



2 Corinthians - Chapter Five

- I. 2 Corinthians 1:1-7:16 - Paul's Defence of His Legitimacy as an Apostle (continues)
- I.e 2 Corinthians 4:1-6:13 - Paul's encouragement in his ministry (continues)
- I.e.ii 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10 - Living by Faith (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Five

Verses 1-10 are one of the most researched and written-about passages in Paul's writings, and for a good reason. Paul is tackling the topic of the Christian hope beyond the grave, and more specifically, what happens to the believer at the point of death.

Paul clearly believed there is the certainty of physical resurrection and transformation (vv.1-5), the confidence that death begins a journey in the realm of sight (vv.6-7), and the assurance that death places Christians in the presence of Christ (v.8). All this is confirmed by the deposit of the Spirit within believers, guaranteeing what is to come.

Paul attributes his changed perspective of God to two things that he did for him. First, he reconciled Paul to himself through Christ, and second, he gave him the ministry of reconciliation. Paul then goes on to speak of this ministry as ordained by God with the purpose of uniting all believers to himself. Paul wants that same spirit of reconciliation to exist between his ministry team, the Corinthians and, indeed, all other believers.

¹ For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 Corinthians 5:1

The earthly tent we live in refers to present human bodies that will die: <<*I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory, since I know that*

my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me>> (2 Peter 1:13-14).

Have refers to the future resurrection, and a building from God, which is eternal in the heavens, refers to the resurrection body believers will receive on the last day; refer to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and Revelation 21:1-22:5. The tent analogy was quite apt since Paul made tents while living in Corinth: *<<and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together – by trade they were tentmakers>> (Acts 18:3)*, and the Corinthians likely sold tents to sailors or used them for housing visitors attending the Isthmian Games.

The word translated destroyed actually means to dismantle. Paul likens the process of physical decay and death to the dismantling of a tent-dwelling. The Greek word *skene* or tent brings to mind the OT tabernacle that could be dismantled and carried along wherever the people of Israel travelled. All human beings experience the dismantling of their earthly tent-dwelling. Christians, however, look forward to a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands: *<<The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things>> (Acts 17:24-25).*

In contrast to the tent, the word house or building, Greek *oikodome*, denotes a stable and permanent structure. Paul's language has led some to think in terms of a literal house in heaven, as spoken of by Jesus: *<<In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?>> (John 14:2)*. However, it seems more likely that Jesus was referring to the resurrection bodies of believers that will be made in heaven and given when he returns. This house will be just as physical and material as is the human body that is experienced during this life on earth.

² For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling – ³ if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

2 Corinthians 5:2-4

Paul groans for the resurrection, i.e. longing to be clothed, in order to not be found naked or unclothed, which likely refers to the intermediate state in which believers' spirits are with God but they do not yet enjoy their resurrection bodies. Paul appears to be combating some form of Greek dualism, where immortality is viewed as the shedding of the physical body at death and the persistence of the soul beyond the grave. To a church that prided itself on having arrived spiritually: *<<Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you!>> (1 Corinthians 4:8)*, and tended to look at the physical side of things as a matter of indifference: *<<There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. In return – I speak as to children – open*

wide your hearts also>> (2 Corinthians 6:12-13), this would be an especially appealing notion.

Paul could also be reflecting Jewish feelings about nakedness. Unlike the Greeks, who gloried in the unclothed body, the Jews considered nakedness a disgraceful state. Nakedness and shame are equated in the OT. Babylon's punishment was to have its nakedness exposed and its shame uncovered: <<*Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your shame shall be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will spare no one*>> (Isaiah 47:3), while Israel is to be left naked and bare and its shame exposed: <<*and they shall deal with you in hatred, and take away all the fruit of your labour, and leave you naked and bare, and the nakedness of your whorings shall be exposed*>> (Ezekiel 23:29a). Therefore, even if Paul exists only as a spirit for a period of time, he will not be found to be naked and therefore be in a state of guilt or shame.

We groan under our burden. Paul is not despairing of life and wanting death, he is simply expressing that the new life to come will be so much better: <<*We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies*>> (Romans 8:22-23), and: <<*For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory'*>> (1 Corinthians 15:53-54).

To be further clothed is written in the sense of putting on an overcoat. Paul sees eternal life as ultimately a physical and not ephemeral state. The resurrection body, then, will be similar to the present one in some respects, i.e. material, and quite different in others, especially imperishable and immortal.

⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

2 Corinthians 5:5

He who has prepared us for this very thing is God lends weight to the argument that this was always God's intended plan for his people and not some sort of Plan B when things did not work out following creation.

The Spirit as a guarantee. The presence of the Spirit in Christians' lives now is the down payment or guarantee that they will receive resurrection bodies when Jesus returns: <<*But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first instalment*>> (2 Corinthians 1:21-22), and: <<*In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory*>> (Ephesians 1:13-14).

⁶ So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord — ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.

2 Corinthians 5:6-7

While we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. In religious language, to be away from the Lord can mean to be relationally distant from God. Paul, however, is speaking in spatial, not relational language. Paul had written something similar in his earlier letter: <<*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face*>> (1 Corinthians 13:12a). Refer also to the comments made on v.8.

Walk is the Greek *peripateo*, which some translations have as live. Paul uses it frequently to describe the Christian life on earth.

By faith, not by sight. This is not a reference to believing the unbelievable but to living all of one's life based on confident trust in God's promises for the future, even when one cannot yet see the fullness of the coming glory: <<*For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*>> (2 Corinthians 4:17-5:1). This is similar to Hebrews 11:1, where faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. Just as faith is the opposite of sight, it is also the opposite of doubt. That is what living by faith in God is about; having no doubt that he will always do what he says.

⁸ Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:8

We do have confidence is the outcome of having placed faith in Jesus and the Gospel he established through his life, death and resurrection.

Away from the body and at home with the Lord refers to the intermediate state between a Christian's death and the resurrection of all believers' bodies on the day Christ returns. Paul means that when he dies, although his physical body will be buried here on earth, he expects that he, as a spirit or soul without a body, will go immediately into the presence of Christ, and will be present with Christ in that condition until the day of resurrection: <<*He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise'*>> (Luke 23:43), <<*I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better*>> (Philippians 1:23), and: <<*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect*>> (Hebrews 12:22-23).

⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

2 Corinthians 5:9

We make it our aim to please him. Paul lives his entire life in light of a hope that his actions will bring delight to God day by day. It is possible for Christians to please or displease God in their daily actions: <<*Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord*>> (Ephesians 5:10), <<*I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God*>> (Philippians 4:18), <<*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord*>> (Colossians 3:20), and: <<*Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen*>> (Hebrews 13:20-21). By contrast, Paul fears displeasing God: <<*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption*>> (Ephesians 4:30). Refer also to v.11.

There is no implied meaning that Paul believed in justification by works. For Paul it is always the concept of justification by faith. However, this does not mean that God has decided that moral behaviour does not matter after all, only faith counts. God wants his people to live according to his standards.

¹⁰ For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

2 Corinthians 5:10

For all of us must appear. The statement is inclusive of all humankind and not just those who have come to believe in Jesus. Yet, in this context, it is only referring to Christians and not the final judgement that will one day come upon all people: <<*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*>> (Daniel 12:2), and: <<*Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation*>> (John 5:28-29). Paul's intention is to remind the Corinthians that all those who serve Christ will have to give an account of what they have accomplished for the Lord, not how they have increased their own reputation. Even the Corinthians are not exempt from this divine scrutiny and assessment. Although 'washed, sanctified and justified', as in 1 Corinthians 6:11, they too will have to give an account of themselves.

The word must is Greek *dei*, and is commonly used of what is divinely ordained. Divine judgment, therefore, is a requirement, not an option.

The judgment seat of Christ. The judgment seat, Greek *bēma*, was the tribunal bench in the Roman courtroom, where the governor sat while rendering judicial verdicts. Remains of such a *bēma* exist in the Corinthian forum today; refer to Acts 18:12-17 and 1 Corinthians Introduction: The Ancient City of Corinth on the website. In the coming age, Christ will judge as God the Father's representative, ruling the Kingdom the Father has given him: <<*The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son*>> (John 5:22), and: <<*Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God. For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.'* So then, each of us will be accountable to God>> (Romans 14:10-12).

Interestingly, Jesus was brought before the *bēma* of Pilate: <<*When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha*>> (John 19:13), although his was an unjust judgement. What this experience will have in common with ancient times, unlike some modern courts, is that judgement will be very public.

One cannot help but wonder what those men who once sat in judgement of Jesus and condemned him will feel like when their turn comes before the Lord. However, there are many other people who have made a similar judgement by not accepting him as their Lord and Saviour.

So that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil. This underscores the principle that present-day actions have eternal consequences. All Christians will appear before the eternal judgment seat of Christ, to receive recompense or what is due to them for the deeds that they have done in their earthly life. It is debated, however:

1. Whether the aim of this judgment is to determine the measure of reward that the Christian will receive in the age to come.
2. Whether the aim is to provide demonstrative evidence regarding who is lost and who is saved.

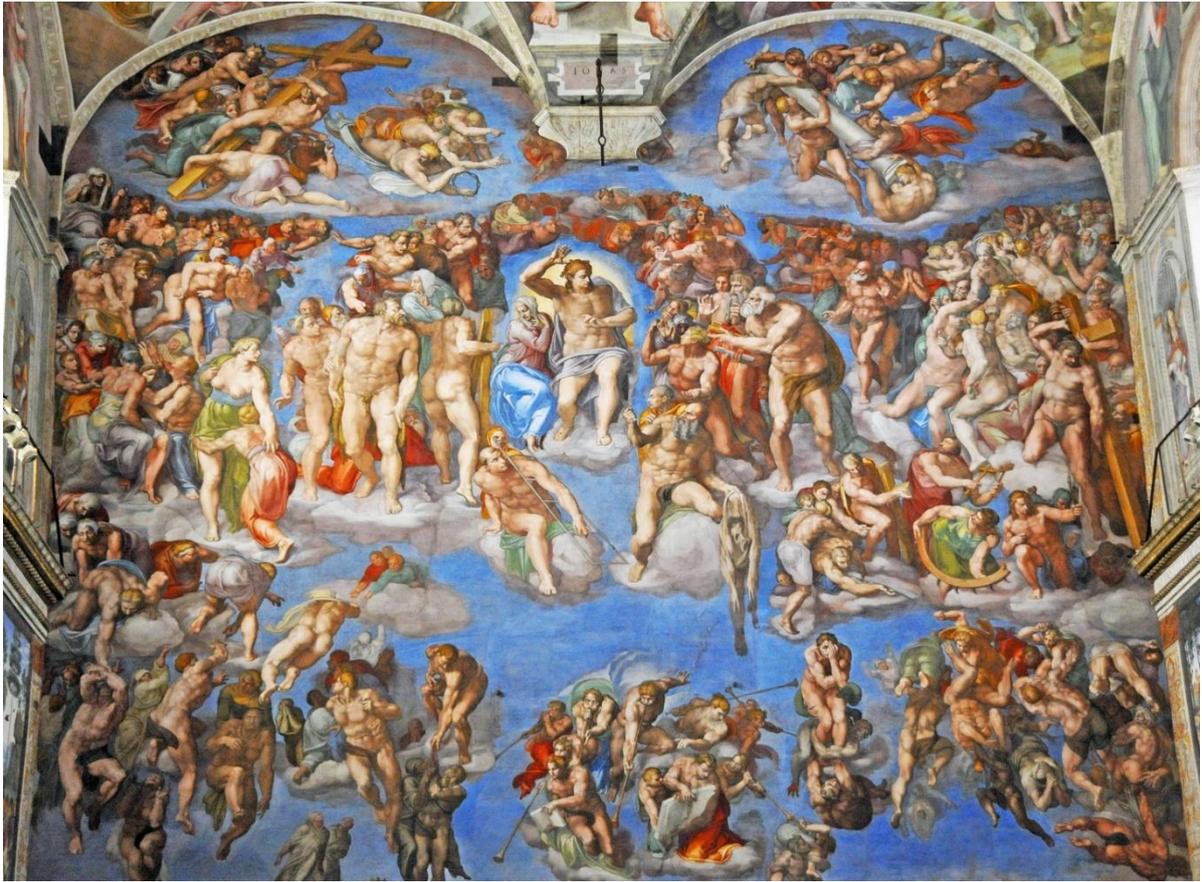
Because the context of Paul's statement refers back to both the believer's hope for the resurrection (v.1 and v.4), and to the reward of 'glory beyond all comparison': <<*So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal*>> (2 Corinthians 4:16-18), it would seem that both aims are in view.

Thus, with regard to the first case, many interpreters hold that the believer's deeds will provide public evidence to indicate the measure of rewards that the believer will receive, corresponding to the believer's 'obedience of faith', i.e. their acts of service, love, and righteousness: <<*and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for*

the sake of his name>> (Romans 1:4-5), and: <<*Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith*>> (Romans 16:25-26).

In the second case, some interpreters hold that the believer's deeds will also provide public evidence brought forth before the judgment seat of Christ to demonstrate that one's faith is real – that is, public evidence, not as the basis for salvation, but as a demonstration of the genuineness of one's faith. Paul therefore makes it his aim to please Christ (vv.5-9), because the extent to which one does this corresponds to the measure of rewards that one will receive: <<*but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal*>> (Matthew 6:20), <<*He said to him, "Well done, good slave! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of ten cities." Then the second came, saying, "Lord, your pound has made five pounds." He said to him, "And you, rule over five cities"*>> (Luke 19:17-19), <<*Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw – the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire*>> (1 Corinthians 3:12-15), <<*They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life*>> (1 Timothy 6:19), and: <<*See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work*>> (Revelation 22:12), likewise giving evidence for the genuineness of one's faith. Paul is confident that genuine believers will pass Christ's judgment, since the new covenant ministry of reconciliation has brought them under the life-transforming power of the Spirit – based on the forgiveness of their sins through faith in Christ alone, all of which is the result of God's grace.

The great last judgment scenes painted by Michelangelo and others are misleading. In particular, the idea of 'going to heaven' as a final destination can trick people into imagining that the Christian teaching about what happens after death is that the body is left behind and one goes off into a non-bodily state where the soul is either saved or lost. That is clearly wrong. Paul argues that believers shall be given new bodies, not immediately after they die, unless their death coincides with the Lord's Second Coming, but on the great day of resurrection which lies in the future.



The Last Judgement by Michelangelo

These opening verses in this chapter have caused endless debate in the church about what Paul does and does not teach concerning life and death. What he does teach is that resurrection-transformation is the inevitable result of the Spirit's regenerative and renewing work within a believer, that the future life with the Lord will involve some form of material existence, and the down payment of the Spirit that ensures continuity between present and future modes of existence. To go beyond this would be to speculate without textual justification to support such statements.

What is also clear from the final verses of this passage is that Paul is not causing a conflict between salvation through grace and salvation by works. The rewards or punishment for what a believer does or does not do in life are real enough, but this will not affect their salvation, which is by God's grace alone; nor will it provide those rewarded with a higher status in the next life.

I.e.iii 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:13 - The Ministry of Reconciliation

Paul wants the Corinthians to know of the genuineness of his message and his desire to have them reconciled to Paul's Gospel proclamation, for his overwhelming motivation in enduring hardship is to see those whom he loves persevere in their faith in Jesus as the Christ. His motivation to press on with this hope is his reverential fear of God's ultimate judgement, a healthy state for all people, and for the sake of Christ's undying love.

I.e.iii.1 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2 - The new covenant ministry of reconciliation

Paul offers one of his most extensive descriptions of the motivation (vv.11-15), content (vv.16-19), and call of the new covenant ministry.

¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences.

2 Corinthians 5:11

The fear of the Lord does not only mean fear of final judgment but is a common theme in Acts referring either to fear as godly awe, reverential fear and devotion, as in Acts 2:43, 10:2 and 13:26, or fear of God's displeasure and fatherly discipline, seen in Acts 5:5, 5:11, 16:29 and 19:17. The writer to the Hebrews states: <<*Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness*>> (Hebrews 12:7-10).

Having reverential fear of God, simply for whom he is and what he does is a very healthy attitude for any disciple to have: <<*Therefore I am terrified at his presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him*>> (Job 23:15).

We ourselves are well known to God. Paul is not only confident that God has an intimate knowledge of the hearts of those who serve him faithfully, but also he has a healthy respect for Christ as judge, which motivates Paul to discharge his ministry with integrity, a fact that is plain to God and would be apparent to the Corinthians if they stopped and thought about it. While a person's motives and intentions can be hidden from others, they cannot be hidden from God. Paul, however, makes his ministry available to the scrutiny of all who would care to inspect it, including the Corinthians.

And I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. The use of the first person singular is quite deliberate by Paul in an effort to express a deeply heartfelt and sincere concern for his readers. What he hopes is that if his apostolic legitimacy is not immediately apparent to the Corinthians, at least his integrity will be evident to their consciences.

¹² We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart.

2 Corinthians 5:12

On Paul's commending himself, refer to the comments made on 2 Corinthians 4:2. Paul writes so that the Corinthians will be able to respond to false teachers who do not operate on the basis of a new covenant ministry.

An opportunity to boast about us. Paul sees nothing wrong with commending fellow believers and even other church groups in this way: <<*For we write to you nothing other than what you can read and also understand; I hope you will understand until the end – as you have already understood us in part – that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast*>> (2 Corinthians 1:13-14).

Those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. Paul puts before the Corinthians the major distinction between himself and these intruders. His rivals take pride in the externals or what is seen. Paul takes pride in the internals or what is in the heart.

¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

2 Corinthians 5:13

If we are beside ourselves, if we are in our right mind. This possibly responds to Corinthian mockery of Paul as crazy; certainly it draws a contrast between Paul's own private experiences in worship and prayer: <<*It is necessary to boast; nothing is to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows – was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat*>> (2 Corinthian 12:1-4), and his being sober, Greek *sōphroneō*, 'being in a right mind', while also being passionate in his ministry. Since Paul's motivation is to please Christ (v.9), his priority in public is to persuade others (v.11b), not to seek or urge others to seek exotic religious experiences.

There were those who had claimed that Jesus was not in his right mind when he came proclaiming the Kingdom of God: <<*When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind'*>> (Mark 3:21).

¹⁴ For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

The love of Christ urges us on. In v.11 Paul had stated that it was his reverential fear of God that motivated his continued life of service. Here, Paul gives a second compelling reason: <<*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*>> (Romans 8:35).

One has died for all, therefore all have died. By Christ's death, the death penalty for sin: <<*but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat,*

for in the day that you eat of it you shall die>> (Genesis 2:17), has been paid for all those who trust in him, refer to Romans 3:21-26, Romans 5:6-8, 1 Corinthians 15:3 and Galatians 3:13, and God counts their old life as ended, thus freeing them from any future penal claims.

He died for all. The debate rages as to whether this means for all of humankind or just for all believers. The context suggests Paul had the former in mind, although it is clearly only those who make a commitment to Jesus who reap the rewards of his sacrifice. Thus Paul can write also that ‘Christ died for us’, referring just to those who have followed Jesus: <<*But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us*>> (Romans 5:8), and: <<*For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him*>> (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10).

The Jewish high priest during Jesus life on earth prophesied that this would be a good thing for Israel and the Jews at least: <<*But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.’ He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation*>> (John 11:49-51).

And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. As a consequence of Christ’s death, the power of sin in one’s life, refer to Genesis 3:1-7, has also been broken for all those who trust in Christ, see also Romans 6:1-14. The Cross of Christ therefore frees the believer for a new way of life, exemplified by Paul himself as one that the love of Christ controls and motivates: <<*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds*>> (Titus 2:11-14). Yet this freedom is one that is meant to direct the believer into a life of service to God and to his creation.

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way.

2 Corinthians 5:16

Regard no one from a human point of view, literally ‘after the flesh’, Greek *kata sarka*, is a favourite phrase of Paul’s that occurs twenty times in his letters. This phrase means according to worldly standards and values that derive from living as if one’s present physical life is all that matters.

Before Paul’s conversion, he once regarded Christ from a human point of view, i.e. Paul considered Christ to be a false messiah according to Jewish standards,

viewing his suffering and death as the curse of God: <<*When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not defile the land that the Lord your God is giving you for possession*>> (Deuteronomy 21:22-23), and: <<*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'*>> (Galatians 3:13). Following his encounter with the Risen Lord on the Road to Damascus, Paul had to re-evaluate his understanding of Jesus, coming to the conclusion that, although he died a criminal's death, it was in fact everyone else that was the criminal and only Jesus who was innocent!

¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

2 Corinthians 5:17

The new creation in question refers both to the person concerned and to the world which they enter, the world which has now been reconciled to its creator and owner. It is the redemption of a people who now live for Christ by living for others, effected by the power of the Spirit and the death of Christ (vv.14-15); and is the beginning of the new creation that was destined to come amid this evil age, refer to Isaiah 43:18-19, 65:17-23 and 66:22-23. This new creation is also the beginning of Israel's final restoration from God's judgment in the exile; see the context of Isaiah 43:1-21 and 65:17-25. This is something that is then seen for all of mankind through Christ's revelation to John: <<*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'* And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true'>> (Revelation 21:3-5).

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

Who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. This is an amazing statement. The reconciled become reconcilers. In Paul's writings, God is always the reconciler. Those in need of reconciliation are hostile human beings. This is the reverse of Hellenistic religion, where it is the human being that seeks restoration of the gods' favour, and also of Judaism, where confession of sin and repentance are the means by which reconciliation with God is sought. The initiative now is with God who changes a relationship of enmity

to one of friendship and devotion. This is accomplished through Christ, that is, through his death on the Cross.

Reconciliation is an expression of the significance of God's saving activity in Christ that is unique to Paul: <<*For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation*>> (Romans 5:10-11), <<*For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead!*>> (Romans 11:15), <<*He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it*>> (Ephesians 2:15-16), and: <<*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him*>> (Colossians 1:19-22).

These verses outline:

1. The basis of Paul's apostolic ministry of the new covenant; Paul's own reconciliation to God through Christ.
2. Its consequences; his ministry and message of reconciliation to the world for Christ.
3. Its essential content; that is, the forgiveness of sins by virtue of Christ's death.
4. Its call, i.e. on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself. This indicates that God was in Christ and used his death of the Cross to bring about reconciliation. God was the initiator and the world, Greek *kosmos*, was the recipient.

Entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. This is the primary way that God uses his people to spread the Gospel message. It was probably entrusted to Paul as early as his initial few days in Damascus: <<*The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight'*>> (Acts 9:11-12).

Ambassadors for Christ. Paul is sent as God's prophetic minister of the new covenant: <<*Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*>> (2 Corinthians 3:4-6), to announce God's 'peace treaty': <<*But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was*

the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed>> (Isaiah 53:5), with those who will trust in Christ to free them from the penalty and power of sin (vv.14-15), as well as: <<*Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore on that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.' Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God*>> (Isaiah 52:6-10), <<*And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'*>> (Romans 10:15).

In the OT the range of duties of an ambassador included offering congratulations: <<*Toi sent his son Joram to King David, to greet him and to congratulate him because he had fought against Hadadezer and defeated him. Now Hadadezer had often been at war with Toi. Joram brought with him articles of silver, gold, and bronze*>> (2 Samuel 8:10), and: <<*Now King Hiram of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, when he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father; for Hiram had always been a friend to David*>> (1 Kings 5:1); soliciting favours: <<*Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, 'Thus says your brother Israel: You know all the adversity that has befallen us*>> (Numbers 20:14); making alliances, even if done in error: <<*But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they on their part acted with cunning: they went and prepared provisions, and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes; and all their provisions were dry and mouldy. They went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the Israelites, 'We have come from a far country; so now make a treaty with us.' But the Israelites said to the Hivites, 'Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a treaty with you?'*>> (Joshua 9:3-7); and protesting wrongful actions: <<*Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said, 'What is there between you and me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?'*>> (Judges 11:12). The Roman counterpart to the Greek *presbeutes* was the legate, who was duly appointed on behalf of the emperor to administer rule in the imperial provinces as the emperor's representative.

Be reconciled to God is a summary of the Gospel message Paul proclaims to unbelievers; it is a call to receive the reconciliation that God has wrought: <<*But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation*>> (Romans 5:11); a recognition of what he alone has done for his people. The Gospel minister's job is not to bring about reconciliation, that is the work of the Holy Spirit, but to announce what has already occurred.

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21

This verse is one of the most important in all of Scripture for understanding the meaning of the atonement and justification. Here we see that the one who knew no sin is Jesus Christ (v.20), and that he (God) made him (Christ) to be sin, Greek *hamartia*. This means that God the Father made Christ to be regarded and treated as sin even though Christ himself never sinned: <<*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin*>> (Hebrews 4:15), and: <<*You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin*>> (1 John 3:5).

Further, it should be noted that God did this for our sake; that is, God regarded and treated our sin, the sin of all who would believe in Christ, as if our sin belonged not to the believers but to Christ himself. Thus Christ 'died for all' (v.14) and, as Peter wrote: <<*He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed*>> (1 Peter 2:24).

In becoming sin for our sake, Christ became the substitute for all mankind; that is, Christ took all human sin upon himself and, as the substitute, thereby bore the wrath of God, the punishment that all humans deserve, in their place, i.e. for our sake. Thus the technical term for this foundational doctrine of the Christian faith is the substitutionary atonement – that Christ has provided the atoning sacrifice as a substitute for the sins of all who believe: <<*For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed*>> (Romans 3:22b-25).

The background for this is Isaiah Chapter 53 from the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew OT, which includes the most lengthy and detailed OT prophecy of Christ's suffering and death, and which contains numerous parallels to v.21. Isaiah's prophecy specifically uses the Greek word *hamartia* for sin five times with reference to the coming Saviour, the suffering servant, in just a few verses: <<*he has borne our infirmities*>> (Isaiah 53:4a); <<*crushed for our iniquities*>> (Isaiah 53:5b); <<*the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*>> (Isaiah 53:6c); <<*he shall bear their iniquities*>> (Isaiah 53:11d); and: <<*he bore the sin of many*>> (Isaiah 53:12e). In a precise fulfilment of this prophecy, Christ became sin for those who believe in him, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. This means that just as God imputed human sin and guilt to Christ, he made him to be sin, so God also imputes the righteousness of Christ – a righteousness that is not a believer's own – to all who believe in Christ.

Because Christ bore the sins of those who believe, God regards and treats believers as having the legal status of righteousness, Greek *dikaiosynē*. This righteousness belongs to believers because they are in him, that is, in Christ: <<*the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe*>> (Romans 3:22a), <<*Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for*

all>> (Romans 5:18), <<He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption>> (1 Corinthians 1:30), and: <<For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith>> (Philippians 3:8b-9).

Therefore the righteousness of God, which is imputed to believers, is also the righteousness of Christ; that is, the righteousness and the legal status that belongs to Christ as a result of Christ having lived as one who knew no sin. This then is the heart of the doctrine of justification: God regards or counts believers as forgiven and God declares and treats them as forgiven, because God the Father has imputed the believer's sin to Christ and because God the Father likewise imputes Christ's righteousness to the believer.