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## Absent in body but present with the Lord

\*Download article in PDF Format \*Watch YouTube video Many misunderstand Paul’s statements to mean that Paul desired to be dead, that Paul would ‘rather’ be dead than living in the present, so that he could be present with the Lord. This is not the case at all, for the dead cannot serve or please God, the dead know nothing, and God does not rule over the dead. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-9: So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather TO BE ABSENT FROM THE BODY AND TO BE PRESENT WITH THE LORD. Therefore we make it our aim, WHETHER PRESENT OR ABSENT, to be well pleasing to Him. PSALM 115:17: The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence. ECCLESIASTES 9:5: The dead know nothing... All who have ever died cannot please God in death and are awaiting the resurrection in a state of death and unconsciousness. What then did Paul mean when he declared, “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord?” He was speaking of being absent from the body, in prayer and meditation. There are two ways to interpret and understand 2 Corinthians 5:6-9: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-9: So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body [IN DEATH] and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent [DEAD], to be well pleasing to Him. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-9: So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body [IN PRAYER AND MEDITATION] and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent [IN PRAYER AND MEDITATION], to be well pleasing to Him. Paul meditated in prayer through which he was in communion with Yeshua (Jesus), who directed Paul to write his epistles. Paul’s letters were the word of God, and he received instruction from Yeshua (Jesus) of what to write, when he was ABSENT FROM THE BODY IN PRAYER AND MEDITATION. We can clearly see this from other related similar verses. 1 CORINTHIANS 5:3: For I indeed, AS ABSENT IN BODY BUT PRESENT IN SPIRIT, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. 2 CORINTHIANS 10:1: I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Messiah (Christ) - who IN PRESENCE am lowly among you, but BEING ABSENT am bold toward you. 2 CORINTHIANS 10:11: Let such a person consider this, that WHAT WE ARE BY LETTERS WHEN WE ARE ABSENT, such we will also be in deed WHEN WE ARE PRESENT. 2 CORINTHIANS 13:2: I have told you before, and foretell as IF I WERE PRESENT the second time, AND NOW BEING ABSENT I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare. 2 CORINTHIANS 13:10: Therefore I write these things BEING ABSENT, LEST BEING PRESENT I should use sharpness, according to the authority that the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction. PHILIPPIANS 1:27: Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Messiah, so that whether I come and see you OR I AM ABSENT, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel... PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13: Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, NOT AS IN MY PRESENCE ONLY, BUT NOW MUCH MORE IN MY ABSENCE, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. COLOSSIANS 2:5: FOR THOUGH I AM ABSENT IN THE FLESH, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Messiah. It is clear through a comprehensive reading of Scripture, upon reading other verse examples, that when Paul spoke of being absent from the body and present with the Lord, he was speaking of being absent from the body in spiritual meditation and prayer, not absent from the body in death. Believers are likewise instructed to meditate, pray, and study God’s word. PSALM 19:14: Let the words of my mouth and the MEDITATION of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and Redeemer. PSALM 119:15-16: I will MEDITATE on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word. PSALM 119:27,48,78: I shall MEDITATE on Your wonderful works. I will MEDITATE on Your statutes. I will MEDITATE on Your precepts. That I may MEDITATE on Your word. This answer is also available in: العربية الربيبة”So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6-8).Paul is comparing his mortal state with the future immortal life of heaven. He is stating the differences between mortal bodies that will perish and the immortal glorified bodies that will last forever. Let’s examine his expressions for these two states in verses 1-8:A- Mortal: Earthly house- this tent- mortality- in the body- absent from the Lord.B- Immortal: Building from God- house not made with hands- our house which is from heaven- absent from the body- present with the Lord.Some have come to believe that Paul’s statements here mean that some immaterial part of us instantly goes to heaven at the moment of death. But this does not agree with the rest of scriptures that teach that the dead sleep with no consciousness whatsoever until they are awakened at the Resurrection. The Bible teaches that for the believer, at the moment of death, the next conscious thought is his awareness of his glorified body at Christ’s coming because in death there is no consciousnesses of time. Please check the Bible references on the state of the dead.Paul is simply saying in 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, that he is eager to be absent from the weaknesses of his earthly body (sickness, infirmities and death) and to have a glorified body. He is eager to be translated to heaven without having to see death. And Paul speaks of his hope of translation saying, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:52-53).Check out our Bible Answers page for more information on a variety of topics.In His service, BibleAsk TeamThis answer is also available in: العربية الربيبة”Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.” - 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 - “Therefore” points us back to Paul’s thoughts, where he celebrated the truth that even if his earthly tent was torn down—even the constant opposition, conflict, and persecution that results from his ministry results in losing his life—he was absolutely certain that God would one day raise him from the dead in a glorified body (2 Cor 5:1-5). And he could be that certain because God Himself had given him a pledge—an earnest—the down payment of the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in his heart, guaranteeing that God will one day deliver all the fullness of Paul’s heavenly inheritance (2 Cor 5:5), The Pledge of the Spirit The consequence of that Spirit-guaranteed assurance of a resurrection body is “good courage.” Verse 6: “Therefore, being always of good courage.” And then again in verse 8: “We are of good courage, I say.” The word means to be boldly and confidently courageous. Whether the beatings and stonings and imprisonments that would come as a result of preaching the Gospel to the lost, or the distrust and the false accusations and the heartache of broken relationships that would come as a result of ministering to the church—he could face any circumstance with courage and confidence. And as we lay our lives down in the service of Christ and His church, so can we. There is so much strength and courage to be drawn from the reality that the Holy Spirit of God Himself is dwelling in us, fighting sin in us, warring against the flesh in us, and will one day raise our mortal body from the dead into conformity with the body of Christ’s glory. As long as that Spirit dwells in you, and guides you and leads you into holiness, and empowers you for ministry, you need never despair in the midst of your labors. You can be always of good courage. One commentator said, “The good courage that animates the [believers] is as permanent and serene as the Spirit dwelling within” (Hughes, 175). The Father’s pledge of the Spirit in our hearts is cause for fearless sacrificial ministry. The Promise of Fellowship But he goes on. That bold confidence for ministry even in the face of death comes not only from the pledge of the Holy Spirit, but also from the promise of increased fellowship with Christ in death. He says, “We’re of good courage, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.” Now, his argument is a little hard to follow because he interrupts himself with that parenthetical comment in verse 7, but if you read verses 6 and 8 together without the interruption, you see that it’s a glorious argument. First, let’s just observe precisely what he’s saying, because it’s just ridiculous how many branches of so-called Christian theology get this wrong. This verse decisively teaches that when a believer in Jesus dies, he immediately goes into the presence of Christ in heaven. At home in the body? Absent from the Lord. Absent from the body? At home with the Lord. There’s no in-between state when you’re absent both from the body and the Lord. This deals the death blow to the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory, which teaches that after death the believer has to endure additional punishment for his sins—being purified for what may very well be thousands of years—so he might eventually be fit to enter into Christ’s presence in heaven. This text also deals the death blow to the doctrine of “soul sleep,” held famously by the Jehovah’s Witnesses and other cults. This is the teaching that, when a Christian dies, he enters into a state of complete unconsciousness—as if he’s sleeping—until the Second Coming of Christ. It’s true that the New Testament describes death for the Christian with the metaphor of “sleep” (e.g., 1 Thess 4:13). But that’s simply a figurative way of referring to the rest that a believer enjoys when he’s ceased from the struggles of this life. There’s simply no way around it: to be absent from the body in death is to be present with the Lord Jesus in heaven. Having understood what he’s said, then, let’s see how the statement functions in the flow of Paul’s argument. Paul is saying, “I can be fearless and courageous even in the face of life-threatening opposition to my ministry because as long as I’m alive in this body, I’m away from the Lord Jesus. As long as I’m in this body, I’m not in Christ’s immediate presence in heaven, worshipping Him face-to-face with the saints and angels. But the thing is: I much prefer to be there with Him than here in my body! So, the very worst they can do to me is take my life. But for me to live in Christ, and to die is gain. Christ is more satisfying to me than all that life can offer and all that death can take. So if I leave it all on the field—if I spend and am expended for the sake of Christ—if they kill me, they do nothing but chase me right to heaven! They do nothing but fast-track me to my greatest joy and happiness: unhindered, sin-free, face-to-face communion with my dear Savior!” Dear Christian, so far from allowing the fear of death to hinder you from sacrificial, life-laid-down ministry in Christ’s name, the prospect of death ought to entice you to that kind of ministry. Paul says, “Not only am I not fearing death—not only am I not allowing the potential of death to drive me to despair and to abandon as a coward the ministry Christ has called me to—my settled preference is to be absent from this body and to go and be with Christ!” Charles Hodge summarizes it by saying, “Death is not an object of dread, but of desire.” Desiring our Death? You say, “Really, Mike? We ought to desire our death? Isn’t that a little morbid?” But would you accuse the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Himself as he writes this, of being morbid? He says in verse 8: we “prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.” You ought to be able to say with Paul in Philippians 1:23 that you are possessed of the earnest desire—the intense longing and yearning of from the bottom of your heart—to depart from this life “and be with Christ, for that is very much better.” In fact, John Calvin wrote, “Let us consider this settled, that no one has made progress in the school of Christ who does not joyfully await the day of death and final resurrection” (Institutes, 3.9.5). How are you doing with that? Do you so desire Christ—is He the heaven of heavens to you—such that the prospect of death brings joy and even excitement? Have you been able to wean your affections off of the fading pleasures of this world, so that you can truly say, “To die is gain. I can lose everything I have in this life and call it gain, because I will gain Christ”? Or have you gripped this world so tightly that, rather than a pilgrim in exile in a foreign land, you’ve gotten so comfortable and complacent that this world feels like your home? That when confronted with the loss of all that this life can give you, you backwardly cling to it, and say, “I have the earnest desire to stay in this life away from Christ, for to me, that is very much better”? Dear reader, one sight of Christ in His exalted glory in heaven will dwarf the most magnificent glory of the very best this life has to offer. In a sermon called, “The True Christian’s Life a Journey Towards Heaven,” Jonathan Edwards wrote, “God is the highest good of the reasonable creature. The enjoyment of him is our proper happiness, and is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here: better than fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of any or all earthly friends. These are but shadows; but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams; but God is the sun. These are but streams; but God is the fountain. These are but drops; but God is the ocean. Therefore, it becomes us to spend this life only as a journey towards heaven” (WJE, 17:437-38). And then, in the sermon he delivered at David Brainerd’s funeral, preaching on our very verse, 2 Corinthians 5:8, Edwards wrote, “O how infinitely great will the privilege and happiness of such be, who at that time shall go to be with Christ in his glory.” It is “the privilege of being with Christ in heaven, where he sits on the right hand of God, in the glory of the King and God of the angels, and of the whole universe, shining forth as the great light, the bright sun of that world of glory, there to dwell in the full, constant, and everlasting view of his beauty and brightness, there most freely and intimately to converse with him, and fully to enjoy his love, as his friends and spouse, there to have fellowship with him in the infinite pleasure and joy he has in the enjoyment of his Father, there to sit with him on his throne, and reign with him in the possession of all things, and partake with him in the joy and glory of his victory over his enemies, and the advancement of his in the world, and to join with him in joyful songs of praise, to his Father and their Father, to his God and their God, forever and ever” (WJE, 25:243-44). Friends, do you prefer Him? Is it your settled preference to be absent from the body and at home with the Lord? Then in the face of difficult, dangerous, sacrificial ministry, don’t lose heart. Don’t abandon your ministry for the sake of comfort or safety. Be of good courage! Be fearless in the face of opposition. And let that fearlessness galvanize you to life-laid-down, give-your-life-away ministry to the body of Christ. The Present Presence of the Lord Some might ask, “Does the enjoyment of Christ’s presence have to wait for heaven? Is there any way that I can behold Christ’s glory now?” To answer that, we need to consider the parenthetical statement in verse 7. Paul says, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” The reason Paul includes this parenthetical comment is to anticipate and answer a potential misunderstanding from what he said in verse 6. To say that as long as we are in the body we are absent from the Lord does not mean that there is no fellowship with Christ to be had in the present body. The Gnostics taught that bodily existence was an impediment to true spirituality; the body was sinful, fleshly, and tempted man’s base instincts, and so it was regarded with contempt—nothing more than a prison from which our souls long to escape. But Paul was no Gnostic. The entire previous paragraph is written in defense of an eternal bodily existence. So Paul doesn’t mean to say, since to be at home in the body is to be absent from the Lord, that there is absolutely no communion with Christ until we’re freed from the prisons of our bodies. No, the only sense in which we are “absent from the Lord” now is simply that we do not physically see Him face-to-face like we will in heaven. In this age, we do not walk by physical sight. But we do see Him. The glory which we do not yet behold with our physical eyes, we do presently behold with the spiritual sight of faith. In fact, John Owen said, “No man shall ever behold the glory of Christ by sight hereafter, who doth not in some measure behold it by faith here in this world” (Glory of Christ, 1:288). Faith is the spiritual sight by which “we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (2 Cor 4:18). What we cannot see with our physical eyes, we behold with our spiritual eyes—the eyes of faith. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” That word “conviction” is the word *elenchos* in the Greek. It comes from the verb *elencho*, which means to expose, to reveal, to bring to light (BDAG). The author of Hebrews says that faith is the exposing, the revelation of that which is not seen. That’s why, in Hebrews 11:27, it says that Moses left Egypt by faith, as seeing Him who is unseen. Faith is the spiritual sight by which that which is naturally unseen and invisible becomes perceptible to the eyes of the soul. And so when Paul says, “We walk by faith, not by sight,” he doesn’t mean to diametrically oppose faith and knowledge—as if faith is just some blind leap in the dark that takes over when knowledge runs out. The contrast is not between sight and no-sight. The contrast is between physical sight and spiritual sight. Though we may be absent from the Lord while we are at home in the body, it does not mean that there is no fellowship with Him now. In this age, the true Christian walks not by the physical sight of our natural eyes, but by the spiritual sight of faith. The glory of Christ that we will lay our eyes on in heaven—that communion that we long for, that fellowship that is our settled preference above all that this life can offer—we may behold that very same glory now through the spiritual sight of faith. And, as Paul says in that precious verse, 2 Corinthians 3:18, “We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” If what will make heaven heaven for us is to finally behold the glory of Christ—if, as Owen said, “The immediate sight of Christ is that which all the saints of God in this life do breathe and pant after”—then we ought to be chiefly occupied with beholding the glory of Christ by faith now, in any measure that He is revealed. Dear reader, make it your daily, your hourly, your moment-by-moment task, to, with the eyes of faith, fix the gaze of your spiritual sight on the glory of Jesus.

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