

# from Death Life

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*It's a funny old world we live in. Truth is often stranger than fiction. There are a multitude of things I don't even begin to understand about the world in which we live. That is one reason I don't feel I have to be able to explain every strange occurrence in the Bible. To me one of the strangest passages in the Bible is the account of Saul's visit to the Witch at Endor (1 Samuel 28:1-20).*

*King Saul, having been rejected by God, asked a "medium" to raise up the prophet Samuel for him. Since Samuel had died some years before this passage is often taken as evidence that the "soul" survives the death of the body. In reality what Saul's visit to the witch at Endor teaches us about the state of the dead makes this strange passage "the exception that proves the rule." Note the following:*

- 1. Neither the word "soul" nor the word "spirit" appear anywhere in this passage (in the original language).*
- 2. Solomon, despite being familiar with this incident, could write (only 80 years later) "the dead know nothing" (Ecclesiastes 9:5).*
- 3. Samuel is said to have come "up from the ground" (13, 15); he did not (as many would expect) come "down from Heaven."*
- 4. Samuel appeared as he had died, as "an old man in a robe." (14). Do "disembodied souls" appear old? Do "immortal spirits" wear robes?*
- 5. Samuel asked Saul, "Why have you disturbed me?" (15), as if he had been asleep not consciously alive in Paradise or Heaven.*
- 6. Samuel told Saul, "tomorrow you and your sons will be with me." (19). Saul did not go to heaven. At death, good and bad, human and animal alike go to one place, the grave (Eccl. 3:20).*

*Surely God would not suffer his holy prophet to be at the beck and call of one under sentence of death according to His divine law (Ex. 22:18, Isa. 8:19). Rather, God himself probably caused Samuel to rise bodily from the dead and to appear there; to return to the grave immediately afterwards.*

*Nothing in this passage leads me to believe anything other than that in the normal course of events, "Man is destined to die once and after that, when Jesus comes, to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27). This passage does however remind me also that I cannot put God in a box. He will do what he will do whether it fits with my nice, neat, notions about how the world works or not.*

David Burge

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# The Intermediate State

Continuing  
2 Corinthians 5

## in Paul

Part Thirteen  
By Carl Josephson

**Verse 4** “For indeed being in this tent, we groan being burdened, because we wish not to put off but to put on over, so that the mortal may be swallowed up by life”

This is a key verse because it sums up the preceding verses from 4:7 and outlines Paul’s hope. It can be readily seen to fit firmly within Paul’s eschatological dualism. This life (in this tent) is characterised not by glory and honour but by groaning under a burden. The burden being our ‘jars of clay’ (4:7), our ‘afflictions’, ‘difficulties’, ‘persecutions’ and ‘being struck down’ (4:8-9), our ‘mortal flesh’ (4:11), ‘death at work in us’ (4:12), our ‘wasting away’ (4:16), and our ‘slight momentary affliction’ (4:17). But our groaning is in anticipation of what is ‘unseen’ (4:18), ‘that [he] will raise us with Jesus’ (4:14), and the ‘building from God’ (5:1), because our hope is not here and now but in the eternal promises of God.

Once again we face the issue of nakedness, this time expressed as being unclothed, and once again Paul rejects it. “To be without a body of any kind would be

a form of spiritual nakedness or isolation from which his mind shrank.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, “Paul could evidently not contemplate immortality apart from resurrection, for him a body of some kind was essential to personality.”<sup>2</sup> Whether it is disembodied existence or the shame of failure before God is of little consequence because Paul says that it is not what he is hoping for. Instead he seeks to be ‘further clothed’ and for the mortal to be ‘swallowed up by life’. Both these images are present in 1 Corinthians 15:54 where ‘the perishable has been clothed with imperishability’ and ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory’. Gillman again notes, “it is not the mortal body, but rather that which is mortal in the person that is swallowed up.”<sup>3</sup>

The phrase ἐφ’ ᾧ is disputed but “most commentators and grammarians believe it ... should be translated causally ‘for the reason that’ or ‘because.’”<sup>4</sup> So in effect Paul could be contrasting his hope with the hope of two groups of opponents – those who have hope in future disembodied existence and those who have hope in this present life. This is, of

course, because Paul’s hope is neither in man’s make-up (an immortal soul), nor in this life (because we are mortal), but in the resurrection of Jesus as “first fruits” (1 Cor 15:20), and in “the one who raised the Lord Jesus” (2 Cor 4:14). We therefore agree with Ellis when he writes, “Paul posits neither a division of the self nor an escape from materiality at death but a ‘changed’ (1 Cor. 15:52) psychosomatic organism which envelops and pervades the whole personality and finds its fulfilment in the deliverance of the whole man at the resurrection.”<sup>5</sup>

**Verse 5** “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”

What thing has God prepared us for? Immortality, the further clothing of ourselves with the dwelling from God. How has he prepared us for it? Not only by our suffering and affliction, but also, more importantly, by the same “divine power that enables Paul to survive” this suffering and affliction also “transform(ing) his being.”<sup>6</sup>

Why is Paul so sure of this? Because of the 'the Spirit as a guarantee' or 'pledge' or 'first instalment'. Once again we can turn to Paul's opponents as revealed in this letter and surmise that those who claimed glory and fulfilment now regarded Paul's afflictions as sure evidence of God's disfavour upon him. Paul's claim is that, quite to the contrary, his afflictions are part of God's plan. It is God's purpose that in our weakness he can be made strong because, as Paul writes, 'when I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Corinthians 12:10). A similar idea occurs in Romans 8:28-30 and 35-39 where Paul writes that 'all things work together for good' and that 'nothing can separate him from the love of God'. The link is that appearances can be deceptive; God often uses apparent defeat or loss to show power and bring about victory.

Linda Belleville suggests that the full payment (completing the part payment of the Spirit as guarantee) that "Paul looks forward to is a complete transformation of a perishable, mortal mode of existence into an imperishable, immortal mode of existence."<sup>7</sup> The term "mode of existence" we support because it implies both transformation and continuity of the whole being. Belleville further points out that it is the "Spirit that provides the line of continuity

between these present and future modes of existence."<sup>8</sup>

**Verse 6** "So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord"

Once again we find Paul using language that appears nowhere else in the Greek New Testament. Verse 6, 8 and 9 contain the only occurrences of ἐνδημέω ("be at home") and ἐκδημέω ("be absent"). So our first question is what does 'at home in the body' mean? One possible understanding of this is as the soul dwelling in the body, but as we have noted earlier this is not a concept that Paul affirms elsewhere. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor suggests it is a concept or slogan of Paul's opponents.<sup>9</sup> While we agree with Murphy-O'Connor's point that up to this stage Paul could be accused of denigrating this life, and therefore the body, the flow of verse 6 doesn't suggest that "he suddenly perceived" this after verse 6a and abruptly changed course in verse 6b.<sup>10</sup> The phrase καὶ εἰδότες ὅτι firmly links the two parts together. 'καὶ' is capable of a number of interpretations<sup>11</sup> but even the emphatic ('yet', 'even', 'also' or 'but') doesn't break the link between the two first person plural present participles ('having courage' and 'knowing') suggesting a continuity of subject so that those who are confident are

also those who know that being at home in the body means being away from the Lord. Thus, although Murphy-O'Connor's theory might fit comfortably with our thesis, we must discard it and look elsewhere for understanding.

The Louw, Nida Greek-English Lexicon suggests that this phrase is an idiom meaning "as long as we are alive here on earth."<sup>12</sup> If so, 'to be at home in the body' is to live in this world with all the limitations and hardships of real life, and this would fit with the overall context of Paul's argument in which he is contrasting this life with that which is to come. Belleville agrees, rejecting any notion of anthropological dualism and suggesting 'Body' and 'Lord' "merely represent two different places that [Paul] can call *home*."<sup>13</sup>

What then shall we make of 'to be away from the Lord'? Is this acknowledging the relational separation caused by our sinfulness or the spatial separation caused by our creatureliness, our present mode of existence? Paul writes in Romans 8:38-39 of his confidence that nothing can separate him from God's love.<sup>14</sup> He also knew that the Holy Spirit was in and with him.<sup>15</sup> So if he is 'away from the Lord' it indicates not an absolute but rather a relative degree of separation - while here in this life he could not

experience the fullness of God. This is in apparent contrast to some of his opponents who have an 'over-realised eschatology',<sup>16</sup> where all the blessings of Christ are claimed or expected in the present.

We conclude that Paul is primarily thinking of the spatial separation but does not rule out the possibility of an incomplete relationship with his Lord while in this life. Paul understands being at home with the Lord would move him from living by faith to living by sight,<sup>17</sup> when he would see Christ 'face to face' (1 Cor. 13:12). This, once again, is indicative of Paul's understanding that he was living in the tension of the two ages – a paradoxical situation where nothing could separate him from the love of God yet he was at one and the same time 'away from the Lord'.

Does Paul indicate that the transition from being away to being with the Lord is accomplished at the moment of death? No. He indicates that this life separates him but simply remains silent in this verse as to when the transition takes place. However he has already made it perfectly clear in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4 that he understands the moment of transformation to be at the *parousia*. He does not mention time or the 'intermediate state' here. He

is simply expressing his conviction that in this life he will not experience the fullness of Christ, but that he will in the age to come, and his hope is confirmed by the 'Spirit as a guarantee' (v5).

**Verse 7** "for we walk by faith, not by sight."

This verse simply sums up Paul's whole approach to life. He does not judge things by how they seem but rather with the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16; cf. Phil 2:5 - Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.) It also contrasts how Paul judges his ministry with some who suggest, from appearances, that it is either inauthentic or of little value.

**Verse 8** "We are of good cheer then and think it good rather to go away from home out of the body and to come home to the Lord."

Having shunned the idea of nakedness in vv3-4 some propose that Paul now thinks it actually preferable to this life because he would be at home with the Lord.<sup>18</sup> W.L. Craig describes this as the traditional view in which "the intermediate state is essentially both undesirable and desirable... (and)... is self-contradictory."<sup>19</sup> Lincoln understands this as not being contradictory but rather indicative of "precisely the kind of psychologically sound tension that a man

could express when caught in the grasp of strong ambivalent feelings."<sup>20</sup> He further suggests that "an excessive fear" of a Hellenistic anthropology has led some to "strange alternative interpretations."<sup>21</sup> His preference is a "temporary duality", citing Philippians 1:23 and the fact that this same form of dualism is present in "apocalyptic and rabbinic concepts (that) provide the framework in which Paul develops his thoughts about the role which heaven will play for the believer after death."<sup>22</sup> Once again we suggest that Philippians 1:23 does not support this (see next chapter) and that there is no need to interpret Paul outside of the anthropological monism of the First Testament.<sup>23</sup>

Ellis has noted that 'to be/go away from the body' has consistently been understood as describing the intermediate state.<sup>24</sup> He proposes that the phrase could be simply understood as the reverse of 'at home in the body' v6, which we have already suggested, following Robinson, means 'in the solidarities and securities of earthly existence.'<sup>25</sup> This being the case, verse 8 shows Paul's desire is to leave earthly existence and have the solidarities and securities of the new age. In other words his desire is identical with that expressed in verse 4,

