

Review

With regard to 4:16-18, please note carefully that “things which are not seen” are things presently hidden from man’s eyes. It does not mean they are not material or visible, as if the eternal state is all just a ghostly thing with no tangibility to it. Spiritual and material can go together simultaneously. In fact, they should be working together in our lives right *now*!

The reason I say this is because of the impact of Platonic philosophy upon Christian thought. Plato postulated a metaphysical dualism in which there are two realms: the realm of the forms/ideas which we can perceive with our intellect, and the realm of perception which we can perceive with our physical senses. This comes down to us through the Gnostic heresy, which says that the immaterial is good and the material is evil.

It is also pertinent to remember from the previous section that the ministry is not to be done for temporal rewards or the honor of men (1 Peter 5:2). These are included among the “seen” things which will pass away. The motivation of the ministry is far more God-centered than that! We hope not for temporal reward, but for the resurrection, for eternal glory and non-temporal things, and for the results of ministry that will cause more and more people to give thanks to God for His mercy.

Introductory Thoughts on the Passage

The overall message of 5:1 is that though our present bodies will, in the end, totally wear out and perish, we have an unseen body awaiting us.

The preposition “for” at the beginning of the verse ties 5:1 back to 4:16-18. Here is how: The outward man is on the decline as we saw in 4:16. In the worst-case scenario, so to speak, the outward man does die. But that is OK (“it is not the end of the world”), for we have learned that we are awaiting a far better eternal glory, and the things which we don’t see with human eyes are eternally lasting.

So 5:1 then focuses upon one of the specific eternal blessings that await us, one of the things that is not seen. This is the spiritual, glorified, resurrection body that we will receive. So this verse sets up a contrast between the present body and the future one. The contrast is not a material versus a non-material contrast, but a present versus future contrast.

“We know” the stuff of which we are about to speak. It is a present knowledge, showing confidence in the assertion that there is something beyond this perishing body.

1. Present body**A. Earthly house**

This refers to our physical body as it is outfitted for earthly existence. We come from the dust of the earth too—so both our origin and capabilities are earthly (Gen. 2:7, Ecc. 3:20 and 12:7).

B. Tabernacle

This is a tent, just like the tabernacle in the OT was a tent-like structure (Acts 7:44). We can understand this metaphor, especially if we remember that Paul was

a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). Because a tent is “temporary housing,” this figure of speech nicely conveys the idea of something temporary as 4:18.

Most cultures would understand that a tent is not a permanent structure. It is movable. It is not as sturdy as a structure built of wood or stone. It indicates a nomadic or pilgrim lifestyle (Heb. 11:9). It is temporary.

The tent idea is used by Peter as well to refer to the physical body (2 Peter 1:13, 14). It is something that he wears now, but will shortly put off. Like setting up and tearing down a literal tent, our bodies will be taken down at the end of our lives. Our life is temporary!

2. Dissolved

This means destroyed, demolished, detached, dismantled. Any reading of the NT will make clear that this dissolution is not annihilation, for to be absent from the body, for the believer, is equated with being with the Lord (5:8).

3. Future, Resurrection Body

This part of the verse uses the same word “house” as the previous part of the verse. However, we are not talking about a literal house, as if the subject were the “mansions” of John 14:2-3. The subject is the resurrection body. This fits the best in the context, which talks about our earthly bodies as if they were houses.

A. From God

Just like the body of the first man was created by God as recorded in Genesis, and just like God formed us (Jer. 1:5, Isa 44:2, 44:24, 49:5), He also is the designer and builder of the resurrection body.

B. House not made with hands

Because this resurrection body is from God, it is not made with hands like a tent in the NT era. It is a supernatural body, not just a natural one. In Col. 2:11 the same word is used of the spiritual circumcision done to believers—one done apart from the hands of a surgeon. It is also used in Mark 14:58, 9:24 of the temple made with hands. In Heb. 9:11 this is clarified as meaning that the temple is “not of this creation.” That is, it does not belong to the present creation. The resurrection body is not part of this present creation either.

C. Eternal in the heavens

The resurrection body is not one that is temporal. It is among the class of unseen things of 4:18. This answers to the “earthly” body we have now—we await a heavenly body! It will be outfitted to handle the glories of heaven.

I don’t think this body is sitting up in a large heavenly closet somewhere awaiting us to put it on, but rather this verse is saying that it will last forever and ever. It is unlike the temporary things of this life. Anything lasting God must create supernaturally.

Conclusion

Other Bible passages speak of this resurrection body. Most notably among them is 1 Cor. 15:35-58. It is also mentioned in Rom. 8:29, Phil. 3:21 and 1 John 3:2. Certainly we should conclude from this section that it is not wise to focus too much on our present existence, given its temporary nature. What hope we have!