



TEACH ME ABOUT
HEAVEN
& ETERNAL LIFE

Kenneth E. Sullivan, Ph.D.

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ABOUT HEAVEN
& ETERNAL LIFE

BY KENNETH E. SULLIVAN, Ph.D.

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Introduction

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.

(Colossians 3:1-2 NLT)

One of the most neglected yet most important subjects in the entire Bible is heaven. One of the things of greatest importance to God is that those who turn to Him should make heaven their primary focus and priority. In these opening verses, the apostle Paul strongly urges us as God's people to set our sights on the realities of heaven. In other words, we are compelled to focus on the fact that heaven is a very real place and the future home and destiny of every believer. Those of us who have placed our faith in Christ are joined to Him. We have been raised to new life in Him. Since this is the case, we should keep this reality squarely in mind and be very deliberate in establishing the habit of meditating on heaven and Christ. Paul makes it clear that even though we cannot see Him, Christ is in heaven, seated at God's right hand. Paul includes this information because he wants us to firmly grasp the reality of heaven's existence. He wants us to realize that heaven is not some imaginary fantasyland, but it is real and tangible. It is visible, touchable, and perceivable through the senses.

To help us avoid losing sight of this fact, Paul urges us to, "think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth." Heaven and our future existence with Christ should not be something we only think about occasionally. We should muse and reflect on the joys, realities, and pleasures of heaven on a daily basis until we get there. Keeping heaven in our thoughts is so important to God that He provides us with a great deal of detailed information about it throughout the

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Bible. But when we come to the New Testament, there is a dramatic increase in the information provided about heaven, as well as an increase in the admonitions for us to focus our sights there. We are urged to think and learn about heaven and long for it.

During His time on earth, Jesus spent a great deal of time teaching about heaven and what it is like because He wants us to understand it, see the value of it, and keep our eyes upon it as the ultimate prize of life. When our eyes are fixed on heaven, we are drawn to it. It becomes the treasure that our heart follows. It becomes our life goal and dream.

Jesus also wants His disciples to understand the culture and customs of heaven in order to properly represent it as His ambassadors here on earth. The Bible provides enough descriptive information about heaven for us to examine, study, and commit to memory in order to maintain a focus upon this wonderful place. This information is intended to give us hope, joy, and encouragement as we travel through this life. There is very detailed information about the architectural design of the capital city of heaven, New Jerusalem. There are details about the landscape of heaven, vegetation, animal life, the environment, social life, relationships and activities, glorified human anatomy, diet, and the beauty and splendor of this eternal world. There is more than enough information to fill our minds, lift our spirits, and keep us motivated while we wait for our turn to enter heaven's gates.

Immediately after my wife, Joyce, and I were married, we decided that we wanted to own our own home. We knew that renting was not the best investment, so we began to save money toward our dream house. We lived beneath our means, banking her paycheck and living off of mine. To keep ourselves inspired and encouraged, we sometimes looked at our bankbook to see how much ground we had gained. To really stay inspired, we made a habit of browsing through real estate magazines with pictures of homes in nice neighborhoods that appealed to us. We took weekend drives through some of the neighborhoods we aspired to live in and discussed the subject with friends who were homeowners. This was our way of seeking the thing we had set our hearts on. These exercises helped to make our dream of owning a home more real and tangible. It filled us with hope, possibility, and anticipation.

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When we had setbacks in our finances, like having to use our savings to repair the car or meet some other unexpected expense, looking at the magazines and visiting the neighborhoods restored our focus. This exercise made the wait more bearable and the sacrifices seem less of a deprivation. It helped us put everything in perspective and keep our hopes, dreams, and expectations alive. It allowed us to continue believing that we would get there, and thus we were encouraged to continue working and saving.

As I worked overtime hours, I would visualize the homes we had looked at and count how many more weeks of saving we would have to do before the goal of home ownership was within our grasp. Finally, after two and a half years of dreaming, looking, and saving, we had enough for the down payment on our first dream home. It was a brick and stone ranch-style home on about half an acre of land in a very nice neighborhood. The home was in excellent condition, so we were able to move right in.

We were able to achieve our goal by keeping our eyes on the prize. This is the same attitude God wants us to have about heaven. We are urged to keep it fresh in our minds and thought lives. To give food for our imagination to feast on, God has revealed many fascinating details to His prophets and apostles, who then recorded these revelations and experiences and passed them on to us in the Holy Scriptures. We are urged to formulate visual images by reading, re-reading, and memorizing these passages, along with imagining what it will be like to live in that wonderful place. No mortal eye has seen the complete picture of heaven, but a number of eyewitnesses have seen different details of it. Like pieces of a puzzle, these bits of information can be fitted together to create a picture of our future homeland. Throughout human history, God has spoken to the world through His prophets, but in the latter days He sent His own Son to communicate directly with humanity (Hebrews 1:1-2). Jesus has given us more information about heaven than any other person, except the apostle John.

We have taken these many bits of information and fitted them together in such a way as to answer important questions about this mystical place and assist the reader in conceptualizing a fuller view of heaven, our eternal home.

CHAPTER 1

After Death, Life Goes On

From the very beginning of human history, fear has been the common reaction on the part of those facing the prospect of the end of life and familiar things. To be faced with the specter of being suddenly snatched from everything we know and are familiar with and thrust into something completely unknown is justifiably frightening. William Randolph Hearst, the newspaper magnate of yesteryear, so feared death that he prohibited anyone from mentioning the word or speaking about death. Yet Jesus makes the startling statement that we need not fear death (Matthew 10:28).¹

Since the time of Adam, people have watched friends and loved ones depart this life and enter the realm that Shakespeare refers to as “the undiscovered country.” Throughout our lives, we’ve watched those around us slip away one by one, never to return. Each time someone we know departs this life, we are reminded that at some uncertain point along the line, our turn will also come.

People of every generation have tried to prepare themselves to face the inevitable in various ways. Some have tried to cope with the anxiety of death by confronting it with courage. Others have sought to trivialize or minimize death in their thinking, seeking to render it an insignificant part of life. Still others have simply concluded that death is only an eternal sleep.

Moreover, ignorance about death has worked through the human imagination to produce a great number of religious superstitions and practices. Some imagine that we die and return

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as either a lower or higher form of life depending upon how good we are. This is the belief system that defines reincarnation. Some religions teach that we become gods. On the other hand, atheism urges us to believe that we simply vanish into nothingness and merely cease to exist.

While there is no denying the fear and terror generated by the thought of leaving this life, most people are also curious about what lies beyond. Many of us hold in tension fear and curiosity about what awaits us after we die. Driven by this need to know the unknown and reconnect with the spirits of the departed, the black art of necromancy arose and has survived throughout the centuries. Some charlatans claiming to have psychic abilities pretend to communicate with the dead. These so-called psychics convince people that those who die are still here on earth and can be summoned by those with a sixth sense.

But what really happens when we die? This curiosity is sparked by our first exposure to death. Every human being is introduced to this enigma as a child. Our first encounter with death may be a lifeless bird or some other tiny creature we happen to stumble upon while playing in the yard. This first introduction to death may be a mild shock delivered by the unfamiliar sight of the stiffened body of something with which we have had no connection and therefore feel no sense of loss. On the other hand, our first encounter may be the heart-rending grief brought on by the death of a beloved pet or even a close relative. We may remember the bitter and sobering sting of death that came when someone explained the loss and separation we would have to learn to live with. It became clear to us that anyone or anything that passes into death will not be returning.

What Happens After Death?

Attached to the understanding that at some point in life everything dies is the fear and dread of our own death. Thoughts about our own mortality have haunted us from childhood. The thing about death that frightens people is the question regarding what happens when we die. Undoubtedly, the apostle Paul had also been curious about this subject while living among people who were also extremely inquisitive. Knowing how important this question

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was to the early Christians, Paul set aside some time and space to address it in several of his letters to the various churches. In his second letter to the church in the city of Corinth, Greece, Paul spoke in great detail about exactly what happens when a Christian dies. It is important to note that Paul was specifically speaking about the fate of Christians after death—not to the world of unbelievers. (We will deal with the fate of non-Christians later.)

After encouraging the Corinthian Christians not to lose heart over the many troubles they were going through (2 Corinthians 4:16-18), Paul launches into the subject of life after death. With eight powerful verses he drives away the fog that has surrounded the issue of death for the Christian. We will use these eight verses to introduce some of what the Bible reveals about the subject of life after death. These verses are only a small part of all that is written in the Scriptures on this important subject. However, as a very important part of the whole puzzle of information, they are critical for helping us understand what happens immediately after the death of those who place their faith in Jesus Christ. To get the most out of these verses, we will examine each one carefully. Opening the fifth chapter of this important letter, Paul writes,

For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.

(2 Corinthians 5:1 NLT)

Paul makes several important points in this verse. First he emphasizes the fact that at some point we will all reach the end of this life in these mortal bodies and die. Of course, the Bible points out elsewhere that there is one exceptional generation. The cycle of death will be interrupted in mid-stride for those Christians who are alive when Jesus returns. They will be instantly transformed from mortal to immortal without ever having to die (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). However, Paul makes it clear that this is the exception to the rule, which is that every person has an appointment with death (Hebrews 9:27). Unless the Lord Jesus returns in our lifetime, we will all keep this appointment. It is just a matter of when and how. Paul says, “We know that *when* we die, . . .” (emphasis author) not *if* “we die.” He wants to convey to us the certainty of death and the subsequent need to prepare for this eventuality.

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Secondly, Paul compares the death of Christian disciples with the act of merely leaving a tent. He uses this analogy because, as a tent maker by trade, he was very familiar with nomadic people who lived in tents and moved about from place to place. When they got ready to move on to another location, they simply took down their tent, packed it away, and relocated.

Paul is not the only biblical author who compares the human body to a tent we live in while here on earth. Peter also refers to his body as a tent and speaks of his impending death as departing his tent (2 Peter 1:13-14). The tent is an excellent analogy because, like the human body, it is a temporal place of habitation that is not made to last forever. Indeed, a tent has an expiration date. It grows old with time and wears out or becomes so damaged that it is no longer inhabitable, so it needs to be replaced.

Paul's third point from verse 1 is that dying is not the end of life. We do not cease to exist, nor do we sleep in the grave, trapped in a decaying body throughout the ages as we wait for the day of resurrection. No! We simply move out of the temporal mortal body, no longer capable of housing the spirit, to live in another dwelling and place. Paul makes it clear that when these tents are taken down, or when we escape these bodies, we go immediately from earth to a place called heaven. He goes on to explain that when we depart from these bodies and move to heaven, God Himself will provide every believer with a brand-new body that will never grow old or wear out. We exit the temporal tent we live in on earth to live in what in contrast would be a palace.

Paul's fourth point from verse 1 is that the new body every Christian will inherit in heaven is made by God, not by human hands. In contrast to the temporary nature of the human body that is brought forth by human sexual means the bodies we can expect to receive in heaven are specifically made by the hands of God, just as Adam's body was created in the beginning. Paul says that we will leave this earth for our home in heaven and the bodies we will occupy are eternal ones that will never perish.

Paul continues his conversation about life after death by highlighting some of the difficulties we experience in our present mortal bodies.

We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put

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on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies.

(2 Corinthians 5:2-3 NLT)

In these two verses, Paul makes two more very important points. First, he reinforces the fact that human beings are spirits that live in bodies. While on earth these bodies are mortal, constructed of flesh and blood and designed to live in the environment of earth for a brief period of time. The duration of life in a mortal body is compared to the brevity of a vapor that appears for a short time and vanishes away (James 4:14). Paul informs us that when death causes a person's body to cease functioning, that person continues to live as a spirit. However, his second point is that we Christians will not be spirits without bodies; instead, we will leave these mortal bodies and put on a new immortal heavenly body as effortlessly as putting on new clothing.

That is exactly how God wants us to look at these bodies we presently inhabit. They are like clothing—earth suits that we use while living on this planet. These bodies are not all there is to us because we only live inside them. When they wear out or are so badly damaged that they can no longer house the spirit, they will be laid aside, and we will be given new eternal ones that will be suitable for living in heaven. When we see the lifeless body of a loved one, we are not looking at the person but at the tent he or she left behind. That's why they are called remains. The body is what the spirit left behind, for the spirit has already departed for another place.

If the person was a Christian, he or she is in heaven with God, the saints, and the angels. Noted evangelist Billy Graham comments on this subject, "Why live in a sea of despair when you can live knowing that, after death, life can be experienced as it was originally intended—in fellowship with our Creator and our Lord? This is the confidence that Christians possess. Death marks the beginning of a new and wonderful life in Heaven with Christ that will last forever. To the believer, death is merely the gateway to eternal life."²

In their book entitled *Beyond Death*, Gary Habermas and J. P. Moreland express it this way: "Immediately after death, a person will continue to be truly alive and conscious, even though

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transformed into a different mode of being. This mode of existence is restful and happy. It is not a period of idleness and inactivity. Far from it.”³

When I was a child, I loved to play in the woods of west Tennessee. Occasionally while climbing a tree I would stumble upon the remains of a katydid. What I saw was the perfect shape of the little insect, but only the discarded shell. The real living insect, having outgrown its skin, would simply crawl out of it through a little slit and move on with its life, leaving the remains—an empty, lifeless shell—behind. This is similar to what happens when a Christian dies. The person moves on but still lives on, leaving the lifeless remains behind.

We look at the remains with pity, thinking that somehow what we see is the actual person. If anyone is to be pitied, it is the people who are left behind to struggle on through life. The believer who departs the temporal body is to be envied, not pitied. This is extremely important because it dispels the notions of soul sleep and wandering human spirits roaming the earth as ghosts. Paul makes it clear that we will not be spirits without bodies in heaven; instead, we will put on new bodies. But when will we receive these new bodies that Paul is speaking about?

There are two major opinions held by Bible scholars regarding this question. The first is that when we die, we will leave these bodies and go immediately to heaven as spirits without bodies. Scholars of this opinion believe we will wait and rest, fully conscious and comfortable, in heaven for the day of the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of the living saints. They believe that on resurrection day, our spirits will return to earth with Christ and enter the new bodies that Christ will instantly resurrect from the grave or from the site of the remains.

Ron Rhodes is among those who hold this opinion. He comments,

The state of our existence between physical death and the future resurrection is properly called “the intermediate state.” It is an in-between state It is the state of our existence in between the time our mortal bodies die and the time we receive our resurrection bodies in the future. The intermediate state, then, is a disembodied state. It is a state in which a person’s physical body is in the grave while his or her spirit or soul is either in heaven with

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Christ or in a place of great suffering apart from Christ. A person's destiny in the intermediate state depends wholly upon whether he or she has placed faith in Christ during his or her earthly existence."⁴

There is a second major opinion concerning the state of Christians in the immediate afterlife. These scholars believe that when Christians die, they receive a body from the Lord immediately upon entering heaven. This second group believes that we will not be spirits without bodies, but rather we will receive some kind of interim body immediately after death. Well-known author Randy Alcorn is among this second group of scholars. He makes the following argument: "It seems possible—though it is certainly debatable—that between our earthly life and our bodily resurrection, God may grant us some physical form that will allow us to function as human beings while in that unnatural state 'between bodies,' awaiting our resurrection."⁵ Paul Enns agrees with Alcorn's position. He remarks,

The Resurrection that the Scriptures describes is the new body we will receive at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:51-53). But what happens at death, before the resurrection? Recall that at the transfiguration of Christ, Moses and Elijah appeared to James, Peter and John (Matt. 17:3). Three disciples recognized Moses and Elijah. Clearly, those two had physical bodies through which they were identifiable. Peter immediately recognized them in their physical form (Matt. 17:4). They are identified as "men" (Luke 9:30), hardly the designation of a spirit. In heaven, prior to the resurrection, the elders are seen falling down and casting their crowns before the throne (Rev. 4:10), all of which necessitates a physical body. They are also seen holding harps and golden bowls (Rev. 5:8). The conclusion? Though we don't know all the specifics of a believer's resurrection . . . those who die before the resurrection of the dead will have intermediate bodies before they receive their final bodies before the resurrection."⁶

Paul seems to suggest as much when he says, "For we will not be spirits without bodies, but we will put on our new heavenly bodies" (2 Corinthians 5:3). Of course, opponents of this view can plausibly argue that Paul is referring to the time when we will put on our resurrection bodies at the return of Christ for His people.

The possibility of living in heaven as a spirit without a body may be a bit disturbing to some. But it might help to realize that God is a Spirit (John 4:24). Angels are also spirits (Hebrews 1:14).

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As spirits they take on human form, eat, talk, see, and hear (Genesis 18:1-8). They wear clothing, experience joy and pleasure, are capable of moving about the universe freely, and have far greater power and intellectual capabilities than mortal, physical human beings.

Regardless to whether we enter heaven and wait as spirits without bodies or have an intermediate body, life in heaven will be far better than what we are now experiencing. In either case we know we will be full of love, joy, and peace and experience great pleasure. We also know that we will rest from all the struggles of life in these present bodies. Even those who believe that we will be disembodied spirits in the interim period agree that life during that time will be far, far better than life as we now experience it.

After positing his theory of a disembodied existence after death, Ron Rhodes goes on to say, “Christians in the intermediate state enjoy a sense of serene rest in the presence of Christ. They have no tedious labors to attend to. All is tranquil . . . This ‘rest’ will be a comprehensive rest. There will be rest from all toil of the body, from all laborious work, from all the diseases and frailties of the body, from all outward sorrows, from all inward troubles, from the temptations and afflictions of Satan, and from all doubts and fears.”⁷

Land of the Dying

Now let’s examine more of what the apostle Paul has to say on the subject of life after death:

While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it’s not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life.

(2 Corinthians 5:4 NLT)

In verse 4, Paul makes four very important points. First, he points out the fact that these bodies we now occupy are in the process of dying. Christians often say that they are grateful to be in the land of the living. But the truth is that we are in the land of the dying. Every living thing on earth is in the process of dying from the moment of conception. From the instant of the merger

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of sperm and egg, we begin moving toward death. Each heartbeat diminishes the number of heartbeats we have left. Each night we lie down leaves us with one less day to live on earth. Our bodies are dying, and we live in a world of dying people and dying things.

As Paul puts it in his second point, “Our dying bodies make us groan and sigh.” The process of dying takes a toll on our bodies, even when we are young. Even children and young adults suffer from illnesses, diseases, and the process of wear and tear on a finite body. We sigh and groan with the agony and pain we sometimes experience in these bodies. These periods of suffering are reminders of the temporal nature of our existence in these mortal bodies. We are especially reminded of our mortality when we begin to grow older.

Wise King Solomon warns of the challenges that come with old age and urges young people not to allow the excitement of youth to cause them to forget about God. Describing the aging process, he writes,

Remember him before your legs—the guards of your house—start to tremble; and before your shoulders—the strong men—stoop. Remember him before your teeth—your few remaining servants—stop grinding; and before your eyes—the women looking through the windows—see dimly. Remember him before the door to life’s opportunities is closed and the sound of work fades. Now you rise at the first chirping of the birds, but then all their sounds will grow faint.

(Ecclesiastes 12:3-5 NLT)

Paul the apostle and Solomon the king were all too familiar with the ravages of age and wear upon the human body. We are born into this world with the human spirit somehow encased within our bodies, and we begin marching toward death. As we grow older, our bodies begin to wear out and we experience pain. Our teeth begin to wear down, our eyesight diminishes, our hair falls out, and our skin wrinkles. Also, our energy level wanes, so we require more rest. We slow down, so the reduced activity coupled with a slower metabolism contributes to weight gain for many of us.

In addition to the aging processes that weigh heavily upon us, there is the assault of sicknesses and sometimes terminal diseases that exacerbate the pain and anguish of living as mortals in this problematic world. We fuss and worry over health care issues and

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rely more and more on our physician's care. We see more and more of our friends and loved ones pass away all around us, constantly reminding us that death is inching closer and closer. All these things tire us out and cause us to begin to grow weary with life in these mortal bodies. The aging process is a reminder to us that we are not designed to live forever in this world in these bodies as they are now.

Along with the physical changes in our bodies, we also grow weary with life emotionally. And with age come fears, phobias, and concerns about things we once paid no attention to. Our deteriorating physical condition makes us less self-sufficient and no longer confident—and more dependent upon others for our well-being. For many elderly people, bouts with loneliness accompany debilitating diseases, as well as a host of other things that are an emotional drain. Our dying bodies also plague us with guilt and condemnation, sinful thoughts, weariness, disappointment, regret, embarrassment, and physical and mental deficiencies. We indeed groan in these bodies.

Paul's third point is that even with all these struggles that we endure in a dying body, we still do not want to die and have no body at all. No, we long to escape the painful torments of living in these dying bodies to enter into the new heavenly ones that God has waiting for us in heaven. This third point seems to support those who believe that we will receive a temporary body immediately after death. Paul says that our bodies are now ready and waiting for our arrival in heaven and we will put on our new body like a new suit of clothes.

Paul's fourth point from verse 4 is that the new bodies we enter will be eternal rather than temporal. These dying bodies will be swallowed up by everlasting life. Life will triumph over death, and we will live forever. We will drink the waters of life freely and be full of energy and vitality in the presence of God, the angels, and the saints (Revelation 21:6).

Prepared to Die

God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit.

(2 Corinthians 5:5 NLT)

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In verse 5 Paul makes it clear that we are not left alone in the struggle of life or when we face death. God has prepared us for the transition by giving us His Holy Spirit as the guarantee or the earnest money. Nowadays in our society we practice a universal custom of demonstrating sincerity and good faith when making a major purchase, such as a house or car, by depositing a down payment or earnest money. In the same way, God has deposited His Spirit in us as His guarantee, demonstrating that the process of the transition from this life into eternal life has already begun. In the midst of all the challenges, pain, and weariness of life and in the face of the terror of death, we are encouraged by the fact that God is present with those of us who turn to Him in faith. He has prepared us for the moment of death and for eternal life with Him. In fact, our entire life on earth is a time of preparation for the end of this earthly life and the beginning of life in heaven.

When the time to die finally comes, there will be no reason to fear because no Christian will have to face death alone and unprepared. King David is famous for saying, “Even when I walk through the darkest valley. I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me . . . Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:4, 6 NLT). God walks with us through life, and He will walk with us through death into the joys and beauty of life everlasting. We are strengthened by His Spirit and presence and filled with inexpressible joy and anticipation because of the future He has in store for us. He infuses us with peace that defies understanding in view of all we face in this world. We enjoy sweet fellowship with God now and anticipate a future of uninterrupted fellowship in a perfect world as we live among perfected people.

But these present blessings are only a foretaste of what is in store for us in heaven. The knowledge of just a tiny fraction of what God has reserved for us is a great part of what sustains us and keeps us looking up and moving forward. As we reflect upon the promises of God, our resolve is strengthened so that we are able to persevere through this life.

Paul continues his discussion of life after death:

So we are always confident, even though we know that

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as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord.

(2 Corinthians 5:6 NLT)

In verse 6 Paul makes it clear that because we have the Holy Spirit, we have confidence that God is with us, even though as long as we are living in these mortal bodies “we are not at home with the Lord.” The tenor of Paul’s words reveals his opinion that living in these mortal bodies is not as good and desirable as being away from them. As long as we live in these bodies, we are away from the Lord. In other words, we are not beholding Him as He is beholding us. We are separated from God by a wall of flesh. Our mortal bodies hold us here in this present world, but when they release us at death, we will instantly be free to go home with the Lord. While we are in these bodies, we cannot see God, but He sees us. We cannot see heaven, but it is real. While we are in these bodies, our physical senses are blind and dumb to the greater reality of heaven and eternal life. Our contact with our God and future home is through the implement of faith. This is exactly what Paul meant when he wrote,

For we live by believing and not by seeing.

(2 Corinthians 5:7 NLT)

Although Paul had witnessed many miracles and on one occasion had even seen heaven, he makes the statement that “we live by believing and not by seeing.” As Christians, we have all had personal experiences with God during which He has revealed Himself in some personal way that boosts our belief that He is true to His Word. However, none of us have really seen heaven, so our imagination is limited regarding what the experience of living in a new, perfect, glorified body in heaven will be like. Yet, having not seen, we believe. We follow after Christ and seek to imitate His lifestyle because we believe. We have not seen Him, yet we love Him and fully expect to be with Him someday.

Moreover, we have God’s written Word and our own personal experience of how He has kept His promise to transform our own lives. We have experienced the birth of a deep desire to live righteously and please Him, suddenly and immediately after being born again. Additionally, we have seen His work of transformation in the lives of fellow believers. With this evidence and many other

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infallible proofs of God's integrity, we fully expect Him to keep His promise to take us home to heaven.

No one is perfect, but every true Christian has been changed. From generation to generation, the lives of those who have truly placed their faith in Christ have been transformed. This reality, coupled with God's Word that encompasses the testimonies of the apostles and prophets and God's promises about the future, is what our faith rests upon. We believe and are confident that while we are living in these bodies, we are not at home in heaven with the Lord. So we live our lives believing that when we leave these bodies, we will be at home with the Lord. This faith dictates how we live our lives in this world. Because we have this expectation of living forever in heaven with Jesus, we aspire to live in this world as He lived. This hope and expectation shapes and colors how we conduct business, how we treat others, how we raise our families, and everything we do in this life. We live our lives by believing, not by seeing.

Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, refused to believe that He had been resurrected from the dead until he had seen Him and felt the wounds in His body. One day Jesus appeared to Thomas and commanded Him to touch Him and feel the wounds that the nails and spear had made. Upon seeing, Thomas believed. Jesus told Thomas he had seen and believed, but those who had not seen and still believe are the ones who are truly blessed (John 20:25-29). Jesus knew that millions upon millions of people, beginning with those who lived during His generation and extending over more than two thousand years, would have to believe without seeing. They would have to rely upon their faith in His written Word, along with their personal relationship and experience with His work in their own lives and the lives of fellow Christians. They would be blessed because they would live their lives based upon their confidence in His promises.

Paul continues his discussion:

Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:8 NLT)

In verse 8, Paul makes the bold statement that he would rather be absent from his body and at home with the Lord. In essence,

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Paul is saying that he is so confident death is the vehicle that will deliver him safely home with the Lord Jesus, he would rather let death have his body and take him home than to continue living in his body and this world. Reading these words from Paul is what inspired Dr. Erwin Lutzer to comment, “Death is the means by which our bodies are put to rest while our spirits are escorted through the gates of heaven Death in the New Testament is transformed from a monster to a minister. What at first seems to box us in, frees us to go to God.”⁸ Of course, in this passage Paul is not thinking of terminating his life. This would have been a terrible sin against God. Instead, he is attempting to help us understand that death holds no terror for Christians and life after the death of these earthly bodies, these tents, is far better than the life we are now living. At death we are freed from the difficulties and limitations that these bodies impose upon us, and we will be at home with the Lord in a perfect paradise. This makes it clear that whatever our state in heaven, whether we are given new temporary bodies immediately or whether we will have to wait as spirits until the day of the resurrection, life in heaven will be sweet.

As she felt her spirit begin to pass from her worn-out mortal body, Lady Glenorchy uttered these final words: “If this is dying it is the pleasantest thing imaginable.”⁹ This understanding of what awaits those who believe in and follow Christ is very liberating.

Chapter 1 | Thought-provoking Questions

1. Why does Paul compare the human body to a tent?
2. When a person dies, does the soul sleep?
3. What happens to a Christian at death?
4. There are two major positions about when the spirit of a departed Christian receives a body again. What are they?
5. Why do they call the body of a dead person “remains”?
6. Why does Paul say he would rather be away from his body (2 Corinthians 5:8)?

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Imagine a world of absolute peace and safety with no war, crime, sickness, pain, death, or fear of any kind. Picture a world where lions and lambs lie down together and children play with wild beasts. Imagine a new earth with the perfect climate, pristine lakes, towering mountains, crystal-clear rivers, beautiful gardens, exotic and familiar plant and animal life, and trees that produce fruit every month. Imagine a cube-shaped city of light, constructed entirely of transparent gold and jewels and extending fourteen hundred miles in every direction and fourteen hundred miles out into space. Picture a government where Christ is king, Christians rule, and love is the only law. Imagine possessing a glorious, super-strong body that can defy gravity, is perfect in every way, surges with boundless energy, and will never grow old, get sick, or die. Imagine suddenly possessing super intelligence, a thirst for knowledge, and eternity to learn and discover new things. In fact, imagine becoming immortal.

Now imagine death as nothing more than a doorway exiting this old world and entering the world of the immortals. Sounds like science fiction, doesn't it? It's certainly nothing you'd expect to hear in most churches. But it's all true and either implicitly or explicitly written in the Bible.

Dr. Kenneth E. Sullivan has taken over a hundred biblical references and descriptions of heaven and eternal life and compiled them, along with clear, easy-to-understand commentary in *Teach Me About Heaven and Eternal Life*. This book will enlighten, encourage, and excite the reader, causing him or her to look forward to the future with hope, anticipation, and optimism. Dr. Sullivan deals with the subject of death and the afterlife, our resurrection bodies, the environment and culture of heaven and the new earth, the capital city, the role and function of God's people, and so much more.

Teach Me About Heaven and Eternal Life is the perfect compliment to any Bible curriculum. This book was designed for use in large- or small-group Bible studies, Sunday school, or for individual, self-guided study. It is biblically based and includes a variety of thought-provoking questions along with an answer key.

Dr. Kenneth E. Sullivan has enjoyed a dual career in the fields of education and pastoral ministry. He is the founding pastor of New Direction Christian Church of Indianapolis, where he served as senior pastor for twenty-one years. He also taught in the Indianapolis public schools system for twelve years before resigning to serve as a full-time pastor. Dr. Sullivan is an author and Bible teacher. His degrees include a B.S. from Indiana University, a M.S. from Indiana University, and a Ph.D. from Trinity College and Seminary.

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