OUR GOAL TO PLEASE THE LORD

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Key Verse: 5:9

“So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.”

When we think of Paul until now in 2 Corinthians, his life was always endangered to be killed at any moment because of Christ whom he carried and preached. As he confessed, he was always given over to death for Jesus’ sake. In today’s passage, we see his clear view of the body in this physical world and his wonderful hope of the resurrection body, the heavenly dwelling. In this hope, he leads us how we should live in this earthly body, being aware of the judgment seat of Christ. May we have a clearer direction with ambition to please the Lord in our limited yet opportune life on earth.

**First, to be clothed with heavenly dwelling (1-5).** Verse 1 says, “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.” First of all, why did Paul use the word “if”, instead of “when.” Usually “if” can indicate the second option. So here “if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed” implies that Paul believed in the imminent return of Christ and meeting Christ the Lord in the glorified body without going through the process of death. It is as Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” What a glorious hope! Surely, this would be the first option for the believers. Otherwise, they would face death.

What is Paul’s view of death? According to verse 1, it is the earthly tent we live in being destroyed. This indicates that our body is a tent. In this passage, the word “body” and “tent” are used interchangeably as written in verse 4 “while we are in this tent” and in verse 6, “as long as we are at home in the body.” Apostle Peter also had the same view of the body as the tent in 2 Peter 1:13, “I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body.” We all live in this tent of body. A tent is transient, temporary, insecure, lowly and fragile like a human body. Paul as a tent-maker knew this very well. And a tent belongs to somebody who wanders around with no secure house. In the Bible (1 Peter 2:11), a believer is regarded as a stranger, an alien, a sojourner, and a pilgrim.

Paul continues in verse 1, “…we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven…” Now Paul uses the term “a building” “a house” in contrast to “tent.” Certainly, building or house is solidary, firm, secure, fixed and permanent. As for the Israelites, in the wilderness they built and carried the tabernacle/tent, which was movable, but in the land of Canaan the temple was built as a fixed permanent place of worship. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:19, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.” Our body can be a temple of the Holy Spirit or evil spirits or a house of unclean spirits as Jesus said (in Matthew 12:44 and Luke 11:24). Through all these we can infer that a building from God and an eternal house in heaven is our glorified resurrection body. So the earthly tent becoming a building from God and an eternal house in heaven is a metaphor for our perishable body becoming imperishable, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:53, “For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the moral with immorality.”

And then Paul said, “…not built by human hands.” In this expression, we can refer to Hebrews 9:11, “When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation.” At the time of Jesus’ trial, some stood up and gave this false testimony against him, “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man’” (Mk 14:57-58). Actually, what Jesus said is in John 2:19, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” and John commented in verse 21, “But the temple he had spoken of was his body.” In the false testimony, some said unwittingly, “this man-made temple” and “another, not made by man”, not knowing what it meant. Yet, what they said was true. How ironical it was. What we are to know is that our resurrection body is not by human hands, not a part of this creation. We can know that even Adam’s body made of dust was not a glorious imperishable body.

Let’s read verse 1 again, “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.” What a rich expression concerning our glorious resurrection body!

Subsequently Paul says in verse 2, “Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling.” What kind of groaning is this? Romans 8:23 says, “…we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Our groaning is like, “I am sick of this debilitated and limited body that is a beachhead for iniquity, this fallen flesh in which my redeemed nature exists.” Paul cried out in Romans 7:24, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” We all battle with our own fallenness and our own flesh, longing to get rid of this body of death and be clothed with our redeemed body, our heavenly dwelling. With that heavenly dwelling we want to serve God, worship and adore and love God, with absolute purity and perfection.

Paul says in verse 3, “because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.” Being naked would be a condition in which you did not have your resurrection body. Corinthians, though they claimed to believe in the resurrection of Christ could not believe their own bodily resurrection. Then a person would be just a disembodied floating spirit lost infinity after death. Here, Paul says that when we put on the resurrection body, we will not be naked.

Paul says further in verse 4, “For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.” Paul was so passionate about our being clothed with the heavenly dwelling. It is so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. What a powerful statement! According to 1 Corinthians 15:54, “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” In this world, death swallows up everything. No one is an exception, for all are mortal and are destined to be swallowed up by death, which is the wages of sin. However, those who believe in Christ Jesus have life that is eternal in them. Death cannot destroy this seed of eternal life given through Christ’s death and resurrection. In the end, what is mortal will be swallowed up by life in the fullness of the perfections of eternal life. So Paul sings the song of victory in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, “‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us victory throughout our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Then Paul says in verse 5, “Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” God’s purpose for us is to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, that is, to have the same glorious resurrection body of Christ. Furthermore Romans 8:29 says, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” 1 Corinthians 15:49 says, “Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” Also 1 John 3:2 says, “…we know that when he appears, we shall be like him.”

How can we be assured of this? For he has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Paul also had said in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, “…He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” It is also written in Ephesians 1:13-14, “Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession.” How is this deposit in the hearts of believers shown? They call Jesus as Lord, for no one can say, “Jesus is the Lord,” except the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3). According to Philippians 2:9-11, God exalted Jesus, who humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross, to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” When we call Jesus as Lord, it is our expression of faith that he is the sovereign Lord and the solution for all matters in life, holding everything in his hand. And those who have this deposit of the Spirit call God ‘Abba, Father.’ Romans 8:15 says, “…you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” And Galatians 4:6 says, “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’” We thank God that he has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come, that is, we being clothed with our heavenly dwelling. No one can take away this deposit.

**Second, our goal to please the Lord (6-10).** Now Paul says in verse 6-8, “Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” Here Paul used the word “confident” two times meaning “of good courage.” This is different from the confidence Paul had used in 3:4, “Such confidence at this is ours” where confidence means trust and reliance. What kind of courage do we have? This courage is though we are away from the Lord, living at home in the body, we live by faith, not by sight.” Most people see only what their physical eyes can see and live by sight. But those who have the hope of being clothed by the heavenly dwelling live by faith in this world. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” As we live by faith, we can be sure of our hope of the heavenly dwelling and certain of what is unseen, eternal. Our Christian life is from the beginning to the end by faith, as Romans 1:17 says, “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.” By faith we sinners are made righteous, faith in Christ Jesus (Ro 3:22). By faith we can come to God relying on what Christ has done for us, his merit, as Hebrews 4:16, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” and Hebrews 10:19-22, “Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body…let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our heart sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience…”

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family (11:7). By faith Abraham, when called to go to place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going (11:8). By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country, looking forward the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem (11:9-10). By faith Abraham received what was promised considering God faithful and waiting patiently (6:15; 11:11). Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became a father of many nations (Ro 4:18). By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice and received him back from death (Heb 11:17-19). By faith Moses chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward (11:25-26). By faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea as on dry land (11:29). By faith the walls of Jericho fell (11:30). By faith the prostitute Rahab was saved with her family members and recorded in the genealogy of Jesus (11:31, Mt 1:5). By faith people’s weakness turned to strength (11:34). By faith they could confront any hardship and any suffering in the world and because of their faith the world was not worth of them.

We can again think of life as a puzzle. In the course of living by faith, from time to time we don’t know how some parts of a puzzle of life can be fit to the whole puzzle, seemed to be completely out of it. We even want to discard them, wondering why this event happened or why this person appeared in my life. But no piece of the puzzle is unnecessary. All the pieces are needed. As we live by faith to the end, God will complete the puzzle of life. When we think of Joseph’s life, his being sold as a slave by his own brothers and imprisoned by false accusation, certainly he could not understand why such things happened and must have been at a loss at that moment. Yet, in his old age he confessed to his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” How substantial is one’s view of event or life! When we say that people did this or that, then we can become bitter or envious of others. Then victims’ mentality dwells in our hearts. However, when we say that God did this, even through evil people, our view of life becomes different, for God is absolutely good. We can have victor’s mindset. Victim mentality is to be uprooted in our hearts. Rather victor mindset should fill our hearts. Paul said in Romans 8:28, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Truly, living by faith is wonderous and mysterious as the best way of life, although it seems to be foolish to the eyes of the people of the world.

Verse 9 says, “So we make it out goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.” Here our goal is in other translations our ambition. Ambition seems to give us a negative connotation. However, God wants us to have a noble ambition to please God, while most people live to please themselves and other people, not necessarily God, according to their selfish sinful nature. But to please God or glorify God is God’s creation purpose, as Genesis 1:31 says, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” God was fully satisfied by his creation and was very pleased. Jesus said in John 8:29, “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” Even Jesus did not do to please himself but God. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

In Ephesians 5:8-10, it is written, “You were formerly darkness now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.” As we studied in 1 Thessalonians, he said, “We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts” in 2:4. And he said to his spiritual son Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:4, “No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer.” Pleasing God should be our life goal and ambition. This is truly a free life; otherwise we become slaves of people and circumstances. Especially we should strive and seek to please the Lord at crucial times in life.

Then Paul says in verse 10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” This is the judgment for believers. The judgment for unbelievers is written in Revelation 20:11-15, “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it…And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books…each person was judged according to what he had done…If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” It is also written in Revelation 21:8, “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

Here is again the judgment for believers. It will be evaluated and judged concerning how a Christian lived and served the Lord. Some truly live sacrificially; others live fundamentally a selfish Christian life in the name of Christ. Some truly serve God’s flock of sheep for their salvation and for their fruitful future life in Christ; others serve for human recognition and for their own popularity and success, not really thinking of the eternal destiny of God’s flock of sheep. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, “If any man builds on this foundation (Jesus Christ) using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.” And Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:7, 8, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” James 1:12 says, “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” And Peter said in 1 Peter 5:2-4, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers…And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” Jesus said in Revelation 22:12, “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has one.”

Let’s look at 2 Corinthians 5:10 again, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad.” Here ‘bad’ is in other translations ‘worthless.’ It is easy to do many worthless things, not truly valuable, spending much time on them. May we consider how we spend each time with the expectation of Christ’s reward on top of our salvation in Christ Jesus, for living in the body is the limited opportunity for the reward from Christ.

Thank God for his precious words in this passage. With the hope of being clothed with our heavenly dwelling may we have the ambition to live a life in this body of tent to please the Lord in the awareness of the judgment seat of Christ.