

THE BELIEVER IN THE BODY AND OUT OF THE BODY

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A SERMON
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Now he that has wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also has given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always 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, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad.”
2 Corinthians 5:5-10.

IT is quite clear that the apostle did not consider his body to be himself. He speaks of it as being the frail tent or tabernacle in which he dwelt, and again as the garment with which for a while he was clothed. That tent or tabernacle he expected to see dissolved, and that garment he expected to put off. He distinguished between the outward man which would perish, and the inward man, which was his true self, which he speaks of as “renewed day by day.” The apostle reckoned upon living here in the body, according to the divine will, till he had finished the work which was given him to do, and then he expected to put off his mortal flesh, and to be a spirit unclothed and disembodied.

Such is the condition at the present time of all the saints who have departed, they are well described as “the spirits of just men made perfect.” With the exception of Enoch and Elijah, who carried their bodies with them into the celestial world, all departed believers are now spirits unclothed of their bodies, and wearing only such array as befits spiritual existences. Is it difficult to conceive of them in that condition? I do not think it should be. Spirits *without* bodies are not such marvelous things as spirits *in* bodies.

You every day as you walk the streets meet spirits in bodies, spirits that quicken flesh and bone and muscle, and move a mass of material from place to place. If we had never seen such a thing as a body kept in life and filled with power by an immaterial, invisible, and spiritual substance, it would be a very hard thing to realize it. No man among us knows how it is that this inner spirit of ours is connected with the body. Where is the point of union? What is the link between soul and sinew? Where does spirit begin and where does matter end? We know that if we will to move our arm it is moved, but how does the mind that wills manage to grasp the materialism which obeys its bidding? How is spirit capable of acting upon matter at all? How is it that a spirit can dwell within an abode of flesh, look out of these eyes, listen through these ears, speak by these lips, and perform its will by these hands?

Eyes and ears and hands are but earth, they are made of such matter as we meet with in other parts of the solid world, mere dust of the earth, materialism wisely molded, but yet corruptible materialism, and yet the soul somehow manages to indwell and inhabit its house of clay—a far more wonderful thing it seems to me than for a spirit to exist without a body. We shall find it easy to conceive of a spirit disentangled of materialism in proportion as we have learned to meditate upon spiritual things, and to feel the powers of the world to come. Multitudes around us know nothing of anything which does not appeal to their senses, but the man who has been renewed by the Spirit of God is himself made spiritually minded, and, hence the idea of disembodied spirits is not strange to him. Let us, according to

Scripture, look forward to a condition in which our perfected spirits shall abide with Christ, “waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23).

Yet Paul did not expect that the disembodied state would last forever, for he was assured of the resurrection of the body. He did not despise the body so as to hope never to see it again, but he reckoned that after it had been put off, it would undergo a change, and thus would be so renovated that at the coming of the Lord he would put it on afresh, and so his spirit would again be clothed. He expected that mortality would be swallowed up by life, and we also confidently indulge the same hope.

The fabric which was put into the ground when the believer was buried was sown in corruption, we expect to see it raised in incorruption. That which we laid in the tomb the other day was a poor dishonored corpse on which decay was working its fierce will, but we shall see it raised in glory, radiant with the light which made Moses’ face shine. That which we committed to mother earth we lowered into the grave in weakness, but it shall as surely rise in power. That which was buried was a soulish body, only fit for the natural soul, but not adapted for the movements and aspirations of the regenerated spirit, but we know that when it shall rise it will be a spiritual body adapted to our highest nature, fitted to be the palace of that gracious life which makes us sons of God.

The Apostle’s great expectation was the perfection of his entire manhood, spirit, soul and body in Christ Jesus. He was confident in the expectation that though his body would be unhoused for awhile by the dissolving of his earthly tabernacle, he would soon enter into a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens, and stand before the presence of God both as to his body and his soul made perfect in Christ Jesus. This was confident expectation.

From the text it is clear that this belief had a powerful influence over the apostle. It had especially two effects upon him, one was to make him “always confident,” and the other was to create in him a high ambition, “wherefore,” he says, “we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.” He felt that wherever he might be, and in whatever condition he might exist, the only thing he had to care for was that he might be pleasing to Him who had redeemed him with His precious blood, and so whether in the body or out of the body it mattered little to him so long as he could but be accepted of the Lord in Jesus Christ.

Of the apostle’s *confidence* and *ambition* we are going to speak this morning as the Spirit of God may graciously help us.

I. And first, dear friends, THE BELIEVER HAS GROUND FOR CONSTANT CONFIDENCE.

The apostle tells us, “Therefore we are always confident,” and then again, lest we should lose the sense by the interjected sentence in the seventh verse, he says, again, “We are confident, I say.” The condition, then, of the Christian, when he is living in faith of resurrection and eternal life, is a condition of continual confidence, a confidence which regards both the life which now is, and the state in which we expect to live before we reach the fullness of the promised glory, a confidence which concerns the present state—for while we are at home in the body we are always confident, a confidence which equally concerns, and rather more so the state which is to come, for “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”

First, let me speak with you upon *the confidence which the believer has in reference to his present condition while he is at home in the body*. Our translators have been somewhat unfortunate in their choice of terms in this instance, for they have lost part of the interest of the passage. We should have seen more beauty in these words if they had given us their literal meaning a little more closely. Let me read them to you as they may be read, “We are always confident, knowing that, while we are at home in the body, we are from home as to the Lord. We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be from home as to the body, and to be at home with the Lord. Wherefore we labor, that, whether from home, or at home, we may be accepted of Him.” You see the point lies in *at home* and *from home*. These words are as near an approach to the original as could readily be found, though they do not exhaust the sense of the Greek terms.

Here, then, in the present state we are said to be at home in the body, but we are at home in a very modified sense, for it is a home which is not a home, but only a frail lodging, a temporary tenement to accommodate us till we reach our true and real home in the New Jerusalem. It is such a home as a soldier has in the camp at a bivouac, or as a passenger has when he is crossing from continent to continent. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had each a home, but it was in a strange country, and they were daily looking for a city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God.

While we are in this present state we are at a disadvantage, for we are dwelling in a house which is not as yet in our home country, and by it we are kept from our real home in the fatherland above. In a sense, however, this body is a home, for here dwells the living, thinking, active mind, somewhere in the brain, whence it spreads itself and rules all the members of the body. We know that within the walls of this earthly fabric our spirit is ordained to live for awhile, a lamp burning within a pitcher, a precious jewel set in a ring of clay. It is a house for which we have no little affection, and we are loath to quit it—

*“For who to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing, anxious being e’er resigned,
Left the warm precincts of this house of clay,
Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind?”*

We complain of the infirmities of our bodies, but we are in no hurry to leave them, they threaten to fall upon us in their decay, but we linger in them still, till death serves a writ of ejectment and at the same time pulls down the tenement. We have, some of us lived in our body for forty years, some of you for sixty or seventy years, and it is natural that we should have made a home of it, such as it is, and it is small marvel that we are in no haste to emigrate, and even the temptation of that brighter home, and the “many mansions,” is not always enough to make us wish to be gone.

But yet this body is not a fitting home for us and we often discover, by experience, how inconvenient it is. It is a poor old tent, easily overturned, constantly getting rent, and the older it gets the more trouble it takes to patch it up and to keep it in habitable repair. In the course of years it has become soiled and creased, and worn-out like the tents of Kedar, with the wear and tear of many years it becomes more and more evident that it is not a worthy dwelling place for the child of a King, nor a fit abode for an immortal spirit, born from on high.

We have suffered many inconveniences from this crumbling tabernacle in many ways, but especially in spiritual things, we have been willing to watch, but the body has been inclined to sleep, the spirit has been willing, but the flesh has been very weak. We have been cumbered with weariness, pain, care, and bodily appetite when we have desired to be altogether engrossed with heavenly things. Sometimes, when we would sing, a throbbing headache makes us sigh; when we would rejoice with joy unspeakable, a palpitating heart depresses us; and when we would go about our Master’s business, a lame foot or a decaying constitution hinders us, so that we dwell in a house which is beneath the quality of so noble a creature as a spirit.

We have to put up with flesh and blood, but we are outgrowing them—we feel we are, there is a something within us which warns us that, like certain of the sea creatures which have to break their shells up as they grow, so we are growingly in need of another and better abode. We are like the young chick within the eggshell—it has been a home for us until now, but it is becoming too strait for us, we begin to chip it, and we sometimes wish it would break altogether, that we might enjoy fuller liberty. “We that are in this body do groan, being burdened,” and groan we shall till the day of our full redemption and the deliverance of the body from the bondage of corruption—

*“Welcome, sweet hour of full discharge,
That sets my longing soul at large,
Unbinds my chains, breaks up my cell,
And gives me with my God to dwell.”*

According to the expression of the Greek, ours is a home in a foreign country, we are not dwelling among our own people at this present, but we are exiles in a far-off land. We are not alone, for a numerous band of our brothers and sisters are with us, even as the Jews found company of their own race in Babylon, in whose songs and sighs they could unite, but this is exile to us, we have no inheritance here. "A possession of a burying place" is all that we need ask for, and all that we shall soon have, for this world is not our rest. The Lord has not been pleased to give us our portion in this life, our inheritance lies on the other side of the Jordan.

We are at home in the body, but, as I have already said, it is but a lodging place in the midst of a strange country in which we are pilgrims and sojourners, as all our fathers were. We are wayfaring men hastening away and passing through a foreign land amongst people who speak not our tongue, know not our customs, understand nothing of the place to which we are going, and therefore cannot comprehend us, but even they think us mad when we talk about another country, of which they have no idea, and for which they have no longing. We are at home only in a narrow sense, as a man may be said to be at home when, being in banishment, he takes up his abode for awhile, in a foreign town, it can never be more than this.

It is a home, too, which keeps us from our true home. We are not yet where we can see our Lord and hear His voice, we are not yet in the "rest which remains for the people of God." Today we are at school, like children whose great holiday joy is to go home. We are laborers, and this is the work field, when we have done our day's work we shall go home, but this is the workshop, not the home.

It is a very sweet thing after a week of hard work to reach home at last, to take off one's dusty clothes and throw them aside, and feel that toil is over for the present, and rest has come. In this world we cannot find a total rest so as to be completely at ease and at home, we shall only reach that happy condition when we are out of this foreign world. No sense of perfect home rest ever comes over the soul while we are here, except as faith anticipates the joys prepared above. There remains a rest for the people of God, but in this body and in this world it is not to be had.

Home is the place where one feels secure, our house is our castle. Outside in the world men watch your words, and if they can they misrepresent or misinterpret them. You have to fight a battle of life outside, but it is a very blessed thing if the battle is over when you cross your own threshold, when you are no longer misunderstood, but are appreciated and loved around your own fireside. Beneath our own dear roof-tree there is nobody to catch us up, nobody to cavil at us, but wife and children and friends love us and delight in us.

Well, brethren, we find no such home spiritually in this world, for this is the place of conflict and watchfulness. Here we dwell among enemies, and we have to sorrowfully cry, "My soul is among lions, among those that are set on fire of hell." We sing—

*"Woe's me that I in Mesech am
A sojourner so long;
That I in tabernacles dwell
To Kedar that belong.*

*My soul with him that hates peace
Has long a dweller been;
I am for peace; but when I speak,
For battle they are keen.*

*My soul distracted mourns and pines
To reach that peaceful shore,
Where all the weary are at rest,
And troublers vex no more."*

In heaven there will be no foes to watch against, nor men of our own household to be our worst enemies. Home, sweet home, is to be found above, and from that home our present home in the body is keeping us.

Home, too, is the place of the closest and sweetest familiarities. There all unbend. The judge takes off his gown and the soldier his sword, and both sport with their children. He who wears his buckram out of doors, finds himself stripped of it when he comes among his own kith and kin. There is the kiss of affection, there are the blandishments of love.

Here, alas, our spirits cannot take their fill of heavenly familiarities, for distance comes between. We long for the vision of love, but it comes not as yet, but up there, what indulgence shall be accorded to us! What discoveries of the love of God in Christ Jesus! Then shall the cry of the spouse in the song be fulfilled forever and ever—"Let him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth: for your love is better than wine." Then shall the inmost heart of Christ be known to us, and we shall dwell in Him forever and ever in closest communion. This home of ours in the body keeps us away from such intercourse with God as the glorified ones above enjoy without ceasing, said I not truly that our present state has its drawbacks, such as make a man sigh and cry to be gone?

But, dear friends, the main point in which the present state is at a disadvantage compared with the future one is this, that here we have to live entirely by faith. We walk here by faith, not by sight. You believe in God, but you have not beheld His glory as the blessed dead have done. You believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, but it is in one "whom having not seen you love." You believe in the Holy Spirit, and you have been conscious of His presence by faith, but there is a something better yet, a clearer sight is yet to be had, which we cannot enjoy while we tarry here.

At present we take everything on the testimony of God's Word and the witness of His Spirit, but we have not yet seen the celestial city, nor heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps, nor eaten at the banquets of the glorified. We enjoy a foretaste of all these, and anticipate them by faith, but actual enjoyments are not for this world. What a man sees why does he yet hope for? As this place is the realm of hope we cannot expect to see, but we are going to the place where we shall not so much believe as behold, where we shall not so much credit as enjoy! We are nearing the country where we shall—

***"See, and hear, and know,
All we desired or wished below."***

And faith shall be exchanged for the clearest sight. Here we gaze through the telescope at heavenly things, but we cannot get into contact with them as we wish to do, but when we have shaken you off, O flesh, then shall we come actually into sight and fruition, and shall behold the Savior, as He is, face to face.

These are the inconveniences, then, of this present state, but Paul despite all these disadvantages was confident. "We are always confident," says he. He was contented, he was happy, he was courageous, he was steadfast still, and why? Why, brethren, because he had a hope of the immortality to be revealed. He knew that as soon as ever he shook off this body his soul would be with Christ. He knew that in some future day, when Christ should come, his body and his soul, remarried, should be forever beatified with the Lord, and therefore he counted all the disadvantages of this life to be as nothing—"these light afflictions which are but for a moment." He laughed to scorn anything that he had to suffer here below, because of the "exceeding weight of glory" which his faith realized as soon to be revealed.

Observe, also, that his confidence came from God's work in his soul. "He that has wrought us to the same thing is God." He was sure he should one day be perfect and immortal, because God had begun to work in him to that very end. When the statuary takes the block of stone and begins to carve it into a statue we get the promise of that which is to be. I no sooner see the master workman take the first stroke than I feel sure of a work of art, because I see that he has begun to work towards that end. From that

work the mason may turn aside, or he may die, and therefore I cannot be sure that from the chosen stone there will leap out by and by the statue.

But God never undertakes what He does not finish, He never fails for want of power, or because of a change of mind, and so if today I am the quarried block of marble, if He has begun to make the first chippings in me of genuine repentance and simple faith towards God, I have the sure prophecy that He intends to work upon me till He has worked me up into the perfect image of Christ, to be immortal and immaculate like my Lord. Paul by faith knew that by a divine decree before all worlds he was predestinated to be made a perfect and immortal being. He saw that God had created him for that very purpose, and new created him to that end, he felt the working of God within him—he could feel the Spirit of God operating in him, giving him newness of life, causing him to hate sin and to receive more and more fully the likeness of Christ, his Master. “He has worked me for the selfsame thing,” said the apostle and therefore he felt confident that to this end he should be brought.

Again, there was another ground of confidence—“who also has given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.” You know what an “earnest” is. It is not a mere pledge, for a pledge is returned when that which it certifies is given, but an earnest is a part of the promise itself. A man is to receive a wage at the end of the week, in the middle of the week he obtains a part of the money, and this is more than a pledge of the rest, it is an earnest of the whole, a most sure and positive pledge of that which remains unpaid.

The man who has received the Spirit of God in his soul has obtained the immortal seed which will expand into perfection, he is forgiven and accepted, and the Spirit helps his infirmities in prayer, fills him with faith, perfumes him with love, adorns him with holiness, and makes him commune with God—all this is the earnest of his perfected condition, and the beginning of the joys to come, the infallible assurance of all those joys which the Lord has prepared for them that love Him.

No man ever had the Spirit of God dwelling in him, molding him to the divine will, but what he ultimately obtained the heavenly state, for the Spirit of God leaves not His work undone, neither does He bestow divine gifts to take them away again. “Therefore,” says Paul, “we are always confident.” We have a hope which enters into that which is within the veil, we know what image the Lord is working in us, and we have received the Holy Spirit as the earnest of eternal blessedness, therefore, come what may, we are filled with a sacred courage and a sublime peace which make us await the future with calmest confidence.

Now we shall pass on to the next point, which is, that *Paul was equally confident about the next state into which he expected soon to pass*, namely, the condition of a disembodied spirit. Nature when it acts apart from grace shrinks from the thought of dying, but death can have no terrors for the man whom it lands in a condition which he prefers. By turning to the text, we see that Paul preferred the state into which death would cast him. “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord,” that is, we have a preference for being away from this home in the body, that we may be at home with the Lord. He looked at the state into which he would soon come by the dissolution of his body as a more desirable one than even his life of confidence here below.

Yet let us observe that it was not because Paul thought it would be better to be without a body than with one that he thus spoke. He has told us already “not for that we would be unclothed,” he did not desire to be a disembodied spirit for its own sake. There are certain mystics who look upon the body as a wretched encumbrance, the thought of resurrection has no pleasure to them, and therefore they spiritualize the doctrine, and make it to be no resurrection at all. The apostle was not of their mind, he called the body the temple of God, and desired its perfection, not its destruction.

The Lord has constituted man to be a wonderful combination of many forms of existence, a link between the angel and the animal, a mixture of the divine and the material, a comprehensive being taking up into himself the heaven which is above him and the earth on which he treads. Our great Creator does not mean us to be maimed creatures forever, He intends us to dwell with Him eternally in the perfection of our humanity. When our Lord Jesus died He did not redeem one half of man, but the whole man, and He means not to leave any part of the purchased possession in the enemy’s hands. We

ought not to think that to be half a man would be more desirable than to be a whole man, for our Lord Jesus thinks not so. We should be waiting for the second advent of our Lord, who will call His saints from their tombs, and redeem them altogether from the power of the grave. We should even now rejoice that this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

It will be evident to you all, dear friends, that if Paul preferred the disembodied state to this, as the text tells us he did, then the spirits of those saints who have left their bodies in the grave are not annihilated—they live on. Paul could not have counted it better to be annihilated than to lead a life of holy confidence. The saints are not dead, our Lord gave a conclusive answer to that error when He said, “Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For He is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto Him.” Those who have departed this life are still alive, we are sure of that, or else Paul would not have preferred that state.

Neither are they unconscious, as some say, for who would prefer torpor to active confidence? Whatever trials there may be in the Christian life here below, the man of faith does really enjoy life, and could not prefer unconsciousness. Neither are the saints in purgatorial fires, as the Babylonish harlot says, for nobody would desire to be tormented, and we may be sure that the apostle Paul would not have been willing to be in purgatory than to live here and serve his Lord.

Brethren, the saints live, they live in consciousness and in happiness. Moses came and talked with Christ on the mount of transfiguration, though he had no body, just as readily as Elijah did, though that mighty prophet carried his body with him when he ascended in a chariot of fire. The body is not necessary to consciousness, or to happiness. The best of all is, that the spirits of the departed are with Christ. “To be with Christ, which is far better,” says the apostle. “Forever with the Lord,” their portion is allotted them. It is the Lord’s own prayer, “I will that they also whom you have given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory,” and the prayer is fulfilled in them. “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth, yea, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors and their works do follow them.”

This made the apostle something more than confident and courageous in the prospect of death, he was willing to depart into the disembodied state because he knew he would be at home with the Lord in it. I wish you to dwell a minute on that thought of being at home with the Lord. We rejoice that we have Christ with us here, spiritually, for His presence brings us spiritual blessings of a very high order, and joys prophetic of the joys of heaven, but still we have not His bodily presence.

We have now a sight of our Lord through a telescope as it were, but we do not see Him near at hand. We speak to Him as through a trumpet across the sea, we do not talk to Him face to face. Ah, what will it be to be at home with Christ! When we reach His own palace gate, and sit at His own board, we shall know Him far better than we do now, and He will look more lovely in our eyes than ever because we shall see Him more clearly. The sound of His voice will be much sweeter than anything we have heard in the Gospel here below, for we shall actually hear Him speak. Will we not take our fill of Him when we once behold Him? I think I shall never want to take my eyes off Him, but find a heaven, an eternity, an infinity of bliss in drinking Him in with all my eyes and all my heart. To be at home with Him will be to understand infinitely more of Him than we have ever dreamed of as yet.

Ah, you do not know His glory, you could not bear to behold it as yet, you would fall at His feet as dead, in a swoon of delight, if you could but gaze upon it while you are yet in this frail body. When disembodied you shall not have the flesh to throw a mist over your eyes, but you shall behold the King in His beauty, and be able to bear the joy.

In that condition to which we are speeding we shall also be beyond all doubt as to the truth of our holy faith. There will be no more mistrust of our Lord or of His promises, and we shall no more doubt the power of His blood or our share in His atoning sacrifice. Sometimes the dark atheistic thought will come, “Is it not all a dream?” You shall never have such a thought there, for you will be at home with Jesus.

Now there arises the troublesome question, are you a real believer? Has Jesus really washed you in His blood? You will be beyond all such inquiries when you are absent from the body and present with the Lord. Now you have to walk by faith, and you must not try to get beyond faith, for that is the mode of spiritual life for this present state, but after death you will no more walk by faith, you will have sight, and fruition, and these will banish all the doubts which try your faith while in the body. How pleasant and desirable does the prospect of actual fruition cause heaven to become even though we know that for awhile we shall be away from the body.

In the future state we shall communicate with Christ more sensibly than we do now. Here we speak with Him, but it is by faith through the Spirit of God, in the glory land we shall actually speak to Him in His immediate presence, and hear His voice while He personally speaks to us. Ah! what we shall have to tell Him! What will He have to tell us! Truly, I dare not venture into these great deeps of expectation lest I drown myself in the delights of hope. Oh, the joy which awaits us! It is almost too much for me to think of.

When we are at home with Him, without the body, and also, I suppose, even more when we are at home *in* the resurrection body, we shall have greater capacity for taking in the glory of our Lord than we have now. Sometimes He fills us with His love which passes knowledge, and then we think we know very much of Him, but oh, my brethren, our knowledge is but that of little babes as yet. We are such small and shallow vessels that a few drops of Christ's love soon fill us up, and we begin running over, but He will enlarge us till we hold great measures of Him, and then He will fill us with all the fullness of God.

You have sometimes tried to imagine what heaven must be. Well, you shall have many such heavens, nay, ten thousand times as much delight in God as you have dreamed of. If even here He does for us exceeding abundantly above what we ask or think, what will He do for us there? As for His person and His sweetness, and His excellence, and His glory, you have only touched the hem of His garment. You have only, like Jonathan, dipped the end of your rod in that flood of honey, and it has enlightened your eyes, but oh, when you shall be at home with Him you shall feast to your heart's content. Here we sip, but there we shall drink full bowls, here we eat our daily morsel, but there the heavenly feast will never break up.

Now, putting these two things together, the present state and the next, we have great reason, like the apostle, to go on from day to day with holy courage and confidence. If the way be rough, it leads to an unspeakably joyful end, so let us trip over it cheerfully, and if the way should grow rougher still, let us show still greater confidence, for one hour with our God will make up for it all, and infinitely more.

II. The last point I can only spend a few minutes upon, it is this—THE BELIEVER HAS REASONS FOR AN ABSORBING AMBITION.

According to the text, we are to live alone for Jesus—"Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him." From henceforth my brethren, the one great thing we have to care about is to please our Lord. You are saved, and heaven is your portion, now from this time concentrate all your thoughts, your faculties and your energies upon this one design—to be acceptable with Jesus Christ. Live for Him as He has died for you, live for Him alone.

Believer, it ought to be your ambition to please Christ in every act you do. Do not say, "How will this please myself or please my neighbor?" but ask, "How will this please my Lord?" And, remember, it is not by the action alone that He will be pleased, but the motive must be right or you will fail. Oh, cry to Him to keep your motives clean, pure, elevated, heavenly, for groveling aims will be a sour leaven, and will render the whole loaf unfit to offer.

Nor is it merely the motive, it is the spirit in which the whole thing is done. Labor, brethren, with a divine ambition to please Jesus Christ in your thoughts, in your wishes, in your desires, in everything that is about you. I know you will have to lament many shortcomings and errors, there will be much about you that will be displeasing to Him, take care that it is also displeasing to you, and never be pleased with that which does not please Him. Never accept anything in yourself which He would not accept. With all your

ardent spirit watch every movement of your soul that no power or passion so moves as to vex His Holy Spirit. Seek to please Him every moment while you are upon the earth. You know what sort of things Jesus did, and what He would like you to do, follow His every step, obey His every word. He has bidden you walk in holiness as He did, O sin not against Him. He bids you clothe the naked, feed the hungry, teach the ignorant, visit the sick, look after the fatherless and widows—all these things He speaks of as peculiarly pleasing to Himself, and as mentionable to the honor of His saints, in the day of His appearing, let these things be in you and abound. Be fruitful in those graces which were most conspicuous in Him. Do not let a day pass without doing something with the one objective of pleasing Christ in it.

We do a great deal because it is customary, or because church opinion expects it, but to do holy acts directly for Christ, simply and alone for love of Him—this should be our constant habit. Have we not some alabaster box to break to anoint *His* head, some tears with which to wash *His* feet? Need I urge that something, however humble, should frequently be done, even at the cost of self-denial, for His dear sake? Yes, let everything be done as unto Him.

For then, mark this last, we shall please Him in the next state, for “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” The child of God is glad of this. The text might be translated “we shall all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ.” Today men do not understand us, but they will know us in that day. I will warrant you this one thing, if you will live the most devoted and disinterested life possible, you will find people sneering at you and imputing your actions to selfish motives, and putting a cruel construction on all you do or say. Well, it does not matter, for we shall all be manifested at the judgment seat of Christ, before God, and men, and angels.

Let us live to please Him, for our integrity of motive will be known at the last, and put beyond all dispute. The world said of one man that he preached from selfish motives, while all the time he had no thought but for God’s glory, the Lord will make it clear how false was the judgment of men. They said of another man that he was very earnest but that he wanted to win popularity, yet all the while he cared not one straw for human praise. Such a man need not trouble himself, the smoke will clear away in that great day, and he will be seen in his uprightness.

If you have lived only to please Christ you need not be afraid of His coming, for in that day He shall clear away all slander and misrepresentation, and you shall stand out vindicated and justified before an assembled universe. In that day, when God shall publicly justify His saints, He will make all men, and angels, and devils know that they are truly just. The solemn verdict of God will be one to which the whole universe of intelligent spirits will give in their assent. They will say “ay” to the sentence passed by the Lord Jesus, they themselves would bring in a verdict in favor of believers in that last testing day if it were left to them.

As for the ungodly, the condemning sentence shall be not only just, but such as the whole universe shall assent to. The punishment which God will lay upon sinners for the evil deeds done in the body, will not then be caviled at as too severe. It will be such a sentence as every intelligent spirit shall be compelled to own to be right.

But my brethren, let us so live that while our lives shall challenge no judgment on the score of merit, for that thought we utterly abhor, yet there shall be in our lives evidences of our having received grace from God, and evidences of our being acceptable with Christ, for if we do not so live, we may talk what we like about faith, and boast what we please about experience, but without holiness no man shall see the Lord. If our life has never had in it that which pleases Christ, then the evidence will be taken against us that we were not pleasing to Him, that we had no spiritual life, that we had no grace in the heart, and that we were not saved. Then there will remain nothing for us but to be condemned with the ungodly.

Come, then, brothers and sisters, do not let us care whether we live or die, let us not suffer ourselves to be alarmed about the passage out of this world into the next state, but let us be “steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.”

I have been twice to the grave this week, with two of our aged friends, a sister and a brother, who have passed into glory, and the lesson which they have left behind for our edification is—let us not be careful whether we be at home in the body or whether we be at home with Christ, but living or dying, let us be careful to please Jesus.

I wish I knew how to enforce this lesson, and send it home to every believer's heart, but I must rather pray the Holy Spirit to do so. May He write it on my soul and on yours, and may we all be found practicing it from this time forth even forever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 CORINTHIANS 4:14-18, 5

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—865, 858, 850

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