

“Christ is Our Confidence”

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

If the first verse of our Epistle reading today sounds familiar, it should. That was the final part of the reading from last week. “We know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with human hands, eternal in the heavens.”

Last week, we focused on what this means for us here and now and how the Bible speaks of three spiritual options for the house of your body. The first option is for you to remain all by yourself. Remain an empty house. “I and I alone own this body.” However, the reality is, empty houses do not inherit the kingdom of God. There is no reason to place any confidence in your own mortal flesh.

Also without the Spirit of God dwelling in you, your body is an empty house in which an evil spirit may come and inhabit and decide to stay. And even though our “sophisticated” society doesn’t want to consider this, it is real. It is dangerous to be an empty house. By the way, I Googled “Exorcism Lutheran Church of Madagascar” on Monday and watched a video.

Again, as I said last week, the third and best option, and really the only good option, is for your body to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. Here and now, the tent, the earthly home of your

body is not just some worthless shell that we get to discard when we die or Christ returns (whichever comes first).

Although we do not put confidence in our mortal flesh, you are precious in the sight of the Lord. You are His beloved child. Your life, your day to day activities matter to your Father in heaven. Which points us to the final verse in our reading today which, if taken out of its context, sounds very unLutheran. Paul says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

If this were the only verse in the entire Bible, it would lead us to think that our salvation, when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ, would be determined by whether or not we did enough good in this life. As we look at this one verse over and against the rest of the Bible – “For we are saved by grace through faith, it is a gift from God, not by works, so that no one may boast” – among others like John 3:16 etc. You cannot make a case for your righteousness being determined through your works – unless you decide to throw out a lot of what Jesus and St. Paul say.

But even within Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, the context around this verse gives us some clues that Paul has not abandoned salvation through Christ alone. This entire section is not about “how are you saved?” Quite the opposite – Paul is talking about the fact that you are saved and what this means for how you live now.

Writing to Christians who live daily in a hostile culture – a culture which hates them; (The world outside of the church hates you also, because Christ in you is the stench of death to them –

and rightly so. The law is written on all men's hearts and deep down they know judgment day is coming).

Paul writes, "We know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with human hands, eternal in the heavens." Even if they come and take my life today, I know that it will not be the end of me. There is life to come, and we long for this. Every bit of you that comes from God groans for this to happen – "Come Lord Jesus."

So we are of good courage no matter what happens. No matter what comes into this life, as we heard last week, it is transient (temporary); it will not last; it is mortal; what we have in Christ is life.

So, Paul says, we walk by faith, not by sight. We don't see the goodness of a perfect life, much less perfect work flowing from these hands. But we do see the perfect, complete promises of Christ having done everything for us. We find comfort and rest in what He has achieved as we live in the present time.

For this reason, Paul says, we make it our aim to please God. Knowing that we are going to be set free from this world of sin, decay, and death, we don't wallow in it and look for ways to invent new evil (the world outside of the church does that on its own just fine). Instead, we make it our aim to live according to what God originally designed the world to be.

Because, as Paul says, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." Of course, ultimately the "good" you will be credited for is Christ's

righteousness and goodness, and the evil you have done is all covered in the blood of Christ. However, there are eternal aspects to your actions in the here and now.

He is talking about the redeemed people of God who are saved. There are a few places in Scripture which speak of heavenly rewards and degrees of glory. What the Bible basically says is that, in eternity, we will not all have the same position, the same vocation, the same degrees of glory. The apostles themselves were told they will sit on 12 thrones and judge the 12 tribes and Satan and his angels.

Here is the catch. You don't get to the higher place, by trying to get a higher place. In fact, the moment you would try and do a good work so that you can gain a higher place in heaven, rather than doing that work for the good of your neighbor and to the glory of God, it instantly becomes not a good work.

Christ will put us in our place in eternity as Christians who are saved by grace through faith alone. But in regard to our degree of glory, that place or vocation set aside for us should not be a concern because God's Word is very clear that there are no degrees of bliss. All of God's children will share in the complete joy and bliss of the presence of God. At the feast which has no end, there is no bad seat at the table.

Again, Paul desires to instill confidence in those reading his words. Have confidence in Christ. Have confidence that when this tent, our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with human hands, eternal in the heavens. Amen.