



YOU: Connect. Grow. Serve. Go!
Summer 2018 Leader Commentary

Unit 3: Final Destinations
Session 4: It's Reward Time! (see pp. 156-159)

The Question: What can believers expect after they die?

The Point: Believers can expect to be changed.

Background Passage: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Focal Passage: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

This commentary is designed to help you think about the question, "What can believers expect after they die?" and drive home this one truth: Believers can expect to be changed.

Focus on These Points

A Glorified Body
(2 Cor. 5:1-5)

Paul relied on an illustration his readers would have understood—the difference between a temporary structure and a permanent building. He noted that humans currently live in an “earthly tent” that was not built for the long haul. While it serves its current purpose well, it falls apart a little more each day. Paul understood this all too well, having endured suffering and persecution for the name of Christ. In the previous chapter, he had compared humanity to clay pots filled with the glorious treasure of Christ’s presence (2 Cor. 4:7). Given that, it would have been foolish for him to find his ultimate hope in a physical body that would one day be offered as a sacrifice to his Lord.

The idea of groaning could refer to physical pain. But, more likely, Paul was talking about the intense desire Christians feel to move from the temporary to the permanent. This longing recognizes that this world is not all there is and wants to find its ultimate glory in the security and permanence of the heavenly dwelling. (Pratt) Rather than an indication of mourning or dejection, this groaning is hopeful and expectant. It can’t wait to experience the full measure of salvation in heaven. (See Rom. 8:23.)

Paul’s readers may have been concerned about what would happen to them once they passed from this world. Death is the result of sin and represents one of humanity’s greatest fears. It was the same in Paul’s day. But the apostle never spoke of death without also pointing readers toward life. The life we have in Christ makes death powerless over those who believe.

But the Corinthians may have imagined themselves in some sort of disembodied limbo in the afterlife. To counter this belief, Paul assured them that surrendering the old tent would not leave them “naked” or without a body. Paul made clear that believers would get new, heavenly bodies instead. He used the image of being clothed to describe the transition from our physical bodies to our spiritual bodies, though we “wear” a measure of eternity with us even on earth. Rather than being redeemed from our bodies, our bodies are redeemed in Him. Just as God solved Adam and Eve’s problem with nakedness, He will not leave His people unclothed once they leave their earthly body behind. Their bodies will be renewed and glorified, transformed into something that will never wear out. As a result, believers should be longing for the permanence

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of heaven even while they walk on the earth. Paul said we should be looking forward to the day when we will be completely clothed, the time when our earthly lives and everything associated with them are totally lost in the eternal life found in Christ. When that happens, our mortality will be “swallowed up” by immortality. Our life on earth will be overwhelmed by our life in eternity.

A Home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6-8)

The confidence that we will enjoy an eternal dwelling can be extended to the knowledge that leaving this life means entering the presence of God for eternity. Paul pointed out that being at home in this earthly body—our everyday existence—means we are separated from the eternal presence of the Father. As part of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), Jesus said that He would be with His followers until the end of the age. Earlier, He had promised His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to be with them after He returned to the Father (John 14:16-17). Finally, as the writer of Hebrews reminded readers, God has promised to never leave them or turn His back on them (Heb. 13:5).

Paul said he could be content on earth until God’s appointed time because he still had fruitful ministry that could be accomplished (Phil. 1:21-26). While his heart would always beat for heaven, his hands would continue working for the churches on earth. His confidence in the future also gave him the boldness to preach the gospel on earth. He could face any threats on earth because he knew persecution and even death were no threat to his eternal destination.

An Hour for Judgment (2 Cor. 5:9-10)

What is our purpose in life? That’s a common question among people today, and Paul gave us the basic answer in these verses. Our primary mission on earth is to please God in all we do and say. He called it “our aim,” the target we try to hit every chance we get.

Of course, no human hits this mark perfectly. That was true before we came to Christ, but it is also a reality after we accept His offer of salvation. But it should be our goal—not as a way to earn God’s favor but as a way to express our gratitude for a personal relationship with Him.

We also should strive to please God because we will all give an account to Him for the things we have done on this earth. As God’s people, we are His stewards. He is the owner of all things (Ps. 24:1), and we manage what He provides in a way that brings Him glory. And, when the time comes, we will answer for the effectiveness of our management.

Our earthly actions carry moral weight into eternity, so we cannot afford to be indifferent to the way they affect our lives and the lives of others. Again, this should not have been a new concept to the Corinthians. In his earlier letter Paul challenged their spiritual immaturity and reminded them that their works would be tested like materials going through a purifying fire (1 Cor. 3:12-15). Such judgment will not determine our eternal destination. Our relationship with Christ is the only factor in that situation. But it will determine rewards. As Paul noted, we will be “repaid” for what we do on earth—for better or for worse.