

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

Paul, never short of metaphors, today offers two relating to Christian death. For believers, death is like a day when we will change our residence, and it is definitely a move to a nicer neighborhood, from a temporary tent to an eternal house (5:1). Death is also like going from a state of nakedness to putting on clothes. Being clothed is, generally speaking, a much more secure feeling than being naked. So in both metaphors, death is presented as something positive. For believers, death is actually our preference! "We are of good courage...and prefer to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (5:8). And there is a third metaphor! Death is like going home.

Of course, only those who look at death by faith rather than by sight possess such an attitude about it. To the eye, death seems to be anything but favorable. The world recoils at the thought of dying (and so they should), but we face it courageously knowing it promises better things for us. Twice Paul refers to our current "groanings," alternately translated as "deep sighs." Our hearts are longing for the place for which we've been prepared, longings which are birthed by the indwelling Holy Spirit who has been given to us by God as a "pledge," or "down payment," of our future inheritance. The best is yet to come! This life is the only hell believers will ever know, while this life is the only heaven unbelievers will ever experience.

Knowing what is to come motivates us to strive to please God now, because we also know that our first stop on the other side of death is repayment at the judgment seat of Christ. Everyone, believers and unbelievers alike, will stand before Christ to give an account (and this is certainly illustrated in the judgment of the sheep and goats of which Jesus spoke in Matthew 25). Everyone will be repaid, reaping what they have sown. That is a very fearful thing for those who have never repented (5:11). Believers will be rewarded for the good they have done, but obviously, they will also suffer loss for the good that they could have done, but didn't. So judgment won't necessarily be all joy for every believer. For pseudo-believers, like the goats Jesus spoke of in Matthew 25, there will be great shock, followed by weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Take note of Paul's words, "Having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died" (5:14). That is, because of the fact that Jesus died for everyone, we know that everyone was spiritually dead. This one verse exposes the error found in the Calvinistic concept known as "Limited Atonement," the idea that Jesus only died for those who were allegedly pre-selected by God. Paul clearly states that Jesus died for all, and not "all" in the sense that Calvinists twist it to mean "all who were preselected to be saved." No, Paul states that because Jesus died for all, we can therefore be sure that "all died." Calvinists universally agree that all unregenerate people are spiritually dead, and not just those who are allegedly pre-selected to be saved. So if the "all" in the second part of that verse means "all human beings" (which it must) then the "all" found just two words earlier also refers to all human beings. There is no way to escape this fact.

Why did Jesus die for all? "So that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again" (5:15). There's the gospel in a nutshell. Jesus died, not just to forgive us, but to make us holy, or as Paul said, "so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (5:21). One must ignore the context of 5:21 to claim, as so many do, that Paul was speaking only of our being made "legally righteous" without being made practically righteous. True Christians have been made "new creatures" (5:17), people who have been spiritually reborn and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, all so they might live righteously. As John would later write, "Make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous (1 John 3:7).