

2 Corinthians 5:1–10 EHV

Theme: The Holy Spirit prepares us for life

1. By focusing our attention upon the hope Christ won for us,
2. So that we may live for the LORD in all confidence.

Now we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal home in heaven, which is not made by human hands. ²In fact, the reason we groan is that we long to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven. ³If we do indeed put it on, we will certainly not be found naked. ⁴To be sure, while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵Now the one who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as the down payment. ⁶Therefore we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸But we are confident and would much prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹And for this reason we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home or away. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he did while in the body, whether good or bad.

Graduation season is upon us. It's an exciting time, as we see family members or friends get ready for the next stage in life. Don't you wish you could still be filled with the same optimism and hope that many of the graduates are feeling this week? I know I do!

Sadly, the many disappointments, evils, tragedies and sins we face in life tend to curb our excitement and optimism for the future. Worse yet, many of life's triumphs lead us to misplace our hope upon things that have no lasting value. An older gentleman once confessed to me: All the dreams and goals I worked so hard to obtain seem so meaningless now. I feel like I wasted my life.

I hate to crush the optimism and excitement graduates are feeling today, but there is a lot of truth to what that older gentleman said. The things that seem so important and exciting to us in our youth often reveal themselves as being meaningless later on in life. No matter how hard we work, happiness and success are never guaranteed. Unforeseen problems, sickness, tragedies and death make life hard. All of these evils are a consequence of the fall into sin. They reveal our desperate need for a Savior.

But what if I told you that the LORD offers us an enduring optimism and hope that will never diminish or fade regardless of how many disappointments and evils we face in life? Where does God offer such a gift? In the Gospel of Christ. With the great apostle Paul as our guide, let us consider this truth, under the theme: **The Holy Spirit prepares us for life:** 1) By focusing our attention upon the hope Christ won for us, 2) so that we may live for the LORD in all confidence.

Part One: The Holy Spirit prepares us for life by focusing our attention upon the hope Christ won for us.

Our sermon text is found in a section of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, where he tells us where he found motivation to continue conducting his ministry in the midst of all the hardships he faced in life. And where did he find it? In the Gospel he preached: the good news of God reconciling the world to himself in Christⁱ, which led him to confess this about our lives:

Now we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal home in heaven, which is not made by human hands.

Do you remember learning the Bible stories about Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt? For over 40 years, the Israelites moved through the desert – living in tents - until the time came for them to inherit their permanent home in the promised land of heaven.

Paul compares our lives on this earth to the living conditions of the Israelites during the Exodus. As Christians, we are all on a journey. Where to? The promised land of eternal life with God in paradise. Like the tents the Israelites built for themselves in the wilderness, the lives we build for ourselves on this earth are fragile and temporary – merely meant to serve us on our journey until the time comes for us to receive the permanent home Jesus promised us, when he said: *In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you may also be where I am.*ⁱⁱ

Having a proper understanding of both the temporal nature of our earthly lives, as well as the permanence of the home Christ prepared for us through his cross, moves us Christians to endure life's hardships in hope. Why? Because we know that the earthly evils we face are temporary, as the Apostle Paul writes:

²In fact, the reason we groan is that we long to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven. ³If we do indeed put it on, we will certainly not be found naked.

Our sins burden us with a lot of regret and guilt. We may succeed at hiding this fact from each other, but we can't hide it from God. Before him we stand spiritually exposed with our sin and shame – and we would have to remain that way for all eternity, if it weren't for Christ. He covers us with the righteousness he won for us through his perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection.ⁱⁱⁱ Our eternal home with God is guaranteed – all because of the salvation Jesus won for us through his cross, salvation which we receive through faith.

And, knowing what is coming, we Christians long to receive our permanent home. Why? Because we know it will be far better than the "tent" we are living in now – our earthly lives that are often filled with disappointments, tragedies and sins. We are like little children on a long journey to visit our grandparents: we can't wait to get out of the car to see their smiling faces.

⁴To be sure, while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

Now, it's important that we understand the apostle's words correctly. Paul doesn't pine away in sorrow under the burdens and pain he faces in life – hoping that Christ will grant him the death necessary to escape his suffering. No, he sees his future salvation more as a prize to be received after completing a marathon. He can't wait to be free from all the sin, shame and pain that marks his temporal existence. He can't wait to experience death being swallowed by life! For this reason, Paul strives forward in all hope – willing to work, preach and endure everything he must endure during life on this earth with renewed vigor; because he knows what's coming.

I want to pause here for a second to apply this important truth to us. Many times, the problems and sorrows we face in life seem so heavy that we want to give up – hoping and praying that God would just let us die so as to escape every earthly evil. But this is not the perspective God wants us to have. Rather, focusing on the future that is guaranteed for us in heaven, God wants us to ask for the strength and help we need for our journey through life – ever moving forward in hope. Yes, we long to be with Christ in glory – something that is far better than being on this evil earth. At the same time, God does not want our longing for salvation to hinder our living for him now. Rather, he wants the hope of heaven to motivate and strengthen us in our zeal to move forward in our earthly lives – filling us with a godly optimism, excitement and hope for the future. He wants our groans under the burdens of life to be like those of a professional weightlifter: they don't groan in defeat, but in defiance of the burdens that oppress them – pushing forward with all their might so as to win the prize. And we can be certain that we too will receive our prize at life's end: the salvation Christ won for us through his cross. What gives us such confidence? The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We read:

⁵Now the one who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as the down payment.

When the LORD adopted us as his own children through Holy baptism, he gave us a special gift: the Holy Spirit. He is the down payment, guaranteeing our redemption. More than that, he is the one preparing, strengthening and guiding us on our pilgrimage home to heaven. And how does he do that? First of all, by using God's law to show us our sins so that we might repent. He then directs our attention to Christ through the Gospel, showing us how Jesus paid for our sins in full – winning for us our hope of heaven. The Holy Spirit uses the means of grace to forgive our sins and focus our attention on the hope we have in Christ. And as we focus our attention on that hope, the Holy Spirit directs us as to how we can live our lives on this earth to God's glory in all confidence – absolutely certain of the salvation Jesus won for us through his cross, as St. Paul says:

Part Two: The Holy Spirit prepares us for life so that we may live for the LORD in all confidence.

⁶Therefore we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸But we are confident and would much prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹And for this reason we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home or away.

Yes, our life on this earth is a pilgrimage. Right now, we are away from the LORD – that is to say, we don't see him face to face. But that doesn't mean that God has abandoned us. Jesus himself promised: *I am with you always until the end of the age.*^{iv} In other words, the LORD is with us, even though we don't see him. This is a truth we accept by faith, and not by sight. He will make sure to rescue us from every evil that tries to separate us from him. He will deliver us safely to his side in glory.^v

Oh, how awesome it will be when we get to see Christ in glory! But until that time, we have work to do on this earth. You see, the Lord did not only save us from sin, but also for the purpose of serving him – glorifying his name in everything we think, say and do, as the Scriptures say: *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance so that we would walk in them.*^{vi}

And because God has given our lives on this earth purpose and meaning, we can live in all optimism and hope. We don't need to despair in the great difficulties and challenges that come our way, but can face them with the confidence that *all things work together for the good of those who love God.*^{vii}

¹⁰*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he did while in the body, whether good or bad.*

I know, at first glance this verse seems awfully scary. We all know our sins. Left to ourselves, we certainly would have no hope of salvation. But here's the thing: we are not left to ourselves. The Holy Spirit is with us - covering us with the righteousness Christ won for us. Through faith in the Gospel, his work becomes our work. Not only is this the case, but the Holy Spirit also allows our faith him in to produce fruit – God pleasing acts of love towards both him and our neighbor.

And just as a person can determine a type of tree by the fruit it naturally produces, so also the fruit a person naturally brings forth reveals whether or not that person truly trusts in Christ for salvation.^{viii} On the Last Day, God will point to these fruits of the Spirit as the evidence of our righteousness^{ix}: the righteousness Christ won for us, and that can only be received through faith.^x

And this truth gives us hope, as we look forward to Christ's reappearing. How so? Because we know that the Holy Spirit is working in and through us by means of the Gospel. He prepares us for glory by directing our attention to the eternal salvation Christ won for us. This, in turn, moves us to live our earthly lives to God's glory in all optimism, excitement and confidence – trusting that no sorrow or hardship we face in life will be able to separate us from the love God has for us in Christ Jesus our LORD.^{xi} Amen.

ⁱ Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14ff

ⁱⁱ John 14:2-3 (EHV)

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21

^{iv} Matthew 28:20 (EHV)

^v Cf. 2 Timothy 4:18

^{vi} Ephesians 2:10 (EHV)

^{vii} Romans 8:28 (EHV)

^{viii} Cf. Luke 6:43-45 and Galatian 5:22-25

^{ix} Cf. Matthew 25:31-46

^x Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21, John 3:16 and Romans 4:5

^{xi} Cf. Romans 8:35-39