

The Ministry of Hope, Love, and Peace

An Exegetical Overview of 2 Corinthians 5

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Why did you become a pastor? Was it for the glory? Was it to suffer? You have probably been asked this question before and (I hope) have given better answers than these. Are the answers you gave years ago the same answers you would give today?

Why are you still a pastor? Is it for the glory? Is it to suffer? Although this question is probably asked less frequently today, our life and ministry can only be enriched the more often we ponder it. It is tempting to view ministry in terms of only glory or suffering, depending on the day or our mood. A study of 2 Corinthians 5 directs our eyes to see that ministry is shaped by a powerful and merciful God who chooses to work in a hidden way through his suffering servants. Only by faith can this tension be understood and appreciated; only by faith can we see that in suffering God blesses us with his hope, love, and peace;¹ and only then can we ministers of Christ lead God's people to see the hidden work and purposes of Christ for their sake through the work of the ministry.

Thus while this chapter was assigned for the homiletical advantage it might provide for preaching on the upcoming 2nd Lessons of the Fourth (2 Cor. 5:1-10) and Fifth (2 Cor. 5:14-21) Sundays after Pentecost, Year B,² I pray that our study together will reach far beyond that to benefit your entire ministry and life, as well as the lives of God's people entrusted to you.

Background and Context

Paul's complex relationship with the Corinthians³ is mirrored by the complicated picture that awaits any who attempt to reconstruct the interactions Paul had with the Corinthians.⁴ Suffice it to say that by the time Paul writes the letter known as 2 Corinthians, he had already made multiple

This paper has been slightly modified in light of the discussion that took place when it was presented, with a few additional changes and corrections being made. Many thanks are given to Rev. Aaron Jensen for his helpful input and insights into this paper.

¹ This paper's title and theme are a reflection on the gifts of hope (5:1-10), love (5:11-17), and peace (5:18-21) God gives to us through the ministry of the Word, one that is often marked with sufferings and conflict.

² These Sundays are June 17 and 24, 2018, respectively. They are part of a larger *lectio continua* series in 2 Corinthians, spanning from the Second through the Seventh Sundays after Pentecost (respectively, the readings are 2 Cor. 4:5-12; 4:13-18; 5:1-10; 5:14-21; 8:1-9, 13, 14; 12:7-10). A number of these pericopes fall within Paul's section defending genuine gospel ministry and thus could be turned into a series on that topic. Note further that the 2nd Lesson for Ash Wednesday in every year of the Three Year Lectionary is 2 Cor. 5:20b-6:2, and in the One Year Historic Lectionary it is 2 Cor. 5:17-6:2.

³ As seen in broad terms in the suffering he experienced in Corinth (Acts 18), in the numerous problems he dealt with in 1 Corinthians, the misunderstanding about why he did not visit them as originally planned (2 Cor. 1-2), and the prospect that some in Corinth still might not have repented (2 Cor. 12:19-21), not to mention the super-apostles who were challenging Paul's apostolic ministry among the Corinthians (2 Cor. 10-13).

⁴ Carson and Moo (*Introduction*, 415-456) provide a helpful overview of the various issues to grapple with regarding the chronology, composition, and setting of 1 and 2 Corinthians, comparing the primary interpretations of these issues and more.

visits and written multiple letters to the Christians in Corinth.⁵ In general we can say that in this epistle we find one of Paul's most personal letters, written from Macedonia⁶ around 56 or 57 A.D.⁷ Before he visits them once again,⁸ his threefold purpose in writing is 1) to encourage and instruct the Corinthians by defining the nature of true gospel ministry (chs. 1-7); 2) to prepare them for the offering he is gathering on behalf of the poor Christians in Jerusalem (chs. 8-9); and 3) to defend his apostolic ministry against the "super-apostles" who were causing trouble in Corinth (chs. 10-13).⁹

We Groan for Our Home (2 Corinthians 5:1-10)

2 Corinthians 5:1-4

1 Οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ἐὰν ἡ ἐπίγειος ἡμῶν οἰκία τοῦ σκηνοῦ καταλυθῆ, οἰκοδομῆν ἐκ θεοῦ ἔχομεν, οἰκίαν ἀχειροποίητον αἰώνιον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. **2** καὶ γὰρ ἐν τούτῳ στενάζομεν τὸ οἰκητήριον ἡμῶν τὸ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἐπενδύσασθαι ἐπιποθοῦντες, **3** εἶ γε καὶ ἐκδυσάμενοι¹⁰ οὐ γυμνοὶ εὐρεθησόμεθα. **4** καὶ γὰρ οἱ ὄντες ἐν τῷ σκηνῇ στενάζομεν βαρούμενοι, ἐφ' ᾧ οὐ θέλομεν ἐκδύσασθαι ἀλλ' ἐπενδύσασθαι, ἵνα καταποθῆ τὸ θνητὸν ὑπὸ τῆς ζωῆς.

1 For we know that if our earthly house which is a tent¹¹ is destroyed,¹² we have a building from God, an eternal house in the heavens, not made by hands.¹³ 2 For in this [tent]¹⁴ we groan, longing

⁵ Paul seems to have written a letter to Corinth before 1 Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9), now lost and commonly called the "previous letter." After learning that his letter (1 Corinthians) seems to not have taken effect among them, Paul appears to have made a second visit to Corinth that is not recorded in Acts (referred to as the "painful visit," cf. 2 Cor. 2:1, 12:14, 13:1-2). In conjunction with this he seems to have written a "sorrowful letter" (cf. 2 Cor. 7:8), before finally writing 2 Corinthians in preparation for his third visit to them.

⁶ Cf. 2 Cor. 2:13, 7:5.

⁷ Paul's hearing before the proconsul Gallio in Corinth (cf. Acts 18:12-17), which occurred somewhere in mid to late 51 A.D., helps us to nail down the timeline for his third missionary journey and the events surrounding 1-2 Corinthians.

⁸ Cf. Acts 20:1-3. Despite the turbulent relationship between Paul and the Corinthians, from all we can tell it seems that 2 Corinthians accomplished its purpose in preparing the way for Paul to come to them. For when Paul does arrive, he resides there for three months, and, apparently viewing his work in the eastern Mediterranean as being complete for now, he writes his epistle to the Romans from the vicinity of Corinth so that the Romans will be ready to support his mission work to the west. Cf. Rom. 15:23-26.

⁹ Cf. Franzmann (*Word of the Lord*, 75-110) for a useful introduction, outline, and analysis of 2 Corinthians, especially in light of the overall Corinthian situation leading up to the writing of 2 Corinthians.

¹⁰ For reasons given below in footnote 16, our translation follows a different reading (ἐνδυσάμενοι) than the majority decision of the editors found in the 4th Revised Edition of the UBS Greek New Testament (ἐκδυσάμενοι).

¹¹ Note first of all that this is not the more common feminine noun σκηνή, but the neuter noun σκῆνος, both of which mean "tent." τοῦ σκηνοῦς is an exegetical genitive highlighting even further the lowly character of this earthly house.

¹² Or, "dismantled, torn down." Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 371) maintains that this verb likely points to "the dismantling of a tent rather than simply the demolition of a building."

¹³ Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 249 footnote 636) notes the similarities between 5:1 and Mark 14:58 as follows: "I will destroy" (καταλύσω) = "is destroyed" (καταλύθη); "I will build" (οικοδομήσω) = "building" (οικοδομή); and "made without hands" (ἀχειροποίητον). However, he comments: "But how they may relate is difficult to unravel."

¹⁴ While grammatically this neuter pronoun τούτῳ could refer to all of 5:1, in view of 5:4 (ἐν τῷ σκηνῇ) it is preferable to take it as a reference to τοῦ σκηνοῦς in 5:1. Thus even though Paul does identify our current earthly dwelling as a house, it is the imagery of a tent that governs the rest of his thought in these verses.

to put on our dwelling from heaven, 3 since¹⁵ when we are clothed¹⁶ we will not be found naked. 4 For indeed, while we are in this tent we groan because we are being burdened, since¹⁷ we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

It is unfortunate that our study cannot begin a little sooner. Paul's current train of thought in 5:1ff actually begins in 4:16,¹⁸ which in turn is part of a larger argument from 4:7-5:10 where Paul insists "on seeing the present in the light of the future."¹⁹ In fact, Paul is still expounding on the nature of genuine gospel ministry that began in 2:14.²⁰ He has been reflecting on his own person, frail and unimpressive as it seems, and what his physical sufferings mean for his ministry. God in fact uses such weakness to further magnify his power that works life for Jesus' sake even when death is all that can be seen (4:7-12; cf. 12:7-10). Thus Paul places his ministry in its proper eternal perspective, a perspective of faith that, in the face of present troubles, looks beyond what is visible and temporary to see invisible and eternal realities (4:16-18).²¹

But for all that, Paul's elaboration on this thought²² in 5:1-4 raises more questions than we can address today.²³ Indeed, 5:1-10 may be the most debated section of the entire letter.²⁴ Therefore, we limit our focus to this: "What exactly is Paul comparing with two different houses (οικία), and what point does he wish to drive home with this comparison?"

¹⁵ εἰ introduces a simple condition and γε adds emphasis. Guthrie (*2 Corinthians*, 281) cites research that in Paul εἰ γε καὶ "communicates a strong note of confidence in the assertion being made."

¹⁶ The textual issue here is a choice between ἐκδυσάμενοι ("taking it off," a reference to the earthly tent) and ἐνδυσάμενοι ("putting it on," a reference to the heavenly house). Even though the latter could sound redundant in asserting that once we put on the heavenly house we will not be found naked, that is exactly the point Paul is making. To avoid this apparent redundancy it seems the text was later altered to ἐκδυσάμενοι. Most modern translations (excluding NRSV) adopt ἐνδυσάμενοι as the reading with stronger external support. Cf. Metzger (*Textual Commentary*, 511), where the majority opinion of the committee oddly chooses ἐκδυσάμενοι instead of ἐνδυσάμενοι. Cf. also Guthrie (*2 Corinthians*, 281) and Seifrid, (*Second Corinthians*, 226).

¹⁷ ἐφ' ᾧ = ἐπί τούτῳ ὅτι, "for this reason, namely that." Possible parallels in other extra-biblical Greek indicate it could mean "on the condition that," but the meaning of that here would be unclear. Cf. Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 387) and Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 342. Cf. the only other occurrences of this prepositional phrase in Phil. 3:12, 4:10, and the much debated Rom. 5:12.

¹⁸ The NRSV and the UBS 4th Revised Edition support this with a section break that continues into chapter 5.

¹⁹ Wright, *Resurrection*, 361-362. Wright continues: "The present is full of suffering, especially for the apostle; but he sees it as organically connected to the future in which there is resurrection (4.14), glory (4.17), a new body (5.1), and judgment (5.10)." Later he describes three segments of 4:7-5:10 thus: "The first [4:7-15] describes Paul's sufferings, and explains them as the making present of the dying and rising of Jesus; the second [4:16-5:5] relates this entire experience to the future promise of the resurrection body; and the third [5:6-10] reflects back on the present, explaining why, in the light of this future, it is appropriate to have confidence, and to work at pleasing the lord. This then leads in to the further explanation of the nature of apostolic ministry in 5.11-6.13."

²⁰ Throughout 2 Corinthians it is difficult to determine in every context who Paul means by "we," namely, whether he means 1) all believers; 2) himself and the Corinthians; 3) himself and his fellow ministers, like Timothy and Titus; 4) an editorial "we" referring only to himself. In these opening verses of chapter 5 and for much of this chapter, in view of his overall purpose to defend his ministry in 2:14-7:13, we will lean toward the fourth option. Cf. Guthrie's extensive study of the issue in *2 Corinthians*, 32-38.

²¹ Guthrie (*2 Corinthians*, 275) considers 5:1-10 a "fitting crescendo" to Paul's point about suffering that surrounds genuine ministry (4:7-5:10).

²² Note the γὰρ in 5:1.

²³ Cf. Kistemaker (*Second Corinthians*, 165-166) for a list of 8 overarching questions related to 5:1-10. Some of these questions will be addressed in what follows.

²⁴ Cf. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 175; Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 150. Lincoln (*Paradise*, 59) states: "Possibly the one point about which there is no dispute with regard to 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10 is its difficulty."

First, let's get more acquainted with the facts: On the one hand, Paul speaks of a house (οικία) that is on earth (ἐπίγειος) and described as a tent (τοῦ σκηνούς), which is likely (ἐὰν + subjunctive)²⁵ to one day be destroyed (καταλυθῆ) – in this tent Paul is groaning (στενάζομεν).²⁶

This is compared to another house (οικία), a building from God (οικοδομὴν ἐκ θεοῦ),²⁷ a dwelling (οικητήριον)²⁸ from heaven for which Paul is longing (ἐπιποθοῦντες),²⁹ not made by human hands,³⁰ eternal, and in the heavens (ἀχειροποίητον αἰώνιον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς) – in some sense Paul says that we *have* this house (ἔχομεν).

Digging deeper, Paul mixes metaphors when he says that he wants to *take off* (ἐκδύσασθαι) his current tent and to *put on over it* (ἐπενδύσασθαι) the house from God, just as one would clothe and unclothe oneself.³¹ Paul longs to be clothed with this house from God and does not want to be unclothed and found naked (οὐ γυμνοὶ εὐρεθισόμεθα, οὐ θέλομεν ἐκδύσασθαι ἀλλ' ἐπενδύσασθαι), because he wants that which is mortal (τὸ θνητὸν) to be swallowed up by life (καταποθῆ ... ὑπὸ τῆς ζωῆς).³²

We limit our discussion of these much debated verses³³ to two chief interpretations. One view understands Paul to be contrasting a sinful, earthly existence in this present life with a future,

²⁵ Guthrie (*2 Corinthians*, 277 footnote 9) agrees with Wallace (*Greek Grammar*, 696) in identifying ἐὰν ... καταλυθῆ (an aorist passive subjunctive) as a third class conditional, indicating that the speaker views the condition as uncertain of fulfillment, but still likely. Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 370) defines this conditional with the aorist subjunctive as meaning “‘in the specific case that ever,’ with the context determining the degree of probability attaching to the ‘open’ condition. Here the context indicates that ἐὰν means ‘if, as is probable.’”

²⁶ Note that the only other occurrence of στενάζω in Paul is in Rom. 8:22-27, where Paul has similar consolation on his mind. There Paul describes the threefold groaning of creation (8:22), the Christian (8:23), and the Spirit (8:27) in the manner of a “crescendo” (Schneider, J. “στενάζω” in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 602).

²⁷ As Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 223) observes, ἐκ θεοῦ means that “Its future is unshakeable because it is God’s work, not our own.” Cf. καθ’ ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν αἰώνιον βᾶρος δόξης previously mentioned in 4:17.

²⁸ While there may be certain nuances to draw out of each of the words Paul uses in 5:1-2 to describe the heavenly residence from God, we conclude with Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 381): “Whatever differences of meaning may lie behind οἰκοδομή, οἰκία (v. 1), and οἰκητήριον (v. 2), these three terms must designate one and the same reality.” Chrysostom further observes that Paul “was not trying to make an exact contrast between the earthly and the heavenly but rather to exalt the latter in every possible way.” Bray, *2 Corinthians*, 239.

²⁹ Guthrie (*2 Corinthians*, 280) notes that this “longing” indicated by ἐπιποθέω could range from contexts of earnest desire to anxiety, but in Paul’s writings it is used positively to express his longing, “most often of his (or a coworker’s) longing to see members of the church in various places (Rom. 1:11; 2 Cor. 9:14; Phil. 1:8, 2:26; 1 Thess. 3:6; 2 Tim. 1:4).”

³⁰ Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 252) points out: “‘Not made with hands’ contrasts something that is temporary, impure, and incomplete (made with hands) with something enduring, incorruptible, and finished—something made by God.” He further notes: “In Scripture something ‘made with hands’ is connected to idolatry and implies impurity (Lev. 26:1, 30; Isa. 2:18; 10:11; 16:12; 19:1; Dan. 5:4, 23; 6:26; Acts 7:48; 17:24; Col. 2:11).”

³¹ Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 226) comments about Paul’s switch of metaphors: “While the former [building metaphor] emphasizes the happy difference between this life and the one to come, the latter [clothing metaphor] communicates the continuity of our personal existence and self-consciousness.”

³² Paul here reverses a common picture in ancient times of death as the one who swallowed up its victims. Cf. Ps. 49:14; Prov. 1:12. The note on Ps. 49:14 in the *Concordia Self-Study Bible* observes that death is also pictured as an “insatiable monster, feeding on its victims,” in Ps. 141:7; Prov. 27:20; 30:15-16; Isa. 5:14; Jon. 2:2; Hab. 2:5. “The imagery appears in Canaanite mythology, which so depicts the god Mot (death). As one Canaanite document reads, ‘Do not approach divine Mot, lest he put you like a lamb into his mouth.’” Cf. also 1 Cor. 15:54, which along with our verse here both cite Isa. 25:8.

³³ Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 250) cites Thrall as listing no less than nine proposals for the meaning of “building,” including the body of Christ, that is, the Church; the heavenly temple; the inner man; the resurrection body of Christ. Cf. also Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 349.

heavenly existence beginning at the moment of death and persisting into eternity.³⁴ The distinctive point about this view is that it understands the house from God to be descriptive of the believer's entire *post mortem* existence. The present tense of ἔχομεν would then point to the moment of death when the believer *has* this hope fulfilled. It would also correspond with Paul's later comments in 5:6-8, where he describes the believer's communion with Christ that is simultaneous with death.³⁵ Furthermore, Paul says this heavenly dwelling is *in heaven* and *from the heavens*, which could point to the enjoyment of God's presence in heaven at the moment of death.

While there is certainly nothing contrary to sound doctrine in this interpretation, Paul seems to be speaking more precisely about his hope. The contrast does not appear to be between a believer's existence before death with the entirety of his existence after death. Rather, Paul is more specifically contrasting *bodies*, namely, the body he inhabits on this earth over against the transformed body God will give him in the resurrection. Paul views his current corruptible body as a tent that will be destroyed at death, and with this in mind he longs to put on over it an eternal, incorruptible body in which God will dress him permanently on the Last Day, like a house he will never leave again.³⁶ Therefore, even though Paul will soon address the believer's interim state between death and the Last Day, he is not here concerned with that experience other than to use it as a foil for how much he longs for bodily resurrection.³⁷

In support of this view, Paul's use of οἰκία to describe *both* the earthly *and* the heavenly residence suggests an exact correspondence.³⁸ Since the preceding context (4:7-18)³⁹ strongly suggests that ἡ ἐπίγειος ἡμῶν οἰκία refers to a body, then so also does οἰκοδομῆν ἐκ θεοῦ.⁴⁰ Further, there is biblical precedent for speaking of bodily living as dwelling in a tent.⁴¹ Paul has also already mentioned his resurrection hope in 4:14, making it natural for Paul to continue in that same vein with regard to his longing for the day of resurrection.⁴²

³⁴ Cf. Lenski, *Interpretation*, 995-1006; Valleskey, *2 Corinthians*, 74-76; Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, 81-83; Kieta, "Restoration," 13; Kistemaker, *Second Corinthians*, 169-170; Balge, *Sermon Studies*, 194-196.

³⁵ That is, *as soon as* he is "away from the body" he is "at home with the Lord," 5:8.

³⁶ Unlike how he left the tent of his body at death.

³⁷ In support of this view are some early church fathers, such as Chrysostom (*Homilies*, 326): "Some indeed say that the 'earthly house' is this world; But I should maintain that he alludes rather to the body"; and Ambrosiaster (Bray, *2 Corinthians*, 239): "Our present body is our earthly home. Our resurrection body is our heavenly one." For more recent support, cf. Kretzmann, *Commentary*, 189; Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, 165-166; Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 150-156; Lincoln, *Paradise*, 59-71; Wright, *Resurrection*, 364-369; Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 219-229; Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 275-283. Cf. also the headings of NIV 2011, "Awaiting the New Body" and NKJV, "Assurance of the Resurrection."

³⁸ The NIV, CSB, and NRSV do not capture this parallelism well in that they do not translate both occurrences of οἰκία in the same way.

³⁹ Cf. 4:7, 10, 11, 16, where Paul is clearly emphasizing the weakness of his own *body*. Cf. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 248-9, and Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 349.

⁴⁰ Lincoln, *Paradise*, 61. Cf. Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 371-372), who says that "in view of 4:16a, it seems incontestable that the ἐπίγειος οἰκία of 5:1a alludes primarily, if not solely, to the physical body and that therefore it would destroy the parallelism and opposition of the two parts of 5:1 if the second, antithetical οἰκία referred to anything other than some form of embodiment."

⁴¹ Cf. especially 2 Pet. 1:13, 14, as well as Isa. 38:12 and John 1:14. Cf. Lincoln, *Paradise*, 61.

⁴² This is not surprising in view of Paul's opening statement to this letter, namely that Paul, despairing of life because he felt the sentence of death, understood God's purpose in all this to be a strengthening of faith solely in "God who raises the dead" (2 Cor. 1:8-10). See also Wright's survey of the resurrection theme in all of 2 Corinthians in *Resurrection*, 297-309, 361-371.

Paul's language here both echoes and foreshadows his other writings at this period in his life. First of all, he reiterates for the Corinthians a point he previously made in explaining the nature of the resurrection body on the Last Day. He states in 1 Corinthians 15:53, 54:

For the perishable must clothe itself [ἐνδύσασθαι] with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality [τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσασθαι ἀθανασίαν]. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality [τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσῃται ἀθανασίαν], then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory [Κατεπόθη ὁ θάνατος εἰς νίκος]."⁴³

Secondly, in Romans 8, which Paul will soon write from the vicinity of Corinth,⁴⁴ we find numerous parallels with our verses here, parallels that will only be fulfilled on the Last Day.⁴⁵

Finally, Paul's use of τὸν ἀρραβῶνα τοῦ πνεύματος, the deposit of the Spirit given to us in 5:5, is another indicator of hope fulfilled only on the Last Day. Its meaning of "deposit" or "down-payment" lends itself to an eschatological orientation.⁴⁶ Paul uses this phrase two other times,⁴⁷ one of which undeniably points to fulfillment on the Last Day. Furthermore, the parallels with Rom. 8:23 are too striking not to quote: "we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit (τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος) groan (στενάζομεν) inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies."

Two primary objections stand against this resurrection view, however. First, the dwelling from God is said to be *in* heaven and *from* heaven, which, one could argue, makes it difficult to pin down the timeline too precisely.⁴⁸ Yet it may be that Paul does not speak this way to emphasize a specific time or place but that, whenever we get there, this new body will be fit for life in heaven (ἐν

⁴³ Consider also how Paul makes an intriguing comparison between our present body and the resurrection body in 1 Cor. 15:44-49, though admittedly using different terminology. Most scholars identify this σῶμα πνευματικόν with the οἰκοδομὴν ἐκ θεοῦ here. On this cf. Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 372) and Harris (*2 Corinthians*, 349), where he states "the fourfold description of the *oikodome* in v.1 (from God, permanent, heavenly, spiritual) matches Paul's description of the 'spiritual body' in 1 Cor. 15:38-54."

⁴⁴ Cf. Romans 16:1.

⁴⁵ Consider the parallels between Rom. 8 and 2 Cor. 5 within its broader context: the role of the Spirit throughout Rom. 8:1-27 as compared with 2 Cor. 3:1-18, and cf. 5:5; sharing in the suffering of Jesus in Rom. 8:17 as compared with 2 Cor. 4:7-12; the incomparable nature of present suffering with future glory in Rom. 8:18 and 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Paul's only uses of στενάζω to describe the groaning that is endured at present in light of our glorious future hope in Rom. 8:22-27 and 2 Cor. 5:1-5; the role of the Spirit as the bridge between our present groaning and the guarantee of future glory in Rom. 8:23, where ἀπαρχή ("first fruits") performs a similar function as ἀρραβῶνα ("down payment") in 2 Cor. 5:5. Finally, in view of these parallels, the case is strengthened that the clear reference to resurrection hope in Rom. 8:23 is paralleled by the more figurative expression of resurrection hope in 2 Cor. 5:1-4. For more on this point, cf. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 258.

⁴⁶ Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 68.

⁴⁷ 2 Cor. 1:20 "[God] put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come [τὸν ἀρραβῶνα τοῦ πνεύματος]." Eph. 1:13-14 "the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance [ὅ ἐστιν ἀρραβὼν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν] until the redemption of those who are God's possession."

⁴⁸ Cf. Valleskey, *2 Corinthians*, 75.

τοῖς οὐρανοῖς) and it will come from there (ἐξ οὐρανοῦ).⁴⁹ Perhaps Paul is thinking along the same lines as Peter, who viewed our eternal inheritance as already being “kept in heaven for you.”⁵⁰

The other obstacle is the present tense of ἔχομεν: When do we have this heavenly dwelling? Let’s examine three main views:

- 1) we have it during this present life
- 2) we have it at the moment of death in the interim state
- 3) we have it at the resurrection on the Last Day⁵¹

The first view is easily rejected in that it would imply some sort of preexistent, other body that even now awaits us, whereas the Scriptures show clearly that it is *this same* body which God will raise on the Last Day.⁵² Some argue that we somehow receive our resurrection body at the moment of death, suggesting some kind of “idealized body.”⁵³ What that means is unclear,⁵⁴ and regardless, this second view runs into the same problem as the first.⁵⁵ Others contend for the second option by surmising that there may be no interval of time between death and the resurrection for those who are experiencing “eternity.”⁵⁶ But all the passages of Scripture which speak not only of the conscious

⁴⁹ Cf. Guthrie *2 Corinthians*, 279, 281, and Wright, *Resurrection*, 367. Lincoln (*Paradise*, 61, 65) notes that these phrases may take on a qualitative meaning rather than a purely locative one. Cf. Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 224): “With this description, Paul underscores the ‘otherness’ of the resurrected body and the life to come. He by no means speaks of an immaterial home in heaven. His language recalls his defense of the hope of the resurrection in 1 Cor. 15:44b-58, where he likewise stresses the incompatibility of our present body and life with that which is yet to come...The location of the house built by God ‘in the heavens’ presupposes its present hiddenness. It belongs to the ‘things unseen’ (4:18), to which the attention of the apostle is directed.” Paul’s earlier statement in 1 Cor. 15:50 that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable,” also fits well with this view.

⁵⁰ 1 Pet. 1:4 “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you [τετηρημένην ἐν οὐρανοῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς].” Consider also how Jesus will say to us at the final judgment that our inheritance, which throughout our life had not been fully realized for us until this Last Day, had also in fact been prepared for us in some sense since the creation of the world (Matt. 25:34).

⁵¹ Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 374-380) provides a more detailed comparison of these different views, and though his conclusion in favor of option 2 is not persuasive, he lays out well the support and the challenges for each view.

⁵² Witherington (*Conflict and Community*, 391) posits the idea that this body from God currently lies in “heavenly cold storage.” But cf. Job 19:25-27 and Phil. 3:21.

⁵³ Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 380) maintains that this “idealized body” must be received at the moment of death because the “moment when the consolation is needed must be the moment when the consolation is given; and the consolation received at death cannot simply be identical with that assurance of the future acquisition of the resurrection body, which is already possessed during life.” See also Garland, (*2 Corinthians*, 252-253): “Quite simply, Paul says here that when Christians die they have resurrection bodies.” However, there is no reason why the consolation of future resurrection cannot be most comforting to a believer in the face of death. Resurrection hope means that death will not win in the end, and what is done by death will soon be undone and more gloriously improved in the resurrection. It is telling that Jesus found significant comfort in resurrection hope in his interaction with Martha after Lazarus died (John 11:21-26).

⁵⁴ Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 224 footnote 435) responds to this idea of an “idealized body”: “This interpretation remains insufficiently defined and misses the Christological center of Paul’s thought,” and later (*Second Corinthians*, 226 footnote 442): “The distinction between an ‘ideal’ possession of this resurrection body at death and the ‘real’ possession of it at the last day only obscures Paul’s confession.”

⁵⁵ Even though he proposes that the believer experiences no interval of time in the interim state, Bruce (*1 and 2 Corinthians*, 204) rules out some kind of partial reception of the body at death, stating that Paul is not “thinking of a temporary integument for the intermediate state pending his investiture with the imperishable resurrection body; the ‘dwelling’ of which he speaks is ‘eternal in the heavens’ (verse 1), and it is doubtful if this dwelling can be envisaged even as an initial and ‘temporary phase of the eternal body.’”

⁵⁶ Cf. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 204.

passing of time in the interim state,⁵⁷ but also of our anticipation and comfort in being with the Lord at the moment of death,⁵⁸ oppose this notion.⁵⁹

Therefore, we prefer the third option and are not worried about a present tense being used in reference to the future reality of the resurrection.⁶⁰ Just as surely as Jesus lives, those in whom Jesus lives (4:10, 11) can express in the present that their future resurrected body is already as good as theirs. The down payment of the Spirit (5:5) urges believers to speak this way. This is the “the language of hope,”⁶¹ a “confident certainty,”⁶² or as Seifrid says: “The dwelling is his, even if he possesses it presently *in spe non in re* (“in hope, not in substance”). God’s Yes to all his promises is found in the risen Son of God (1:20). We have that Yes in hope...Although our resurrection remains in the future, it has entered the present in the resurrected Lord and in the Spirit given through him.”⁶³

Returning to Paul’s chief concern here,⁶⁴ resurrection hope is what enables Paul to endure his groaning within a frail body as he suffers in ministry⁶⁵ and daily faces death⁶⁶ for the sake of Jesus and the Corinthians. Paul is energized by the anticipation of what God will do for him and all believers with respect to their bodies when Jesus returns to present us in his glory with himself.⁶⁷

Because God’s resurrection promise is so powerful and because Paul so longs to wear his eternal house from God, Paul can even say in 5:3-4 that he does not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed.⁶⁸ In other words, even though Paul groans and is weighed down in his present body, he would prefer not to be found naked,⁶⁹ that is, not to be separated from his body.⁷⁰

⁵⁷ Cf. Rev. 6:9-11 and Luke 16:19-31.

⁵⁸ Cf. Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:6-8; Phil. 1:20-23; Acts 7:55-56.

⁵⁹ Cf. Tepker (“Problems in Eschatology,” 21-28) for a summary discussion of the various ideas about the interim state and a defense of the biblical passages that present a restful, conscious passing of time for dead believers.

⁶⁰ Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 224) states: “Paul’s affirmation that he already ‘has’ a building from God has caused unnecessary problems for interpreters.” This would not be the only occurrence in the New Testament of a present tense having future implications as defined by context. Kistemaker (*Second Corinthians*, 168), cites Matt. 26:45 as one example. Also consider the prophetic perfect used frequently throughout the Old Testament.

⁶¹ Guthrie citing Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 278 footnote 11.

⁶² Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 151.

⁶³ Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 225.

⁶⁴ After all, as Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 250) notes, “Paul did not write this passage to answer questions we might have about the when, what, or how; he only intends to affirm his confidence in the Christian’s transformation in the life after death.”

⁶⁵ Cf. 2 Cor. 4:7-12, 6:3-10, 11:22-33.

⁶⁶ Cf. 1 Cor. 15:29-32; 2 Cor. 1:8-11, 11:23.

⁶⁷ Cf. 2 Cor. 4:14; Col. 3:4; Rom. 8:17.

⁶⁸ Paul’s imagery here is not unusual for his time, as other ancient writers also described the body as wearing clothes and death as the act of undressing. Guthrie *2 Corinthians*, 281.

⁶⁹ It is interesting, though perhaps not conclusive for supporting Paul’s reference to the intermediate state here as “nakedness,” that Paul in 1 Cor. 15:37 envisions a body which has not yet been transformed into the resurrected body as a naked seed (γυμνὸν κόκκον). Cf. Guthrie (*2 Corinthians*, 282), who surveys the various uses of γυμνός in the New Testament, including the notion of “being spiritually vulnerable” (Heb. 4:13, Rev. 3:17, 16:15). Although the picture of being clothed in Christ’s righteousness or else naked and separated from him is certainly found elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Gal. 3:27; Rev. 3:17-18; 16:15), it does not fit Paul’s overall thought here. More natural is the reading of being with or without one’s body, which is an idea Paul will come back to shortly in 5:6-8. Cf. Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 259-260): “Redemption was not redemption from the body, but redemption of the body.”

⁷⁰ Cf. Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 227): “‘To be found naked’ is to be separated from one’s bodily life;” and Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, 166. On being burdened in this mortal body, Augustine (Bray, *2 Corinthians*, 240) strikes a nice balance: “On the one hand, our corruptible body may be a burden on our soul; on the other hand, the cause of this encumbrance is not in the nature and substance of the body. Therefore, aware as we are of its corruption, we do not desire to be divested of the body but rather to be clothed with its immortality. In immortal life we shall have a body, but it will no longer be a burden since it will no longer be corruptible.”

To understand why Paul would prefer not to be in a disembodied state, we recall the ancient setting of conflicting Jewish and Hellenistic worldviews regarding man's condition.⁷¹ Nonetheless, the Greek view was already influencing the Jewish mind, as seen in the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon 9:15: "For a perishable body weighs down the soul, and its earthly tent burdens the thoughtful mind."⁷² Against such a view that would elevate the soul at the expense of the body, Paul builds off his Jewish background to defend the value of the body, even going so far as to regard separation from the body as an undesirable "nakedness." At the same time, as we will soon see, Paul can also prefer a bodiless existence over his present circumstances (5:6, 8). In the end, Paul here is not pitting body against soul, for both are eternally significant for God's ultimate plan for us. The resurrection Paul longs for is the ultimate and permanent reuniting of body and soul. Paul understandably never wants to experience that terrible consequence of death which is the tearing apart of soul from body.⁷³

Such fervent hope is no accident for Paul. Through his Spirit God has instilled this hope in Paul in order to sustain him throughout the sighs and groans of his life.

2 Corinthians 5:5

5 ὁ δὲ κατεργασάμενος ἡμᾶς εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο θεός, ὁ δὸς ἡμῖν τὸν ἀρραβῶνα τοῦ πνεύματος.

5 Now⁷⁴ the one who has prepared us for this [purpose] itself is God, who has given us the down payment⁷⁵ of the Spirit.⁷⁶

God's eternal purposes for us are always bigger than the brief troubles of the moment; indeed, our troubles only enable us to see eternity all the more clearly.⁷⁷ Weakness and death will not have the final say. Resurrection life is already ours, in a sense, as God works his new creation in us (cf. 5:17) so that the risen Lord Jesus is already living his resurrection life within us.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Bruce (*Paul*, 311) puts the difference this way: "It is, no doubt, an over-simplification to say that while for the Greeks man was an embodied soul, for the Hebrews he was an animated body; yet there is sufficient substance in the statement for us to say that in this as in other ways Paul was a Hebrew born and bred." Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 260, footnote 686) points out that this imagery would have been understood in a Hellenistic context (cf. Plato, *Cratylus* 403B; *Gorgias* 523E-524D), citing Philo's description of the death of Moses: "He began to pass over from mortal existence to life immortal and gradually became conscious of the disuniting of the elements of which he was composed. The body, the shell-like growth which encased him, was being stripped away and the soul laid bare (ἀπογομνουμένης) and yearning for its natural removal hence" (*On the Virtues* 76).

⁷² Wisdom of Solomon 9:15, Goodspeed's translation. Compare the statement of Seneca (c. 4 BC – AD 65), who complained about "this clogging burden of a body to which nature has fettered me," as cited by Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 261).

⁷³ Cf. Eccles. 12:7.

⁷⁴ A transitional δὲ.

⁷⁵ Cf. BDAG ἀρραβών, a Semitic loanword used in legal and commercial settings (cf. Gen. 38:17-20 and the LXX of this verse). Cf. also Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 284. It is used only two other times in the New Testament, in Eph. 1:14 and in 2 Cor. 1:22.

⁷⁶ An appositional genitive, that is, "the down payment, namely/that is the Spirit."

⁷⁷ Cf. κατεργάζεται in 4:17. Wright (*Resurrection*, 366 footnote 150) notes the connection between 4:17 and 5:5 and states: "The frequent translation 'prepare' is adequate enough, provided one remembers that it means 'prepare' as in 'prepare a meal', not simply 'prepare' as in 'give advance information about something'. The root of *katergazomai* is after all *ergon*, 'work': the point is that the living God is already *doing* something, even though it remains often and largely out of sight."

⁷⁸ Cf. Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 229), who notes: "Already in his earthly sojourn, Paul has been remade, 'worked by God' (*katergasamenos*) for the life of the resurrection."

God has prepared us for all this by giving us his Spirit as an ἀρραβών, a “deposit” or “down payment.” That is, the Spirit whom we receive through the means of grace⁷⁹ is himself a guarantee of the future new life we already begin to experience by faith. In him we catch a glimpse and even now begin to enjoy a foretaste of our future heavenly life. And if the Spirit of Jesus living in us grants such a glimpse, how much more will he not bring to completion this work he has begun in us?⁸⁰ In view of our continual groaning in this life, we cling ever more to this important work of the Spirit⁸¹ within us, as he assures us that “God has in store for us an existence of which the pristine life of Adam and Eve in paradise is a reflection.”⁸²

2 Corinthians 5:6-8

6 Θαρροῦντες οὖν πάντοτε καὶ εἰδότες ὅτι ἐνδημοῦντες ἐν τῷ σώματι ἐκδημοῦμεν ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου· 7 διὰ πίστεως γὰρ περιπατοῦμεν, οὐ διὰ εἵδους· 8 θαρροῦμεν δὲ καὶ εὐδοκοῦμεν μᾶλλον ἐκδημησai ἐκ τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἐνδημησai πρὸς τὸν κύριον.

6 Therefore, we are always confident and know⁸³ that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. 7 (For we walk by faith,⁸⁴ not by appearance.) 8 But⁸⁵ we are confident and instead prefer to be away from the body and at home with⁸⁶ the Lord.

With the promise of the heavenly house he will one day wear and the down payment of the Spirit guaranteeing his resurrection, Paul cannot help but express his confidence for ministry. Paul knows he may die before Christ returns, but in the face of death he does not shrink back. Instead, Paul’s Christian confidence only serves to clarify his present situation: he is an exile separated from his home, that is, from the One who alone makes home truly home – his Lord. As long as he is at home in the body (ἐκδημοῦμεν) he is away from his Lord (ἐνδημοῦντες).⁸⁷

⁷⁹ The teaching that the Spirit dwells within us is by no means an argument that we should search within ourselves for the confidence of our faith. The Spirit’s presence is ascertained not by endless soul-searching or feeling his fire within, but by his Word which creates both the faith and the confession that “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor. 12:3).

⁸⁰ Cf. Phil. 1:6. As Gibbs (“Five Things,” 364) notes: “The gift of the Holy Spirit, however, is the ‘bridge’ between this mortal existence and that immortal, resurrection life—the Spirit is the ‘guarantee of final inheritance and life.’”

⁸¹ Cf. Guthrie 2 *Corinthians*, 284. Note how the church has long acknowledged the Spirit’s role in these troubled and anxious days of the end times in that the doctrines of the “resurrection of the body and the life everlasting” are included under the 3rd Article of the Apostles’ Creed.

⁸² Kistemaker, *Second Corinthians*, 175; cf. 1 Cor. 15:44-49. Perhaps Paul had this down payment of the Spirit on his mind when he later wrote to the Romans: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you” (Rom. 8:11). Cf. Garland, 2 *Corinthians*, 263.

⁸³ Both θαρροῦντες and εἰδότες appear to be independent declarative participles. Similar constructions can be found in Hebrew and Aramaic as well. Cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 653.

⁸⁴ An expression of means, cf. Guthrie 2 *Corinthians*, 286. However, Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 397) observes that while διὰ πίστεως in Pauline usage can denote means (e.g., in Rom. 3:22, 25; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8), the verb περιπατέω is normally followed by other prepositions and constructions. In view of this rare combination (cf. also Rev. 21:24) Harris takes this phrase as attendant circumstance and translates “in the realm of faith.”

⁸⁵ A resumptive δὲ signaling that Paul is returning to the thought he interrupted at the end of 5:6.

⁸⁶ According to Wallace (*Greek Grammar*, 359), πρὸς + the accusative normally indicates movement toward an object, but a general rule holds that when a stative verb is used with a transitive preposition like πρὸς, the verb overrides the transitive force of the preposition. Wallace cites John 1:1 among many other instances of this.

⁸⁷ The present tenses (ἐνδημοῦντες, ἐκδημοῦμεν) suggest the simultaneous relationship between the two ideas (that is, when the one ends, the other begins, and vice versa), even though some would suggest that Paul here speaks of his union with the Lord at the resurrection (cf. Harris’ list of those supporting this view in *Second Corinthians*, 400,

God has sharpened Paul's vision to now see what is far better (cf. Phil. 1:20-23)⁸⁸ than this present earthly life. But rather than view 5:6-8 as somehow conflicting with 5:1-5, we should see how they combine to form a twofold hope where they do not contradict, but rather complement one another. Seifrid notes:

Thus, while the intermediate state does not contain the fullness of the eschaton, it brings an essential element of it: our being present with the Lord. ... Paul knows of no other communion with Christ than that which is found in Christ's saving death and resurrection. The Lord in whose presence he longs to be is none other than the crucified and *risen* Christ, in whose resurrection lies the promise of the resurrection of all those who belong to him.⁸⁹

Paul adds the somewhat parenthetical remark⁹⁰ of 5:7 because he wants to guard against any false impression that Christ is not currently present. By faith he knows his Lord is always with him, so that he can later exclaim that "to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). Thus 5:7 concisely provides the chief argument and theme of the entire letter: "We walk by faith and not by appearance."⁹¹ The translation of "appearance" rather than "sight" for εἶδους, while both are understandable, is preferred here, because it highlights not so much the human faculty of seeing as the objective reality of that which is seen ("appearance").⁹² Despite what appears to him and all the world on the surface, Paul clings to God's promises in Christ until he is at home with the Lord. Paul knows that "he is being carried by Another."⁹³ This is the One he always seeks to please.

2 Corinthians 5:9-10

9 διὸ καὶ φιλοτιμούμεθα, εἴτε ἐνδημοῦντες εἴτε ἐκδημοῦντες, εὐάρεστοι αὐτῷ εἶναι. 10 τοὺς γὰρ πάντα ἡμᾶς φανερωθῆναι δεῖ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ βήματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα κομίσηται ἕκαστος τὰ διὰ τοῦ σώματος πρὸς ἃ ἔπραξεν, εἴτε ἀγαθὸν εἴτε φαῦλον.

footnote 200). Cf. Lincoln (*Paradise*, 69): "But verses 6, 8, and 9 all imply that being at home in the body is coincident with being away from the Lord, so that as soon as one ceases to be at home in the body, one also ceases to be absent from the Lord."

⁸⁸ It is interesting, as Gibbs ("Christ is Risen," 114-115) notes, that even in Philippians it is the hope of the Last Day that dominates Paul's thoughts. Cf. Phil. 1:6, 10-11; 2:10-11, 16, as cited by Gibbs, along with 3:11, 13-14, 19-21.

⁸⁹ Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 231-232. Consider how the Scriptures speak of our longing to be like the One we shall see (1 John 3:2), just as has been promised (Phil. 3:21).

⁹⁰ That is, grammatically and in thought 5:6 and 5:8 fit together and 5:7 is an aside, as noted by θαρροῦμεν δὲ in 5:8. Note the parentheses in the KJV here. Cf. Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 396; Lincoln, *Paradise*, 68.

⁹¹ As Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 232) notes: "[This verse] contains the entire argument of the letter."

⁹² Though Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 396-397) argues for the subjective sense of εἶδους here, meaning our capacity for seeing, with the common translation of "by sight" for εἶδους (cf. NIV, ESV, NKJV, etc.), it is preferable to take it objectively as that which is seen and translate "appearance." In support of this is 4:18, which focuses on that which *is seen or unseen*. Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 233) notes: "But the apostle is not speaking of mere human faculties. He describes 'things seen' and 'things unseen' (4:18). Just as 'faith' is not a mere faculty or sense but includes the content and hope of the Gospel, so *eidos* does not signify the act of seeing but the object and content of sight, namely, the outward and visible present world." Further, the four other occurrences of εἶδος in the New Testament carry this objective sense and are often translated "form" (cf. Luke 3:22, 9:29; John 5:37, 1 Thess. 5:22). Cf. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 286; Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 396.

⁹³ Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 230.

9 Therefore we also aspire,⁹⁴ whether we are at home or away [from the body], to be pleasing⁹⁵ to him. 10 For we must all be made known⁹⁶ before the judgment seat⁹⁷ of Christ, in order that each may receive his due⁹⁸ regarding what he did while in the body,⁹⁹ whether good or bad.

Like his opponents in Corinth, Paul could easily have aimed to please the Corinthians by acquiescing to their immoral life, or his sinful self by responding in like manner to his enemies' criticisms. But his Lord calls him above all that. Pleasing submission to Christ is what defines him, whether he is at home or away from the body, especially in view of the final judgment. It will not ultimately be before the judgment seat of the Corinthians, his opponents, or anyone else that Paul stands – but only before the judgment seat of Christ.

What an encouragement believers have in knowing that Christ is the Judge.¹⁰⁰ Paul is eager to please the One in whom he has already been made pleasing before God. Contrary to the overwhelmingly negative attitude toward “judgment” in our day, we are here reminded that believers should eagerly anticipate the final judgment, for we have already heard the final verdict in advance: “Not guilty!”¹⁰¹ spoken by Christ our Redeemer and Judge.¹⁰²

⁹⁴ BDAG φιλοτιμέομαι, referring to a special honor afforded for a person who gave exceptional service to the state and to many wealthy people who endeavored to outdo one another in philanthropic service, “to have as one’s ambition, consider it an honor, aspire,” with focus on rendering public service. Cf. Rom. 15:20, “It has always been my ambition [φιλοτιμούμενον] to preach the gospel where Christ has not been known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation.”

⁹⁵ Guthrie (2 Corinthians, 288) notes that εὐάρεστος occurs 7 other times in Paul (Rom. 12:1-2; 14:18; Eph. 5:10; Phil 4:18; Col. 3:20; Titus 2:9) and once in Hebrews (13:21), with Titus 2:9 being the only instance where it does not refer to pleasing God.

⁹⁶ Guthrie (2 Corinthians, 288) comments that the combination of δεῖ and the passive φανερωθῆναι “communicates a strong note of accountability.”

⁹⁷ Originally referring to the step one climbed to reach the judge’s seat, it came to refer to the judgment seat itself, as noted in BDAG βῆμα 3, “a dais or platform that required steps to ascend, *tribunal*,” in which sense it is used in Matt. 27:19; John 19:13; Acts 12:21; 18:12, 16-17; 25:6, 10, 17. As Guthrie notes, Acts 18 forms a background for this verse since only a few years before writing 2 Corinthians Paul stood trial before the βῆμα of Gallio (Acts 18:9-17). Incidentally, this reference provides extra-biblical evidence that corroborates Paul’s ministry and helps nail down the timeline of his ministry. Cf. Brug, “Chronology,” 287; Fant and Reddish, *Lost Treasures*, 336-338.

⁹⁸ Cf. Col. 3:25 for a somewhat similar use of κομίζω and receiving recompense for one’s deeds.

⁹⁹ διὰ + the genitive here could either be taken in a temporal sense of “during [the time spent in the] body” (cf. NIV, NET, GW; Guthrie, 2 Corinthians, 290) or in an instrumental sense of “things done through the body” (cf. CSB, NASB, NKJV, ESV; Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 237). Ultimately, as Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 407) states, “the former [means] implies the latter [temporal].” This prepositional phrase is probably pulled ahead out of the relative prepositional phrase πρὸς ᾧ ἔπραξεν for emphasis.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Meyer (*Ministers of Christ*, 86): “That is the same person who laid down His life as a ransom for us; the same person who, though He knew no sin, permitted Himself to be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, who by His act of substitution procured for the whole world, for every individual sinner, the verdict of ‘not guilty’ from His Father. He is the same one who sent His apostles into all the world with instructions to proclaim the message of a re-established peace between God and man.”

¹⁰¹ As Meyer (*Ministers of Christ*, 86) notes: “The judgment is the final phase in [Christ’s] act of mediation. He announced His verdict in advance when He declared: ‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned’ [Mark 16:16].”

¹⁰² This is the Christ, who now lives in us and in whom we live (2 Cor. 4:10-12; Rom. 8:10); Christ, in whom we are reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-21; Rom. 5:9-11); Christ, in whom God’s promises are always “Yes” and because of whom we can give a resounding “Amen” (2 Cor. 1:18-20). As Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 235) notes, Paul is not seeking to please the Lord by works, but rather, as stated in 5:9, to be one who is pleasing to the Lord. Not just his deeds but his entire person is in view here, and “God has already remade him for the life of the resurrection and his

All people¹⁰³ must¹⁰⁴ stand before Christ's judgment seat to face judgment for what was done while in the body. A surface reading of 5:10 could lead to the conclusion of a judgment based *primarily* or *solely* on our works. There are two main ways to take the final phrase of this verse (εἶτε ἀγαθὸν εἶτε φαῦλον). One suggests that ἀγαθὸν and φαῦλον refer back to τὰ διὰ τοῦ σώματος πρὸς ἃ ἐπραξεν, that is, whether the actions done were good or bad. The other interpretation takes this final phrase with the verb κομίσηται, that is, each person receiving *something* good or bad in connection with one's deeds, namely, the *verdict* God will pronounce upon all people.¹⁰⁵

Ultimately, both views have to deal with the fact that works in some way play a part in the final judgment.¹⁰⁶ As Seifrid notes, "For Paul the final judgment is not a 'weighing' or 'counting' of works, but a manifestation of persons by their works."¹⁰⁷ It is clear from Scripture that a person enters and is preserved in a relationship with God solely by God-given faith in Christ; and still the Scriptures can tell us that "you reap what you sow."¹⁰⁸ Like so many things in these last days, we let the tension stand while eagerly delighting with Paul in the coming judgment of our Judge.

Concluding Thoughts on 5:1-10

Just as Paul elsewhere¹⁰⁹ teaches Christians how to *grieve* in resurrection hope at the death of a believer, so here he teaches us how to *long* for resurrection hope as we groan under the weight of our own mortality. We therefore do well to imitate Paul and to evaluate the manner in which we speak about our hope. In what ways do we preach and teach the full and ultimate picture of the hope God gives us to speak for the comfort of his people?

We note first of all that the Bible simply does not say much about the intermediate state and what a believer experiences between death and the Last Day.¹¹⁰ We have been given real and powerful words of comfort to provide real hope to every believer,¹¹¹ but about this state we cannot

home with the Lord (v. 5). Paul seeks to be what God has made him to be in Christ. He walks by faith, not by appearance."

¹⁰³ πάντας ἡμᾶς is all encompassing while ἕκαστος specifies that each individual will receive a particular judgment. Cf. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 289, and Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 406-407. There is debate whether "all" refers only to Paul and the Corinthians (Kistemaker, *Second Corinthians*, 180), only to all believers (Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 289; Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 406), or to all people in the world (Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 265-266; Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 236). We lean toward the latter view here. Cf. Rom. 2:5-16.

¹⁰⁴ Note δεῖ, which Meyer (*Ministers of Christ*, 86) describes as "that rugged and stern, forbidding δεῖ."

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Guthrie (*2 Corinthians*, 289-290), who concludes his discussion by noting that, since Paul shifts from the plural (τὰ) to the singular, perhaps "the apostle has in mind the judgment of one's life or character as a whole, rather than individual acts."

¹⁰⁶ As is most clearly seen in Matt. 25:31-46, among other passages.

¹⁰⁷ Seifrid, "Justified by Faith," 90-91.

¹⁰⁸ Gal. 6:7.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18.

¹¹⁰ As observed by Pieper (*Christian Dogmatics III*, 511): "Holy Writ reveals but little of the state of the souls between death and the resurrection. In speaking of the last things, it directs our gaze primarily to Judgment Day and the events clustering around it." Cf. also Tepker, "Problems in Eschatology," 21; Kieta, "Restoration," 13; Gibbs, "Biblical Hope," 320.

¹¹¹ E.g., we know that the believer enters paradise immediately (Luke 23:43), is at rest from his labors (Rev. 14:13), is conscious and aware of passing time (Rev. 6:9-11), enjoys the beatific vision (Acts 7:55-56), experiences something beyond our ability to describe (2 Cor. 12:1-4) and for the present should prefer union with the Lord in heaven to continued existence in this sinful world (2 Cor. 5:6-8; Phil. 1:20-23).

say much beyond that. This is in no way a slight against the comfort afforded by immediately being with Jesus after death, but simply an acknowledgment of the biblical witness.¹¹²

However, it is noticeable that in Paul's consolation of others and in the rest of the New Testament as a whole, it is resurrection and the fulfillment of all God's eschatological promises that are repeatedly presented for our faith to hold onto.¹¹³ We put these observations in perspective regarding our biblical hope: If a believer had the choice between being in heaven with the Lord as a disembodied soul, sinless but not yet complete,¹¹⁴ and enjoying the final realization of all God's promises on the Last Day, while also never experiencing the unnatural pain of death – what choice is there really? In view of Jesus' words about his imminent return,¹¹⁵ few things would be more beneficial for God's people than to have their eyes firmly set on Jesus' reappearing and all that comes with him.¹¹⁶ We ourselves would also benefit from pondering further how we can bring out this emphasis clearly in our ministries, as Paul did in his.¹¹⁷

Ultimately this comparison between the interim state and the Last Day is not an either/or, but a both/and, with Scripture leading us to emphasize the “and” of the Last Day in our teaching and preaching. Leaning toward our ultimate hope will enable us to better keep the communal¹¹⁸ and cosmic¹¹⁹ aspects of God's redemptive plan before our eyes as we live together in his creation. As

¹¹² This is contrary to some who would speak of Paul in these verses as having an abhorrence for the disembodied state (Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 153-154) or assert that to Paul the nakedness of the intermediate state would be an “absurd idea” (Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 260). This notion clearly does not fit with Paul's preference in 5:6, 8 for existence apart from the body over against his current bodily existence in the earthly tent. Consider also Phil. 1:20-23.

¹¹³ Among the numerous passages that plainly support this, consider as a starting point the study of Matt. 24:1-25:46; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Cor. 15:12-58; 2 Pet. 3:3-13.

¹¹⁴ While this phrasing might at first sound uncomfortable and unfamiliar, it is no different than the reality of the 6 days of creation, each of which was good and perfect in itself by virtue of the Creator, and not yet complete according to God's plan. Or consider the experience of Old Testament believers who had the good and perfect promises of God regarding the coming Messiah, but had to wait for God's plan to unfold in Christ.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Jesus' words in Matt. 24:36-51, as well as Rev. 22:7, 12, 20, “Look, I am coming soon!”

¹¹⁶ Cf. Jesus' encouragement in Luke 21:28, “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

¹¹⁷ One way to evaluate ourselves in this regard is to consider what we mean by emphasizing “going to heaven when you die” and how this often is presented as *the* key concept for believers in regard to their future hope. Again, as stated above, this is not biblically incorrect, but perhaps it muddies the waters when it comes to clearly distinguishing between the comfort of the interim state and the much richer Last Day hope that the Bible provides as the primary nourishment for our faith. On this cf. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 290-291. For more evaluations of the way we speak about our future hope, cf. especially Gibbs, “Biblical Hope,” 315-322, and “Five Things.”

¹¹⁸ That is, to step outside ourselves and reflect on the same hope we share with all God's people and which God desires for those sheep “who are not of this sheep pen” (John 10:16). While granting that Paul in 5:1-10 is first of all referring to his own ministry, he undoubtedly intends for the Corinthians and all believers to apply his words to themselves. Further, when taken in light of his entire eschatology, it is clear that his mindset is constantly on the greater community of God's family of believers and the hope they together share, as, e.g., in 1 Thess. 4:13-18, noting especially the last verse, “Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

¹¹⁹ While not in the scope of this paper (although some have taken 2 Cor. 5:19 to refer to the cosmic reconciliation of all the created universe to God, it seems best to interpret κόσμος there in light of “all” people mentioned in 5:14-15), the biblical evidence leans heavily in favor of world renovation over against world annihilation. Rom. 8:18-25 provides the clearest evidence of this. Cf. also Ware, “Paul's hope and ours”; Raabe, “‘Daddy, will animals be in heaven?’ the future new Earth.”

one writer puts it, what the whole world is waiting for is in fact “life *after* life after death.”¹²⁰ We conclude our look at Paul’s argument in 5:1-10 with this:

Our identity is found *finally* in an embodied existence. Yet our identity is not found in *mere* bodily life, but in a communication with God that penetrates and defines bodily life...Over his present life, Paul thus prefers the *better* life of the intermediate state, which in turn contains the promise of the *best* life, the life of the resurrection.¹²¹

The Ministry of Reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11-21)

2 Corinthians 5:11-13

11 Ειδότες οὖν τὸν φόβον τοῦ κυρίου ἀνθρώπους πείθομεν, θεῶ δὲ πεφανερῶμεθα· ἐλπίζω δὲ καὶ ἐν ταῖς συνειδήσεσιν ὑμῶν πεφανερῶσθαι. **12** οὐ πάλιν ἑαυτοὺς συνιστάνομεν ὑμῖν ἀλλὰ ἀφορμὴν διδόντες ὑμῖν καυχήματος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, ἵνα ἔχητε πρὸς τοὺς ἐν προσώπῳ καυχωμένους καὶ μὴ ἐν καρδίᾳ. **13** εἴτε γὰρ ἐξέστημεν, θεῶ· εἴτε σωφρονοῦμεν, ὑμῖν.

11 Therefore, since we know the fear of the Lord, we are engaged in persuading¹²² men. We have been made known to God, and I hope to have been made known in your consciences as well. 12 We

¹²⁰ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 147-163. Cf. also his comparison of this way of thinking with the looser phrase “life after death” in *Resurrection*, 30-31.

¹²¹ Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 220, 234. In recent years this reemphasis on our ultimate biblical hope has been reignited, though with unfortunate conclusions in some cases. For example, consider Wright’s treatment of the topic in *Surprised by Hope*, about which Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 232) comments: “Current theological interest is so narrowly focused on the resurrection that it threatens to lose the personal dimension – and perhaps ‘the soul’ – of Paul’s hope.” The cited footnote here reads: “This weakness appears in N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*... The concomitant minimizing of the intermediate state is the result of an overemphasis upon material and physical good. If liberal Christianity and existentialism tended to reduce the human being to a mere soul, the current tendency is to reduce the human being to a mere body.”

For the best overall treatment of this issue from the Lutheran perspective, compare the writings of Kieta (“Restoration”) and Gibbs (“Biblical Hope;” “Christ is Risen;” “Five Things”). Both acknowledge the same problem of a significant absence in the Lutheran church’s eschatological focus, but they approach the problem in different ways. Kieta (“Restoration,” 15) rightly emphasizes that “the only doctrinal error in the Lutheran pastor’s handling of death and grief would be if he failed to present all the promises of God.” He underscores that the pastor needs to ask himself: “What part of the gospel is the most comforting, the most strengthening, the most edifying at this moment?” And yet his treatment of the issue does not seem to give full consideration to the biblical emphasis on resurrection hope. Gibbs (“Biblical Hope,” 310-311, 315), on the other hand, presents the situation as more urgent:

A very minor Biblical theme, which really belongs on the sidelines, has supplanted true Biblical hope and become the functional center for many if not virtually all of our people. I’m speaking of the doctrine of the ‘interim state of the soul,’ ... The sun has been eclipsed by the moon. ... A minor Biblical emphasis about which we know very little and to which the Bible gives hardly any attention has supplanted the return of Christ as the content of Christian hope. ... We must recover for ourselves the power and the joy that flow out of the true and Biblical understanding of the consummation of the age.

¹²² Other translations for πείθομεν include, “we persuade” (cf. ESV, NKJV, NASB) and “we try to persuade” (cf. NIV, HCSB, CSB, NET, NRSV). Those who lean toward the former translation maintain that the notion of “attempting to persuade” is implicit in the verb itself, and Paul here wants to highlight that he has been successful in actually persuading people to a saving knowledge of Christ (cf. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 270; Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, 90). Proponents of the latter translation look to other instances where πείθω occurs but where it is not necessarily true that the attempt to persuade was in all cases successful, e.g. Acts 18:4; 19:8; 28:23 (cf. Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 413). However, the conative translation “we are trying to persuade” might too easily lend itself to the idea of a failed attempt in modern usage. Ultimately, the context must determine in what sense Paul uses this

are not commending ourselves to you again but are giving you an opportunity for pride on our behalf, in order that you may have [a response to give]¹²³ to those who boast in appearance and not in the heart. **13** For if we were out of our mind,¹²⁴ it is for God;¹²⁵ if we are in our senses,¹²⁶ it is for you.

Paul's ambition to please Christ naturally leads him to explain how he goes about this: "in the fear of the Lord." With a reverent and healthy understanding of his Lord, Paul occupies himself with persuading men to know and believe in this Lord.¹²⁷ His sincere motives are not hidden from God, and Paul hopes this will be transparently clear to the Corinthians as well. Paul aims to persuade men not with fine sounding arguments (cf. 1 Cor. 2:4-5), but with the message of the cross that is foolishness to those who are perishing, but the power of God to those who believe (1 Cor. 1:18-31; cf. also 2 Cor. 2:14-16).¹²⁸

Thus Paul wants to make clear to the Corinthians that he is not trying to commend or boast in himself. Yet in one sense Paul actually is commending himself and does so throughout the letter.¹²⁹ Paul contrasts his self-commendation with the self-commendation of his opponents: They boast in what is seen rather than what is in the heart.¹³⁰ Paul, on the other hand, does not peddle the Word of God for profit¹³¹ and needs no other "work" to boast in than the Corinthians themselves, his "letter of

verb, that is, whether or not the natural endpoint of attempting to persuade results in an actually persuaded person. Therefore, we lean toward the translation used in the main text above to emphasize that Paul is attempting to carry out what God has commanded him to do: to fully persuade people for Christ, while also knowing that only God can accomplish this in the end. His focus is on the work God has given to him to do, which he knows is plain to God. Thanks to Aaron Jensen for help working this out.

¹²³ Something needs to be supplied to complete the thought of ἵνα ἔχητε πρὸς τοὺς ἐν προσώπῳ καυχωμένους. Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 416) offers several suggestions along the lines of our translation above. Meyer (*Ministers of Christ*, 92) simply has "you may have (it) over against those who boast..."

¹²⁴ BDAG ἐξίστημι 2.a. "to be out of one's normal state of mind... 'to lose one's mind, be out of one's senses.' "

¹²⁵ θεῶ and ὑμῖν in this verse are datives of advantage.

¹²⁶ BDAG σωφρονέω 1 "to be able to think in a sound or sane manner, *be of sound mind*, as also in Mark 5:15 and Luke 8:35."

¹²⁷ Cf. Guthrie's observation (*2 Corinthians*, 296) that "rather than debilitating, such reverence [τὸν φόβον τοῦ κυρίου] reverberates through an appropriate faith, ultimately manifesting a trust in God as one reflects upon the awesome dimensions of God's power."

¹²⁸ Witherington (*Conflict and Community*, 392) understands Paul's "fear of the Lord" his Judge to mean two things in this rhetorical setting: 1) Paul must not use rhetoric to deceive or be hypocritical in his life; 2) He must speak in a such way that the substance, and not the style, is what wins people over to the truth of the gospel. "The love of Christ constrained [cf. 5:14-15] both the content and the form of his persuasion, and the sort of rhetorical moves he would make." Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 270) also comments: "What he wants to make clear is that he persuades others by God's means and according to God's standards, not with the trappings of a gilded rhetoric or with seductive trickery... He trusts in the merits of the gospel, paradoxical and scandalous as it is, to pass any honest scrutiny and allows his hearers to decide for themselves its truth."

¹²⁹ Note the numerous references to commendation and boasting in 2 Corinthians: 1:12-14; 3:1-3; 4:2; 5:11-13; 6:3-13; 10:17-18. 1:12-14 especially mirrors the intent behind Paul's words here in 5:11-13. Paul later states that the Corinthians should never have put him in this position of needing to defend himself in the first place (2 Cor. 12:11). Cf. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 297-298.

¹³⁰ We potentially get a hint at some of their external boastings and their attacks on Paul in his replies found in 10:10, 11:6, 22-23, 12:1. Witherington (*Conflict and Community*, 393-394) states: "This was in fact a typical complaint against the Sophists—they were all show and no substance. They paid special attention to their clothing, appearance, and delivery and to the sound of their voices."

¹³¹ Cf. 2:17. This may have been an impression they would have gotten from his abrupt change of plans to not return to Corinth. Cf. 1:15-17, 23.

recommendation” (3:1-3). Furthermore, he knows that in the end the only commendation that matters is the Lord’s (cf. 10:17-18).¹³²

Paul equips the Corinthians with such a response so that they will not be defenseless when others oppose Paul in their presence.¹³³ Paul wants the Corinthians, like good theologians of the cross, to call a thing what it actually is.¹³⁴ Others may label Paul as crazy, but, he contends, even this is to the glory of God (θεῷ, 5:13). While there is debate as to what Paul means by ἐξέστημεν in 5:13,¹³⁵ it may be best to view this as an attack against the very heart of the gospel message itself.¹³⁶ Paul does not worry about such accusations, because God sees his “madness” for what it truly is: the foolishness of the cross.¹³⁷ When even Jesus was accused by his own family of being out of his mind (ἐξέστη) for what he taught,¹³⁸ what minister of Christ should expect anything different?¹³⁹ With Paul we would gladly be called fools all day long if it meant that those we serve would embrace the gospel as truly the work of God himself for their sakes and receive it in faith for their reconciliation (cf. 5:18-21).¹⁴⁰ For then those who are “in the know,” who look past appearances and see the humble, faithful, diligent work that Christ’s ministers carry out, they will judge these servants to be completely in their minds (σωφρονοῦμεν) as they carry out this noble task.

No matter how others view him, Paul’s intentions and motivation remain out in the open: “For God...for you.” Paul now explains what enables him to carry out his selfless ministry.¹⁴¹

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

14 ἡ γὰρ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ συνέχει ἡμᾶς, κρίναντας τοῦτο, ὅτι εἷς ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν, ἄρα οἱ πάντες ἀπέθανον· **15** καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν, ἵνα οἱ ζῶντες μηκέτι ἑαυτοῖς ζῶσιν ἀλλὰ τῷ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἀποθανόντι καὶ ἐγερθέντι.

¹³² Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 241): “It is not Paul’s boasting in himself, as the Corinthians would expect in a self-commendation, but a boast in God’s work in Paul.”

¹³³ Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 239) takes this to be one of Paul’s primary purposes for what he writes from 4:1-5:21.

¹³⁴ Cf. Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 21.

¹³⁵ One view states that Paul is referring to his ecstatic experiences of receiving visions from the Lord since this verb is used in such instances (cf. Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17-21). However, since Paul shows his reluctance to bring up his visions later in 12:1-7, it is unlikely that he has them in mind here. Cf. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 274-276. In another view Paul is perhaps referring to the reactions to past letters and visits and his “harsh” way of dealing with them, but as Meyer (*Ministers of Christ*, 93) notes, “He has to speak sharply, the honor of God was at stake.” On this see also 2 Cor. 7:8-13.

¹³⁶ Consider Acts 26:24-25: “At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. ‘You are out of your mind, Paul!’ he shouted. ‘Your great learning is driving you insane [εἰς μανίαν περιτρέπει].’ ‘I am not insane, most excellent Festus,’ Paul replied. ‘What I am saying is true and reasonable [σωφροσύνης].’”

¹³⁷ Cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-31.

¹³⁸ Mark 3:21: “When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind [ἐξέστη].’”

¹³⁹ Cf. Matt. 10:24-25, John 15:18-21.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. 1 Cor. 4:9-13; 2 Cor. 11:1-12:13.

¹⁴¹ Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 418) provides a nice paraphrase of Paul’s thought in 5:11-13 thus: “We are certainly not promoting ourselves [v. 12a], for (γάρ) whether our words and conduct be thought irrational [v. 13a] or rational [v. 13b], God and you are the ones for whom I speak and work, just as my life is an open book to God and you [v. 11b].”

14 For the love of Christ constrains us, since we conclude¹⁴² this: one died for all, [and] consequently¹⁴³ all died. 15 And he died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves¹⁴⁴ but for him who died for them and was raised.

The foundation for Paul's selfless ministry is undeniably the love of Christ. This genitive phrase has been taken in three different ways:

- 1) An objective genitive = "the love we have for Christ constrains us"
- 2) A subjective genitive = "the love Christ has for us constrains us"
- 3) A "plenary genitive" combining the objective and the subjective = "the love of Christ for us which in turn produces our love for him – this constrains us"¹⁴⁵

Most commentators correctly reject a purely objective sense, recognizing that the context does not allow a self-oriented foundation for Paul's selfless ministry. While option three, Paul's own Christ-like love which Christ's love for him produces within him,¹⁴⁶ is indeed the point Paul is driving at here, it is problematic to derive that point from this particular phrase. Then the foundation of Christ's universal sacrifice would be a combination of Christ's love and Paul's love. For Paul to interject his own love at this point would only obscure the Christ-for-all impact he delivers in these verses.¹⁴⁷ Paul's own selfless love is best seen as the intended result of Christ's love found in the latter half of 5:15.¹⁴⁸

This love συνέχει Paul. συνέχω has a wide range of uses,¹⁴⁹ but a common factor in all of them is an external force acting to "hold together" or influence in some regard. Here the verb shows

¹⁴² BDAG κρίνω 3 "to make a judgment based on taking various factors into account, judge, think, consider, look upon." Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 419) compares the potential nuances here: 1) causal and preterite ("because we reached this conclusion"); 2) causal and perfective ("because we are convinced"); 3) temporal and perfective ("once we have reached this conclusion").

¹⁴³ ἄρα is an inferential particle expressing the result, "therefore, consequently."

¹⁴⁴ ἑαυτοῖς and τῷ ... ἀποθανόντι καὶ ἐγερθέντι are datives of advantage.

¹⁴⁵ Meyer takes an approach that mirrors this but comes from a different direction, namely, interpreting as a qualifying or descriptive genitive: "a Christ-like love." He allows for the possibility of either an objective or subjective genitive, but considers that something "more directly to the point in hand," namely, Paul's defense of his own specific actions among the Corinthians, is needed. Meyer (*Ministers of Christ*, 94-95) states: "The same love, or at least the same kind of love, which was evident in Christ's conduct toward sinners is permeating Paul's heart and dictating his mode of procedure in the individual cases." While grammatically possible and certainly biblical, this runs into the same problem as the objective interpretation described in our commentary.

¹⁴⁶ Wallace (*Greek Grammar*, 120-121) labels the genitive here as a "plenary genitive," asserting that the subjective produces the objective. He cites Rom. 5:5; 2 Thess. 3:5; Jude 21; 1 John 3:17; and John 5:42 as other instances where it is difficult to decide between the objective or subjective sense of the genitive. Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 277) favors the subjective interpretation but acknowledges that Paul "could not ignore his own response of love for Christ (Eph. 6:24)."

¹⁴⁷ On a linguistic level, the idea of a plenary genitive here is "linguistic nonsense," because the self-opposing sense A) would mean Paul was simply being vague and did not know what he was saying, or B) Paul was making a pun, which would require him to somehow mark this in context. Thanks to Aaron Jensen for this point.

¹⁴⁸ The subjective genitive view is further supported in that within Paul's usage a personal genitive after ἀγάπη always denotes the person having or showing love, not the one receiving it, cf. Rom. 5:5; 8:35, 39; 15:30; 2 Cor. 8:24; 13:13; Eph. 2:4; 3:19; Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:8, 13; 1 Thess. 3:6; 2 Thess. 1:3; 3:5; Philemon. 5, 7. Cf. Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 418-419) and Guthrie (*2 Corinthians*, 303-304) on this point and in defense of the subjective genitive view overall.

¹⁴⁹ BDAG lists 8 meanings. Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 419) offers the following list of potential translations: "constrains," "impels," "compels," "urges (us) on," "overmasters," "completely dominates," "overwhelms." Harris here argues that "controls" best captures dual notion of constraint and restraint, "Christ's love is a compulsive force

Christ's love to be a limiting power that also drives Paul in the right direction.¹⁵⁰ The love of Christ directs Paul away from self so that he lives for Christ (5:13a-15) and for others (5:13b, 16). Paul's new man finds in the love of Christ a force that liberates him from the bondage¹⁵¹ of his sinful flesh, so that in true freedom he can now live for Christ and for others rather than for himself.¹⁵²

This love of Christ most beautifully manifested itself on the cross, where Christ both represented and replaced all mankind as their substitute. We find more than enough evidence in both extra-biblical and biblical usage to understand ὑπὲρ in a substitutionary sense, overlapping and replacing ἀντί at times.¹⁵³ Thus Christ died the death that all deserved to die, and in his death all have died in him.¹⁵⁴ At the same time, Christ's death was a death that only he could die, and yet his death both substitutes and draws all people into his own death, so that it counts as their death as well.¹⁵⁵

Christ died for all and was raised to life. But who now lives for him? Whom do we identify with οἱ ζῶντες in 5:15b? The three preceding πᾶς references all point to the same group of people, namely, all humanity, but one could grammatically understand οἱ ζῶντες as referring either to this same group or to a subgroup, that is, to believers alone.¹⁵⁶ Paul could easily have retained the

in the life of believers, a dominating power that effectively eradicates choice in that it leaves them no option but to live for God (cf. θεῶ, v. 13a) and Christ (τῷ ... ἀποθανόντι καὶ ἐγερθέντι, v. 15b)."

¹⁵⁰ Thus Guthrie (*2 Corinthians*, 304) states: "In other words, he is a man under orders and cannot cavalierly set his own agendas in life and mission. This gospel constrains, boxing out self-indulgent self-love."

¹⁵¹ Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 244) notes: "Christ died in order to deliver human beings from their fatal bondage to themselves. It is this deadly narcissism of the Corinthians that Paul deals with throughout the letter."

¹⁵² Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 243) observes: "This motivation is not goal-oriented. As we have noted, the apostle does not live a purpose-driven life. His life is a Christ-driven life, one driven, not by what he must do and accomplish, but by what God has done for him and yet does in him. Contrary to all our usual reasoning, the completed work of God in Christ does not lame or paralyze the apostle. Just the opposite: it frees him for service. ... The constraint of Christ's love is not a compulsion. It brings the freedom of a sound mind (v. 13)." As one commentator puts it, for Paul "egocentricity has given way to Christocentricity" (Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 278, quoting Barnett).

¹⁵³ Cf. BDAG ὑπὲρ 1.c "in the place of, instead of, in the name of." Wallace (*Greek Grammar*, 383-389) provides an extensive discussion of the following reasons for allowing for a substitutionary sense in certain soteriological passages:

- a) It is found in extra-NT Greek literature (Classical, LXX, and Papyri);
- b) It is found in soteriologically insignificant passages (Rom. 9:3; Philemon 13);
- c) It is found in at least one soteriologically significant passage (2 Cor. 5:14; cf. Gal. 3:13, John 11:50);
- d) It occurs with ἀντίλυτρον in 1 Tim. 2:6;
- e) ὑπὲρ is a richer term than ἀντί.

He concludes that the burden of proof falls on those who deny such a sense in soteriological passages when clearly it can be used in non-soteriological passages.

¹⁵⁴ In Romans 5:12ff Paul makes a similar point about the universal impact of Adam and Christ. As Guthrie (*2 Corinthians*, 305) notes, the language of "one" and "all" calls upon Paul's Adam-Christ theology that he will expand shortly after this when he writes Romans. Cf. also Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 420). Consider further how Becker ("Universal Justification," 16-17) states the universal nature of Christ's vicarious work: "Christ's work is so completely vicarious that all men died when He died (2 Cor 5:14). In the same way, all men were condemned when He was condemned (Ga 3:13) and all men were justified when He was justified (Ro 4:25)."

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 243-244): "Christ did not merely come to share the lot of humanity, but to fill their place in their stead. ... Paul thus regards Christ's death as substitutionary. Yet his description of Christ's death is broader and deeper. ... Substitution (or exclusive place-taking) implies for Paul an inclusive place-taking. Christ was not merely a representative. In his self-giving death, he also incorporated 'all,' so that all humanity was really present in him. His death was their death. In Christ's death, all died."

¹⁵⁶ οἱ ζῶντες in the former view would mean that "the all," namely all humanity, for whom Christ died are also all "living ones." With the latter view it means that Christ indeed died for "the all," all humanity, but only a certain subset of this "all" are actually "those who live."

parallelism of 5:14 by saying in 5:15: “And he died for all so that all/they might live for him,” but he breaks that parallelism in order to focus on the new life of believers: “He died for all so that those who live [believers] would no longer live for themselves.”¹⁵⁷ Paul regularly speaks of objective and subjective justification in the same breath,¹⁵⁸ and that seems to be a more natural way of taking 5:15b. It also provides a better transition to his conclusions in 5:16-17.

“The fear of the Lord” (5:11) and “the love of Christ” (5:14) – these blessed realities in the life of Paul and every servant of Christ serve as the impetus for truly selfless ministry.¹⁵⁹ Since God’s work in Christ has turned Paul’s gaze outside of himself, he naturally turns our attention outward to our neighbor and to Christ as well.

2 Corinthians 5:16-17

16 Ὡστε ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν οὐδένα οἶδαμεν κατὰ σάρκα· εἰ καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν κατὰ σάρκα Χριστόν, ἀλλὰ νῦν οὐκέτι γινώσκομεν. **17** ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινά·

16 Therefore,¹⁶⁰ from now on we know no one according to the flesh. Even though we did know¹⁶¹ Christ according to the flesh, now, however, we no longer know him [according to the flesh]. 17 Therefore,¹⁶² if anyone is in Christ—new creation! The old things have left — look!¹⁶³ — the new things have come.

In view of Christ’s universally redemptive work and in keeping with this letter’s theme of looking beneath the surface,¹⁶⁴ Paul no longer sees people κατὰ σάρκα, according to external, worldly standards¹⁶⁵ as defined by a specific gender, age, race, or social status of any kind.¹⁶⁶ Paul can personally attest to the drastic change Christ makes on our perspective. Paul had previously

¹⁵⁷ This was pointed out in e-mail conversation with Aaron Jensen, 3/27/2018.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Rom. 3:22-24; 1 Tim. 4:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-21.

¹⁵⁹ Franzmann (*Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, 166) states: “Paul moves between the two poles of *the fear of the Lord* (11), who will judge all men (10), on the one hand, and the compelling impulse of the love of Christ, who died for all men in order that all might live for Him (14-15), on the other hand.”

¹⁶⁰ ὥστε introduces a result based on what was asserted in the preceding verses.

¹⁶¹ Rather than view a sharp distinction in meaning between οἶδαμεν and ἐγνώκαμεν here (i.e., οἶδαμεν meaning “to know a fact” vs. ἐγνώκαμεν meaning “to know by experience”), Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 427) explains the change of verbs thus: “the change from οἶδαμεν to ἐγνώκαμεν is determined by the absence of a perfect of εἰδέναί, the form οἶδα being itself perfect with a present meaning.”

¹⁶² It seems best to view this sentence as a second conclusion to what was stated in 5:11-15, being parallel to 5:16 rather than subordinated to it. In other words, the two sentences begun by ὥστε in 5:16 and 5:17 respectively point to two distinct conclusions based on 5:11-15. Cf. Barrett’s translation (*Second Corinthians*, 162): “16 The consequence of this [i.e., 5:11-15] is that... 17 A further consequence is that...” Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 426) further observes that 5:16 is a negative consequence, while 5:17 is a positive one.

¹⁶³ Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 287-288), citing Furnish, notes that ἰδοὺ “is ordinarily used by biblical writers to mark an unusual moment or deed” (cp. Rev 21:5, ‘Behold, I make all things new’).” Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 434) also comments that ἰδοὺ acts like a “sign, stimulating attention; but here it also conveys a sense of excitement and triumph.”

¹⁶⁴ Cf. 2 Cor. 3:1-3; 3:12-18; 4:7, 18; 5:7, 10; 11:13-15.

¹⁶⁵ BDAG σάρξ 5, “the outward side of life as determined by normal perspectives or standards... Usually w. *kata* indicating norm or standard.” Cf. later on in 2 Cor. 11:8, where Paul says: “Since many are boasting in the way the world does [κατὰ σάρκα], I too will boast.”

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11.

misunderstood the Messiah who was to come and mistreated those who followed him, until Jesus himself appeared and opened his eyes to see the truth.¹⁶⁷

What does this mean for the pastor and that unfamiliar face on the other side of the door, that unexpected visitor to church, that sudden interruption to his day? They are far more than what we first might see. They are the “all” of 5:14-15a for whom Christ gave his life into death. And now, through the message of reconciliation that God has called you to speak to them (5:18-21), Christ is eager for them to live in him and for him.

In 5:17 Paul reaches another conclusion regarding the work of Christ for all people: When any individual is in Christ—new creation (καινή κτίσις)! First of all, “in Christ,” one of Paul’s favorite expressions¹⁶⁸ capable of conveying a variety of senses,¹⁶⁹ here means being united to Christ through faith in him.¹⁷⁰ Paul is asserting that something new has taken place when any individual for whom Christ died and rose then enters into fellowship with him by faith.

But what exactly is true in such a case? Paul’s abrupt phrase “new creation” has been taken in two primary ways:¹⁷¹

- 1) “he is a new creation,” that is, *the believer is a new being* on account of God’s work in Christ through his death and resurrection (5:14-15), which he now enjoys because he is ἐν Χριστῷ, that is, enjoys a relationship of faith in Christ. The “new creation” has taken place within the individual so that he in his person now views others differently.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Tasker, as cited in the Seminary notes, states: “In light of the prejudices of his upbringing ... [Paul] had concluded that it was impossible that one born in such obscurity, living in such restricted circumstances and dying such a humiliating death, could be the Christ that the Jews were expecting.”

¹⁶⁸ Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 431) states there are over 160 uses in Paul’s writings, including references where Christ’s name is not explicitly used but where he is obviously the referent.

¹⁶⁹ Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 286) notes these senses of ἐν Χριστῷ which are not mutually exclusive: “that one belongs to Christ, that one lives in the sphere of Christ’s power, that one is united with Christ, or that one is part of the body of Christ, the believing community. Paul’s assumption is that being in Christ should bring about a radical change in a person’s life.” Jensen (“Faith in Christ,” 135) also notes that the language of participation in Christ can point to a variety of things. His list of categories includes:

1. The spiritual vivification of faith
2. Clinging to and possessing the vicarious active obedience of Christ
3. Clinging to and possessing the vicarious passive obedience of Christ
4. Clinging to and possessing (in the future enjoying) the physical resurrection of Christ
5. Living a Christ-like life with respect to morality
6. Christ-like suffering, perhaps to the point of death

¹⁷⁰ Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 432), after pointing out the wide range of uses for the preposition ἐν, concludes that here we could paraphrase “united in faith to the risen Christ.” Jensen (“Faith in Christ,” 134), after discussing various passages with the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ (including our passage under discussion here, 131-134) also notes that this phrase “is not indicative of a soteriological model antithetical to justification by faith, but, when used attributively to denote a participatory union, speaks of that same instrument of faith.”

¹⁷¹ Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 286-288) provides a succinct and helpful discussion of this phrase. Cf. also Hoch (*All Things New*, 147-167) for a study of this phrase and concept in the larger context of the ancient world both within and outside of biblical thought.

¹⁷² Cf. NASB, NET, NLT, CSB, NKJV, NIV 1984, NIV 2011 footnote, ESV; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 395. Witherington, while agreeing that “Christ’s death has objectively changed the state of affairs in the spiritual world,” does not view this as Paul’s primary point here and thus slightly favors this view for the reasons we mention in the commentary on this point. He further adds: “The reference to believers’ consciences and judgment throughout this section points in this direction. Eph. 4:24, whether by Paul or by a Paulinist, also favors this interpretation.” Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 432) translates “there is a new creation” but favors the individual interpretation, stating, “Were it not for the conditional and individual cast of the sentence (“if anyone”), we might readily find in the phrase καινή κτίσις a reference to a cosmic and ontological reality brought into existence by the

- 2) “there is a new creation,” that is, *a new situation has come into being*, and the believer who is in Christ now grasps that he is part of a new order of the world resulting from God’s work in Christ’s death and resurrection (5:14-15). The new creation within which he exists causes him to view others differently (5:16).¹⁷³

We unfortunately cannot dive too deeply here, other than to say that the first view benefits from the preceding τις (“anyone”) and might seem to anticipate an equally individualistic conclusion to Paul’s thought;¹⁷⁴ and that the second view fits the overall context of the wide scope of Christ’s redemptive work¹⁷⁵ and the fact that nowhere else does Paul use κτίσις in reference to an individual.¹⁷⁶

But perhaps it is best to consider the element of truth in both interpretations. That is, an individual who is a new creation and a new world order created by God are not mutually exclusive. The believer who is made new by the Spirit’s working through faith in Christ is not alone; he finds himself in a world where the dominion of Christ’s Spirit is making advances against the kingdom of darkness under the dominion of the flesh.¹⁷⁷ It is in this sense that Paul can glory in the reality that the old – both the old self and the old order of things – has gone, and the new – both the new self and the new order of things under the Spirit – has come!¹⁷⁸

While Seifrid seems to lean toward the second view described above, he considers the implications of Paul’s juxtaposition of ‘person’ and ‘creation’:

How can it be that, if *someone* is in Christ, there is *new creation*? The predication is jarring, not only for individualistic readings of Paul, but also for all those that give priority to community or cosmology. What we tend to separate, the apostle joins. ... [The crucified and

Christ-event. As it is, the εἰ and the τις combine to give καινή κτίσις a personal reference relating to an individual’s faith-union with Christ.”

¹⁷³ NRSV, HCSB, NIV 2011; Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 308; Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 251-255.

¹⁷⁴ Further support for this view includes 2 Cor. 4:6, where God’s act of creating in the beginning is paralleled with the same creative power of God in his Word at work to convert the heart of a believer to faith in Christ. One can also point to rabbinical writings that frequently refer to the Jewish convert as a “new creature.” Cf. Harris, (*Second Corinthians*, 432-434), who applies this interpretation thus: “When a person becomes a Christian, he or she experiences a total restructuring of life that alters its whole fabric—thinking, feeling, willing, and acting.”

¹⁷⁵ As Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 286) notes, Christ’s death and resurrection constitute a “radical eschatological break between the old age and the new,” since “Christ is the divider of history.”

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 287). Further support and connections for this view within Scripture are: 1) Paul’s upcoming appeal to the Corinthians in 6:1-2 that begins, “Now is the day of salvation,” an indicator that Paul has the broader scope of the new creation inaugurated by Christ’s work on his mind; 2) a similar use of καινή κτίσις in Gal. 6:15, where Paul makes the parallel argument that the Galatians should no longer view external realities like circumcision or uncircumcision as decisive factors in one’s life, since the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14) has ushered in the new order of creation, leading to a different view of those who are within this world (cf. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 287); 3) The concept that what God will say with finality on the Last Day (namely, “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away ... Behold, I make all things new!” Rev. 21:4-5) is already in a certain sense beginning to take place in this present world as the kingdom of Christ overpowers the kingdom of darkness (cf. Col. 1:12-14; Matt. 16:16-19).

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Rom. 8:1-17; Gal. 5:13-26 and 6:15, the latter of which contains a similar use of καινή κτίσις. The same view taken here would apply to this parallel use in Gal. 6:15.

¹⁷⁸ However one interprets καινή κτίσις, one should not overlook the significance of the tenses: the aorist παρήλθεν (“the old has come to an end”) and the perfect γέγονεν (“the new has come to stay”) are significant. Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 434).

risen Christ] by his love possesses human beings as his own and, in re-creating them, creates his own community. In the first instance, Paul’s striking juxtaposition puts us human beings in our place: we are mere ‘created things,’ ... At the same time, the re-creation of the human being implies the re-creation of all things.¹⁷⁹

In this understanding, then, we might be well served to leave the translation as ambiguously as Paul says it: “If anyone is in Christ—new creation!” Or perhaps we could translate: “If anyone is in Christ, he is part of the new creation.”¹⁸⁰ In the end what matters is that we urge God’s people to view and treat everyone in the human race as ones Christ has redeemed for himself. After all, believers themselves are a new creation in Christ, and the Spirit of Christ is effecting new creation all around believers through the gospel, just as Paul earlier proclaimed to the Corinthians: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (3:17).¹⁸¹

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

18 τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ καταλλάξαντος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ διὰ Χριστοῦ καὶ δόντος ἡμῖν τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς, **19** ὡς ὅτι θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσων ἑαυτῷ, μὴ λογιζόμενος αὐτοῖς τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν καὶ θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν τὸν λόγον τῆς καταλλαγῆς.

18 Now all these things are from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry¹⁸² of reconciliation,¹⁸³ 19 namely, that¹⁸⁴ God¹⁸⁵ was reconciling the world to

¹⁷⁹ Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 252. Cf. also Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 434): “Paul is clearly emphasizing the radical discontinuity between the pre- and post-conversion states, but in other contexts he implies the coexistence or interpenetration of the present age and the age to come...and speaks of the ongoing renewal of the believer”; and Guthrie (*2 Corinthians*, 308), “Others, however, have taken the new creation to refer to the new created order established by Christ...which certainly takes in believers as newly created but places the phrase in a broader, eschatological context. The new bases for understanding others stems not simply from the individual person who has been transformed by the gospel but also from the kingdom values put in place under Christ’s rule; a new eschatological order has been brought in.”

¹⁸⁰ This translation is from a conversation with Aaron Jensen, 3/27/18, to whom I am indebted for pointing out many of the connections made on this verse.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 252, where Seifrid previously noted that “the inbreaking of the eschaton is localized. It is not found everywhere in the world. It is found in Christ, the crucified and risen Lord alone... That this experience arrives hidden under the cross and suffering does not mean that it is not real.”

¹⁸² Significantly, Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 290) notes that “the verb ‘to minister’ (διάκονεῖν) and the nouns ‘ministry’ (διακονία) and ‘minister’ (διάκονος) appear in Paul’s letters thirty-five times out of the one hundred occurrences in the NT. Twenty of these thirty-five occurrences are in 2 Corinthians.”

¹⁸³ Possible uses of the genitive include 1) genitive of origin, ministry that originates in God’s gracious act of reconciliation; 2) qualitative genitive, ministry characterized by reconciling; 3) objective genitive, ministry that brings about reconciling; 4) genitive of content, a ministry that consists of reconciling. Either 3 or 4 seem to fit best here. Cf. Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 291), who opts for the fourth view while admitting, “It is hard to decide among the various options since all have a measure of truth.” Cf. also Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 439), who leans toward the objective sense.

¹⁸⁴ This is an exegetical use of ὡς ὅτι. Cf. Harris, (*Second Corinthians*, 439-440). Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 292-293) notes that some believe Paul uses ὡς ὅτι to recall for the Corinthians something he has previously said to them, giving a translation of “as you should know,” or “it is well known.”

¹⁸⁵ Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 440) argues that the anarthrous θεὸς brings the emphasis: “God and no other,” “God as he is in himself.”

himself in Christ, not counting their transgressions¹⁸⁶ against them, and he has placed in us the message of reconciliation.¹⁸⁷

All of these things (τὰ δὲ πάντα) described in 5:14-17 come from God. It cannot be emphasized enough: from beginning to end and at every point in between, God is the Reconciler in Christ.

Nevertheless, God entrusts *his* work of reconciliation to the *human* ministry of reconciliation, a ministry that is characterized by speaking the message of reconciliation. In 5:18 Paul is only speaking about himself and his fellow ministers being reconciled to God through Christ and receiving from him the ministry of reconciliation.¹⁸⁸ In 5:19 Paul then proceeds to lay out the substance of the message of reconciliation.¹⁸⁹ Thus as Paul preaches this message to the world (cf. 5:20-21), he can speak firsthand¹⁹⁰ as one who has already begun to enjoy the benefits of that reconciliation¹⁹¹ and who now speaks a real peace to all people.¹⁹²

In the New Testament the words καταλλάσσω, καταλλαγή, and their cognates are exclusively Pauline,¹⁹³ though the concept is found throughout the Scriptures.¹⁹⁴ Notice that the Scriptures never speak of God being reconciled to man, as if there were something in God that was wrong or needed to be changed. Instead, it was man who was hostile to God and needed to be reconciled to him.¹⁹⁵ 2

¹⁸⁶ BDAG παράπτωμα, “in imagery of one making a false step so as to lose footing: a violation of moral standards, offense, wrongdoing, sin.” Garland (2 Corinthians, 294) observes that παραπτώματα are more than just sins of ignorance, but deliberate sins, a “defiant mutiny” that “created what seemed to be an unbridgeable gulf between us and God.”

¹⁸⁷ The use of the genitive here is parallel to that in 5:18. Cf. Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 445.

¹⁸⁸ As is the case throughout the larger section of 2:14-7:13, Paul is defending his genuine apostolic, gospel ministry for Christ. Note the role of the ministry brought out in δόντος ἡμῖν (5:18), θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν (5:19), ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ οὖν πρεσβεύομεν ὡς τοῦ θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντος δι’ ἡμῶν (5:20), Συνεργοῦντες δὲ καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν (6:1).

¹⁸⁹ Note that Paul uses a similar pattern in 5:18-21: He first emphasizes that he and his fellow apostles have received this ministry of reconciliation (5:18, 20a), and then describes the content of that message (5:19, 20b-21). Contra our interpretation, Wallace (*Greek Grammar*, 399) instead takes ἡμᾶς in 5:18a to be inclusive of all believers, in view of the context, and argues that ἡμῖν in 5:18b is exclusive, referring only to Paul and his fellow ministers. Yet Wallace also admits there is no linguistic basis for this shift.

¹⁹⁰ Dobberstein (“Justification, 19”) underscores the change this reconciliation entailed for Paul himself: “The enemy of Christ became the follower of Christ and his word. The persecution (*sic*) became the confessor.”

¹⁹¹ Those who bring the message of reconciliation to the world must first themselves be reconciled to God. Cf. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 309. As Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 257) notes, “Paul acts out of that which he has received.” This is not to deny the role of all believers in acting as universal priests who share the message of reconciliation. In the context of this chapter and the broader context of the letter it seems best to take the references to “us” here as referring to his own ministry or at least to himself and other apostles. In 6:1 Paul says, “As God’s fellow workers,” thus clarifying that what he has been saying is from the perspective of a minister of Christ.

¹⁹² Cf. Garland (2 Corinthians, 294-295): “God did not deputize Paul to make people feel good about themselves and their relationship to God but to effect a real peace. This task means that he must always point to something beyond himself, not to himself, to what God has done in Christ, not what he is doing for Christ.”

¹⁹³ Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 435) notes that καταλλάσσω occurs six times (twice in Rom. 5:10; 1 Cor. 7:11; three times in 2 Cor. 5:18-20), ἀποκαταλλάσσω three times (Col. 1:20, 22; Eph. 2:16), and καταλλαγή four times (Rom. 5:11, 11:15; twice in 2 Cor. 5:18-19).

¹⁹⁴ Consider, in varying contexts, Matt. 5:9, 24; Luke 12:58; Col. 1:20; 1 Tim. 2:5.

¹⁹⁵ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 290. Cf. also Guthrie (2 Corinthians, 309), who notes that in comparison with both ancient pagan and religious writings (for the latter, 2 Maccabees 1:5; 7:33; 8:29), the initiative for reconciliation as coming from God is unique.

Corinthians 5:14-21 finds a striking parallel in Romans 5:1-11,¹⁹⁶ where Paul describes God reconciling to himself those who were weak (ἀσθενῶν, 5:6), ungodly (ἀσεβῶν, 5:6), sinful (ἀμαρτωλῶν, 5:8), and his enemies (ἐχθροὶ, 5:10). It could only be in Christ¹⁹⁷ that God exchanged the hostility between mankind and himself for peaceful, friendly relations. This change has not taken place in man, who is still just as hostile to God until he hears and believes the gospel invitation to be reconciled to God. And since God in himself does not change either,¹⁹⁸ it is best to keep Christ at the center and speak of a change in man's status before God,¹⁹⁹ because God now views mankind "in Christ."²⁰⁰

Indeed, the *whole* world has been reconciled to God. Paul explains how this is possible: God does not count their sins against them (μὴ λογιζόμενος αὐτοῖς τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν).²⁰¹ In other words, granting the real semantic distinctions between them,²⁰² we see no substantial difference between the reconciliation of the world that God accomplished in Christ and the non-imputation of the sins of every individual in the world, that is, the universal justification of all people.²⁰³ In Romans

¹⁹⁶ The two most important parallels being the love of Christ for all humanity as displayed in the saving work of Christ and the connection between justification and reconciliation.

¹⁹⁷ For the sake of his Son the Father sees every person as included in the "all died" of 5:14, introducing through and in his Son the death to hostility that existed between God and all people. Recall that this atoning work of Christ in 5:14-15 was also the reason for Paul and all believers to view others in a different light, no longer κατὰ σάρκα, but from the vantage point of new creation in Christ. How much more so isn't this true for God who also views the world ἐν Χριστῷ!

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Mal. 3:6.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Kuske ("Lutheran Heritage," 16): "God never changed in either his love or his justice; he loved man ἐν Χριστῷ, and ἐν Χριστῷ the justice which God's holiness required as the punishment for sin was satisfied completely... The only change which took place as a result of God's Christ-worked-world-reconciliation was in every sinner's account before God."

²⁰⁰ Incidentally, with the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ it is important to always examine the context. 2 Cor. 5:17-21 provides a classic example, as Paul has just spoken of *an individual* who is "in Christ" (5:17), clearly referring to subjective justification, but now in 5:19 Paul says God reconciled *the world* "in Christ," which is an objective assertion. As Jensen ("Concrete Justification," 14) notes, "This tension [between objective-subjective language] can most simply be expressed using the Pauline motif 'in Christ,' which can denote either the sphere or lens through which God views the world or also our being brought into that sphere by faith:

In Christ all sins and all sinners were forgiven at the cross. (objective justification)

We were forgiven when we were brought into Christ by faith via the means of grace. (subjective justification)."

²⁰¹ Note that λογιζόμενος, along with θέμενος, is in apposition to καταλλάσσω, all of which are periphrastic constructions governed by θεὸς ἦν, as we will discuss below. Cf. Kuske, "Lutheran Heritage," 16.

²⁰² Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 260 footnote 539) defines this verse as a forensic event and comments: "In this context 'reconciliation' and 'justification' refer to the same *event*, namely the cross and resurrection of Christ. But they bring out its significance in differing ways. The former has to do with the effecting of harmony between persons; the latter, with establishing justice and proper order within the world." Cf. also Barrett's comment (*Second Corinthians*, 176): "Reconciliation, if located within God's court and expressed in forensic terms, becomes justification—another pointer to the reference to God's righteousness in verse 21." Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 302 footnote 840) also makes the observation that "in Romans 5:1-11 Paul starts with justification and ends with reconciliation. Here [2 Cor. 5:18-21] he begins with reconciliation and ends with justification." He cites Cranfield who also notes a key difference between justification and reconciliation in Romans 5:1-11 (*2 Corinthians*, 290): "Justification is a judicial term used in the law courts. A judge may acquit an accused person without ever entering into any personal relationship with him or her. He just announces the verdict, not guilty. The accused hardly expects to be invited over for dinner by the judge, and probably hopes that he will never see him again."

²⁰³ Cf. Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 290), as well as Harris, (*Second Corinthians*, 439), who gives his brief thoughts on whether reconciliation is subordinated to justification or vice versa. He does well to point out the parallelism also found in Romans 5: "Reconciliation is neither central nor peripheral in Pauline theology, yet it is integral to his

4:3-8 Paul speaks of God crediting righteousness (λογίζεται δικαιосύνην), and part of his argument there is that to credit righteousness is the same as never crediting sins against a person.²⁰⁴ Here Paul is simply describing the objective, universal truth of this non-imputation of sins (5:18-19), which must be applied and received individually through the administration of means of grace (5:20-21).²⁰⁵ This is the solid foundation upon which all gospel ministry rests, as Schaller emphasizes: “[E]vangelical ministry basically has only one task, correctly to proclaim this doctrine, indeed, that without the doctrine of objective justification the gospel would cease to be the gospel.”²⁰⁶ It is the objective reality of God’s accomplished work for all people in Christ that allows us to proclaim to everyone we encounter a no-strings-attached, full and free gospel.²⁰⁷

Thus it is important to maintain that God does not view the world as one abstract lump of humanity, providing a potential reconciliation that is only true or actualized when it is received in faith. There is a real reconciliation that has occurred between God and the world that is composed of every individual within it (note the αὐτοῖς and αὐτῶν).²⁰⁸ Yet objective, universal justification, or

central theme of God the Father’s salvation through Christ. By that salvation sinners are justified and thereby reconciled and adopted as God’s sons and daughters.” Cf. further Franzmann (“Reconciliation,” 90):

If God no longer imputes our sins to us, He has acquitted us, He has absolved us of our sins, He has forgiven us, He has justified us. We speak of *objective justification* as well as of objective reconciliation ... no sharp line is to be drawn between Reconciliation and Justification, that both terms refer to the same act of God in Christ.

Franzmann then cites Althaus who says:

The term ‘justification’ is taken from the sphere of law, the term ‘reconciliation’ from the domain of personal relationships. Their material identity is clear from the fact that Paul at one time (2 Cor. 5:14-21) can proceed from reconciliation to justification and at another time from justification to reconciliation... Reconciliation is actualized as justification; justification involves (*bedeutet*) reconciliation.

To this last thought Franzmann adds: “We go one step further and say that with reconciliation the actual absolution of the world’s sins has taken place.”

²⁰⁴ Cf. Franzmann (“Reconciliation,” 90-91), who notes as well the connection between these two portions of Paul’s writings and says that “justification is given in and with reconciliation; the one is as real and objective as the other.”

²⁰⁵ Several excellent resources on the importance of and distinction between objective and subjective justification are readily available: Brug, “Christ the Savior;” Buchholz, “Jesus Canceled Your Debt;” Deutschlander, “Justification.” Note how many of Buchholz’s “litmus test” questions regarding a person’s view of the biblical teaching of objective justification are taken from 2 Corinthians 5 (“Jesus Canceled Your Debt, 26):

- “Did Jesus complete his work of reconciling the world to God? (2 Cor. 5:11-21)
- Because of Christ’s completed work, are the transgressions of the world no longer attributed to sinners but to Christ, the sin-bearer? (John 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:19)
- Is God’s reconciliation of the world to himself a completed reality (2 Cor. 5:19) or merely something to be fully realized when faith is added?
- Has the world’s status before God changed from guilty to acquitted due to the completed work of Christ? (2 Cor. 5:19) ...

The answer to each of these questions should be a resounding, unequivocal ‘yes!’”

²⁰⁶ Schaller, “Redemption,” 310. Cf. also Calov (“Thoughts,” 200-201): “Therefore in this verse, Paul reminds us of the two most important works of God that are especially evident in the church. After the Fall, the world has been reconciled to God, and this reconciliation is announced through the ministry of the Word. Both are supremely necessary.”

²⁰⁷ Cf. Dobberstein (“Justification, 11): “The real content of the Gospel is the Word of reconciliation. Through Christ God has reconciled us to himself. The work of redemption is finished and done. Note the message to be proclaimed by the church is not what God intends to do, what God is willing to do, much less what God promises to do if certain conditions are met. It is the good news of what God has done. God has reconciled the world to himself. Men’s’ sins are no longer charged against them. Each man is declared righteous. It is an accomplished fact.”

²⁰⁸ Cf. Schaller, “Redemption,” 316, and also Deutschlander (“Justification,” 2), who urges us to “notice the all-embracing, already accomplished character of the passage: the world is reconciled! Not, the world *can be*

world reconciliation, does not teach that any of the individuals in this world know of this universal act of deliverance yet, believe in it yet, or yet enjoy all the blessings that flow from being a new creation through faith in Christ. God has united²⁰⁹ his reconciling work in Christ to his work of delivering this gospel through servants like Paul, the other apostles, and those gathered here today, who proclaim this message of reconciliation to the world.²¹⁰

Before moving on to that message of reconciliation as individually applied in 5:20-21, we need to ponder briefly how God accomplished this reconciliation. Paul uses the unique phrasing θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσων. It is grammatically possible that this could be a simple verb (ἦν) predicating something about God (namely, that he was incarnate in Christ, the God-in-Christ who reconciled the world), thus highlighting the incarnation as essential to God's work of reconciliation.²¹¹ While this would be a doctrinally true statement in keeping with Scripture,²¹² it seems preferable to view it instead as a periphrastic construction, with ἦν καταλλάσσων acting as the verbal idea ("was reconciling") and ἐν Χριστῷ indicating that God brought about this reconciliation in Christ.²¹³ Though an imperfect periphrastic construction like this would be unusual in New Testament Greek,²¹⁴ the point of emphasizing God's agency through Christ seems to fit better as a parallel with 5:18 (διὰ Χριστοῦ) than does the point about God's incarnation in Christ here.²¹⁵

Whichever view one takes, it is clear that God wants to deal with us and be known by us in Christ. Apart from him there is no reconciliation. Naturally, after explaining more fully in 5:19 the divine act of reconciliation in Christ, Paul expands in 5:20-21 on the ministry and message of reconciliation²¹⁶ that God has given to and placed in him (5:18, 19).²¹⁷

reconciled, or has reconciliation available to it. That reconciliation is entrusted to us in the Word. But it would be folly to speak of the reconciliation as entrusted to us, if, in point of fact, the reconciliation had not yet occurred; if prior to committing the word of reconciliation there is no reconciliation, then the word entrusted to our proclamation is a lie. And far be it from us to rend the sacred mantel cast over us in the Word, to make His Word and His Act of reconciliation of no effect until we have done something or until we have believed something."

²⁰⁹ Note again that θέμενος is a participle that coordinates with καταλλάσσων and λογιζόμενος, all being governed by θεὸς ἦν.

²¹⁰ Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 258) notes that God's act of reconciliation would "remain isolated and distant if it were not communicated in a definite 'word' (*logos*) that effects reconciliation." Cf. also Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 449), who says: "In the divine economy, the declaration of 'the message of reconciliation' (v. 19), or, in other words, the preaching of the cross of Christ (1 Cor. 1:18, 23) with the attendant entreaty to be reconciled to God, is the link between the objective work of reconciliation accomplished by Christ and the subjective appropriation of its benefits by the sinner. Paul saw himself and everyone who proclaims reconciliation in Christ as trustees of a message (v. 19), ambassadors for Christ, and mouthpieces for God (v. 20)."

²¹¹ Supported by Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, 109-110.

²¹² Cf. Col. 1:19-22.

²¹³ Cf. Becker, "Note," and Kuske, "Lutheran Heritage," 15, in support of this view.

²¹⁴ Cf. Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 441. As to why Paul might have used this particular construction here, Jensen comments that Paul's use of a periphrastic rather than a synthetic imperfect "may be that this is meant to highlight God's involvement in the process, or it is meant to background this entire verse to verse 20." Noted in a conversation on 3/27/2018.

²¹⁵ Cf. Becker "Note," 1-2. Furthermore, since the following participles (λογιζόμενος, θέμενος) are also governed by the same subject, it more naturally fits the setting to think of God the Father acting through Christ (as in 5:18) with these participles as well, rather than Christ the incarnate God taking action.

²¹⁶ Note the parallel phrases in 5:18 (δόντος ἡμῖν τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς) and 19 (θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν τὸν λόγον τῆς καταλλαγῆς). Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 445) concisely sum this up: "The ministry is the proclamation of the message."

²¹⁷ On the significance of the committing of this ministry of reconciliation (θέμενος), Calov ("Thoughts," 210-211) cites Balduin: "When the apostle rather emphatically explains the word 'giving' with the word θέμενος 'one who puts, places; establishes, sets,' he refers back partly to:

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

20 ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ οὖν πρεσβεύομεν ὡς τοῦ θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντος δι' ἡμῶν· δεόμεθα ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, καταλλάγητε τῷ θεῷ. **21** τὸν μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς γενώμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ.

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors on Christ's behalf, since²¹⁸ God is giving his appeal²¹⁹ through us. We plead²²⁰ on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 He made him who did not know²²¹ sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

How mercifully God condescends to us in Christ, such that not only has God reconciled to himself us who were once his enemies, but he also chooses to bring the message of reconciliation to a hostile world through clay jars like us (cf. 4:7). Yes, God privileges us to be the ambassadors²²² of his Son. In ancient times an ambassador was a sacrosanct role treated with great respect, since the ambassador carried all of the authority of the one he represented.²²³

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- The order established in God's eternal plan. God was pleased through the ministry of the Word to put things back in order with sinners and to restore the lost grace.
 - The certainty of this doctrine. For God has decreed, established, and set it in place. Therefore it cannot fail.
 - Also the constancy and stability of this doctrine. For whatever God sets in place, the gates of hell with all the heretics and tyrants cannot overcome it.

For this reason, when Paul talks about his own ministry, he freely uses the phrase 'God placed me into the ministry,' cf. 1 Timothy 1:12, 2:7, etc."

²¹⁸ It is best to avoid the sense of uncertainty that the NIV, NET, NKJV, NASB give this word with the translation "as though." Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 259 footnote 536) comments: "It is not 'as though' God were entreating through the apostle, but precisely the case that God does so, just as God has worked salvation in the crucified and risen Christ." Guthrie (*2 Corinthians*, 311) explains that here we have "ὡς plus a genitive absolute construction," which "communicates 'subjective motivation' and here, rather than 'mere supposition' ('as though,' 'on the pretext that') it communicates 'actual fact' ('since,' 'in the conviction that')... Paul has a firm conviction that God speaks his message of reconciliation through him." See also Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 446. Cf. the translations found in HCSB, CSB, NRSV.

²¹⁹ BDAG παρακαλέω 2, "to urge strongly, appeal to, urge, exhort, encourage."

²²⁰ BDAG δέομαι "to ask for something pleadingly, ask, request."

²²¹ Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 450) takes Rom. 7:7 as a close parallel usage of γινώσκω and ἁμαρτία, reinforcing the common use of γινώσκω to denote a personal acquaintance, participation, or experience in sin. "Although Christ was aware of the reality of sin and observed sin in others (cf. Heb. 12:3), he himself, Paul affirms, never had personal involvement in sin."

²²² In the New Testament only Paul uses the verb πρεσβεύω, and that only here and in one other passage, when he boldly asserts that he is "an ambassador in chains" for the sake of the gospel (Eph. 6:20). However, the corresponding noun, πρεσβεία, is used also twice in Luke 14:32 and 19:14, namely, parables of Jesus that "depict the 'diplomatic relations' between God and his people in the age before Christ's return." Winger (*Ephesians*, 761 and footnote 36) further believes that Paul's words in Philemon 9 could, instead of its cognate πρεσβύτερος, perhaps rather be πρεσβευτής "either because of an early copying mistake or simply because the two terms were somewhat interchangeable."

²²³ Guthrie (*2 Corinthians*, 311) comments further: "In the political realm, those to whom an ambassador was sent understood that he was to be treated well and with respect. Dire consequences fell upon those who abused an ambassador."

To be an ambassador of Christ simultaneously humbles and exalts us ministers of his Word.²²⁴ In such humble confidence Christ's ambassador realizes that he does not speak an uncertain word, a word that may fail or prove false; it is none other than the Word of God in Christ he has been given to speak, and a blessed Word of reconciliation at that. It cautions him to speak every word carefully, since he represents no less than the Son of God himself as he speaks that Word to whomever he speaks it. He dare not change even one word to fit his own fancy or the prevailing winds of the world's opinions. Christ's calling him to this office leads him and everyone else to treat this office as God's work in him, regardless of his own stature, self-esteem, or others' opinions.²²⁵ For this reason his hearers should treat him as if Christ himself were standing before them, regarding his words not as the word of men, but as the Word of God.²²⁶ It is this reality that God's people experience in awe-filled joy as the words of absolution are spoken by Christ's minister in public and in private.²²⁷ Christ himself calls on all people to receive in faith his ambassador's words: "Be reconciled to God."

Paul now illustrates his typical appeal for reconciliation²²⁸ by unraveling the Great Exchange.²²⁹ As others have noted, Paul seems to have had Isaiah 53 on his mind when he penned this verse, and further study of that connection would be beneficial.²³⁰ When Paul says that God made him who did not know sin to be sin in our place, we see that Paul is right in line with the rest of

²²⁴ Harris, (*Second Corinthians*, 449): "[Paul and all other proclaimers of the reconciliation message] enjoy incomparable dignity, yet their task is the lowly one of παράκλησις and δέησις. This simultaneous conjunction of dignity and humility forms an exquisite paradox first exemplified in the person and ministry of Christ."

²²⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:4.

²²⁶ Cf. 1 Thess. 2:13.

²²⁷ As Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 446) notes, "As an ambassador [Paul] worked both 'on behalf of Christ' and 'in the place of Christ.' That is, there is no need here to choose between the notions of representation and substitution for ὑπέρ; both concepts are present, given the use of ὑπέρ in v. 14 (see above) and its association here with πρεσβεύειν. Not only in the words he spoke but also in his whole life Paul was acting in Christ's name and place." Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 259) also observes: "The crucified and risen Lord makes appeal through Paul, communicating his *work* to the world through the *word* of his ambassador," and adding in a footnote (footnote 537), "Paul simultaneously represents Christ *and* Christ speaks in him (cf. 13:3)."

²²⁸ There is debate on whether Paul is here appealing 1) to a subset group among the Corinthians, namely, his opponents; 2) the Corinthians in general; or 3) expressing his general appeal in all situations as he describes the content of his reconciling message. Cf. Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 447-448. With the first two options most translations will insert a 2nd plural pronoun that is not in the original to support this interpretation (cf. NIV, NET, ESV, NRSV, NKJV, NASB). While Guthrie argues in favor of including "to you" as Paul's specific appeal to the Corinthians, one could also take 6:1ff as the point where Paul turns his specific appeal over to the Corinthians (cf. CSB; Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 259).

²²⁹ We call it a "great exchange"; Luther (*Select Works*, 369; WA 5:608.6-14) called it a "wonderful exchange" (*admirabili commertio*), as seen in his comments on Psalm 22:1:

And this is that mystery which is rich in divine grace unto sinners: wherein, by a wonderful exchange, our sins are now no longer ours but Christ's: and the righteousness of Christ is ours. He has imparted that unto us, that he might clothe us with it, and fill us with it: and he has taken our evils upon himself that he might deliver us from them. So that now, the righteousness of Christ is not only ours objectively (as they term it), but formally also; and so, our sins are not Christ's objectively, but also formally. For in the same manner as he grieved and suffered in our sins and was confounded, in the same manner we rejoice and glory in his righteousness: and it is manifest that he did grieve and was confounded in them truly, as we here see; and so also we rejoice and glory truly in his righteousness.

²³⁰ Cf. Guthrie *2 Corinthians*, 314-315, and Tackmier, "Exegesis," 280-281. Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 456) points out three main parallels: 1) Christ as sinless (5:21a) with Isa. 53:9; 2) Christ "made sin" (5:21a) with Isa. 53:10; 3) The resulting benefit of being made righteous (5:21b) with Isa. 53:11.

Scripture in identifying Christ as the sinless one,²³¹ and yet we are left to ponder in what sense God “made him to be sin for us.”²³² In general, the most common interpretations for 5:21a include:²³³

- 1) God made Christ to be a sacrificial sin offering²³⁴
- 2) God identified Christ with sinners so as to treat him as “the sinner”²³⁵

Harris points out that all “the interpretations of the phrase have in common the idea of identification, the understanding that God caused Christ to be identified in some way with what was foreign to his experience, namely human sin.”²³⁶ Nevertheless, the second interpretation is the one that best fits the context. One main problem with the first view is that in this verse Paul would then be using ἁμαρτία in two different senses.²³⁷ In addition, nowhere else in the New Testament is ἁμαρτία used in this sense, and being “parallel to δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ it is more likely to bear a judicial or forensic sense than a sacrificial or cultic one.”²³⁸ All this put together urges us to adopt the second view above, namely, that God treats Christ as *the* sinner, so that he can treat us sinners as those who have the righteousness of God in Christ.

Another name for this view is the doctrine of imputation. That is, God truly reckons, accounts, credits sin to Christ – and not just sinful acts, but in view of Paul’s language, Christ’s very

²³¹ Cf. John 8:46; Acts 3:14; Heb. 4:15, 7:26, 1 Pet. 1:19, 2:22, 3:18; 1 John 3:5. Cf. Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 450-451.

²³² Note the same substitutionary sense of ὑπὲρ here as in 5:14-15. Christ was the only one who could take on sin in the place of all humanity, and that was accomplished by his perfect righteousness and innocent death. Cf. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 301-302. As Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 453) also says, “This total identification of the sinless one with sinners at the cross, in assuming the full penalty and guilt of their sin, leaves no doubt that substitution as well as representation is involved.”

²³³ Cf. Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 354. Wright offers an additional unique perspective on this verse in “On Becoming the Righteousness of God,” and *Saint Paul*, 104-105, maintaining that δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ here points to Paul’s ministry as an expression of God’s covenant faithfulness, a view which others simply characterize as strange. Cf. Bird (*Saving Righteousness*, 184 footnote 8); Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 268). Another interpretation would take Christ being “made sin” as a reference to his incarnation in a human nature that was subject to the weaknesses of sin (cf. the NEB translation, “God made him one with the sinfulness of man” and GNB, “God made him share our sin”, and Bird, “Incorporated Righteousness,” 272), finding support in Rom. 8:3, “in the likeness of sinful flesh [ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας].” But it is important to note that there Paul only speaks of “likeness” and here makes no such statement. It would further run into the same problem as the first interpretation listed above by having an unclear parallel to δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ. Cf. Harris *Second Corinthians*, 451-452.

²³⁴ This interpretation goes back to the early church fathers, including Augustine. It also fits well with Isa. 53:10 (cf. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 300). Note that this translation is found in the NLT, NEB (footnote), NIV (footnote), NJB (“a victim for sin”).

²³⁵ This would be labeled as a metonymy of abstract for concrete. Cf. Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 455; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 301; Jensen, “Faith in Christ,” 103. Compare Luther’s comments on Gal. 3:13 (*Galatians*, 118), “Holy Writ does not say that Christ was under the curse. It says directly that Christ was made a curse. In II Corinthians 5:21 Paul writes: ‘For he (God) hath made him (Christ) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.’ Although this and similar passages may be properly explained by saying that Christ was made a sacrifice for the curse and for sin, yet in my judgment it is better to leave these passages stand as they read: Christ was made sin itself; Christ was made the curse itself. When a sinner gets wise to himself he does not only feel miserable, he feels like misery personified; he does not only feel like a sinner, he feels like sin itself.”

²³⁶ Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 451.

²³⁷ That is, it would be hard to grasp how, if the second ἁμαρτία is a “sin-offering,” the phrase “God made him who knew no ἁμαρτία (= “sin-offering”)” would make sense.

²³⁸ Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 453. Cf. also Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 300-301.

person in particular – so that Christ is identified and treated as the one and only sinner, the sinner of sinners.²³⁹ God associates everything wrapped up in our sin with him.²⁴⁰

The accompanying truth is that we, in turn, “become the righteousness of God.” This, too, is a forensic act: we are counted as the righteous one and declared to be righteous before God. In our very person God views the believer who is in Christ as the “one who knew no sin,” that is, righteous, justified, and without sin. As Seifrid notes, “Christ became what we *are* – in order that we might become what he *is* in his resurrected life.”²⁴¹

This language should not be taken as suggesting that Christ ever actually committed sin or by nature was sinful. Nor does Paul mean to say that we are indwelt with any kind of essential righteousness.²⁴² Rather, as “a result of God’s imputing to Christ something that was extrinsic to him, namely sin, believers have something imputed to them that was extrinsic to them, namely righteousness.”²⁴³ Deutschlander observes here:

²³⁹ Thus, paradoxically, Christ is the “sinless sinner.” Seifrid, (*Second Corinthians*, 262), borrowing this phrase from Michael Cameron.

²⁴⁰ Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 260-262. Cf. Luther (*What Luther Says*, 1421): “He is the greatest of sinners. There is no greater sinner in the entire human race than the Son of God. This is so true that He is called sin itself (2 Cor. 5:21). ... His sin is ours. It was foreign to Him. He had none. He committed none. It was made His own because of the love wherewith He loved us. He bore it, and because of it He suffered as though He had committed it Himself, although He was entirely innocent and spotless.” Elsewhere in his comments on Gal. 3:13 Luther comments (*Galatians*, 114-115):

All the prophets of old said that Christ should be the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, blasphemer that ever was or ever could be on earth. When He took the sins of the whole world upon Himself, Christ was no longer an innocent person. He was a sinner burdened with the sins of a Paul who was a blasphemer; burdened with the sins of a Peter who denied Christ; burdened with the sins of a David who committed adultery and murder, and gave the heathen occasion to laugh at the Lord. In short, Christ was charged with the sins of all men, that He should pay for them with His own blood. ... I am told that it is preposterous and wicked to call the Son of God a cursed sinner. I answer: If you deny that He is a condemned sinner, you are forced to deny that Christ died. It is not less preposterous to say, the Son of God died, than to say, the Son of God was a sinner. John the Baptist called Him “the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Being the unspotted Lamb of God, Christ was personally innocent. But because He took the sins of the world His sinlessness was defiled with the sinfulness of the world. Whatever sins I, you, all of us have committed or shall commit, they are Christ’s sins as if He had committed them Himself. Our sins have to be Christ’s sins or we shall perish forever.

²⁴¹ Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 263. Seifrid also refers to Rom. 8:29-30 at this point. Cf. also Theodoret (Bray, 2 *Corinthians*, 252): “Christ was called what we are in order to call us to be what he is.”

²⁴² This would lead to the error of Osiander and others in the days of the Reformation that pointed to the indwelling of Christ’s righteousness within the believer as the focus of one’s certainty for salvation. Cf. Article III of the Formula of Concord. Against this error Seifrid (*Second Corinthians*, 264) notes: “This new reality does not entail an ‘infusion’ or ‘impartation’ of righteousness, nor an ‘essential’ indwelling of divine righteousness. It is best described as a transfer, a relocation of our persons to a ‘place’ outside ourselves: the righteousness of God is found ‘in Christ.’ As is more than obvious in this letter, the Corinthians do not have this righteousness in themselves, but in Christ, in whom the exchange of life and death has taken place.” Harris (*Second Corinthians*, 454) notes how this ultimately transcends our understanding: “Paul is not saying that at the crucifixion the sinless Christ became in some sense a sinner, yet he is affirming more than that Christ became a sin offering or even a sin bearer. In a sense beyond human comprehension, God treated Christ as ‘sin,’ aligning him so totally with sin and its dire consequences that from God’s viewpoint he became indistinguishable from sin itself.”

²⁴³ Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 456. Just before this citation Harris explains that “‘become the righteousness of God’ is to gain a right standing before God that God himself bestows (cf. Rom. 5:17; Phil. 3:9). It is to be ‘constituted righteous in the divine court, so that γενέσθαι δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ = κατασταθῆναι δίκαιοι (Rom. 5:19). Although the term λογίζομαι is not used in v. 21 (but cf. v. 19), it is not inappropriate to perceive in this verse a double imputation: sin was reckoned to Christ’s account (v. 21a), so that righteousness is reckoned to our account (v. 21b). Certainly the literary symmetry of the juxtaposed opposites, ἀμαρτία and δικαιοσύνη, supports such an inference.”

Notice yet again the imputed and judicial and forensic nature of the change; the Apostle speaks neither of a change in man's essence, nor of damage to God's immutability; but a change in status, a change in relationship is spoken of, and that by a just decree of God on the basis of the exchange made in Christ's sacrifice.²⁴⁴

This exchange is purely declarative, and yet it is no mere "legal fiction."²⁴⁵ The powerful Word of God creates out of nothing the new life that God wills into existence (2 Cor. 4:6; Rom. 4:17). Faith receives this new life and by faith in Christ we are counted as righteous before God. This, then, is the heart and soul of the ministry and message of reconciliation: God acted in Christ to reconcile the world (5:19) so that he could send ambassadors in the name of Christ (5:18, 20) to proclaim the message of reconciliation for anyone and everyone in this world to believe it and thus enjoy peace between God and man in Christ (5:21).²⁴⁶

It is unfortunate to hear some in our day either downplaying²⁴⁷ or outright denying²⁴⁸ the doctrine of imputation as taught in this verse. In short, there are those who reject imputation language in favor of speaking of "union/participation/incorporation in Christ" as the better way to speak. Now of course there is nothing wrong with language about union in Christ in general.²⁴⁹ The problem, as Jensen notes, is that many who speak this way are "consciously and intentionally using the debate as a way to mitigate, or even eradicate, forensic language within Paul."²⁵⁰ In order to avoid the notion that sinners should look within themselves and to their faith for the confidence of their justification, advocates for participation language are emphatic to point out Paul's frequent use of the ἐν Χριστῷ formula in his writing. However, imputation by itself should naturally entail that there is something lacking to the individual that needs to be credited to him, or else why would God consider imputing righteousness to him in the first place? Thus these concerns about imputation are unwarranted. When

²⁴⁴ Deutschlander, "Justification," 3.

²⁴⁵ Bird (*Saving Righteousness*, 8 footnote 9) cites the following as using this pejorative term: "W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896), 36; Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 492, n. 57; idem, *Paul* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), 46, 49, 67; more cautiously Wright, *Saint Paul*, 113, 122–23."

²⁴⁶ Note that in our interpretation of 5:14–15, the progression of thought with 5:21 is closely parallel: The universally atoning work of Christ (5:14–15a, 21a) drew in all people, so that (ἵνα in 5:15, 21) those who receive it subjectively by faith (5:15b, 5:21b) might benefit from it.

²⁴⁷ Bird ("Incorporated Righteousness," 257) cites Seifrid as considering the doctrine of imputation to be "a reasonable way of understanding the forensic nature of justification over against a view of infused or imparted righteousness. The problem with the term 'the imputed righteousness of Christ' is not that it is wrong but that it is deficient." Seifrid's view shows itself in his comments on this verse in *Second Corinthians*, 260–268. To his credit Seifrid is trying to guard against Protestants viewing imputed righteousness as "money in the bank," that is, as any sort of intrinsic possession, such that the "very concern to affirm the extrinsic nature of justification may then be undermined." Thus he is focused on the "locating" aspect of the forensic *event* of God *in Christ* and using such language to speak of what God has done to effect our salvation. He believes that "the language of justification by faith as the imputation of Christ's righteousness through the instrument of faith requires supplementation," so as to present a more biblically accurate picture of salvation (i.e., "union with Christ") as opposed to a logically constructed *ordo salutis* that is not found in so many words in the text of Scripture (Seifrid, *Second Corinthians*, 267). Guthrie (*2 Corinthians*, 315) prefers the language of "transformational interchange," to that of "imputation." Though he acknowledges this passage fits into the broader theology of imputation, he does not see it taught here specifically.

²⁴⁸ Bird, "Incorporated Righteousness," 274; Wright, *Saint Paul*, 98; Wright, "On Becoming the Righteousness of God."

²⁴⁹ Again, however, we recall the problems that arose from the Osiandrian controversy and the idea of Christ's dwelling in the sinner as the source of confidence for one's salvation. Cf. Article III of the Formula of Concord.

²⁵⁰ Jensen, "Faith in Christ," 128.

imputation is rightly taught, it avoids in every way pointing the sinner within himself, but always points to God as the Giver of Christ's righteousness to him. While this is a long and complicated debate,²⁵¹ suffice it for our purposes to say that the language of imputation and participation are not contradictory, but complementary: "Justification by faith is the bedrock, the fundament of the gospel. But participation, rightly understood, is the broad theme which encompasses every part of the gospel."²⁵² Nothing less than the consolation of souls, our souls and the souls of God's people, is at stake here. For that reason we defend this glorious doctrine of imputation and justification by faith in Christ alone to the very end.

In lieu of any lengthy conclusion to our exegetical study, we end by simply recalling the questions with which we began today: "Why did you become a pastor? Why are you still a pastor?" By now we have come to realize that things are now always what they seem. Our answer to these questions is found neither in glory nor in suffering by themselves, but in a God who hides himself in suffering so that the glory of reconciliation can become all the more powerful for those who preach and for those who believe it. In light of 2 Corinthians 5, the inviting and sustaining power in our ministry is nothing less than the power of God in Christ who calls us to speak hope (5:1-10), love (5:11-17), and peace (5:18-21). In short, isn't the real reason you became and still are a pastor that your calling in life is to speak with Paul and Luther the following words in the Spirit of Christ to any troubled heart?

Therefore, my dear brother, learn Christ and him crucified. Learn to pray to him and, despairing of yourself, say: "You, Lord Jesus, are my righteousness, but I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given to me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not and have given to me what I was not." ... [You] will learn from him that just as he has received you, so he has made your sins his own and has made his righteousness yours.²⁵³

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²⁵¹ For a well-balanced summary and analysis of the issues involved with this question, cf. first of all Jensen, "Faith in Christ," Appendix H, "The Relationship and Relative Positioning of Faith and Incorporation/Participation on the *Ordo Salutis*," 128-142. In addition, see John Piper (*Counted Righteous*), who provides a detailed summary of the modern challenge to imputation and provides his own exegetical defense of the doctrine of imputation. See especially his treatment of 2 Cor. 5:21 in 68-69, 81-83. Bird ("Incorporated Righteousness") reacts to the debate between Piper and Gundry and provides his own alternative view which he calls "incorporated righteousness." Schreiner ("Justification," 30-34) discusses the doctrine of imputation as found in the writings of N. T. Wright and points to several helpful resources that defend the doctrine of imputation.

²⁵² Jensen, "Faith in Christ," 136. He cites Constantine Campbell who states that "union with Christ" is "an essential ingredient that binds all other elements together; it is the webbing that connects the ideas of Paul's web-shaped theological framework."

²⁵³ Luther, *Letters*, 110. I have updated the language above, but here is entire citation quoted verbatim in context: Therefore, my dear brother, learn Christ and him crucified. Learn to pray to him and, despairing of yourself, say: "Thou, Lord Jesus, art my righteousness, but I am thy sin. Thou hast taken upon thyself what is mine and hast given to me what is thine. Thou hast taken upon thyself what thou wast not and hast given to me what I was not." Beware of aspiring to such purity that you will not wish to be looked upon as a sinner, or to be one. For Christ dwells only in sinners. On this account he descended from heaven, where he dwelt among the righteous, to dwell among sinners. Meditate on this love of his and you will see his sweet consolation. For why was it necessary for him to die if we can obtain a good conscience by our works and afflictions? Accordingly you will find peace only in him and only when you despair of yourself and your own works. Besides, you will learn from him that just as he has received you, so he has made your sins his own and has made his righteousness yours.

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