

## Absent From The Body Present With The Lord

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Excerpts from "Thou Shalt Surely Die"

*We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. ([2 Cor. 5:8](#))*

This verse is familiar to almost all who have been taught the immortality of man, but at the same time it is one of the most misunderstood and misquoted of any verse in the Bible. In order to understand this verse properly, we must see the thrust of Paul's argument in the preceding verses. Let us study this verse in its context, using a literal translation:

*For we are aware that, if our terrestrial tabernacle house should be demolished, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eonian, in the heavens.*

*For in this also we are groaning, longing to be dressed in our habitation which is out of heaven, if so be that, being dressed also, we shall not be found naked.*

*For we also, who are in the tabernacle, are groaning, being burdened, on which we are not wanting to be stripped, but to be dressed, that the mortal may be swallowed up by life.*

*Now He Who produces us for this same longing is God, Who is also giving us the earnest of the spirit.*

*Being, then, courageous always, and aware that, being at home in the body, we are away from home from the Lord, (For by faith are we walking, not by perception),*

*We are encouraged, and are delighting rather to be away from home out of the body AND to be at home with the Lord. ([2 Cor. 5:1-8](#), C.V.)*

Verse one states that there are two tabernacles, or bodies, one heavenly and the other terrestrial (earthly). Verses two and three explain that at the present time we are burdened in our earthly, mortal bodies; but our hope is that some day we shall be "dressed" in the heavenly body, "that the mortal may be swallowed up by life" (vs. 3).

When will this mortal "be swallowed up by life?" The moment we die? No, for Paul tells us in [1 Cor. 15:52-54](#) that our mortality will not be changed to immortality until "the last trump." Paul makes it plain that he looked forward to the resurrection, not to the day of his death:

*. . . we are not wanting to be stripped [die], but to be dressed. . . [resurrected] (vs. 3)*

Did Paul then turn around and say in verse 8 that when he died, he would be "present with the Lord"? Of course not. He simply repeated what he had previously stated: (1) that this mortal

body was burdensome, and (2) that he would rather be dressed in his resurrected body AND "be at home with the Lord."

Notice that even in the King James Version, verse 8 does not read that "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." That reading is a deliberate misquotation designed to prove an unscriptural theory.

## **PAUL'S DILEMMA**

*For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better ([Phil. 1:23](#)).*

Some time ago a well-known minister said that if Phillippians 1:23 was the only verse in Scripture teaching man's immortality, he would believe it, disregarding all the rest of Scripture to the contrary. But we do not believe that the Bible contradicts itself, and we shall show that this passage is no exception.

Notice first that Paul says "to die is gain" (vs. 21). He does not say that to die is heaven, or that to die is to be with the Lord. He says it is gain. Whose gain will it be, Paul's or Christ's?

If the reader will read verses 12-21, it will be clear that Paul was saying that his death would be gain for Christ, not for himself. Paul had been cast into prison, but instead of the other Christians hiding themselves, they were "waxing confident by my bonds" and openly preaching the gospel. Thus, Paul says:

*But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel. ([Phil. 1: 12](#))*

After spending much time rejoicing over "the furtherance of the gospel," Paul finally begins to discuss the possibility of his being executed for his faith:

*. . . So now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For [because] to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ([Phil. 1:20, 21](#))*

We see, then, that Paul is telling us that the Gospel of Christ would be spread further . . . whether he lived or died, and Christ would be magnified. As Tertullian testified in the second century A.D., "The blood of Christians is seed. . ."

In verse 23 the phrase, "I am in a strait betwixt two," as it reads in most Bibles, is misleading. The Greek verb used is *sunechomai*, a form of the word *sunechoo*, which means "to hold together, to press." The same word also occurs in [Luke 8:45](#), "the multitude throng thee and press thee." It occurs again in [Acts 7:57](#), when the Jews "stopped [pressed] their ears." Thus, the beginning of [Philippians 1:23](#) should read, "I am being pressed. . ." In most Bibles the next phrase reads, "betwixt the two." The Greek word here is *ek*, which all Lexicons and Concordances render "out of." This is the only verse in the Bible where it has been mistranslated to read "betwixt."

Thus, the entire phrase should read: "I am being pressed out of the two . . ." The next word in this verse which we shall discuss is *anulusai*, rendered "to depart." This word is found only one other time in the Scriptures, where it is rendered "return."

*And [be] ye yourselves like unto men looking for their Lord, when he shall return [anulusai] from the marriage feast; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may straightway open unto him. (Luke 12:36)*

The Companion Bible tells us that this word was used often in the Apocrypha as well, where it frequently was translated "return." It also states that "to depart" should be translated "for the return." Thus, the entire verse, translated properly, reads:

*Yet I am being pressed out of the two, having the desire for the return and together with Christ to be, for it rather is much better.*

Having established the proper translation of the passage, we can now proceed to interpret it from the beginning. Paul was preaching in jail, and the Christians outside were taking courage because of Paul's example. So Paul concludes that Christ would gain glory, whether he (Paul) would be executed or acquitted.

These were the two "choices" that Paul mentioned. If he was executed, Christ would be magnified; if he was acquitted, Christ would be magnified as well. Paul says that he did not know which would be the most gain for Christ, so he decided not to state any preference to the Philippians: . . . yet what I shall choose I wot not. [literally, "I am not making known"]

So Paul would not state his preference, for he was "being pressed out of" the two choices. In other words, he could not choose either of them. Instead, he introduces a third choice, which was his real desire—"the return" of Christ. This is the hope of the Christian, and it is "much better" than either living or dying.

Even as it is translated in the King James, verse 23 which seems to say if he departed (died) he would be with Christ, can be explained by death as unconsciousness. Paul knew that if he did die, the next conscious moment would be his resurrection at which time he would then be with Christ.

We conclude, then, that Paul did not believe that when he died, he would be with Christ immediately. His hope was the return of Christ, when the dead believers would be raised to inherit the Kingdom.

### **PAUL'S REWARD — WHEN?**

*For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Tim. 4:6-8)*

This passage is quite similar to [Philippians 1:20-23](#). The word "departure" is in Greek, analysis, from analuo. We have already shown in the previous section that analuo means "return."

Thus Paul said that "the time of my returning is at hand." Where would Paul return? Well, where did Paul come from? If Paul pre-existed in heaven, then obviously, he would return to heaven. But we have already shown that man originated in the dust of the ground and that death is a return to our origin ([Gen. 3:19](#)).

Paul's reward was "laid up" for him, and he expected to receive it "at that day." At what day? The last part of the verse tells us that Paul expected to receive it at the same time the other believers received it, for he says:

*. . . and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

Furthermore, a look at the context proves that Paul was thinking of the return of Christ, for verse one says:

*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom. ([2 Tim. 4:1](#))*

Paul's reward was laid up for him in heaven, but he shall not receive it until Christ returns, for Jesus said:

*And behold I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. ([Rev. 22:12](#))*

All of the world's major religions teach that man receives his reward when he "dies." The Bible says that no one, not even Paul, receives any reward until the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead.