

AN ETERNAL HOPE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 7:14–25

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 4:16–5:10

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16–18

16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1–10

1 For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:

3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

5 Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:

7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:)

8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.



Photo © Getty Images

KEY VERSE

We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.—2 Corinthians 5:1

CONFIDENT HOPE

Unit 3: Faith Gives Us Hope

LESSONS [10–13](#)

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the basis of Christian confidence.
2. Explain the sense and reference of one or more of Paul's metaphors.
3. Write two brief explanations of the basis of Christian confidence: one to a discouraged believer, and the other to a hard-core unbeliever.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Faith, Not Sight
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Weight of Glory (2 Corinthians 4:16–18)
 - A. Daily Renewal (v. 16)
 - B. Momentary Affliction (v. 17)
 - C. Eternity Unseen (v. 18)
- II. Reality of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:1–5)
 - A. What We Know (vv. 1–3)
 - B. Why It’s Important (vv. 4–5) *Camping?*
- III. Walk of Faith (2 Corinthians 5:6–10)
 - A. Our Confidence (vv. 6–8) *Flying as Faith?*
 - B. Our Labor (vv. 9–10)

Conclusion

- A. Faith, Not Sight Revisited
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Corinthians	Ko- <i>rin</i> -thee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Hades	<i>Hay</i> -deez.
Pharisees	<i>Fair</i> -ih-seez.
Sadducees	<i>Sad</i> -you-seez.
tabernacle	<i>tah</i> -burr- <i>nah</i> -kul.
theophanies	the- <i>ah</i> -fuh-neeze (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Thessalonians	<i>Thess</i> -uh- <i>lo</i> -nee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).

Introduction

A. Faith, Not Sight

A science-fiction movie portrays a future world where an evil alien monster can influence people through eyesight. Those infected this way commit destructive acts, even suicide. The solution is to live blindfolded—unable to be infected but also ill-equipped to navigate the currents of life. A climactic scene has the heroine attempting to navigate a dangerous river with two small children, all three blindfolded in a rowboat.

That fictional tale bears resemblance in some ways, but not in others, regarding how a Christian is to live. Christians are not “blind” to the evils of the world. We see them. And the way we can avoid that dark influence is because we also “see” the Lord’s way—the way of faith based on evidence. Ours is not a

blind(folded) faith. It is a faith based on evidence, a faith grounded in the facts of history. When a crisis looms, will we walk by faith or by something else (see [Proverbs 3:5](#))?

B. Lesson Context

As Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in AD 57, his contemplation of death was more than a spiritual exercise. Paul admitted to his readers that adverse circumstances resulted in being “pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life” (2 [Corinthians 1:8](#); compare [11:24–27](#)).

This expectation of the potential end of his life forms the background for almost everything he writes in the initial chapters of 2 Corinthians. However, he emerges from this contemplation with a triumphant note, proclaiming in [4:8–9](#): “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.”

Paul did not allow the prospect of death to deter him from his mission to bring the gospel to Gentiles in cities like Corinth. Some of Paul’s anguish may have been caused by false teachers who had come to Corinth to undermine his teachings and his authority. These are the sarcastically designated “very chiefest apostles” referred to in [2 Corinthians 11:5](#); [12:11](#). Whether their opposition included death threats is uncertain. But we know that Paul’s opponents were not above resorting to such intimidation (example: [Acts 18:12–17](#)).

Even so, Paul did not fear dying, for he knew that Jesus had defeated death ([1 Corinthians 15:12–32](#); [2 Corinthians 4:14](#)). Paul also knew that in his day there were many theories of what happened to people after death. The Greeks generally believed in an underworld place, the realm of the dead ruled over by the god Hades. It was a place of residence for souls released from their bodies, resulting in a shadowy spiritual existence. This place, also called Hades, was thought to be filled with gloom and despair, with no hope of ever being released (compare [Acts 17:32](#)).

Some Jews and Greeks believed there was no existence after death. The party of the Sadducees was known for teaching there was no resurrection ([Matthew 22:23](#)). This was a minority opinion, though, for most Jews believed in a future resurrection of all the dead, who would receive reconstituted bodies in order to stand before God for judgment (examples: [John 11:24](#); [Acts 23:8](#)). Being a Pharisee, this had been the general mind-set of Paul as well ([Acts 23:6](#)). But the resurrection of Jesus from the dead on the third day (rather than at the end, at the general resurrection) brought everything into sharper focus.

I. Weight of Glory

(2 CORINTHIANS 4:16–18)

A. Daily Renewal (v. 16)

16. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

Having made a strong point about resurrection in the previous verses, Paul moves into the implications. In so doing, he begins by using a Greek word translated *for which cause* that he uses elsewhere seven more times in this book. The translations in these other seven are “wherefore” ([2 Corinthians 2:8](#); [5:9](#) [see below]; [6:17](#)), “therefore” ([4:13](#) [twice]; [12:10](#)), and “and in” ([1:20](#)).

This particular word usually implies that what the writer has just been talking about is self-evident. Paul spoke openly in the previous section concerning the prospect of his death, hinting that his life was in jeopardy (see [Lesson Context](#)). This threat, while dire, did not deter him from his mission. He preached Christ, not himself or his fears ([2 Corinthians 4:5](#)). This is his point: whether in the short-term or the long-term, Paul knew his life was temporary—and that earthly life was relatively less important than eternal life.

Therefore, Paul said he had found great peace, even in (or especially in) dangerous and discouraging circumstances. Even were his life not to end soon, the effects of aging and stress were only the *outward man* perishing little by little. Paul was growing stronger in his *inward man*—his heart and spirit—as a result of his relationship with the Lord. Daily, constantly, he found inner renewal (compare [Ephesians 3:16](#)). That was what kept him going.

What Do You Think?

What is the most important change you would have to make to your daily routine in order to make inner renewal a priority?

Digging Deeper

Predict how Satan might attempt to prevent you from doing so.

B. Momentary Affliction (v. 17)

17a. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment.

Paul put into perspective the dangers regarding his safety and longevity by calling the threats a *light affliction*. Qualifying this as *our* extends his comforting perspective to all of us. No one is exempt from worries caused by our mortality and the eventual death of those we love. But when compared to the eternity that makes up our future, these tribulations are *but for a moment*.

17b. Worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

In contrast to these “light afflictions,” Paul extols the heaviness of the weight of our future *glory*. This is a play on words. Paul writes in Greek, but he is fluent in Hebrew as well. In the latter language, the word for *heavy* (as in “weight”) is the same as the word for *honor* (as in “glory”). Thus he used dramatic phrasing to frame the nature of our future in eternity. As we ponder this, however, we should not understand Paul as saying that the “light afflictions” are ultimately irrelevant. The phrase *worketh for us* carries the sense of “causeth” (as the same word is translated in [2 Corinthians 9:11](#)). Our struggles with life will yield the result of inexpressible and unimaginable glory.



Visual for Lesson 13. Start a discussion as you point to this visual and ask,
“How would your life change if you voiced this from memory daily?”

C. Eternity Unseen (v. 18)

18. While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Paul continues to speak in paradox. We should not focus our sights on troubles in life but instead turn our attention to *things which are not seen*. The things that we can see last for a short time (*are temporal*). Such things may seem significant right now, but this significance fades with time. The things we cannot see have much greater importance because they *are eternal*.

To see the unseen, we must have eyes of faith, trusting the testimony God has provided. We do not want to be “without excuse,” the verdict on those who fail to discern the invisible qualities of God even though they should ([Romans 1:20](#)). Even more, how do we experience the eternal, our future “weight of glory”? We must do this with hearts of faith, not crushed by the complexities and disappointments of life. We must live out the assurance that comes from believing God raised Jesus from the dead and will raise us too ([1 Corinthians 15](#)).

II. Reality of the Spirit ([2 CORINTHIANS 5:1–5](#))

A. What We Know (vv. 1–3)

1. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Paul uses various metaphors to contrast the temporary with the eternal in this letter. In the verse before us, he draws on biblical imagery of a *tabernacle* as a way of understanding our bodily existence (compare [2 Peter 1:13–14](#)). The tabernacle was a movable tent that was eventually replaced by the temple. Thus the metaphor emphasizes the impermanent nature of our bodies. Paul did not fear the destruction of the *earthly house* of his physical body because he had assurance of another *building*, a permanent structure. This *eternal dwelling place* has a prime real-estate location: it is *in the heavens*.

2–3. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

This situation of living faithfully while faced with impending death brought Paul to a state of groaning, a word he uses for inward longing ([2 Corinthians 5:4](#), below; [Romans 8:23](#)). The challenges of this life sometimes overshadow the magnificence of our future life in glory. A few years later, as Paul endured imprisonment in Rome, he went on to say, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” ([Philippians 1:21](#)).

What Do You Think?

How can you help your church set up a ministry that encourages its members to reach out to one another in times of “groaning”?

Digging Deeper

What problems are likely to occur in churches where members in distress reach out only to a staff member in such times?

Another metaphor for the human body is that of clothing, often conveyed with the phrase “put on.” In this world, we “put on the armour of light” ([Romans 13:12](#)); we “put on Christ” in baptism ([Galatians 3:27](#)); we “put on the new man” and “put on the whole armour of God” ([Ephesians 4:24](#); [6:11](#)); we “put on the new man” as we put on virtues that culminate in charity, or love ([Colossians 3:10–14](#)). In the next world, when we are given resurrection bodies, we “put on incorruption, and . . . immortality” ([1 Corinthians 15:53](#)). We need not fear some type of spiritual nakedness. Death will not obliterate our identity but, rather, confirm and enhance it if we have “put on Christ.”

B. Why It’s Important (vv. 4–5)

4. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

Paul further comments on the reality of the “right now” vs. the coming reality of the “not yet.” The burdens of life are known so well and experienced so often that we need not even offer any examples—they are in the public domain of common knowledge. The main problem with these burdens is that in directing our attention to the “as is,” we take our eyes off of the “to be.” Paul’s acknowledgement in this regard builds on what Jesus said (see [Luke 8:14](#); [21:34–36](#)).

Paul makes it clear that we should not expect a future existence without a body. Unlike some Greek philosophers of his time, Paul, a Pharisee, would never expect a permanent, eternal existence as some sort of freefloating spirit (compare [Acts 17:32](#); [23:6–8](#); [24:15](#); see also [Lesson Context](#)). What he longed for was the new body at the time when *mortality*, with all its limitations and frailties, would *be swallowed up*

of life. As Paul stressed to the Corinthians in his first letter, in resurrection, “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54; compare Isaiah 25:8; Hosea 13:14).

CAMPING?

I once heard a stand-up comedian explain in only five words why he never went camping: “Because I have a house.”

He then went on to poke fun at an imagined sequence of events. Our ancient ancestors initially slept out in the open. With the passage of time, they eventually saw the advantage of sleeping in caves. As more time passed, they moved on to sleeping in huts. After a few years of that, can it be imagined that anyone would say, “I’ve got an idea—let’s go back to the cave for the weekend!” The comedian then elaborated on how camping appliances were little more than poor imitations of appliances at home.

Being a non-camper myself, all this rang hilariously true to me. I think I understand the appeal of camping (getting close to the creation gets you closer to the Creator, etc.). But the bottom line is that I don’t go camping because I have a house.

Yet as much as I like to hang my hat on that fact, I must occasionally remind myself that my earthly houses—my current physical body and my place of physical residence—are both temporary. I should be a good steward of both resources, while not trying to cling too tightly to either. Hmm ... Could it be that campers have an advantage over us non-campers in that regard?

—R. L. N.

5. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

Paul retreats a bit from this future celebration of his own freedom from death to bring a present reality to his readers. We do not just await the glorious gifts of God; we enjoy some of them now. Chief among these blessings is *the Spirit* of God, given as an *earnest* of these future things. We may think of “earnest money” in a real-estate transaction: a potential buyer puts down a deposit to indicate that the offer to purchase is a serious one. The presence/gift of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, given at baptism (Acts 2:38–39), assures us that God fully intends to carry out His side of the covenantal contract (see also Romans 8:16–23; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:12–14).

III. Walk of Faith

(2 CORINTHIANS 5:6–10)

A. Our Confidence (vv. 6–8)

6. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.

During the time we exist in our current bodies, we cannot experience the full presence of God. To be *at home* in our present bodies means to be *absent from* the closest presence of *the Lord*. This was the result of the sins of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; the resulting separation and banishment included the loss of direct fellowship with the Lord (Genesis 3:23).

God’s holy nature does not tolerate sin in His presence (compare 1 Peter 1:15–16). His holy nature is connected with His glory (Isaiah 6:2–3), and His glory is too great for sinful humans to endure. As the Lord told Moses, “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (Exodus 33:20; compare John 1:18; 1 John 4:12). Places where humans apparently see God directly are what are called *theophanies*—visible manifestations of God, but not God in the fullness of His being (examples: Genesis

32:24–30; Exodus 18:12; 33:11; Isaiah 6:5). Something of a reversal will occur when Jesus returns; at that time, “we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

7. (For we walk by faith, not by sight:).

Our lives must be controlled by the things we know to be true in a sense of faith that is based on evidence. Paul expresses this in one of the greatest statements of the Christian life: we must *walk by faith, not by sight*. Paul’s own ministry stands as a testimony to this mind-set, as indicated by his enduring great hardships in obedience to his calling and purpose in ministry (see 2 Corinthians 11:23–29; compare John 20:29).

What Do You Think?

Where is the Lord calling you in your faith walk?

Digging Deeper

What is the single greatest “by sight” challenge that seems to be interfering with this call? How can you overcome it?

FLYING AS FAITH?

Would travel by air be an example of faith? Think about it. We get into a massive machine that is much heavier than air, and we willingly yield control of our lives for a couple of hours to people we don’t know. We do so even when visibility is at or near zero. We do so even though we might not understand how the GPS navigation works its wonders. We do so even when we are very well aware of the plane crashes we hear about from time to time.

All the above has to do with a certain type of faith—and there’s more than one type. We might call this type “airplane faith”; it is a faith based on historical evidence that chances are much greater than 99 percent that your plane will make it to its destination safely. It is not “blind faith,” another type, which is mere belief in something without any objective basis for that belief.

Our faith in the future that God promises is not a blind faith. Rather, it’s faith based on the historical fact that God’s track record is that of 100 percent reliability, as centuries of historical evidence prove. Is that the kind of faith you have and witness of to others? If not, why not?

—C. R. B.

8. We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

Once more Paul affirmed that death did not deter him or cause him to be fearful. He was *confident* in his ministry and life. If God called him *to be absent from the body* (to die), he would accept that willingly. He knew that his death would mean experiencing the full presence of *the Lord*, the full inheritance of his salvation, of which the Holy Spirit was the down payment.

What Do You Think?

What is the single most important change you should make to have more of the kind of confidence of which Paul speaks?

Digging Deeper

What will be your greatest challenge to overcome in doing so?

B. Our Labor (vv. 9–10)

9. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

Regarding the opening *wherefore*, see commentary on [2 Corinthians 4:16](#), above. By this conjunction Paul connects the ideas of our *labour* and being *accepted of him* with being “present with the Lord” of [5:8](#), just considered. To labor for Christ is not to work for salvation ([Ephesians 2:8–9](#)) but to express gratitude as we show that way to others ([John 14:15, 23–24](#); [15:10](#); [1 Thessalonians 1:3](#); [1 John 5:3](#)). There are common elements to every Christian’s labors (example: [1 Thessalonians 4:9–12](#)). But there are other elements of labor that are unique to the individual (example: [Romans 15:20](#)).

10. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

The reasoning that follows the *for we* introduction to this verse stands in something of a chain reaction to the “wherefore” result of the previous verse. While we unreservedly look forward to being “accepted of him” (previous verse, above), Paul wanted his readers to remember that actions in this world (*the things done in [the] body*) are important and are known to God.

At *the judgment seat of Christ* will occur an evaluation of our lives (see [Romans 2:6](#)). This picture of a time of future, heavenly judgment is consistent in Paul’s teachings (examples: [Acts 17:31](#); [24:25](#); [Romans 14:10](#)). Christians are already justified (that is, treated as “not guilty”) in the eyes of God because the penalty for sin was paid on the cross (see [Romans 3:21–26](#); [5:16](#)). Any misgivings about having to endure judgment are far outweighed by the promise of glory Jesus has purchased for us.

Conclusion

A. Faith, Not Sight Revisited

Paul’s world was not a safe place. Cities could be impersonal and nasty. Villages could be hostile and dangerous for outsiders. Roadways always harbored the threat of bandits. Ships could be swamped by storms or attacked by pirates. Even in a case of assault or robbery, justice in court was often unavailable or corrupt. People needed to be ever wary and alert for danger. It seemed prudent to live just day by day in a self-protecting manner.

Even today we hear of incidents that scare us: “Widow bilked out of life savings by online dating.” “Ten-year-old girl in a crosswalk struck and killed by texting driver.” “Super-infection detected that resists any known treatment.” It is easy to despair.

For many, life lurches from one crisis to another. To look beyond one’s present sufferings seems impossible. But that is what Paul calls us to do. We are not to fear death. We already enjoy the peace and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Rather than our succumbing to despair, Paul challenges us to walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we must endure and manage life’s crises as they come. But we do so knowing that God is in control and our future is sure. Take a minute to evaluate. Do you walk primarily by faith or by sight?

What Do You Think?

What concept in today's lesson is most difficult for you to see "faith walk" value in? Why?

Digging Deeper

With what spiritually mature person can and will you discuss your misgivings?

B. Prayer

Father, it is tempting to respond to life's challenges using only our own resources. May we instead have faith to trust You, to live as You would have us live. We pray in the name of the one who conquered death, Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Base hope in faith, not sight!

