

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10

CERTAINTIES: FACING THE UNKNOWN

“We know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

“So, we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”¹

My dad was fond of saying to his sons, “Only two things are certain—death and taxes.” So long as politicians act as politicians are observed to act, rather than acting as statesmen, the taxes part is assured. Similarly, despite advances in medical science and despite our best efforts to put off the inevitable, death is certain. We exercise, consume copious quantities of dietary supplements with our meals, visit the various health professionals regularly, and we just keep on dying. Death is more real for me now than at any time heretofore in the brief days of my earthly pilgrimage.

I am moving inexorably toward a day when this mortal flesh shall fail. Then, life as I’ve known it will cease and real life will begin. One day, if we live long enough, you’ll read that Michael Stark has died. I’m telling you now, that will be a lie. I won’t be dead! I’ll be alive for the first time. As the Apostle has written, so I have learned, “Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” [1 CORINTHIANS 13:12].

Now—knowledge is restricted. Then—knowledge is full. Now—truth only vaguely understood. Then—truth fully understood. Paul will testify, and we accept this testimony as true, “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but *we shall all be changed*, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and *we shall be changed*” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:51, 52].

We are told, “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” [PHILIPPIANS 3:20, 21]. This testimony is a comfort for the child of God.

Peter hit precisely the right note when he wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” [1 PETER 1:3-5].

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Frankly, I'm not ecstatic about the process of dying. Everything else being equal, I'd as soon not be there when I die. I'm not afraid of death; however, like many others, I'm not eager to experience the process. Death does not frighten me; I am certain that I will not cease to be. According to the Saviour's promise, I am confident that my transformation will be complete. That prospect does not intimidate the child of God. Spurgeon is noted as saying that he wanted to taste death, so that he could experience something of what his Saviour had experienced on his behalf. There is wisdom in that view. However, I cannot read the words of the Apostle to the Gentiles without concluding that Paul anticipated transformation without seeing death.

THE TRANSIENCE OF THE PHYSICAL — “We know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-4].

This passage begins with the preposition “For.” This is a translation of the Greek conjunction “*gár*.” This literary device is pointing us back to what has preceded. Thus, to understand what the Apostle is saying, we need to review the preceding paragraphs. Let's read those immediately preceding paragraphs so that we can understand what is communicated.

In 2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-18, Paul has written, “We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So, death is at work in us, but life in you.

“Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, ‘I believed, and so I spoke,’ we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

“So, we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

When the Apostle speaks of “our earthly home, it is obvious that he is looking back to verse 14: “knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus.” Christians are a confident people. Though we see the world in dark terms, as fallen and separated from the love of God, we are confident concerning our relationship to the Living God and His provision for us. We believe that God has ennobled the human body by residing within the life of each believer. I do not say that we Christians are better than others, but we are different in that God Himself watches over us for His Great Name's sake. Thus, the Apostle says, “We have this treasure in jars of clay.” “Jars of clay” and “earthly home” speak of this body, a body designed and suited for existence on this earth. This body has all the limitations we would expect of a mortal entity. However, God sent His Son to share in this life, thereby making this body more than a mere vessel to house the person—it is that, and much more.

One commentator has teased apart the Apostle's description with exacting precision. Robert Gundry² notes how the Apostle contrasts the tent we now occupy and the building God is now preparing. He draws our attention to the fact that the building which we are promised is "from God;" it is not manmade, as is the tent in which we now live. Paul speaks of the building God is preparing as eternal, rather than something that is "wasting away" [see 2 CORINTHIANS 4:17].

We now have an "earthly home." This is Paul's description of our present physical body. It is important to remember that we are tripartite beings—that is, we are created living souls with a spirit housed in a body of flesh. As result of the sin of our first parents, we are dead to God and dying. By this, I mean that we are not alive to God, who is life. The soul is condemned and separated from God, who is life. Our spirit is dead so that we cannot know God. At this present time, the soul and the spirit are housed in temporary housing we know as the body. However, this body is under sentence of death—it is perishing. Dottie Rambo was right when she sang,

"This house of flesh is but a prison
Bars of bone hold my soul
But the doors of clay are gonna' burst wide open
When the angels set my spirit free.
I'll take my flight like a mighty eagle
When the hills of home start calling me"

All is not negative for the Christian, however. When one is born from above, the Holy Spirit takes up residence and we are made alive to God. Unsaved people can know about God, but they can never know God. However, the redeemed individual has a spirit that is made alive in Christ and thus is alive to God. At the point of salvation, God saves our soul which. The sentient becomes alive in Christ. We can know God, sensing Him and experiencing all that He is. Because we are sentient beings, the housing for the soul and the spirit is also made new so that it is no longer subject to death.

When Paul writes of "our earthly home," it is obvious that he is focused on the body. Earlier, Paul identified our bodies as "jars of clay" [see 2 CORINTHIANS 4:7] and compares the body to a "tent" [see 2 CORINTHIANS 5:1]. These fragile vessels we identify as "the body" are easily broken. Paul also acknowledges that "our outer self is wasting away" [see 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16]; he writes that our earthly home is subject to being destroyed [see 2 CORINTHIANS 5:1]. He contrasts what is transient with that which is permanent and substantial. We are being informed that our earthly home is mortal, subject to decay and ultimately to death. However, just as this body is frail, so that building God is preparing is immortal, vibrant, dynamic. There is great encouragement here. Paul writes, "We have a building from God," using the present tense. The body we shall receive is so certain that we need not question whether we will receive it.

I invite your attention to the precision with which the Apostle writes. Paul contrasts our earthly home with the home we have from God. He is careful to state that the latter home is "eternal in the heavens." I tend to read more rapidly than is advisable, and likely you, also, read so fast that you can miss details. As a result, somehow, I've always read that the home in view is "*eternal in heaven.*" However, the Apostle has employed the definite article—the building from God, that building which is "a house not made with hands" is "*eternal in the heavens.*" Don't overlook the definite article or the plural noun as essential for understanding Paul's meaning.

² Robert H. Gundry, **Commentary on the New Testament: Verse-by-Verse Explanations with a Literal Translation** (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA 2010) 702

“The heavens” is not “Heaven.” When I see the phrase, “in the heavens,” it would be a mistake to assume it means that believers will live in their resurrected bodies forever in Heaven. Heaven is a place of origin in this context. The context does not speak of destination or continuance.³ Therefore, “in the heavens” should not be understood as a complement for “eternal.” The Apostle is adding another identifying feature of the building from God—it is *made by God*, it is *eternal* and it *originates by God’s action from Heaven*, where God dwells.

I was required to spend some days in Vancouver this past week. Travel meant being crammed into a metal tube that hurtled across the sky. The seats on modern planes are designed for someone far more petite than me. Consequently, upon landing, I am in some pain for a few hours. As I walked to several appointments, my knees hurt. My neck and shoulder were in pain. The thought kept coming to me that one day, all this will be past. Nevertheless, for the moment, the reality of Paul’s words was borne home with a vengeance: “In this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:2].

Following this momentary reverie, I recognised in a salient fashion the reality of Paul’s words: “While we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:4]. As quickly as that thought arose, the comfort arising from the source of hope was impressed on my mind. “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:5]. God has placed His Spirit in our bodies, and we long for the transformation. The trials and pains of this life become reminders that what is promised is beyond our expectation.

The Apostle had already written to this same church, encouraging them to look forward to what God has planned. He wrote, “There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another... As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:40, 48, 49]. Though I now bear the image of the man of dust, it is certain that I shall bear the image of the man of heaven. Even now, by the mercies of the Father, I am being transformed into the image of Christ Jesus. This is true for each Christian.

In a previous message, we studied the teaching of the Apostle concerning the work that the Spirit of God is now performing in our lives.⁴ Review in your mind the teaching presented in **ROMANS 8:28-30**. “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

Scope in on the twenty-ninth verse where we are told that we are predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son of God. What is written in that verse and here in the text anticipates what is written in another of Paul’s letters. In the Letter to the Church in Philippi, Paul has encouraged Christians by writing, “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” [PHILIPPIANS 3:20, 21]. We will be transformed so that we have a body like the Saviour’s.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Michael Stark, “Certainties: All Things! Really? All Things?” (sermon, 2017 November 5, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Romans-08.26-30-All-Things-Really.pdf>)

Doesn't this sound like what John has written? "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" [1 JOHN 3:2].

Let me step aside for a moment and speak of this transformation that is coming for the child of God. As I flew home on Friday, I looked down on the mountains and the forests of this great province. I love being in the mountains; I love being alone in the forests, observing the animals that call those regions home. I have enjoyed the opportunity of climbing these mountains and trekking through boundless forests. As I looked down from 21,000 feet, my mind turned to what is promised for the Christ follower.

People tend to think of our heavenly employment as rather dull. The common image is of sedate individuals floating around on clouds, strumming on harps. Let me say that I am not particularly fond of harps. And though I could enjoy swooping and diving, floating holds less interest for me. So, I thought of my life that God has granted me in the years past. I have been active, exploring new vistas and seeking vigorous adventure. God did not save me so that I would be restricted throughout eternity; I must believe that the adventuresome spirit He gave me will be fulfilled through endless exploration beyond this life. Since God is infinite, I should imagine that my opportunities to explore and discover will be infinite, in keeping with His character. I have loved declaring the glories of the Saviour. I conclude that I shall have all eternity to plumb the depths of God's love, declaring His glories and rejoicing in His majesty.

Paul has testified elsewhere, "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" [1 CORINTHIANS 13:12]. All that I have aspired to do and all that I have hoped to be shall be fulfilled in eternity. I suspect that many of us have read the final warnings and blessings found in the Apocalypse, and as we read, we likely focused on the warnings rather than the blessings. However, consider this pronouncement delivered to John: "Let ... the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy" [REVELATION 22:11]. For the Christian, what we are becoming in this life will be fulfilled in that world to come. The encourager will be a true encourager. The bold will be bolder still. The one who hungers after God will be filled. Even now, the Spirit is preparing us for what is to come.

THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE SPIRIT — "We are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord" [2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-8].

The sixth verse begins with the conjunction, "So;" many translations use "Therefore." This literary device points back to what was just written. Of course, Paul was emphasizing that God has given us His Spirit as a guarantee of what is to follow. The Spirit of God is a down payment on the divine promise of all that is to be given to His dear children. God has given me His Spirit, the identical Spirit who lives with and in each child of God. His Spirit is the guarantee of what is to come. When the way grows dark and the pressures mount, we have One living with us who lifts our heart to look up; and, looking up, we see the Master waiting for us. Again, in stirring song, Dottie Rambo pointed to this truth as she wrote:

"I see loved ones over yonder—
Tears are gone and hearts are free;
And from the throne, my Savior beckons,
When the hills of home start calling me."

I have often been encouraged as I read the words written by the unknown writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians. Writing of Moses, this writer said, “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible” [HEBREWS 11:23-27].

We have the down payment of the Spirit; He lifts our eyes to Christ and what is coming. Therefore, the Christian lives in confidence. Oh, I’m plenty pessimistic concerning this world. The great and the powerful of this world manage to ensure that things pretty much remain in a mess. Politicians and the plutocrats seem quite taken with their power and possessions. If I was compelled to focus on them, I’d quickly become cynical. However, the Spirit who lives within drives me to the Word of God to hear the voice of the Master. Then, He drives me to the throne of God to speak with the Lord God. He lifts my head and directs me to look to Him. Doing this, I am heartened. Though the world is being destroyed, God is on the throne, ruling.

In the text, the Apostle writes of our confidence and how it is constant. “We are always confident” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:6a CSB]. The presence of the Spirit gives us confidence. It is only when we stifle the Spirit and assume that we can take care of matters that our confidence is shattered. How often I’ve been compelled to say, “I don’t know why God has brought me to this time and to this place; however, He is leading and He is with me.” I want to encourage the people of God to note that the Spirit of God is constant companion—He is always with us.

There is a truth in this sixth verse that compels me to make an excursus. Paul writes that “we are at home in the body.” To be certain, this world was invaded by sin, and the body suffers as result of that sin. However, we must never forget that even this body was divinely crafted. The Psalmist writes, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made [PSALM 139:14a]. I remind you that this body was divinely engineered to house the soul and the spirit. Though the flesh can be perverted to become an instrument of evil to carry out wicked desires of fallen individuals, our bodies were nevertheless fashioned by omniscient genius and omnipotent power. We treat the bodies of those we love with respect, both because those bodies are the visible reminder of the persons we love and because these bodies were crafted by God.

When the Saviour came to offer Himself, He took up residence in a body. Thus, we read, “When Christ came into the world, He said,

‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body have you prepared for me.’”

[HEBREWS 10:5]

Because the body was crafted by God and ennobled by the Christ, we should not seek to alter the body through disfiguration or injury, imagining that we are making beautiful what is already beautiful. We should never imagine that God made a mistake in making us as we are. Whether one is stout or svelte, whether lanky or diminutive, whether male or female, whether swarthy or fair-skinned, no individual should ever imagine that they must take it upon themselves to change their body through extreme measures, through surgery or through actions that can only prove injurious. We are at home in the body, and it shall remain thus until this life is finished.

Though we are at home in the body, “we would rather be away from the body.” We confess that we do have a physical existence, and we do not want to somehow say that this means nothing. God has given us our life and the vessels in which we carry out the activities of this life. However, we anticipate something greater that yet lies ahead. We realize that this present condition is transient, our bodies are temporary; so, we live in light of the ultimate rather than focusing solely on what others see as immediate realities. It is not that we are insensible of the immediate; rather, it is that we refuse to permit the immediate to dictate how we approach the ultimate. We are living for God’s glory and not for our own pleasure.

I remind you that God’s people will be found in one of two places—either in heaven or on earth. None of God’s people are in the grave or in some intermediate place conjured up in the fevered imagination of religious frauds. Believers on earth are “at home in the body,” while believers that have died are “away from the body.” Believers on earth are “away from the Lord,” but believers in heaven are “at home with the Lord.”

Wherever we go, we carry a treasure in these jars of clay [cf. **2 CORINTHIANS 4:7**]. The treasure each Christian carries is “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” [see **2 CORINTHIANS 4:6**]. Because we are carrying this treasure, we experience difficulties. When the Apostle speaks of the trials Christians face, he is speaking of being experiencing trouble, of being perplexed, of being persecuted and even of being knocked down [see **2 CORINTHIANS 4:8, 9**]. Being a Christian is not easy; it is demanding. Yet, through the many trials a Christian may face, “we are always of good courage.” Nothing can shatter the confidence of the child of God. The reason for this extreme confidence is that “we walk by faith, not by sight” [**2 CORINTHIANS 5:7**].

Perhaps you will recall the definition of faith which is recorded in the Hebrew Letter. “Faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen” [**HEBREWS 11:1 CSB**]. Christian life is conducted on the basis of faith. “Seeing is believing” is a saying sometimes recited by people in this world. However, for the Christian, “Believing is seeing.” We are not unaware of the pressures of this world, nor are we unconscious of our physical needs. Nevertheless, we have charted our course through this world on a path defined by faith.

This mortal flesh is not the totality of the story; there is so much more. Thus, the Apostle writes, speaking for each follower of the Master, “We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” [**2 CORINTHIANS 5:8**]. The Christian may be confident that “away from the body” means that we are “at home with the Lord.” Paul’s words reveal genuine confidence and not some ersatz certainty generated in a spirit of momentary bravado. Writing as he does, he speaks for all Christians. We are a people of confidence, a people imbued with hope, a people who are certain. The cults hope they will be able to somehow do enough to compel God to accept them. Likewise, among the churches are many who imagine they can do something that will convince God to accept them. Christians, however, know that they are accepted in the Beloved. This is part of the faith equation.

I do want to speak to you who suffer. I know that some suffer at the hands of some supposed church members who imagine they are appointed by God to make war on the saints. You experience what seems to be outright war. Others suffer physically and you wonder if the trials will ever stop. You question God, asking why it is necessary to live with chronic pain or why you must contend with debilitating limitations. Still others have experienced wounds to your heart inflicted by those you love. Your wounds are deep—so deep that no eye could ever see the raw, gaping lesion. You sometimes wonder if you can even breathe, the pain is so severe. Listen to the Apostle as he writes, “we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” This present existence is but an anteroom to eternity.

CONFIDENCE IN WHAT CHRIST HAS PLANNED FOR HIS OWN — “Whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:8-10].

It is of no consequence where Christ’s Advent finds us; however, it matters how that event finds us. Because we know He is coming, “we make it our aim to please Him.” We Christians have been residing temporarily in a foreign land. As we have already seen on other occasions, “Our citizenship is in heaven” [see PHILIPPIANS 3:20]. Some of our fellow believers have begun to live as though this world will be a permanent home—it will not. Others have allowed themselves to be so focused on what is coming that they fail to fulfil the responsibilities they were assigned when they came to faith. People focused on eternity to the absolute exclusion of the present are sometimes said to be so heavenly-minded that they are no earthly good. Though the theology we have seen thus far is meant to give us comfort, it is also meant to challenge us to live holy lives before the eyes of this fallen world.

Pleasing God will be far easier when we have been perfected. Pleasing God while we are in this present body is far more difficult. One inducement to righteous lives is the certainty that we must all appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ. I have heard sermons of this appearance before this Bema in which the preacher sought to terrify people to act in a godly fashion. I believe such efforts are misguided at best and positively detrimental at worst.

Throughout the years of my service before the Lord and to His people, I have endeavoured to point them to a godly motive for our service. I do not wish to fall into the trap of excusing anyone from seeking God’s glory. If you imagine that what I’m about to say is meant to excuse spiritual sloth or unrighteousness, you will have misread my intentions. I want God’s people to seek His glory in all that they do. I want God’s people to make every effort to live godly, holy lives to the praise of His glory. I believe we are equipped to reach for excellence when we know what is expected of us.

Having said this, I note the Apostle’s words. “We make it our aim to please Him,” referring to Christ. We do not serve Him in cringing, contemptible, craven fear that we may somehow offend the Living God. Rather, we have received the love of God in Christ the Lord; therefore, we reflect that same love. Our service is motivated by a desire to please Him. What happens is that we read the tenth verse, filtering what is written through our earthly lens. So, when we read, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:10], we see this as a threat rather than understanding that it is a statement meant to encourage us.

Tom Constable says, “The idea is not that God will reward us for the good things we did and punish us for the bad things we did. He will rather reward us for the worthwhile things we did and not reward us for the worthless things we did.”⁵ The word translated “evil” in verse ten is the Greek term *phaûlos*. The word is used in a moral sense to speak of that which is worthless. Good things would be worthwhile things that contribute to advancing God’s mission; worthless deeds speak of actions and efforts that make no contribution to fulfilling God’s good purposes. Dr. Walvoord writes, “The bad works are discarded as unworthy of reward but good works are rewarded. The penalty is limited to the loss of reward.”⁶

⁵ Tom Constable, **Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible** (Galaxie Software, 2003)

⁶ John F. Walvoord, “The Church in Heaven,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123 (1966): 99

It may help in understanding this principle to recall something which the Apostle wrote to this same Corinthian congregation. “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So, I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” [1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27].

So, there is a judgement for Christians. This is not, however, a judgement to determine whether the believer is saved or lost, that judgement was determined at the Cross of Calvary. Neither is it a judgement to determine whether they have been socially active, the closest any of the several judgements come to being concerned with social justice is at the conclusion of the Great Tribulation when Jesus gathers the nations before His throne

Paul writes of this judgement in which all Christians shall be called to account in his earlier letter to this same congregation. The Apostle has written, “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” [1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-15].

Though Christians are disciplined when they are disobedient, we shall be perfected when we appear before Christ. The Judgement Seat of Christ is not to display our failings, then, this is a judgement to reveal Christ’s perfecting work. That which is of eternal worth, that which advanced the cause of Christ and glorified God will stand forever in demonstration of His wisdom. That which would dishonour the Living God, all that is unworthy of the Christ, will be consumed and removed forever. All that will remain is that which honours God. God will not be punishing His beloved children at that time, He will be revealing the work He has performed in each one and which He will have brought to perfection.

Encouraging the saints in Salonica, Paul expresses his gratitude to God for them when he writes, “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore, we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring” [2 THESSALONIANS 1:3, 4].

Then, he encourages them that God is just; He shall inflict vengeance on those who were then tormenting these saints. The Apostle said that this punishment of eternal destruction would send the unbelieving tormentors “away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed” [2 THESSALONIANS 1:9, 10].

What is encouraging for us is that our Master is coming to be glorified in His saints. Displaying the perfection of His work, He would not seek our injury or pain. Rather, He will remove finally all that dishonours, all that contaminates. The Master is coming to be marvelled at among all who have believed. Surely, we will marvel at His majesty, His might, His mercy, His power and His glory. What a glorious prospect that for Christian is the promise that, “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” [COLOSSIANS 3:4]. We shall be with Him, sharing in His glory.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10
FACING THE UNKNOWN

I've spoken to encourage those who seek Christ's glory. You struggle in this world and you wonder what will be. God does not give us a detailed recitation of that He has planned, but He does encourage His people. He reveals enough to cause us to look forward to what is coming. With the Apostle, we look for,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
[this is] what God has prepared for those who love him.”

[1 CORINTHIANS 2:9]

For the one who has never received Christ as Master of life, there is no promise of comfort, no possibility of life. There is but eternal separation from God and from all that is good. Yet, it need not be so. Even now, the Master extends life to you, if you will receive Him. Christ Jesus, the Son of God, died because of your sin; He took upon Himself the punishment you deserve. He tasted death, for you. Yet, He broke the bonds of death, rising from the tomb. He was seen by those to whom He revealed Himself before He ascended into Heaven where He is now seated at the right hand of the Father. Now, the offer of life is extended to you as God says, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and thus has righteousness and with the mouth one confesses and thus has salvation.” The passage then cites the Prophet Joel by promising, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].

This promise is for you, if you are willing to receive it. We invite you to believe and be saved. Amen.