body and the spirit.

This is Paul saying, Therefore we do not lose heart, even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day, for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. And in chapter 5 verse 1, For we know that if our earthly house of this tent is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

This really follows quite immediately without any strong disjunction from the previous material. It's part of his therefore in verse 16 of chapter 4. Therefore we do not lose heart. Now he has just said earlier in chapter 4 that he's facing mortal danger on a regular basis.

And he describes his circumstances in verse 8 of chapter 4 as being hard-pressed, but not crushed, perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, stricken. Struck down, but not destroyed. He says we're always carrying about in our body the dying of

the Lord Jesus so that the life of the Lord Jesus may also be manifested in our body.

He says it again in verse 11. He says we're facing death, we're struck down, we're hard-pressed, we're perplexed, we're persecuted. All of these things keep us ever conscious of our mortality and the nearness of the eventuality of ending our earthly pilgrimage here and making the pilgrimage painful while we await the end of it.

But these things which might discourage others, after all he says we are not in despair in verse 8, the reason we don't lose heart is, well there's two reasons. One, he says that these light afflictions of ours are working for us. And he's not just talking about something far away in heaven, though that is of course part of what it's working for us too.

But it's rather that while the outward man is perishing, there's something happening inwardly. The inward man is being renewed day by day. So there's some inward presence, spiritual benefit gained through this suffering.

And the closer we come to death and the weaker we are in the flesh and the less we have ability to deliver our own lives, the more we must trust in him who raises the dead. The more we must see his strength made perfect in our weakness and the more the life of Jesus is manifest in our bodies. That's the present spiritual advantage of these sufferings.

But now in chapter 5 he introduces another advantage, which is also something beyond this life. And this is another reason we don't lose heart when we face death. One is that facing death is good for us spiritually.

Secondly, that facing death is not anywhere near as bad for us. Death itself is not as bad for us as it is to people who are not Christians. As a matter of fact, death is not a bad thing at all for the Christian.

It is a negative in one sense, and that is of course it brings an end to our earthly activities and whatever profitable labor we might hope to conduct. After all, we only live on this earth one time and there is only a certain number of days and years and moments that we have opportunity to impact the world so that when we're gone it will have benefited from our having been gone. But when we have been here, it is a tragic thing that many people live their lives without any concept of what they are here to do to the world.

What they are to leave behind is their legacy. What it is their presence on this earth is supposed to have accomplished. Many people don't have any concept of meaning.

The nihilism of the present age, the meaninglessness of life, is the dominant feeling. It is not too surprising that a lot of people either kill themselves or simply devote their lives to self-destructive patterns that numb the mind and make one forget the

meaninglessness that they believe is the description of life. But many people live their one lifetime, the only one they get, without a sense of purpose, without a sense of going anywhere, without a sense that anything will have been accomplished or any meaning will have been found or any change of significance will have ever occurred because they lived than would have been if they had not lived.

And yet a life is a significant thing and full of potential, of course. And there is a bit of a tragedy, a tragic side of death, even for the Christian, and that is that whatever good that Christian was doing will not be done anymore on earth. But even that tragedy is somewhat mitigated by the fact that we do not believe that a Christian who is faithfully serving God can die before God has finished with them anyway.

So that when a person dies who is a Christian, we can assume that there was no more that God intended to do with them, that whatever their life's work was to be has been done, or else God would have prolonged their life to finish their work. And so it takes all the tragedy out of death. There is, of course, the tragedy of pain to those who are left behind, and that is perhaps the most grievous thing about death, the death of a Christian anyway, because a Christian who dies goes to a better reward.

Paul says, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain, in a very similar passage to this one in Philippians chapter 1. In both places, this chapter and in Philippians chapter 1, he talks about being absent from the body as essentially being equivalent to being present with the Lord. So that the Christian has nothing to dread in death, and Paul doesn't dread it. Of course, a person might not wish to die prematurely because they hope to accomplish more for God, and they might also wish to forestall whatever grief will come to their loved ones when they die, but apart from those few factors, a Christian has no reason to in any way dread or avoid death.

Because he says, we know that if our earthly house, this tent is destroyed, and he of course is speaking of our physical bodies, he speaks of it initially here as a dwelling place, a tent, a house, but he modifies it from house to tent. The tabernacle in the Old Testament was sometimes called the house of God. When David said, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, the only house of the Lord known to him was the tabernacle.

It was his son Solomon who later built a more permanent house. So also Paul indicates that our present bodies, our present house is really little more than a tent. But there is a house awaiting us, and it is as when the Ark of the Covenant was moved from the tabernacle into the new temple built by Solomon, that is from a perishable structure into a more permanent kind of a structure.

So when we die, the glory that is in us, which he has been speaking of, the light affliction, works for us an eternal weight of glory. And there is a glory to be manifested in us. There is the life of Jesus manifested in our mortal flesh.

This Jesus residing in us and our own spirits as well change residence from this temporary body to a more permanent, durable kind of situation. So he says that if this earthly house, this tent is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. And he says, for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation, which is from heaven.

If indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality might be swallowed up by life. And he who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has also given us the spirit as a guarantee.

Paul mixes two metaphors here, and he does that frequently in his writings. He doesn't seem to feel like he has to make any apology for that. We just have to notice what he's doing.

He'll talk about the body here in one sense as a tent in which we dwell, and secondarily as clothing that we wear. Now, a tent and clothing are very different metaphors. A tent is something that a family might live in.

A suit of clothes is something that an individual wears. But the point is that our body is in one sense a house to us, a temporary tabernacle that we live in. In another sense, it's the clothing that our spirit wears.

And when we die, we are temporarily unclothed. In fact, he mixes the metaphors right there in verse 2, desiring to be clothed with our habitation. We've got a habitation in view here, which is a house from heaven, he says, and it is our clothing also.

Now, our groaning, he says, in this we groan. Now, that phrase in verse 2, in this, might refer to what he's just referred to, this house, this earthly tent that we're in. We groan in this tent.

We groan in this body. And therefore, the groaning could be a groaning of suffering, of grief, of hardship, because in this body we do have hardships that we anticipate putting behind us permanently at death. In Romans chapter 8, we have a similar kind of passage, because it says in Romans 8, 22 and 23, For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now, and not only they, but we also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

Now, this is talking about exactly the same thing that Paul's talking about in 2 Corinthians 5, the groaning that comes from awaiting the redemption of this body. And we do so partly because we have the firstfruits of the Spirit. Now, this groaning, therefore, may not be entirely one of grief.

It may be a groaning of longing, of wishing, like a child groaning because it's still two

weeks before Christmas. And it's because of this longing for Christmas that the groaning is happening. It's not so much that he's in agony or torture at the moment, except whatever torture is involved in the waiting.

And so, it's possible that when Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, to in this we groan, he doesn't mean in this house that we're presently in, but rather in this anticipation that he mentions after it. Like, in this we groan, namely, in our waiting earnestly and eagerly, desiring to be clothed with our habitation, which is from heaven. That is the same thing Paul called the redemption of the body back in Romans 8, 23, and it is the clothing with this secondary habitation, this permanent one, really, the one that comes after this one.

And he says, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. That is, we shall not be disembodied spirits left without a container. Now, Paul might have had to say that for the sake of the Corinthians, because they were Greeks, and because in the Greek thinking of the secular Greeks, the body was seen to be a prison house for the spirit.

And at death, the spirit was released from this prison and was forever free, because the Greek thought was that all physical nature is evil, and all physical nature is evil. And oppressive, and that the spirit alone is free and good, and therefore the man in his lifetime is in an unfortunate state. But when he dies, he is in a better state, because his spirit is forever free from the encumbrance of a physical body.

Now, the doctrine of the resurrection did not suit the Greek mind very well, because the doctrine of the resurrection was that after you've died, sometime after that, your body will be resurrected, and your spirit will again live in your body, permanently. And the Greeks thought, well, what a stupid and undesirable thing that is. Once a spirit has been set free at the point of death, to be recaptured, as it were, to be re-imprisoned by a body, this was something not attractive to them.

So that the Greeks at Mars Hill, when Paul was preaching there, in Acts chapter 17, listened intently to his sermon, until he mentioned the resurrection of the dead. And when he mentioned that, because this offended their Greek sensibilities about the nature of spirit and matter, and the state of things after death, they began to laugh and mock him, and they wouldn't hear his sermon anymore. The Greek Corinthians and First Corinthians had to be given a whole lecture in chapter 15 of First Corinthians, defending the doctrine of the resurrection against people in the church who had doubts about it, or who objected to it.

Again, these were people of Greek culture, Greek philosophy as their background, and apparently even Christians in the Greek culture sometimes had trouble with this idea of the resurrection. In fact, this illustrates somewhat how much our own American culture, or modern Western culture, has still residual influence from the Greek culture. Because many Christians today do not have a concept of the resurrection.

It's not because there's some denomination out there that teaches against it, it's just many Christians are either not informed, or not amenable to the idea of a resurrection. They just like the idea of going off to heaven, in the spirit. Now, heaven's a spiritual place, you don't need a body up there.

God doesn't have a body, he's a spirit, the angels are spirits. And when I'm a spirit, when I'm out of my body, then I can go and live in that spirit place called heaven. It's what many people really believe.

And I've been amazed how many Christians, even in leadership, I met a Christian, I knew a Christian fairly well in youth with a mission years ago. He was the leader of one of the schools that I frequently came to teach. In fact, he was leading the same school that Jeff Roggenbach later led.

He was the previous leader to Jeff at that school. And I remember mentioning once in conversation with him, the resurrection, he'd never heard the concept. He was aghast that we're going to rise from the dead.

He says, you mean after I die and I've gone to heaven, I'm going to have to be raised from the dead again? And I was, if he was aghast, I was more aghast. Aghast that any Christian would not be aware of this doctrine. But I'm asked this from time to time.

I mean, it's one of the frequent questions that I'm asked on the radio about, you know, what happens, I thought when we die, you know, we're dead. And then, I mean, people just don't, a lot of people just don't grasp it. And I think it's because of the notion that when we die, our destiny is just to go to heaven.

And, you know, that's a spirit place. You don't need a body there. Of course, your body goes back to the dust and the earth, so you don't need that anymore.

And you just live forever in a pure spiritual state. That's not what the Bible teaches, but it is what the Greeks believed and it is what many Westerners apparently believe, including some who have become Christians. Now, Paul's trying to clarify that.

He says, we are not planning to be found naked when we die. Now, he's used the word clothing as an image for the body. So, a disembodied spirit would be a naked spirit, not wearing any clothing, not wearing a body.

And he says in verse 4, for we who are in this tent do groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, that is, we're not really planning on a destiny of perpetual disembodiment, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now, he's clearly talking about the resurrection body, because he's using language very much like he's using 1 Corinthians to the same church, talking about the same subject. In 1 Corinthians 15, in 1 Corinthians 15, 42, he says, so also is the resurrection of the dead, the body is sown in corruption, that is, when your body dies and is buried,

it's a corrupt body, subject to decay, but it's raised in incorruption.

It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory, it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power, it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. Now, saying a spiritual body, he does not mean non-corporeal, he doesn't mean it's non-physical. We might think so, because we would typically use the word spiritual in contrast to the word physical, and Paul is capable of using it that way too, but he clearly isn't using it that way here, because he is contrasting spiritual here, not with physical.

He's contrasting spiritual with natural. He says it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. Obviously spiritual there has the meaning of supernatural, not natural.

Our natural body will be displaced by a supernatural body. Our weak body with a powerful body, our dishonorable body with a glorious body. Our decay prone body with one that is not subject to decay.

So there is this further clothing, it's not unclothing, it's being clothed with a more permanent home, a superior garment to that which is left off. And he says this in 1 Corinthians 15 also, verse 51, 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, 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. Now that language is so close to what Paul says here, where he talks about, we want to be further clothed that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

It's clear that he has the same subject matter in view. In another epistle, in Philippians chapter 3, he also speaks of the nature of the body and the resurrection. He says in Philippians 3, verses 20 and 21, For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body, that it may be conformed to his will.

His glorious body, according to the working by which he is able to subdue all things to himself. So, when Jesus comes back, he'll transform our lowly body into the image of his glorious body. Now, these are some of the places where Paul states similar sentiment to what he's saying here in 2 Corinthians 5. He uses different metaphors here.

He talks instead about a body, he talks about a tent or clothing. But he's saying that our longing is to, in one sense, be free from these rags that we wear, this decaying body. And to put on more clothing, not less.

To move out of a tabernacle, but not to be homeless, but to move into a house, an eternal house that does not ever wear out. That is what he says in his way of

communicating about the resurrection. Now, there is a possibility that he has two aspects here in mind of the resurrection.

By speaking of the house and of the clothing, there's a sense in which these are linked. But as I said earlier, clothing is worn by an individual. A house may accommodate a whole family.

As we live in this world, in the church, we are at once a tabernacle ourselves, individually. Your body is a tabernacle. But so is the church corporately as a tabernacle, God, and is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

And in the book of Revelation, John sees coming out of heaven to the new earth, he sees the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven. This new Jerusalem is itself sort of like an idealized temple. It's got the shape and the dimensions and the characteristics of a great Holy of Holies.

It's cube-shaped like the Holy of Holies. It's got no natural light from sun, moon, or stars, but only from the glory of God, like the Holy of Holies. It's got other features that are reminiscent of the Holy of Holies.

It's as if the new Jerusalem is the temple, the new temple in the new earth. The city had no temple in it, it says, because the Lamb and he that is on the throne are the temple of it. In a sense, the whole thing is the temple.

Now, Paul and John and the other writers of scripture use a variety of images for the church. In the same place that the church is referred to as the new Jerusalem in Revelation, it's also called the bride. So you've got the church depicted as a bride, as a temple, and the body of Christ, of course, is familiar to us, imagery.

But one thing that is of interest to the understanding of this present passage is that the imagery of a temple or a tabernacle is applicable both to the church as a whole, seen corporately, and also to our individual bodies. Paul, in 1 Corinthians, uses the image of a temple both ways. In 1 Corinthians chapter 3, he uses it as a reference to the whole church.

The whole church is a temple. In 1 Corinthians 3, verse 16 and 17, Paul says, Do you not know that you, that's plural in the Greek, you, are the temple, singular, of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, which temple you, plural, are. Now, you, plural, are the singular temple.

The church, taken as a whole, is the temple. This comes immediately after him talking about laying the foundation and building on the foundation. Paul is not talking about individual salvation there, he's talking about people building the church.

The church is God's building. And so, it is a temple building, as a matter of fact. So, Paul speaks of the church corporately, as God's house, as God's temple.

We can see Paul speaks that way also to Timothy. We'll look back at 1 Corinthians in a moment and see how he also uses the same image of the individual Christian's body. But in 1 Timothy 3, verse 15, Paul says, But if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Notice the church of the living God is the house of God. The term always applied to the temple or the tabernacle in the Old Testament, the house of God. So, the church as a whole is the temple or the tabernacle, the house of God.

And Paul uses it that way in 1 Corinthians 3. But in 1 Corinthians 6, he says, and here he is speaking of individual morality. He says in verse 15, Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not. Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For the two, he says, shall become one flesh.

But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does outside the body, is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.

Or do you not know that your body, singular, is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own, you are brought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. Now here we have your body, your individual body, is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Now, the temple or the tabernacle of God today is therefore seen alternately as the individual Christian or as the corporate church, including all Christians. And in that sense, when that is the image we use, Peter says we are like living stones built up into a spiritual house. So your body is either a whole temple seen one way or just a stone in the bigger temple, which is the church.

Both are, in Paul's writings, sometimes both in the same epistle. Now, what does he have in mind here when he says, if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens. And then he talks about being clothed upon with better clothing, clothed with habitation.

Let me suggest at least the possibility that Paul has in mind here two things. That the house in the heavens is the ultimate assembled church, the New Jerusalem, the temple of the Holy Spirit made up of all the living stones. And so the corporate house.

That we, after we leave this tent that we live in here, we go up and we will eventually be a participant in a glorious house. And that house is the glorified church. And one reason I

think that he may mean it that way is because he says on one hand that this house in verse 1 is eternal and it is in the heavens.

It is now in the heavens. Is my resurrection body now in the heavens? And then he says in verse 2 that this is our habitation which is from heaven. Now, he indicates that this habitation or house is in heaven, but we're waiting for it to come from heaven.

And that to my mind sounds very much like the imagery of Revelation chapter 21 where the New Jerusalem is descending from heaven. It must be in heaven now, but at a certain point, I believe at the coming of the Lord, it descends from heaven. And that New Jerusalem I understand to be the church.

Now, there's a lot of different ways to understand that, I suppose, but that's the way that I believe the evidence of Scripture points. And therefore, I'm thinking that Paul may be looking at the house that is in the heavens as the temple, the glorified temple, the final product. It's assembling by now.

You know, there are zillions of Christians who have died, innumerable company, and they are the house of God in the heavens. But that house is going to come down at one point to the new earth, it would appear. And that will be our habitation.

And we're waiting for our habitation which is from heaven. You know, it should not be thought, although it is often thought, that the Bible teaches that we will live forever in heaven. It does not teach that.

It may be true. If it is true that we will live forever in heaven, then we must take entirely spiritually or symbolically the whole discussion of the new heavens and the new earth in Revelation. And perhaps that is the right way to take it.

But if we take it at face value, without overly symbolizing it, then we would suggest that the new heavens and the new earth are the new order of things. Because after Jesus comes back, this earth will be melted and burned up and the new heavens and new earth will replace the present system. And we will dwell in the new Jerusalem which is there in Revelation on the new earth.

It comes down from the new heaven, down to the new earth. And therefore our habitation eternally would be on the new earth, in the new Jerusalem. Now, most of the things that people associate with their image of heaven really is found in the new earth.

I mean, talk about pearly gates and streets of gold and so forth. I mean, people think of heaven that way, but the Bible never associates those images with heaven. Heaven has never said they have pearly gates or streets of gold, but the new Jerusalem does.

It has gates that are made of pearl and streets that are made of gold. And so in the popular hymnody and imagination of perhaps modern evangelicalism, the features of the

new Jerusalem are associated in the popular mind with heaven. But really the new Jerusalem will come down from heaven and will rest, it would appear, on the new earth.

And therefore our eternal home is not in heaven, but on the new earth. And that shouldn't be a disappointment, since the new earth will actually have all those features that we associate in our minds with heaven. But technically the Bible doesn't say anywhere that we're going to go off and live in heaven forever.

We're going to live in new bodies on a new earth. When you consider that had Adam and Eve never sinned, they would never have died, we must consider that God intended, ideally, for Adam and Eve to live in their original condition forever. Had they not sinned, nothing would have interrupted this.

And God made things the way he wanted them. Everything he made before the fall is very good. It's just the way he wanted it.

And if it had stayed that way forever, it would have pleased him well. And therefore we would suggest that when God restores things to the way he wants them, that it will be that we will be living in immortal bodies on an immortal planet that has no curse. And if you read Revelation 21-22, that's exactly what you read about the new earth.

There's no curse. It's before the curse. It's restored to the condition it was like before the curse.

There's the tree of life there, which was also in the Garden of Eden, which it was said if they ate it, they'd live forever. That is to say, rather than thinking of our eternal destiny as some kind of disembodied, ethereal, pure spirit existence out in some place beyond outer space, God is going to restore what Adam and Eve enjoyed before the fall. A curseless earth, a paradise of God, as it's called in Revelation.

And we and our immortal bodies will live there just like Adam and Eve lived there in immortal bodies until they made themselves mortal by sin. So this is what Paul is anticipating it would appear, this coming down of the new Jerusalem, of the house, the church in its glorified state, much of which is already in heaven. Much of the church is already there waiting as we are waiting for this assembly to come and be completed.

And yet we also experience a personal clothing, re-clothing with a new nature, an immortal nature, as we've talked about from the other passages we've looked at. Paul says in verse 5 that God has prepared us for this very thing. And he has given us the spirit as a guarantee, or as an earnest, like earnest money.

When someone purchases something of great expense and they don't have the total amount and they put money down on it to hold it, it's called earnest money. It's like when you put something on layaway at a store and you put a portion of the money down and they won't sell it to anyone else because it's now technically yours but you can't

claim it until the full purchase has been paid. Scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit being given to us, as it were, as earnest money, as God's down payment upon us.

This also we saw a moment ago in Romans 8 where it said, we who have the first fruits of the Spirit are groaning. Paul is still groaning here in this chapter and it's because we have received the Spirit. Now, on one hand, having received the Spirit is a guarantee and a comfort that we do belong to God and that the rest of the purchased inheritance will be realized.

That he would not have given us his Spirit if he did not intend to bring about all the things that sonship involves, the whole inheritance. This is the Spirit of his Son, the Spirit of adoption that he's given us. And it's the earnest of the pledge that he is going to give us all the benefits of adoption, of being his sons, of the inheritance.

On the other hand, it is the Spirit who causes us to groan at these times because that Spirit has given a taste of the spiritual reality and awakened a longing for that in us so that it is less easy to be content in our present circumstances now that we've been awakened to it. You know, when you weren't a Christian, you didn't have the Holy Spirit, you probably felt right at home at earth. You might not have been real happy with it, but it was your home.

It's the only home you knew or cared to know. But when the Holy Spirit comes to awaken you and to bring you to life and to give you new life and to define your new life as that of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit is an inhabitant of heaven. And you don't feel at home here anymore and you groan and you await with great dissatisfaction or at least unsatisfaction the coming of the homecoming, you know, when the home comes and you go there.

Now, I just made a distinction between dissatisfaction and unsatisfaction for a reason. To be dissatisfied means you specifically are displeased with something, you're dissatisfied. But unsatisfied simply means that not all that you anticipate and long for has been realized.

You still have unsatisfied longings. So I didn't mean to say that we are dissatisfied. We can be quite content in whatever state we are in and patiently waiting for it, but we are unsatisfied in the sense that we have not had all of the things that we are made to long for come to realization and be satisfied.

Verse 6 says, Therefore we always are confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased, rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Now, there are those who believe that when you die you just go to sleep for a long time

until the resurrection. And that sleeping state is an unconscious state. So that your experience is actually, if you die, that you suddenly drop out of consciousness and you awaken as far as your own subjective awareness is concerned.

No time may have passed, but it may be hundreds or thousands of years later and you awaken in the resurrection. This is the view that is called soul sleep. And it is taught, for example, by groups like the Seventh-day Adventists, and I've known other Christians who hold to it well as well.

And one reason for it is because the Bible frequently speaks of death by use of the metaphor of sleep. Jesus did that. He said, Why are you weeping for Jairus' daughter? She's not dead, she's only sleeping.

When she, in fact, had died. And Lazarus, when he died, Jesus said, Our friend Lazarus is asleep, I'm going to wake him up. Paul used the same imagery.

When he said, We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. Or those who sleep in Jesus, referring to those who have died. When you find the word sleep used of death, it perhaps encourages the notion that when you die, you just kind of pass out of consciousness.

But, of course, that is not a very good way of interpreting that metaphor. For one thing, the metaphor would be poorly chosen if it was to convey the notion that death is an unconscious state. If death were fully unconscious, it would not be like sleep at all, because sleep is not fully unconscious.

When you're asleep, your mind is still active, and you're still having thoughts, you're still dreaming. You're not, perhaps, aware of things going on in the room or in the world around you, but you are not unconscious. You are having experiences in your sleep, and you're aware of those experiences.

So, sleep would be a very unfitting metaphor to use for death if somebody wished to convey the notion that death is an unconscious state. But, sleep is a very fitting metaphor for death if one is seeking to convey the notion that death is a temporary state. No one has yet seen, none of us have yet seen, the dead loved ones that we have known come back again.

There are a few cases in history, in the ministry of Jesus and a few other prophets and apostles, where the dead were raised after they died, like Lazarus, but certainly the vast majority of human beings the world over throughout history have never seen the return of their loved ones after death. Therefore, death has the appearance, to the natural eye, of a permanent departure, of not a temporary situation at all, but a permanent situation, because the person dies and they just don't come back. And in the lifetime of people now living, the resurrection has not occurred.

So, death has a very permanent feel about it, to our view of things. And the word sleep, however, has a different feel about it entirely. When people are asleep, we expect them to wake up.

And that is the reason for calling death sleep in the Bible. It's not because death is an unconscious state. It is not an unconscious state.

But it is, like sleep, a condition from which people will get up again. It is not a permanent condition. It is something from which awakening is to be anticipated.

And so, when Jesus spoke of people being asleep, it was always in the context of him waking them up. He said, Jairus, the daughter, is asleep. Then he woke her up that same day.

He said, Lazarus is asleep. We're going to go wake him up. And in the passages where Paul speaks of death as sleep, they are passages, in fact, about the resurrection.

So, the emphasis on sleep here is an emphasis on the temporariness of death, not the unconsciousness of death. As a matter of fact, the Bible teaches that death is not an unconscious state. When people die, according to Jesus, in the story he told of Lazarus and the rich men, they are somewhere else, alive.

The story of Lazarus and the rich men, we know, saw both men die and both have an ongoing conscious existence after dying. Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham, and the rich men in hell and flames. Now, we can be quite sure that this is not a description of their condition after the resurrection.

It is not that these men are in their permanent place, like Lazarus gone to heaven forever, and the man gone to the lake of fire forever, and the judgment now being passed, and the resurrection passed. That is not the scenario. Because the rich man remembers that he still has five brothers living, who have not yet died, and he hopes that Lazarus or somebody might be sent to warn them so that they won't die and come to hell too, unprepared.

Now, the fact that the rich man's brothers are still living while he's there means that this condition he found himself in was not some far distant time off after the judgment and the resurrection. This was just shortly after his own death, while his brothers were still living on earth. So, Jesus depicts a scenario where people die, but they're not really dead.

They're certainly not asleep, in the sense of unconscious sleep. They are very much aware of their surroundings. In the book of Revelation, John sees the souls of those who have been beheaded, and they're in heaven, and they're singing, and they're praising, and they're waving palm branches and so forth.

And this is before the resurrection also. This is while they're coming up out of the great tribulation. So, the Bible depicts for us a situation where when a person dies, the spirit does leave the body.

Now, whether the spirit, having left the body, remains disembodied until the resurrection, or assumes a temporary heavenly kind of body, or a temporary body that's suited for existence in heaven until the resurrection body comes, we don't know for sure. I only mention it as a possibility because there are commentators who do. I frankly don't see any evidence in Scripture that the spirit takes on a temporary body in heaven until the resurrection body comes.

Those who suggest it, I think, are taking maybe more literally than they should the imagery of Revelation, where you see these people in heaven waving palm branches, wearing clothes, and things like that, white robes, and therefore they must have bodies, it is assumed. I think a lot of that is symbolic, but I don't think that the Bible, certainly the Bible doesn't say anywhere, that in heaven, those who have died awaiting the resurrection on earth, that they have temporary bodies suited for their temporary existence in heaven. The spirit is apparently disembodied for a while after death, though this is not an important point to prove.

If it turned out to be wrong, it wouldn't affect anything. Obviously, whatever state we're in after death, we'll know it then, and it doesn't much matter what we speculate about it right now. But what is important is to know that God intends for our bodies to be resurrected from the dead.

And Paul says that currently, while we are at home in our body, verse 6, we are absent from the Lord. Now, he's not trying to say that the Lord's not near us. We know that Jesus said, I'm with you always, even until the end of the age.

And Paul himself, to the Greeks in Athens, on Mars Hill, said that God is not far from any of us. So, Paul is not trying to speak of some distance between us and God, but he is saying this, that as long as we are in our earthly bodies, we feel the absence of Jesus. Jesus has gone away and he hasn't come back yet, and he's in heaven, and we're here, and we don't see him.

Now, unlike most of us, we did see him a few times, as he saw visions of Christ, Christ appeared to him, but most of us do not. And Christ is not felt to be present with us. It's as if he's an absentee friend, or bridegroom, or whatever.

And we look forward to that changing so that we are aware of being in his presence. And Paul says that happens when we are absent from the body, that is, when we leave the body, when we die. In the meantime, he says in verse 7, we are walking by faith and not by sight.

By that he means we don't see Jesus. We're absent from him. The time will come when we do see him, but that's not now.

Right now we trust him and believe in him and love him by faith. But we do have that faith, and that faith gives us confidence, he says in verse 8. And in fact, we're not only confident, but well-pleased rather to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. Death is not a terror.

The believer is well-pleased to leave this veil of tears and to be in the presence of God where there will be no more tears or sorrow or sickness or sadness or pain or death. Paul expresses similar sentiments in Philippians chapter 1, and he was actually in more uncomfortable circumstances when he wrote Philippians than when he wrote 2 Corinthians. Because he was at liberty when he wrote 2 Corinthians, but he was in prison in Rome when he wrote Philippians, and his circumstance was not a comfortable one.

And he says this in Philippians chapter 1, verse 21 and following. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor.

Yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to remain in the flesh or in the body is more needful for you.

So he says, I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ. Depart, what does he mean by depart? He says to depart from the flesh, from the body, because he makes that contrast. Nevertheless, I figure I'm going to have to stay here in my body because that's good for you and God wants me to finish my work.

So Paul talks about departing from the body. He doesn't talk about lapsing into unconsciousness. He just talks about relocating.

And there will be, it would appear, an interval from the time you die until the resurrection, which occurs at the second coming of Christ. So from the time that you die until the end of the world, you, your spirit, will be with the Lord in heaven, apparently disembodied, but not permanently disembodied. It's not our desire and our groaning is not that we'd be unclothed, but that we'd be ultimately further clothed.

Not that we'd be unhoused, but we'll have a habitation which is in heaven, which is from heaven, he says. Okay, verse 9. He indicates that he is pleased to be alive or to be dead. In this body, he's got his trials and he's got his yearnings for a better home.

He knows someday he will die and he will come closer to that home. But ultimately, he will not have that resurrection body until after we've passed through a stage called the judgment seat of Christ. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Now, there are some who would say to us that the judgment seat of Christ here spoken of only applies to believers. That it is a different judgment seat than that which Revelation tells us of as the great white throne judgment in Revelation 20. The reason for this is that if there's only one judgment seat, it hurts the doctrine of premillennialism, because there is a judgment seat at the end of the so-called thousand years in Revelation, and that's the judgment seat of the great white throne.

If Christians are not judged until then, and do not receive their rewards until then, then it would appear that we do not receive them before the millennium, and therefore the coming of Christ does not come before the millennium. So premillennialists, for reasons of defending premillennialism, have to have two judgments. One that takes place of Christians at the second coming of Christ, and another one that occurs a thousand years later after the millennium, and that would only be for non-Christians.

That would only be for the wicked. Now, the Bible doesn't say any of that very clearly at all, and as a matter of fact, the story that Jesus told of the sheep and the goats certainly depicts all, the righteous and the unrighteous, standing in judgment on the same day, when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and sits on the throne of His glory in Matthew 25, 31, and following, that the sheep and the goats are both there, and both are judged at the same time. Certainly, without the doctrine of premillennialism to confuse us about this, we would all assume there is simply a singular resurrection, a singular judgment.

But because of certain interpretations of the millennium, there are those who suggest that the judgment seat of Christ that Paul speaks of here is not the judgment of all men, but only the judgment of Christians. They have said that the word judgment seat here, being the Greek word *bima*, refers to not a judgment seat like a courtroom judgment, but more the judgment seat of the Olympic Games. When the runners have finished their race, they stand before the judges, and the judges determine what award is to be given to the runners according to their performance.

And that is the Greek word that Paul uses here, this is the *bima*, seat of Christ. Therefore, we'll all stand before the *bima* seat of Christ, but it is argued we will not stand before the great white throne judgment seat of Christ. And that is, of course, the dispensational and premillennial argument about this.

Now, I think too much is made about the use of the word *bima* here. It may be true, and I guess it is true, that *bima* is the right word for the Olympian judges seat, and therefore Paul, by mentioning it here, may well be trying to emphasize to us that at the judgment, those who are Christians, who have run the race well, will receive rewards. The judgment is a place of reward as well as of punishment.

For us, principally of reward, but maybe not entirely, because he says at the judgment seat of Christ, the *bima* seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in his body according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Now, this may suggest, and it

sounds like it does suggest, that he's talking about believers and unbelievers will all be at this seat, that all people will receive their reward, as it were. Some reward will be wicked.

I mean, the reward of wickedness will be punishment. Paul used the word reward that way when he was talking about Alexander the coppersmith who did him much harm. He says, may the Lord reward him according to his works in 2 Timothy chapter 4. Asking God to reward this wicked man according to his works is to reward him with a judgment, obviously.

Everyone will get their just desserts, their rewards, but some will get rewards for having done good, and therefore a desirable and a good reward. Others will be rewarded for their bad conduct, and that reward will be, of course, in the form of a punishment for their conduct. It sounds as if the bima seat of Christ here has both the good and the bad present.

In fact, the language that he has here, that they'll receive the things done in the body according to what was done, whether good or bad, sounds somewhat like an echo of Jesus' own words in John chapter 5, verses 28 and 29, where Jesus said, do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth. Those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil or bad to the resurrection of condemnation. Now, here we have a day when all who are in the graves come out, good and bad.

It's obvious that they come out to be judged. They go to the judgment seat when they come out. Why is that obvious? Because those who do good come to a resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to a resurrection of condemnation.

There's some judgment made between them. And, of course, it's in the context of the resurrection. Paul is talking about the resurrection here in 2 Corinthians, and he is focusing, of course, principally on the resurrection in terms of its effects on the Christian, that we're going to be further clothed upon, we're going to be immortalized, we're going to be glorified.

He is not, just because he doesn't mention here the resurrection of the lost, and their judgment in detail, doesn't mean that he would deny that that happens simultaneously. His purpose is to tell the impact of the doctrine of the resurrection and judgment on him as a minister, facing death on a regular basis. He's not discouraged because he has this hope of the resurrection and the judgment.

And at the judgment seat of Christ, we'll all be rewarded for whatever we did, good or bad. Now, Paul's implication is that he's done good, and therefore he's not afraid of the judgment seat of Christ. He's glad to go.

He's well-pleased to depart and be with the Lord and face the judgment. But, of course, there are people who do bad, and the judgment and the resurrection will not be favorable to them. And that is why he mentions in verse 11, knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

The judgment seat of Christ is not a thing of terror to the believer. It is a thing of comfort. The believer can be well-pleased, as Paul says in verse 8, to be absent from the body and present with the Lord, and go and stand at the judgment.

We can stand in the judgment because we have, through Christ, done good. That's what he says, and we'll be rewarded at the judgment for having done good or bad. Now, some have done bad.

Paul's not one of them, and he doesn't expect that his readers are among them, but there are some out there who have done bad, and they face that same judgment. And therefore, knowing that terrible thing, knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. That is, knowing as we do the judgment of God, we are more motivated to go and persuade people to turn to Christ.

Now, we need to be careful not to diminish our perception of the terror of the Lord. There has been some speculation among us about the various possibilities with reference to hell. Is hell an eternal torment, or is it a torment for a lengthy period of time followed by annihilation, or what? I mean, there are different views out there.

And, as I pointed out before, I think there are some scriptures that could be marshaled for either position. The traditional position of eternal torment is, of course, much more well-known to us, and has its scriptural support texts. The idea of a lengthy punishment in hell followed by annihilation is much less familiar to us, and yet there are probably about the same number of texts of scripture that might incline that direction.

There are a variety of scriptures on either side. We don't know which is which. On one hand, if we see that the scripture might allow this or that option, most of us, I think, if we felt like we have a true choice, would prefer to believe that hell is not eternal, that hell will be a temporal burning and punishment followed by annihilation.

It's just easier for us to stomach that. It's easier for our sympathies. It's hard to imagine anyone that we love who is dead, not saved, suffering forever and ever and ever.

And it may come as a consolation to think, well, maybe there is some hope, even from scripture itself, that such people won't be tormented forever and ever and ever, and that a million years from now, when I'm enjoying Christ in heaven, my loved ones will still be burning in torment in hell. That thought is an unpleasant thought in the extreme. And therefore, some of us might hold out hopes that maybe this other view is possibly correct.

People tend to illegitimately favor a view that they prefer. We might even convince ourselves of this other view without having reason to be 100% sure. And we might say, well, no, hell is not eternal.

It's just going to be temporal and then people will stop suffering and be annihilated. Well, what I want to say is this. If we adopt this other view, and I have not adopted it, but I have not rejected it either.

I see it as one possible view. But if we adopt this other view, the tendency might be to cool down a little bit on the area of evangelism. Well, I mean, when I thought of people burning forever and ever in hell, that was intolerable to think about.

I wanted nothing more than to make sure everyone avoided it. But if eventually, a million years from now, everybody is going to be either in heaven or annihilated, experiencing nothing at all, I don't know if my sympathies are pricked as much about their destiny. It should be, though.

I don't know whether Paul's terror of the Lord, of which he spoke, refers to a concept of an eternal torment in hell, as the traditional Christian church is taught, or whether he had the other view. Whatever view Paul had, I would like to have. I don't know that he ever says clearly, although he does say some things that can be taken actually either way.

He talks about people at Jesus' coming experiencing eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord in 2 Thessalonians 1, verse 9. Is that destruction? Annihilation? Hard to know. But the thing here is that we should not, in any way, out of hopes of diminishing the horrors of the concept of an eternal hell, we should not ever modify the place where it's less terrible. A person who dies without Christ, a person who dies lost, having his sins to answer for before God, is facing a terrible, terrible fate.

One that was terrible enough in Paul's understanding to justify his laying down every comfort, laying down his life even, in order to get the gospel out to as many people as he could and persuade men to change. And if you ever, as a result of your studies and contemplation, decide for this other view of hell, let me just warn you not to ever allow that to soften your resolve. I mean, it is a little easier to think that loved ones, or even people we don't know or love, will not burn forever and ever.

But it's still not very comforting to know that they'll burn at all, or suffer at all. And what's more, it's not just their suffering that is at stake, it's God's. Because even if a man were to, let's say, burn in hell for ten years and then be annihilated and suffer no more, God suffers forever the loss of that person.

God was not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. God is the loser. God is the one robbed, in a sense.

And it is a tragic thing that a person that God made for his glory is lost to him because of rebellion and sin. And it's a terrible thing. Now, the terror of the Lord is an interesting expression that Paul uses here.

It's probably just akin to the very common biblical expression, the fear of the Lord, perhaps intensified a bit. The idea is there is a judgment seat. Those who have done bad will receive rewards for their bad deeds.

That's a terrible thing to contemplate. And knowing that terror, we are not willing to see anyone go there without our struggling to persuade them otherwise. Therefore, knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men the best we can.

It says, we are well known to God, and I trust also well known to your consciences. Now, the conscience, remember, we had some things to say about that when we were talking about chapter 4. Paul cannot prove himself to be the right party. I mean, perhaps he can, but if the Corinthians are prone to believe his adversaries in Corinth, and there were some adversaries of Paul there, if people choose to believe his adversaries, there's nothing Paul can do to convince them that he's in the right and his adversaries are in the wrong.

All he can do, as he said in chapter 4 verse 2, is commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. He said, we have renounced, 2 Corinthians 4, to the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness or handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Just presenting ourselves for who we are and letting every man's conscience decide what to make of him, what to make of Paul and of his message.

And that's what he says, too, in chapter 5 verse 11, I trust we are well known in your consciences. We hope that your consciences have approved of us. We hope that you and your conscience know we're right.

Now, verse 12, for we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to glory on our behalf, that you may have something to answer those who glory in appearance and not in heart. What Paul's saying here is that he's just said a lot about his ministry, his purity, his integrity and so forth, his accomplishments, but he doesn't do it for the sake of commending himself. Remember back in chapter 3 verse 1, he said he didn't need letters of commendation with these people.

They knew him well. He shouldn't have to write his own letter of commendation about himself. And that's not what he's really intending to do.

He says, the reason I'm writing this is that I know there are some among you, and these are Paul's adversaries in the church there, who glory in the flesh, that is, they pay attention to these outward details of a man. They don't look at the heart. If they did, I

wouldn't have to tell you all these things that I'm experiencing outwardly.

You know my heart, and that would be all that matters. But there are people who don't care about the heart, they're looking on the outside appearance only. They're looking at the flesh, they're looking at what a guy's accomplished, what he's suffered, what his outward show is.

And so I'm telling you, so that when you're confronting such people, you'll have something to say about me, to defend me. You can glory in me, you can not be ashamed, in other words, to stand on my side in the conflict. You'll have something to answer, those who glory in appearance and not in heart.

Because, although, if everyone was concerned only about a man's heart, Paul says, I wouldn't have to defend myself. I mean, my heart is clear before God, and anyone who knows me knows that. But these people are questioning that.

And so they want to know about outward things. So I'm telling you about my outward things. I'm going through these struggles, these afflictions.

I'm, you know, suffering such things for Christ. This is his boast, but he's not doing it to commend himself. But that those who are defending him in Corinth might not be ashamed, but have something to say in answer to those who are looking at these kinds of considerations.

For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God. Or if we are of a sound mind, it is for you. Commentators are really at a loss to know exactly what Paul is saying here, and translators too.

There are different translations trying to clear this up. What does he mean, if we are beside ourselves, it is for God? There are some who think that Paul is alluding here to one of the criticisms that is made of him. That he's mad.

That he's insane. That's what beside himself means. Beside oneself means they're insane.

Jesus' own family thought he was beside himself once, in Mark chapter 3. And because he was not eating, he was preaching day and night, not taking time to sleep or eat. And when his family heard about this, it says they said he's beside himself. And they set out to take him into custody, but they were not successful.

They thought he was crazy, because he was so obsessed. So obsessed that he would bypass meals and sleep. A little later on we're going to read that Paul did the same kinds of things.

In chapter 6, describing his own experiences, in verse 5 he says he's in stripes,

imprisonments, and tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fasting. So just like Jesus, who sometimes didn't take time out to eat or sleep, Paul sometimes doesn't take time out to eat or sleep. And just as some people thought that Jesus was beside himself, or crazy, obsessed with his ministry, so some people might view Paul that way.

Now this could either be something that was specifically uttered against him by his critics, that he was beside himself, he's a man obsessed, or it might be that it was something that was just the Corinthians themselves sometimes wondered about. Not so much that his critics were leveling this as a criticism, but sometimes he looked to everybody like he might be a little bit mad. Now some commentators have suggested that the accusation that he was beside himself might come from his experience of ecstatic interludes, or whatever, in his preaching.

That he might get so emotional, or even spiritual. He might go into a trance or something, he might begin to prophesy. Actually he seems to do something like that a little later on in chapter 6, especially in verses 16-18, he kind of lapses into a prophetic oracle.

I'm not saying he went into a trance or anything like that, but he stops speaking as himself and starts speaking like a prophet speaks. Now if Paul did that kind of thing when he was preaching live, it is suggested, perhaps it seemed like he had fits of madness, or fits of being in and out of rational consciousness, and that some were accusing him of being mad or beside himself for that reason. Of course I can't claim to know the answer.

The commentators don't know, and I don't know, but I guess I'm inclined to believe that he might be referring to the fact that he appears to be a madman sometimes just because he is obsessed with what he's doing. He's obsessed because he knows the terror of the Lord. And he devotes himself day and night, even missing meals and sleep, to persuade men to avoid that terrible prospect of standing before the judgment seat of Christ without being prepared.

Sometimes so obsessed that people might think he's gone a little off the rails. But he says, if I'm beside myself, it's for God. And isn't God worth it? If there's anything worth being a fanatic about, it's God.

And a person who is a fanatic for God has no reason to be embarrassed, although people use the word fanatic in describing them as a pejorative. People say, you're a fanatic. Well, a person doesn't have to be a fanatic only about God.

A fanatic generally is somebody who's just, I guess what some would consider overzealous, or obsessed with zeal for something. But when you consider it, people are criticized for being religious fanatics. But they're very seldom criticized for being sports fanatics, for example.

Or fanatics for surfing. Or fanatics for rock and roll. I mean, when you go to a rock concert, in many cases, and you feel like you're in the presence of a bunch of fanatics.

They're fanatically zealous about their musician heroes. You go to a sports event, and the crowds are alternately screaming on their feet and waving flags and throwing things, or sitting down calmly. But when they're getting all excited, are they not being fanatics? Are they not overzealous? There's all kinds of things that people can be fanatics about.

And many of them, they should be embarrassed about being fanatics about, because the things they're fanatics about aren't worth being fanatical about. What is it about a rock concert or about a sporting event that justifies a person going overboard? Being intensely zealous about it? Those are passing things of very little value in the large scheme of things. But God, salvation, eternal life, those are things worth getting excited about.

And why should anyone be faulted for being a fanatic about Christianity, which is something worth being zealous about? Something with eternal ramifications and importance, when other people are not criticized for being fanatics about things of much less importance, and certainly not worthy of their fanaticism. Well, it's possible that Paul is defending himself because he is a fanatic. Some people think a fanatic is imbalanced, beside himself, maybe a little nuts.

But he says, well, if I am, it's for God. If I'm beside myself, it's for God, and I don't make any further defense than that. As far as I'm concerned, it's self-evident that being fanatical for God is justifiable.

But, he says, if we're of sound mind, it is for you. Now, when I'm not being fanatical, when I'm reasoning with you, when I'm teaching you, when I'm presenting a rational discussion to you, then I'm doing that for your benefit. Still, this does not make this verse an easy one, but commentators puzzle over it, and it's not entirely clear what he means when he says, if we're beside ourselves, or if we are of sound mind.

It may be simply that Paul, at one and the same time, is thought by some to be beside himself, and by others to be of a sound mind. But it may be that he's not sometimes seemingly irrational, and other times seemingly rational, but he's always the same guy, but people looking at him from different directions call him different things. Some call him a nut, and other people see him as eminently reasonable.

And those who see him as reasonable receive benefit from it. If I'm of a sound mind, it's for your benefit. You see me as reasonable, you'll learn from it, you'll gain something from it, you'll benefit from it.

But those who see me as a nut, well, they won't benefit, but God will appreciate it. I'll be a nut to God, a fool for Christ, whatever. Whatever, it's not all that easy to quite sort out

the precise intentions of that verse.

Verse 14, now. For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus that if one died for all, then all died. And he died for all that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died for them and rose again.

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh, even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet we now know him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. All things have passed away, and behold, all things have become new.

Now, all things are of God who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us.

We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Now, there is so much in this passage that I'm in despair of being able to handle it in the time we have left, but I'm going to have to give brief treatment of some things that would really deserve much deeper.

Paul says that in verse 14 and 15, we are compelled, as it were, to behave the way we do and to preach as we do and to convince men and persuade men as we do because of our theological presuppositions. He says, my theological proposition, my judgment is this, my understanding, my opinion is this, that if one person died for all people, then all people died. Now, what does he mean by that? In the King James it says, if one died for all, then all were dead.

But that's not as good a translation. It's all died, is the more accurate translation. If it were understood to be all were dead, if one died for all, then all were dead, then some scholars taking it that way, including John Chrysostom, an ancient eastern theologian, believe that what Paul was saying is everybody was spiritually dead.

And because everyone was spiritually dead, Christ had to die for everybody. But that's not really the way it reads. It's not if one died for all, then all were dead.

But rather that if one died for all, then all died. And what this apparently means is that Christ is said to have died for everybody, then it is so that he was our representative and in him all people died. If he died for all, that is, in the place of all, then we must judge that all in him, in the person of their representative, have died.

Vicariously, he died for us. His death was our death. Now, that's a positive thing.

Death is usually thought of as a bad thing, but in terms of a person standing before God, the wages of sin is death. And for that reason, we all must anticipate the judgment of death. Unless, of course, it's already happened.

Now, it has for the Christian, because in his dying for all, we have all died. And that means there's no double jeopardy. The penalty for sin, which is death, has been paid in our case.

We don't look forward to death anymore. Physical, yes, death, but not ultimate death. That we have the advantage of having died in him, instead of having to die ourselves.

Instead of ourselves paying this death penalty, it has been paid by a representative. And if it is said that he died for all, then it must be that all have died in him. By his having done so, it is the benefit accrues to all.

Now, one of the great controversies about this is that which would be the interpretation of the Arminian as opposed to the Calvinist. Because the Arminian, of course, believes that Jesus died for all people. The Calvinist believes that Jesus only died for the elect.

That God never intended for Jesus to die for anyone other than the elect. And Paul says, Christ died for all. Now, that sounds initially like an Arminian statement.

Christ died for all, not just for the Christians only, but for all people. But then the Calvinist can respond, uh-uh, but Paul said if Christ died for all, then all died. So, Paul is assuming that all have died in Christ, and that can only apply to Christians.

Therefore, all here must not mean all humans, but only all Christians. All those who have, you know, the all is the same in both phrases. If Christ died for all, then that same all have died.

So, the ones that Jesus died for have died. And the argument is only Christians can be said to have died in Christ. Only Christians have shared in his death and his resurrection.

And therefore, all here only means the elect. It does not mean all people, including the non-elect. And so, this is actually an argument used by a Calvinist in a debate against me.

And my response is that in verse 19 it says that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The church has never been called the world. The elect has never been called the world.

Although they think it is, because in one place in 1 John it says Jesus died not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And the Calvinist says, well, the whole world there means the whole world of the elect. But that is simply an artificial construction.

Throughout Scripture, the world is always in contrast to the elect. Jesus said, if you were of the world, the world would love its own, but because I called you out of the world, the world hates you. And the world is not identical with the elect.

It is the whole of humanity. And particularly those who are not Christians. But it says that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

Not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. And who do we preach that to? Well, we preach it to the world, of course. But the point here is that Christ's death apparently did accomplish something for all men.

At least that's one possibility. Let me just give you the two possibilities. One is the Calvinist possibility.

And that is that the world here means only the world of the elect. And that all, in verse 15 and verse 14, means only all the elect. All those who have died with Christ.

The other possibility is that Christ's atonement was universal. And even much more universal than most evangelicals of an Arminian sort have really considered. And that is that when Christ died, all humanity really did die.

In the sense that all were saved. That doesn't mean that all will ultimately be saved. But Christ's death was for all people.

Thus, he did not impute their sins against them. He reconciled them to himself. Well, if that is true of all the world, then why are not all the world reconciled? Well, all people, at some point in their life, rebel against God.

Turn from God. The implications of what I'm saying are at least possibilities. His words would allow this.

I know of nothing in Scripture that would disallow it. That God saved everybody, but we lose ourselves. A child would be thus born saved.

Born reconciled to God. Born with, having died with Christ. All children.

But when a child turns from God, when a person reaches an accountable age where he can turn responsibly from God, that person casts away any salvation. That was his. Now the difference here, of course, is diametrical between that and the Calvinist view.

The Calvinist view, and that of many Arminians as well, is that all children are born guilty. All children are born damned, as it were. And people are born initially lost and are only saved if they are somewhere along the line found.

And accept the gospel. This other view would be that all people, because of the

sweeping universal merits of what Christ did, he died for all, and God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their sins against him, that Christ actually saved all. But many, everyone, eventually, sins against that.

And unless they repent of having done so and come to Christ, they will not experience the salvation that he has gotten for all. Now the fact that the reconciling... Let me point out another verse like this. In Romans chapter 5. It's a verse that uses the language very similarly, and likewise has the same variables about it.

The Calvinist versus the Arminian variables there. But in Romans chapter 5, it says in verse 18, Now here, the Calvinist view is going to say, the free gift came to all men means all elect men, because this free gift results in justification to life. Then what do they do with the all men in the previous phrase? It seems like Paul is making a direct parallel.

What Adam did, did something to all men, and what Christ did, did something to all men. And if we want to make the all men in the second case only those who are in Christ, only Christians, in other words, people who ultimately become Christians, then we can't make the all with reference to Adam universal either. Either all is universal or all is not universal.

Did death come to all men without exception through Adam? Yes, without exception. Did life come to all men through Christ without exception? If not, then there's no parallelism in Paul's statement, which is constructed in such a way as to sound as if he's intending it to be a parallel. Adam did something to all men, and Christ did something to all men.

By what tortured logic could we say that all men with reference to Adam's sin must be all men without exception? But the all men with reference to Christ's actions refers only to those who ultimately become Christians. Now, I'm not teaching universalism here. I believe that many people will go to hell.

I don't believe all people will be saved. But what I'm suggesting here is that Paul might be saying, it sounds like he is, to me, it sounds like he is, that Christ, when he died, died for all people, acquiring salvation for every person. But through rebellion, through conscious choices and so forth, people alienate themselves from God, although they come into the world with the benefits of Christ's reconciliation, with the benefits of Christ's atonement upon them.

They deliberately, at some age, where they're old enough to be fully accountable for their actions before God, their sins against God alienate them from God, and they will be lost because of that. And most men are lost, unless they turn back to God. This is, I hope that's not too confusing, but that is, to my way of thinking, a more natural way of understanding Paul's words.

It just goes against what is usually thought, because we live in a very Calvinist influenced church, society. But I would point this out. The Calvinist believes that whoever Jesus died for is inevitably saved.

They believe Christ died only for the elect, and therefore the elect are inevitably saved. The Calvinist would say Jesus didn't die just to make salvation potential, but Jesus died to actually procure salvation, and his death did procure salvation for the elect, they say. He didn't just make salvation an option for everybody, but he actually secured and procured salvation for those few that he died for.

Now, I can't see that in this passage, because although it says in verse 19, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, certainly God reconciled the world. Did that procure the reconciliation? It sounds like it, but look at verse 20. God reconciled the world to himself through Christ, but we used to have to beg you to make the move, to be reconciled with God, to make the choice.

We beg you, we plead you, it's as if God was pleading with you, please be reconciled to God. Now, God reconciled the world to himself, but the world alienated itself from God, and needs to be, by its own choice, re-reconciled, it would appear. Or accept the benefit of reconciliation by individual choice.

But Paul does not indicate that people for whom God sent Jesus to reconcile, that those people are automatically reconciled. But if it's a given that has been procured and certain, he begs with people, he pleads with people, God himself is pleading with people to accept the terms of reconciliation. Why would he bother, why expend so much emotion, if it's a given, if it's already done.

I think what Paul's view was, was that Jesus died for all people on the planet. He procured salvation, potentially, for all people. And the world came to be reconciled to him, but the problem is the world, every person in the world, selfishly chooses to turn from God, and therefore alienates itself from him.

And this way of looking at it only really impacts the way we understand the state of infants, I suppose, and those who are under an accountable age. I'm going to have to say more about these verses, because there are several wonderful verses here that we haven't commented on, but we have to come to the end of our session here. So we'll pick up chapter 5 again next time, and go on into 6 in our next session.