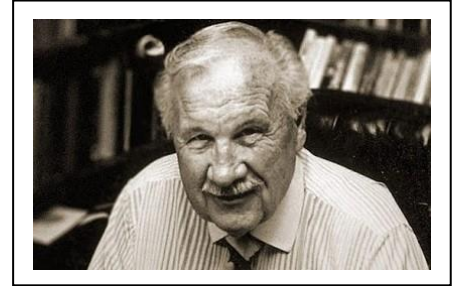


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Time and Eternity

RAY C. STEDMAN

Ever since the publication of H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* in 1895, people have been captivated by the idea of traveling in time. In that book, a scientist builds a time machine, travels far into the future, then returns and tells his astonished friends what the world will be like in 800,000 years! What most people fail to realize is that we don't need a machine to travel through time.



The truth is, we are all time travelers. We are all traveling toward the future at a rate of one second per second, and there's nothing we can do to stop ourselves from time traveling.

And at the end of our journey through time is a destination we can scarcely imagine—a destination called Eternity.

Everything in Scripture points to Eternity, and everything within us cries out for it. As Solomon observed in the Old Testament, God “has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). God designed us to live in Eternity. His work with us is not finished in this life.

We have already seen that authentic Christianity is far more than a “pie in the sky, by and by” religion. It is magnificently designed for life on earth, right now, with all its pressures and problems, its joys and tears. But there is yet more for us to experience. God has prepared something incomprehensibly beautiful for those who love Him and trust Him—something that lies beyond time, something so beautiful and vast and breathtaking that only Eternity is big enough to contain it. The Apostle Paul tells us about the wonders of Eternity in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18—and his description of eternity gives us grounds for confidence and courage as we face the trials and pressures of the present time:

Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

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Paul states plainly that what we are going through now is only preparing us for something yet to come—something so glorious and so different from what we have known that it is “beyond all comparison.” In the words of Robert Browning's “Rabbi Ben Ezra” —yet in a way far more true than Browning ever intended—Paul is saying:

*Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life,
for which the first was made.*

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This is the Christian hope. It is more than merely looking on to life beyond the grave. It declares that everything which happens to us in this life is directly related to what is coming—in fact, is getting us ready for it. Nothing, then, is purposeless or futile in our present experience. It is all necessary to the ultimate end.

THE INCREASING BEAUTY WITHIN

The apostle suggests three aspects of our present experience as believers which indicate that something much greater is coming. First, there is the daily inner renewal which we experience as Christians. “Though outwardly we are wasting away,” Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:16, “yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” The sharp contrast he draws is between the effects of aging upon the body—particularly our lessening physical power and approaching death—and the increase of wisdom and the mellowing of love which mark the spirit of one who walks with God. There is a beauty about godly old age which youth knows nothing of. The spirit broadens and grows serene though the body trembles and feels increasing pain.

What is happening? The outer man is losing the battle; the strength of youth falters and fades, the night is coming on. But the inner man is reaching out to light, growing in strength and beauty; the day is at hand. This inner renewal is another way of describing the new covenant in action. “Everything coming from God, nothing from me.” The law of sin and death is destroying the body; the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is renewing the spirit and also the soul “from one degree of glory to another.” To see this happening in oneself or in another is to be convinced that something wonderful lies ahead.

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THE AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN VIEW OF TRIALS

Furthermore, the apostle stoutly declares that it is our very trials and hardships which actually produce the glory to come! "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Surely there is a twinkle in Paul's eye when he writes, "our light and momentary troubles," in view of what he at a later time describes.

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. (2 Corinthians 11:24-27).

That is what Paul calls "our light and momentary troubles." But he was not complaining. He made light of it simply because he was aware of something we often forget. He knew that these painful trials were actually preparing the "weight of glory" which was coming! Notice he does not say that these trials were preparing him for the glory. While that was true, it wasn't what he said here. The trials were creating the glory!

Perhaps this throws some light upon a strange statement which Jesus made to his disciples in the upper room. In saying that he was going away, he added, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2, KJV). This cryptic statement seems to suggest that heaven was not yet ready and needed some additional work before any guests arrived! But if we link it with the further explanation which Jesus gave them ("but if I go, I will send him [the Holy Spirit] to you," John 16:7), we have the strong suggestion that his way of preparing a place for them was to send the Holy Spirit to them. The Spirit, when he came, would give them the power to handle the pressures and pains of life ("hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; ... struck down, but not destroyed") and in the mystery of redemption, transmute each trial into a corresponding glory. Thus, the trials were preparing the glory; the hardships were preparing "the place" for them. Jesus was doing it by means of the Spirit.

VALUABLE CHAINS

There is a moving story which comes out of the persecution of the Christians in the third and fourth centuries. One aged saint had spent many years in a dark and gloomy

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dungeon, bound by a great ball and chain. When the emperor Constantine ascended the throne, thousands of Christians were released from imprisonment, and among them this old man. Desiring to recompense him for his years of misery, the emperor commanded that the ball and chain be weighed and the old man given the equivalent weight in gold. Thus, the greater the weight of his chain, the greater was his reward when release came.

But the reality Paul speaks of is even greater than this. He says the weight of glory will be beyond all comparison. The Greek expression is, literally, “abundance upon abundance.” It is such an abundance that it constitutes a great “weight.” We speak of the “weight of responsibility” not always as a burden but often as a challenge. Here is the great challenge of a weight of glory, offering indescribable opportunity to those for whom it is prepared.

It seems clear, then, that something tremendous is ahead. Not only does daily inner renewal suggest it, and our present affliction is preparing it, but the very nature of faith itself guarantees it. “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). Paul's argument here is very simple. The visible things of this life are but transient manifestations of abiding realities which cannot now be seen. If the transient form can exist, surely the reality behind it exists. The truly important thing is not the passing form but the eternal reality; consequently, the important thing in life is not to adjust oneself to the changing form, but to relate always to the abiding truth. It is the argument of Hebrews 11:8,10, and 27—

By faith Abraham ... [looked] forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ... By faith [Moses] left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

The best is yet to be

Well, what is it, that is coming? Like a good chef, Paul has been whetting our appetites and stimulating our anticipation by veiled references to some breathtaking experience yet to come. But now he grows specific. In chapter five he describes the weight of glory in more explicit terms:

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. (2 Corinthians 5:1-4).

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“A building from God”? “Not built by human hands”? “Our heavenly dwelling” What do these expressions refer to? They are obviously set in direct contrast to “the earthly tent we live in,” our present body of flesh and bones. But before we take a closer look at these phrases, note how definite and certain Paul is. See how he begins: “We know. . .” There is nothing uncertain about it at all.

Many today, as in the past, are trying to guess what lies beyond death. Some have supposed that the spirit of man departs, only to return in some reincarnation of life as another human being. The evidence used to support this is usually the testimony of certain persons (often given through a medium or in a hypnotic state) who apparently recall whole episodes from their previous existence. But it must be remembered that the Bible consistently warns of the existence of “lying spirits” or demons who have no compunctions about representing themselves to be the spirits of departed persons and who take delight in deceiving humans.

Others have suggested that knowledge of such things is put beyond us, that the only proper approach to life is to view everything as tentative, nothing can be depended on for sure. But Jesus and the apostles never speak that way. Christ said that he came to tell us the truth, that we might know. The Apostle John underlines this point again and again, saying, “These things are written that you might know.” So Paul says here, we know certain things about life beyond death.

Well, what do we know? First, says Paul, we know that we now live in an earthly tent. Twice he calls the present body a tent. Tents are usually temporary dwellings. Once I visited a family who lived in a tent in their yard while waiting for their new house to be finished. It wasn't very comfortable, but they were willing to put up with it until they could move into their real house. This is the case, Paul says, with Christians. They are living temporarily in tents.

Further, he says that in this tent we both groan and sigh. Do you ever listen to yourself when you get up in the morning? Do you ever groan? It is quite evident that the apostle is right, isn't it? There is the groan of daily experience. Perhaps the tent is beginning to sag. The cords are loosening and the pegs are growing wobbly. There may also be the sigh of expectancy. “We groan and are burdened,” says the apostle, “because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling.” No one wishes to be disembodied (which is what “unclothed” truly means), but nevertheless, we do long sometimes for something more than this body offers. We feel its limitations. Have you ever said when invited to do something, “I wish I could; the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak”? That is the sigh of anxiety, longing to be further clothed.

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THE HEAVENLY HOUSE

In contrast to this temporary tent in which we now live, the apostle describes the permanent dwelling waiting for us when we die. It is “a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.”

This is the indescribable “weight of glory” which is now being prepared for us by the trials and hardships we experience. If the present tent is our earthly body, then surely this permanent dwelling is the resurrection body, described in 1 Corinthians:

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

If the apostle can describe our physical body as a tent, then it is surely fitting to describe the resurrection body as a house. A tent is temporary; a house is permanent. When we die, we will move from the temporary to the permanent; from the tent to the house, eternal in the heavens. This resurrection body is further described:

For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:53-55).

When we compare this passage with the one we are considering in 2 Corinthians 5, we note that the word for “clothed” (“longing to be *clothed* with our heavenly dwelling”) is exactly the same Greek word as the one translated put on in 1 Corinthians 15 (“the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable”). This present perishable body of ours must be *clothed* with imperishable life, and this present mortal nature must be clothed with immortality. It is at that time, says Paul, that “death is swallowed up in victory.” Compare that with the statement of 2 Corinthians 5, “that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.” The two passages are clearly parallel and the “house not made with hands” is the resurrection body of 1 Corinthians 15.

But this poses a serious problem with some. They say, “Well, if the building of God is the resurrection body, then what does a believer live in while he is waiting for the resurrection body? Resurrection won't occur till the second coming of Jesus. What about

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the saints who have died through the centuries? Their bodies have been placed in the grave and won't arise until the resurrection; what do they live in during the interim?"

To this problem three widely varying answers have been posed. One is that departed saints have no bodies until the resurrection. They are with the Lord but as disembodied spirits, incomplete until regaining their bodies at the resurrection. But this view ignores Paul's words, "Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, *we will not be found naked*. ... We do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling." Furthermore, the language of both 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 5 seems to imply an immediate donning of the resurrection body. There is no hint of any waiting period.

A second answer to the problem is that of soul sleep. This theory says that when a believer dies his soul remains asleep within the dead body. When the body is raised at the resurrection, the soul awakens. But because it has been asleep since death, it has no knowledge of the intervening time and no awareness of having been asleep. This concept solves the problem of the missing bodies but directly contravenes such Scriptures as the Lord's words to the thief on the cross, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43), and Paul's declaration, "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Still a third group proposes to solve the problem by suggesting that the house not made with hands is not the resurrection body at all but an intermediate body which God gives the believer to live in until the resurrection. Presumably, at that time, the intermediate body is dissolved and only the resurrection body exists. But it is difficult to square that with the description of the house not made with hands as being "eternal in the heavens." Such a view also destroys the parallelism of 2 Corinthians 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. Since there is no hint anywhere in Scripture of the existence of an intermediate body, the view seems hardly tenable.

THE PROBLEM DISAPPEARS

The problem these strange answers propose to solve is really no problem at all. It arises only when we insist on projecting the concepts of time into eternity. We constantly think of heaven as a continuation on a larger and perfect scale of life on earth. Locked into our world of space and time, we find it very difficult to imagine life proceeding on any other terms. But we must remember that time is time and eternity is eternity and never the twain shall meet. We experience something of the same difficulty in dealing with the mathematical concept of infinity. Many people imagine infinity to be a very large number, but it is not. The difference is that if you subtract 1 from a very large number, you have one less, but if you subtract 1 from infinity you still have infinity.

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Dr. Arthur Custance, a Canadian scientist who is also a remarkable Bible scholar and author of a series of biblical-scientific studies called *Doorway Papers*, has written something very helpful on this:

The really important thing to notice is that Time stands in the same relation to Eternity, in one sense, as a large number does to infinity. There is one sense in which infinity includes a very large number, yet it is quite fundamentally different and independent of it. And by analogy, Eternity includes Time and yet is fundamentally something other. The reduction of Time until it gets smaller and smaller is still not Eternity. Nor do we reach Eternity by an extension of Time to great length. There is no direct pathway between Time and Eternity. They are different categories of experience. (*Doorway Paper No. 37. Published by the author*)

The thing we must remember in dealing with this matter of life beyond death is that when time ends, eternity begins. They are not the same, and we must not make them the same. Time means that we are locked into a pattern of chronological sequence which we are helpless to break. For example, all human beings sharing the same room will experience an earthquake together. While there are varying feelings and reactions, everyone will feel the earthquake at the same time. But in eternity events do not follow a sequential pattern. There is no past or future, only the present NOW. Within that NOW all events happen. An individual will experience sequence, but only in relationship to himself, and events will occur to him on the basis of his spiritual readiness. No two individuals need, therefore, experience the same event just because they happen to be together.

All this may sound quite confusing, and it is true it contains great elements of speculation. But let us return to the Scriptures and the problem of what happens to the believer when he dies. Holding firmly to the essential point that time and eternity are quite different, then when a believer steps out of time, he steps into eternity. What was perhaps a far-off distant event in time is suddenly present in eternity if one is spiritually prepared for it. Since the one great event for which the Spirit of God is now preparing believers here on earth is the coming of Jesus Christ for his own, that is the event which greets every believer when he dies. It may be decades or even centuries before it breaks into time, but this particular person is no longer in time. He is in eternity. He sees "the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones," just as Enoch did when he was permitted a look into eternity, and at a time when he was the seventh from Adam and the population of the earth was very small (Jude 14).

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WHERE THE AGES MEET

But what is even more amazing is that in the experience of that believer he does not leave anyone behind. All his loved ones who know Christ are there too, including his Christian descendants who were not even born yet when he died! Since there is no past or future in heaven, this must be the case. Even those who, in time, stand beside his grave and weep and then go home to an empty house, are, in his experience, with him in glory. Dr. Custance carries this even further.

The experience of each saint is shared by all other saints, by those who have preceded and those who are to follow. For them all, all history, all intervening time between death and the Lord's return is suddenly annihilated so that each one finds to his amazement that Adam, too, is just dying and joining him on his way to meet the Lord: and Abraham and David, Isaiah and the Beloved John, Paul and Augustine, Hudson Taylor and you and I—all in one wonderful experience meeting the Lord in a single instant together, without precedence and without the slightest consciousness of delay, none being late and none too early. (*Doorway Paper No. 37, p.28*)

This truly astonishing quality of eternity is the reason Jesus could promise his disciples with absolute certainty, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:3). That promise not only applied to that generation of Christians, but would apply to all, directly and personally, through all the intervening centuries. This also explains the strange promise at the close of Hebrews 11. Speaking of Abraham, Moses, David, Jacob, Joseph, and others the writer says, “These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:39-40).

To be “made perfect” is to be resurrected, so this passage specifically states that the saints of old will not be resurrected without us. Either they are disembodied spirits waiting for the resurrection (which we have already seen is not likely) or there is some way by which we can leave time one by one and yet participate together in one glorious experience of resurrection. The proper understanding of eternity supplies the answer.

ETERNITY INVADES TIME

There are other references in Scripture that present this same phenomenon of the apparent eclipse of time. For instance, in Revelation 13:8, Jesus is referred to as “the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.” Now the cross occurred at a precise

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moment of history. We know when the Lamb of God was slain. But the Bible says it occurred before the foundation of the world. How can an historical event, which occurred at a certain spot on earth, in the biblical reckoning be said to have occurred before the earth was even made? The passage does not say that the Lamb was foreordained to be slain before the foundation of the world, but it says He was actually slain then. Surely it means that the cross was an eternal event, taking place both in time and eternity. In time, it is long past; in eternity, it forever occurs.

The same is true of the resurrection and even the second coming of Christ. When any Christian dies, he passes from the realm of time and space into timelessness, into the NOW of God, when the full effect of these timeless events is experienced by him to whatever degree his spiritual state requires. But the Lord's return is an event yet to take place in historical time when the Church is complete and the end of the age has come. Perhaps this is the meaning of the Lord's words: "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (John 5:25).

A problem passage for some, in this respect, has been Revelation 6:9-11 where John sees the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God under the altar in heaven. They are crying out to God, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" In response they are told to be patient a little longer until the full count of martyrs is complete. This seems to indicate a sense of time in heaven and a need to wait for something in the future. How do we explain this in the light of what we have just seen regarding time and eternity?

The explanation, of course, is that John, who sees all this, is still a man living in time and space on earth. It is necessary, therefore, that what he sees in heaven be communicated to him in the symbols and language of earth. This is a common phenomenon in the Book of Revelation. In the first chapter John sees Jesus in heaven. Does he really have long white hair and feet like burnished bronze and does a sharp sword come out of his mouth? No, clearly these are symbols which convey to John the power, wisdom, and glory of the Lord Jesus in his glorified, risen estate. The truth conveyed by the vision of the souls under the altar is evidently their identification with and concern for their brethren who are still on earth. They express themselves in terms of time and space in order that John (and we) may understand.

CREATION ON TIP-TOE

Perhaps this also indicates a further condition of the eternal experience: those who have stepped out of time into eternity can, if they so choose, step back into time again, though remaining invisible. That is, of course, exactly what Jesus did repeatedly during his forty-

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day post-resurrection ministry. To those in eternity, time may be like a book on our library bookshelf. If we choose, we can pick up and browse through it at random. We can enter the time sequence found in the book at any place we desire, follow it through for as long as we like, and then lay it down to reenter (in consciousness) the time sequence in which we normally live. In similar fashion those in eternity may select some period of history which they would like to live through and step back into that time, living out its events, though invisibly. This, of course, is pure speculation and may not prove to be true at all, but it does at least fit the suggestion of Scripture that in a resurrected state we will be free from many of the limitations of our present body of flesh.

One thing is clear. Paul looked forward with eager anticipation to the day when he would put off his earthly tent and move into his heavenly dwelling. It would be, he says, a “spiritual” body, not meaning, as many have supposed, a body made up of spirit—something rather ghostly and immaterial—but rather a body fully subject to the spirit, designed expressly for the spirit. In this life, we are forced to say, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” But in the life to come, we can say, “My spirit is willing and the flesh is equal to its demands. Let’s go!” Perhaps a quote from C. S. Lewis will help us understand this point:

The command Be ye perfect is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. He said (in the Bible) that we were “gods” and He is going to make good His words. If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said. (*Mere Christianity*, p. 171)

Yes, something more is coming—something so different from anything we have known up to now that it defies description. Yet it is something so splendid and glorious that, even whispered, it sends chills of expectation down the spine of the universe. Philips' version of Romans 8:18-19 is beautifully expressive of this: “In my opinion whatever we may have to go through now is less than nothing compared with the magnificent future God has in store for us. The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.”

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THE COURAGEOUS LIFE

Lest we become so enraptured with this splendid future that we lose all interest in the present, the apostle wisely reminds us that the key to this future is in our present experience.

Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:5-8).

Twice in this passage Paul says that a clear view of the coming glory should mean that our present life is marked with good courage. Surely that means more than keeping a stiff upper lip. Rather, it means to be full of encouragement, to be joyful, expectant, confident. There are two reasons given for this. First, in preparing us for the glory to come God has given us the Holy Spirit as his guarantee. We do not need to doubt that the resurrection of our body is ahead, for the presence within us of the Spirit of resurrection makes it sure.

Remember that in 2 Corinthians 4 the apostle says, “because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus” (vs. 14). The Spirit knows how to resurrect dead bodies, for He has already done it once. Also, the Spirit has not only effected the resurrection of the body of Jesus but he has also been resurrecting our spirits every day since we became Christians. “Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” How many times has the Spirit brought you back from a sense of death and darkness to renewed life, interest, and vitality? That power to renew is our guarantee that God will bring us to glory.

THE OPERATIVE PRINCIPLE

The second reason for confidence in the present hour is that though the resurrection life will be mind-blowing beyond description, it is nevertheless true that we are learning how to handle the resurrection body by the way we handle our present body now. Though resurrection will be something new, it will not be *entirely* new; even though it will be strange, it won't be that strange. Somewhere C. S. Lewis has said that these present bodies are given to us much as ponies are given to English schoolboys—to learn to ride “the ponies” in order to be ready for the glorious stallions that are even now arching their necks and pawing the floor in the heavenly stables.

What is it we are learning now that will be so necessary then? It is to walk by faith and not by sight! That is the operative principle of eternity, and we must learn it here. Certain

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hymns have reflected the idea that when we get to heaven we will no longer need to walk by faith but can then walk by sight. It is true that we will then “see” the Lord, but that in no way will eliminate our need to respond to him. In fact, it will increase it! Faith is the human response to a divine offer. As we live by means of Christ now—by faith in Him—so we will need to live by means of Christ then, by responding to his life and love.

It is for this reason that Paul uses the term “at home” to describe both our present experience in an earthly body and the coming experience when we are “with the Lord.” We are now “at home” in the body, though away from the Lord. Then we shall be away from the body, but “at home” with the Lord. In either case, we are “at home.”

All our tenderest associations gather around the word “home.” It is where we feel relaxed, at ease, natural. And when we step into the stunning glory awaiting us, we will feel the same way—at home, relaxed, at ease, because we have not changed our basic method of operation. At home, here in the body, we are learning to walk by faith in a way that feels natural and comfortable. At home with the Lord, it will be the same.

This was Paul's own experience in that strange episode he recounts for us in 2 Corinthians 12. There he says he was caught up in the third heaven, the very Paradise of God. But twice he says he did not know whether he was in the body or out of it. Though the experience was beyond description, and he heard and saw things he could not utter, yet it was not unnatural. Paul was simply not aware of his body.

He was too much at home to notice.

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