

ABSENT FROM THE BODY

by Tom Ballinger

Some of the traditional Christian doctrine is based upon expressions found in the Bible, but is completely opposite of the truth the Word of God is conveying. This is a result of disregarding the context in which the words or expressions are found.

The arrangement of the words in the Bible are perfect, just as the truth revealed by them, and contained in them. The arrangement and order of the words are Divine. It is a crime for anyone to subvert the arrangement and order, either by ignoring this or changing it.

Beware of any teacher or preacher who does not make the context completely clear. Beware of anyone who quotes passages of Scripture as they develop doctrine without making the context manifestly essential for its development. Some passages of Scripture derive their chief importance **from the place we find them**. Every passage has its own particular place in Scripture, and there is a Divine reason why it is there and why it is not in any other place.

It is essential that if we are to understand the words of God, we must discover why they are where we find them. Likewise, we should discover why they are not in any other passage. In order for the words and the Word of God to be a delight, we must have regard for the context, otherwise we are at the mercy of those who propagate false doctrine using the words of God to prove that which is untrue. To disregard the context of a word, a sentence, or a verse can be interpreted in a manner which is foreign to its original intent.

All of us have heard the old proverb: "The Bible can be used to prove anything." This is true only when there is a disregard to the context from which words or verses are taken. If the context is duly considered, the words or verses could never be made to teach anything different from the context to which God has set it.

Every sentence or verse has something going before it and something following it. To understand the meaning it is absolutely essential that the context be regarded. This is true with human writers. Quite often we have heard complaints made by public speakers and writers that only a part of what they said was quoted, and the result was a false conception given of what they meant. Had the quoted statement been given in its proper context, a quite different complexion would have been given to the point referred.

If this is important where man is concerned, how much more important is it when God's Word is concerned? Words and expressions in the Bible are God's. Thus, it is God's context and not man's. Beware of those who claim to be "called of God" but are so presumptuous to disregard God's context. However, this is constantly done in order to "prop up" some traditional "Christian doctrines."

"Absent from the body" (2 Cor. 5:8) is an expression taken out of context by Christendom. It is used as a motto or a proverbial expression. This expression is often quoted as conclusively settling a

disputed question concerning “sudden death, instant glory.” How often have we heard “absent from the body, present with the Lord” quoted as though it asserted that the moment a believer is “absent from the body” he is “present with the Lord”? Many people will be surprised to know that this is not what it says. God did not say that through Paul in 2 Cor. 5:8. To say He did is to misquote and misrepresent Him. What was said is quite a different thing.

“We are...willing rather to be absent from the body, AND TO BE PRESENT WITH THE LORD.”

THE CONTEXT OF 2 CORINTHIANS 5:8

“Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal”. (2 Cor. 4:14-18).

Verse 14 opens with “Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus SHALL RAISE UP US (i.e. Paul) ALSO BY JESUS AND SHALL PRESENT US WITH YOU.” This is clearly a reference to the resurrection. This is the Divine support Paul had which enabled him to go through troubles he enumerated in verses 8-12: he was willing to go through troubles as on every side and perplexity (vs. 8), persecution and being cast down (vs. 9), bearing about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus (vs. 10), and always being delivered unto death for Jesus sake (vs. 11). This he could endure because he knew that he would be raised from the dead along with the Corinthian believers. He fainted not at all of his trials because he had the promise of God that he would be raised up from among the dead. In light of God’s promise of resurrection, Paul viewed these afflictions as but light, and when weighed in the light of the eternal they were but for a moment. Therefore, Paul looked at the things which were not seen as yet, the glorious bodies of resurrection. The things that were seen were perishing, (i.e. the earthly bodies which were mortal, this was the outward man). Resurrection was Paul’s grounds for confidence, and the reason for not fainting in his labors of ministry.

CHAPTER 5 OF 2 CORINTHIANS

Chapter 5 begins with the word “for” which shows that it is the conclusion of what he had begun in the latter part of Chapter 4. The subject is Resurrection in view of the perishing outward man day by day. The comforting conclusion is found in verses 5:1-8

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle (i.e., the outward man) were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens” (vs.1).

The "building of God, a house not made with hands" is a reference to a resurrection body. This is what Paul referred to in 4:18 – things not seen. He saw it by faith, not with the naked eye.

"For in this (i.e. earthly house), we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven" (i.e. a resurrection body from heaven) (vs. 2).

The outward man was perishing, and Paul earnestly desired and groaned to put on the immortal body which was from heaven. This would not be at death, but at the time of resurrection or "rapture."

"If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed (i.e. dead or naked), but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (vss. 3-4).

In plainer words, Paul's desire was to be clothed with the body made without hands, a building of God which he would receive at the coming of the Lord. He did not long to be found naked or unclothed for that would mean the grave for him. His hope was not to die, for the state of the dead was likened to being unclothed. Yes, he did hope for and long for "the change" when mortality would be swallowed up of life.

Mortality would be swallowed up of life at the time the Lord Jesus Christ would "descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thess, 4:16). The dead in Christ would be the believers who died prior to the Lord's second coming. They were the ones who were considered "unclothed: or "naked" sleeping in the grave; at the shout they would be "clothed upon" with a resurrection body. Paul was assured of this if he fell asleep in Christ, but this was not the way he desired to meet the Lord. He did not look forward to death, because death was an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). He preferred to be alive at the Lord's return: "Then we which ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and SO (i.e. in this manner, by means of resurrection or rapture) shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). The only way to ever be with the Lord is to be "clothed upon with our house which is from heaven."

Paul earnestly desired to be one of those who were alive and remained unto the coming of the Lord, for at that time the Great Change would take place.

*"Behold, I show you a mystery;
We shall not all sleep,
BUT WE SHALL BE CHANGED,
IN a moment,
IN the twinkling of an eye, (When?)
AT the Last trump:
FOR the trumpet shall sound,
AND the dead shall be raised
incorruptible, and
WE SHALL BE CHANGED" (1 Cor. 15:51-52).*

The dead (the corruptible) would put on a resurrection body (incorruptible), and those who were alive and remained (mortal) would experience the great change, they would be made immortal. Thus, the change when "this mortal must put on immortality." Then it shall be brought to pass the saying that is written "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor.15:54).

We will say it again, Paul's earnest hope and great expectation during the Acts period was to be alive when the Lord Jesus returned. Then would he be "clothed upon" with a "building of God, a home not made with hands.

"Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:" (2Co 5:6)

As long as he was at home in the mortal body he would ever be absent from the Lord. His desire was to be present with the Lord. But for him to be present with the Lord he must experience the Great Change; that is to say this mortal body must put on immortality. This would take place when the dead would put on incorruption. Paul was assured of this because he walked by faith believing what God had said, he did not walk by sight. (2 Cor. 5:7).

Now we come to the verse which is traditionally misquoted by Christendom. To say, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord" is a perverted misquotation of God's Words which the Holy Ghost teacheth. To ignore the scope and context within 2 Cor. 5:8 is found, and to ignore the exactness with what is stated, is a little less than a crime. To say "absent from the body, present with the Lord: is to lay aside the hope of resurrection (which is the subject of the passage), and to treat it as though it was unnecessary for resurrection to be "present with the Lord."

"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2Co 5:8).

What Paul was saying could be simply summed up as this: 'We know that if our earthly house were dissolved, we most certainly will be raised from the dead and will put on a heavenly body. This is great assurance, but we desire not to be found naked (i.e. unclothed or dead) at His coming. We groan in this mortal body desiring to be alive when the Lord returns thereby being changed, that mortality might be swallowed up of life (i.e. immortality). For as long as we are in this mortal body we are unable to be present with the Lord. As for me, I am confident and willing rather to be absent from this mortal body and to put on immortality, because only then and in that condition can I be present with the Lord.'

