

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Title: Home or Away

Truth: We eagerly anticipate being with the Lord, and whether we are there or here, we want to please Him because we face a future judgment.

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Introduction

Notice how in verses 1-5 the apostle exudes **complete certainty** about one of the many unseen things that Christians will enjoy: the **resurrection body**. He desires that new body very much, and it would be good for all of us to focus ourselves there whenever we are dissatisfied with our present, degrading physical bodies.¹ Then he refers to **God** who has planned things for that very purpose. Then he speaks about the **Spirit** who dwells in Christians presently. And then in verses 6, 8, 9, and 10 he mentions the **Lord Jesus Christ**. Obviously, he holds all three members of the **Triune God** in the highest esteem.

This paragraph concerns a new topic: the two possible states we can find ourselves in, that being with the Lord is preferable, and how we want to live because of what is coming. Complete certainty with bold confidence is common across both paragraphs.

I. Home and Away, v. 6-9

A. This passage has to do with being present and being absent (NKJV), or in other words being home or being away (ESV, NIV). Paul uses that pair of terms three times.

1. To be **home** is to be in a familiar place. This is figurative speech which we can easily understand by comparison to the feeling of being at home in our own bed compared to being away on travel. Being home refers to our spirit being in our body.
2. To be **away** is to leave one's geographical area or to be living in exile. To be outside of our body is a feeling that is unfamiliar since we do not know what it is like. But when we leave this life, it will soon become the opposite situation, that we will feel more at home with the Lord in Heaven than we do here in our perishing physical bodies.

¹ Those who in our current day are dissatisfied with the body God has given them should take note of this truth. God has not made a mistake in what He gave you. And if you follow Jesus, you will have a glorious resurrection body that is absolutely perfect. In Heaven there will be no dissatisfaction with the state in which we find ourselves.

Caution: The living Christian is “away from the Lord.” This does *not* mean that we live in a deistic situation where we are left to navigate life on our own. It is true that Jesus is not physically present with us. But we have the Spirit of Christ (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7) to teach, guide, convict, etc. We have prayer. We have His word. We are not *cut off* from the Lord.

B. But what is Paul saying about being present or being absent? He is focused on his certainty of those two states, on his desire to be with the Lord, and his life goal regardless of what state he finds himself in.

II. Wish to be With Christ, v. 6-8

Let us think about what it means to be home and away, and to desire to be with the Lord.

A. **Home.** We are at home in the body which God gave to us. We are to live as morally and spiritually well as we can, using our bodies to serve God and one another. In other words, we are instructed to love God and love one another with our bodies. We are not to use our bodies as instruments of sin, but as tools of righteousness. We are to see ourselves as living sacrifices. This all directs our paths in life to do God’s will instead of our own. We do not want to leave this state, for we can serve God very well in it. See Philippians 1:19-24 and embrace with a Spirit-filled mind this attitude about life, that it is needful for you to be here where you can gain more fruit in your labor for the Lord.

Especially do this if you are having some trouble thinking about why God still has you here on this side of the grass (this side of His *grace*?) or you have some overpowering desires to leave. You are meant to be *here* right *now* in the body God has given you, to live for Him. You can rejoice in what God has for you, whether a lot of physical labor, a lot of brain work, a lot of serving others, or whatever it is. Do not covet something which God has not given to you (yet). This applies to the body God has given you (for anyone with body or gender dysmorphia). It also applies to the place God has given you—here on earth and not yet in heaven. Be thankful for what God has given and be patient.

B. **Away.** We cannot see this state. We can only know it through divine revelation. The proposition is that we will be with the Lord. This is another of those unseen things that Paul was confident of. We “see” it as one of those eternal unseen things (4:18) by the eyes of **faith**. We believe that we will be with the Lord Jesus (that will be **sight**). We believe *that* because we trust in *God*, and because we read it in His word.

Let me explain. We have come to know the Lord (1 John 2:3). Everything God has promised He has kept. God has been exceedingly kind to us in a multitude of ways. And we have never found the Bible to be unreliable or lacking in accuracy. We therefore have perfectly good grounds upon which to trust that we will be with the Lord in a heavenly body.

- C. Focus on the double use of the word “confident” and the word “know.” The word does not mean to be confident to a good degree (like “I am 90% confident this will work”). Rather, it means to be *completely certain*, the kind of certainty that leads to boldness, like in Hebrews 13:6. It is like when you are truly righteous, you are bold as a lion (Prov. 28:1).

Paul knows where he is, and where he is headed. A lot of people have no idea where they are, or what the true possibilities are for where they are headed. There are two: with the Lord forever, or away from the Lord and all manifestations of His grace forever. There is not a buffet of choices, a menu from which you can choose 15 different options. There are *two* options, and you need to know what they are, like Paul does.

I can testify that I am 100% certain that right now, I am at home in the body that God has give me. Someday when I leave here, I will be absent from the body and at home with the Lord, whether through the (preferred) rapture, or death. I also want you to be 100% certain and confident. You can be—by well-informed faith in God.

This confidence gives you purpose and direction. It is hard to know what to do if you do not even know where you are! But if you know your present and future coordinates, you can move ahead with the strength of confidence.

- D. Paul ends this sub-section with the powerful declaration that he would prefer to be away from the body and home with the Lord. After all, that would be better (Philippians 1:23). He is not down about his present living arrangements. He simply recognizes that there is something better, something to hope for, to look forward to. (Just because there is something *better* in the future does not mean that what you have in the present is not *good*.) Far from causing Paul to give up in this life and wait for the next, it causes him to press forward to do everything he can to meet his goal.

III. Aim to Please the Lord, v. 9-10

- A. That goal according to verse 9 is to please the Lord. He makes it his aspiration, his ambition, to please Christ in everything he does. See

Romans 15:20 for a similar statement. His love for what is honorable drives him to please Christ.

1. Let us be honest with ourselves. Is it really our aim to please the Lord? I am not asking if we know the “right answer to say” because that does not mean anything. I am asking what the true, heart answer is to that question.
2. Frankly, too many of us aim to please ourselves. Do we tolerate someone wronging us? Can we deal with not getting our way? Is our highest priority to please ourselves?
3. Paul has learned that the proper aim for life is to be well pleasing to the Lord.
4. This means you set for yourself a goal of excellency for God. Your spiritual life should be your highest priority, your greatest desire, with your chief aim to serve the Lord Jesus and please Him (1 Thess. 4:1, Eph. 5:10, Col. 1:10).

B. This ambition to please God grows out of the hope for a new body and the presence of Christ (verses 6-8), but it is also very much motivated by the truth of verse 10. It informs us that this goal is not only a sensible life policy; it is absolutely necessary because we are going to be held to account for what we have done while present in our bodies.

This brings accountability because as we look forward, we realize we want to please Christ. And that does not start in Heaven; it starts now!

Being pleasing or acceptable to God is not automatic or guaranteed. We do not hold the kind of theology that says believers are pleasing to God regardless of their behavior (a variation of the exchanged life or free grace theology). The reality is that our behavior *does* affect our relationship with God and God’s pleasure with us, despite the fact that we are in Christ. See 2 Sam 11:27 for an example of a believer who was *not* pleasing to the Lord at a certain point in his life. Also consider Galatians 2:11 with Peter refusing to eat with Gentiles after being intimidated by some Jewish brothers. Or Peter when he esteemed more highly the things of men than the things of God (Matthew 16:23).

C. Verse 9 simply states the aim, but it does not define how it is done. So how do you please God? Other Scriptures help us:

1. Not by being in the flesh or doing the works of the flesh, Rom. 8:8. That is, the first step is to get saved, as the next verse says.
2. By exercising faith, Heb. 11:6.

3. By staying true to the gospel, 1 Thess. 2:4, Gal. 1:10.
4. By following the instructions found in the Bible, 1 Thess. 4:1.
5. By avoiding entanglement in the affairs of this life, 2 Tim. 2:4.
6. By modeling your life after Christ's, John 8:29, 1 Peter 2:21.
7. By doing good and sharing in needs, Heb. 13:16.
8. By doing good works and increasing in the knowledge of God, Col. 1:10.
9. By giving yourself as a living sacrifice to God, Rom. 12:1.
10. By avoiding any cause for your brother to stumble, Rom. 14:18.
11. By discerning between the works of light and darkness and having no fellowship with the latter, Eph. 5:10.
12. By obeying your parents, Col. 3:20.
13. By living in light of the judgment seat of Christ, 2 Cor. 5:9-10.
14. See also 1 Thess. 2:15 regarding persecution of the prophets; and 1 Cor. 7:32 regarding how to please the Lord through marriage or singleness.
15. God desires this pleasing life for you, as reflected in the prayer in Heb. 13:21.

We also take our part by being ambitious toward this end.

IV. More About the Judgment Seat of Christ.

There are three passages that speak of the judgment of Christians and its associated reward. They are Romans 14:10-12, 1 Cor. 3:11-15, and 2 Cor. 5:9-10. Taken together, they help us understand the main facets of this serious event. The normal 'who, what, where, when, why' questions will help us outline the Biblical data on the subject.

A. **Who?** All Christians are going to face this judgment. In all three passages concerned with the judgment seat, the persons being judged are Christians. That is, believers from Acts 2 all the way until Christ raptures the church. In 1 Cor. 3 those who are judged are specifically Christian ministers because the context is local church ministry.

This being the case, this judgment is not the same judgment as that of OT saints (Dan. 12:2-3), or of Gentile nations (Matt. 25:31-46), or of unbelievers at the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15). There is not one

“general resurrection” and one “general judgment” as some theologians are fond of saying. There are several resurrections and judgments (1 Cor. 15:23).

B. **Why?** One answer to the “why” question is simply that God has appointed it as a requirement for us. All must appear. All are obligated to do so. There is no option.

Another reason is God’s justice. Though not mentioned in this text, God always exercises his justice perfectly. He is not unjust to forget good works (Heb. 6:10). Transgressions also receive a just recompense (Heb. 2:2).

C. **Where?** The judgment occurs at what is called the judgment seat of Christ. This phrase comes from the word “Bema,” which refers to a “raised stone platform where the governor conducted legal business, and where victorious athletes were rewarded” (Kent). It is a judicial bench or tribunal area. Acts 18:12-17 tells us that there was one of these in Corinth, upon which the proconsul Gallio sat and judged a case regarding Paul. The case was thrown out in that instance. The same word is used in the translation of Neh. 8:4 for a “pulpit.” Pilate sat upon such a judicial seat when judging Jesus (Matt. 27:19, John 19:13). King Herod and Festus were also invested with such a seat of judgment (Acts 12:21, 25:6-17).

This judgment occurs in heaven, though this is not mentioned in this text. But Rev. 19:1, 7-8 show that the church is heaven when it receives its fine linen clothing, which is the righteous deeds or acts of the saints. This is one of the outcomes of the Bema seat.

D. **When?** This question is not answered specifically in this text either, but the judgment occurs after the rapture. In the context of this verse, we have discussed already death and the possibility of participating in the rapture. So, it is logical for the judgment seat to occur after this point. Furthermore, 1 Cor. 3:13 refers to “the day” which is the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ. The judgment is thus associated with the coming of Christ for His church. That is, we might say, “part 1” of the second coming of Christ, where He comes in the clouds to rapture the church (1 Thess. 4:13-18) before the tribulation.

E. **How?** We know that God is an impartial judge and He will judge fairly (2 Chron. 19:7, Acts 10:34, Rom. 2:11, Eph. 6:9, Col. 3:25, 1 Peter 1:17). By the way, we ought to be impartial as well (Lev. 19:15, Deut. 1:17, 16:19, Prov. 24:23, 28:21, 1 Tim. 5:21, James 2:1-9, 3:17).

F. What is the subject of judgment? Works, “things done in the body...done, whether good or bad” are the subject of judgment. 1 Cor. 3:13 says that fire will evaluate every man’s work to see what it is made of. Thus, good works are the basis for a positive judgment. What is a good work? In short, it is anything done in obedience to God’s Word, motivated by faith and love toward God. God has ordained that we should walk in these (Eph. 2:10) and he does not make it optional for us (James 2:20, 26).

What about the bad? Sin has already been judged at the cross of Christ. But we have done things useful for God, and things useless for God. We have done worthless things. We have said idle words. We have done things out of love for self, or lacking faith, or disobedient to His word. The Greek word refers to something low-grade, inferior, or ordinary. These things do not elevate our judgment status.

What about unconfessed sin? It is not a basis of judgment at the Bema. Think about this: everyone has unconfessed sin. To say that we do not is to say that we fully comprehend the extent of our own depravity. That would be arrogant. But Christ has paid even for our sins that we do not fully comprehend! Note that unconfessed sin is not a “nothing” however. In this life unconfessed sin results in a level of broken fellowship, the need for confession and a present cleansing and forgiveness on the basis of Christ’s once-for-all work, and even possible chastisement if we go about ignoring our sins.

Are hidden sins revealed at the judgment seat? 1 Cor. 4:5 indicates that hidden things and motivations will be brought to light. 1 John 2:28 says that we could be ashamed before Him at His coming. So yes, there is some revelation going on here. God will not deal with us outside of the parameters of his Word, however. Sins are dealt with on the level they are committed, and not broadcast for public view, as if God replays a movie of our lives and all people see the horrible sins that we have committed. Thank God that He deals with us graciously and is not vindictive or trying to humiliate us.

G. What is the outcome of judgment? The outcome of the Bema is reward or loss of reward (1 Cor. 3:14-15). This judgment is not punishment for sin, because Christ has taken care of that already and we are justified in God’s sight (Acts 13:39). We do not come into condemnation for our sins (Rom. 8:1). We have been forgiven all trespasses (Col. 2:13). So bad works already have penalty paid on the cross. In other words, this is not a judgment in which people’s eternal destiny is determined. If one is at this judgment, eternal destiny has already been determined: Heaven!

But the import of the judgment should not be minimized on that basis. Bad works are obviously not worthy of any reward. That is the point—no reward is given for bad works. Instead, some shame is experienced. And if we do not receive any rewards, we will be saved, yet by the skin of our teeth, so to speak. We will come through with nothing; all will be burned up (1 Cor. 3:15).

What these rewards all are is not revealed to us. Some seem to be levels of responsibility in the kingdom and eternity. This probably raises a question then, and that is, are there levels of blessing in heaven? Yes, just like there are levels of punishment in Hell (Luke 12:47-48). Luke 19:11-27 indicates that in the kingdom age there will be responsibilities distributed as rewards for faithful service. This carries on into the eternal state.

H. What will we feel at this judgment? What kind of emotions will we experience at the judgment seat? Remorse? Yes, that we could have served our Lord better during our lives. But overall, thankfulness and gratitude will dominate our thoughts. Like at commencement ceremony where there is some regret that better grades were not achieved, but the overwhelming emotion is one of joy at having graduated and getting some level of commendation from the school officials. “To overdo the sorrow aspect of the judgment seat of Christ is to make heaven hell. To underdo the sorrow aspect is to make faithfulness inconsequential.”² Let us not fall into either error.

Conclusion

Come back to the big point of the section that has to do with “home and away.” You know you are home right now. You will be away soon. You know it by faith and want to be away—with Christ. But regardless, you want both your home game and your away game to be high quality because you will be evaluated at Christ’s judgment seat. We want to please our master and Lord Jesus by doing things with an eternal impact, with a view toward the eternal glory and not the things temporal and seen.

Let us move ahead in living a high-quality life of eternal value for the Lord instead of a low-quality life for ourselves and temporal values.

MAP

² The graduation illustration and quote is from Samuel L. Hoyt, “The Negative Aspects of the Christian’s Judgment” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (vol. 137, no. 546, April–June 1980).