

**THE CONTEXT** :: Paul has been attacked elsewhere, and in Corinth, as an ineffective leader, one unworthy of being followed. He develops this tension between himself and the community, and also among those within the Corinthian community in terms of who they follow as leaders in the previous section: 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:18

Greco-Roman culture and theology was strongly rooted in dualism: indicating a system which contains two essential parts. Across the Hellenistic, and later Roman, world there was an opposition of everything that was physical and that which is spiritual. Rooted in Socratic thought (think of Socrates talking about the forms – the invisible truest essence of every thing that is behind and unifying the diverse physical, or visible representations of things. For example think of a dog. There are tons of types of dogs. Socrates says that the purest idea of a dog is the “form” which is the thing or idea common (even if we can’t see it, or put our finger on it) to all dogs. So this dualism developed to a point (during the life of Jesus, Paul and afterwards...even into our day today) in which that which is physical, material, the body, the flesh, the corruptible is opposed (and considered of lesser value) to that which is spiritual, invisible, other-worldly, not tangible (which is considered superior). This justified the notions of *carpe dieum* (seize the day) do whatever you want, because this material body doesn’t matter. It also is the root for the notions of asceticism, extreme fasting, etc., in order to punish the physical in hopes of freeing the spiritual. The Greeks thought of the soul as immortal, trapped in the prison of the body until its released anew at death.

We see this dualism in Paul’s thought, but quite different. He’s not saying that everything material (physical, body, flesh, earthly) is inferior, but rather using that dualism as a way to talk about the tension between the life we see and know now, and the life and vision that God is calling us to both in this world and in the world of resurrection (the heavenly realm) to come. He’s subverting the culture to make a different point, in hopes of encouraging the followers of Jesus to be steadfast, enduring, living out their faith even in times of suffering and anguish and moments in which we can’t see what God is up to.

**Therefore** :: Two times in this section Paul uses this word, pointing to a conclusion that has to be drawn from the “data” or reasoning he’s laid out. We should be confident, hope-full, not losing heart...for God is with us which we see and known in Christ who lived, died and rose again. You can hear a similar argument for endurance in the race of faith as that which is laid out in Hebrews 11.

Meanwhile :: the underlined expressions point to the temporal aspects of the argumentation of Paul. We live in a tension, a paradox. We live now in a promise (the deposit v. 5) that we will fully know in the future (the guarantee v. 5) For it seems that in our humility and weakness the resurrection power of Christ is most often made manifest.

**earthly tent** :: our life here and now, earthly life is a tent-like existence, a temporary shelter. He doesn’t say that it’s inferior to our heavenly life to come, but rather insists upon its temporality: *it’s not all that there is.*

## 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10

New Revised Standard Version | (NRSV)

<sup>16</sup> **Therefore** we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

<sup>1</sup> For 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. <sup>2</sup> Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our **heavenly dwelling**, <sup>3</sup> because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> For while we are in this **tent**, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our **heavenly dwelling**, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup> Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

<sup>6</sup> **Therefore** we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. <sup>7</sup> **FOR WE LIVE BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT.** <sup>8</sup> We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup> So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. <sup>10</sup> For we

must all appear before **the judgment seat of Christ**, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

#### **AS YOU READ AND REFLECT ON THIS TEXT:**

↪ When have you felt like Paul, groaning under suffering, pain and burden that you bear because of your faithful following of Jesus in this world?

↪ How are you experiencing affliction or suffering; or maybe frustration and confusion in your life today (your earthly tent)?

↪ While God seeks out suffering, and Paul doesn't minimize it in his writings, the paradox remains that Christ's resurrection power is most often made manifest in our weakness and brokenness. How are you experiencing this resurrection power? Where are you struggling to glimpse and taste that eternal promise in your current suffering and trials (or nakedness as Paul calls it in today's scripture)?

↪ Paul is saying that God's word: Jesus Christ is made visible in his life (and by extension our lives)? But it's in our authenticity and presence, not our power and perfection. How is that challenging for you? How do you struggle to make God visible in your life: actions, words, relationships, choices?

↪ How might the Spirit of God be calling you to live, and walk by faith and not by sight today?

**A BUILDING FROM GOD** :: a building is much more definite than a tent. Paul uses architectural language to emphasize why we should have hope in the future, and endure the tribulations and pains of today. Could it be also that the tent-building contrast is evocative of the Temple – which was first the Tabernacle (a large tent) before being the Temple (a permanent dwelling)?

**heavenly dwelling** :: Like the term “building” it is much more definite than a tent.

**TEXTUAL FORESHADOWING** :: In his argumentation Paul foreshadows what he will later say in conclusion in both :

2 Corinthians 12:10 *“Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.”*

And 2 Corinthians 13:4 *“For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.”*

Paul implies that resurrection life is not just in the heavenly realm, after death, but experienced, known and lived here and now in the body, in the life of our earthly tent – in Corinth then – as well as in our lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century today!

**FOR WE LIVE BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT** :: Since followers of Jesus cannot see the spiritual resurrection power being realized in the world while they groan in pain and suffering, they have to love by faith and courage, aiming to please God. The phrase literally says “for we **WALK** by faith...” the word **WALK** is used throughout the first Testament as a metaphor for life...see Psalm 1 as an example.

**the judgment seat of Christ** :: some scholars think that Paul may be referring to the image of the Roman Assemblies which were institutions in ancient Rome. They functioned as the machinery of the Roman legislative branch, operating on the basis of direct democracy, ordinary citizens. In that way citizens could see what was happening. There was also a seat of judgment (deciding) in the assembly called the bema — or *bima*. [This is the Greek word used in this verse 5:10] It was a sort of elevated platform or dias, where a person of exception merit would sit to lead the people as they decided public opinion, discerned action and separated what they wouldn't do from what they would. In ancient Athens, it was used as an orator's podium. In Roman times it was the seat for those presiding over the assembly. It came to be adopted as the *bimah* (where the Torah is read) in synagogues. In churches this *bema* seat became what we call the pulpit: the place for scripture reading and exposition (preaching). In ancient Athens, it was used as an orator's podium. In Roman times it was the seat for those presiding over the assembly. It came to be adopted as the *bimah* (where the Torah is read) in synagogues. In churches this *bema* seat became what we call the pulpit: the place for scripture reading and exposition (preaching).

In Greek the word for “to judge” is “*Krino*” meaning : to separate, distinguish; come to a choice, a decision, or make a judgment. So while we might quickly picture a medieval European created apocalyptic scene of damned souls going into fire and the faithful rewarded, moving to heaven; Paul could be comparing the power of Christ to the power of Rome, again subverting the supposed power of imperial honor and strength through the image of Christ's resurrection power made most visible in the suffering of the cross and our own weakness and brokenness.

Monte's notes are heavily influenced by his reading of *Conflict & Community in Corinth: a socio-rhetorical commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*. Ben Witherington