

The Earthly and the Heavenly House

By

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The story is told of many years ago when an old farmer brought his family to the big city for the first time. They had never seen buildings as tall as the sky scrapers they saw, nor sights as impressive. The farmer dropped his wife off at a department store and took his son with him to the bank—the tallest of the buildings in town. As they walked into the lobby they saw something else they had never seen before. At one side of the lobby they saw two large doors open wide. A rather large and elderly woman walked in to a small room and the doors closed behind her. Above the doors they saw a dial with an arrow that pointed to an increasing number as it turned clockwise. Presently, it stopped at the number ten. Shortly after that the dial reversed its motion and turned counter clockwise until it stopped on one. At that point the doors opened again and a beautiful young woman emerged from the small room.

The farmer was amazed. He turned to his son and said, “You wait right here, son. I’m going to get your mother and run her through that thing.”¹

Unfortunately, renewal of our human bodies is not as easy as riding an elevator to the tenth floor and back. Nevertheless, despite the lack of remedies for our bodily problems we still look for improvements. Thankfully, for the Christian God has promised a complete renovation—a new body to be brought to us at the return of Christ.

¹ Michael P. Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1990, p. 296.

The longing by Christians for the new body has been felt for many years, perhaps for many generations. It is this yearning that is expressed in the song.

I've got a mansion²



In the song “*Mansions Over the Hilltop*,”³ the introductory lyrics read,

I'm satisfied with just a cottage below...

And the chorus says,

I've got a mansion just over the hilltop...

The idea for the song no doubt comes from the verses in John Chapter 14 where in the King James Version it reads,

John 14:1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to

² Images in this article were generated by Microsoft Paint.

³ Ellis J. Crum, *Sacred Selections for the Church*, Kendallville, Indiana 46755, 1960; *Mansions Over the Hilltop*, No. 393.

prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

The New American Standard Bible calls these “mansions” “dwelling places,” and this difference tends to apply different meanings to the original words. Many people have interpreted the word “mansion” to refer to a large, imposing and luxurious structure where they will live comfortably in splendor. Yet, in this case the idea of mansion relates to the quality of the present dwelling place which the song calls a “cottage.”

The misinterpretation arises from a misunderstanding of the metaphor. The Lord was speaking about the body as a dwelling place, and not a house. The body that God will supply to the believer has this relationship with the present body of flesh: it is like a mansion compared to a tent. Compared to the body we expect to live in—below is a picture of what we live in now.



The building from God

Paul wrote to the Corinthians and used the metaphor “tent” to refer to the human body. He said,

2 Corinthians 5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent⁴ which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

So, if the wear and tear on our present bodily house resembles the picture below we should remember that we have a much better building from God, eternal in the heavens.



⁴ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). In *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 93). United Bible Societies. **8.5 σκῆνος, ος** n; **σκῆνωμα^c, τος** n: (figurative extensions of meaning of σκῆνος ‘tent,’ not occurring in the NT, and σκῆνωμα^a ‘temporary dwelling,’ 7.8) temporary habitation in the human body—‘body.’

σκῆνος: ἐὰν ἡ ἐπίγειος ἡμῶν οἰκία τοῦ σκηνώματος καταλυθῇ ‘if our earthly house, our body, is torn down’ 2 Cor. 5:1.

σκῆνωμα^c: ταχινή ἐστιν ἡ ἀπόθεσις τοῦ σκηνώματός μου ‘I shall soon put off this body of mine’ 2 Peter 1:14. It is also possible to interpret σκῆνωμα in 2 Peter 1:14 as meaning a temporary habitation, though referring, of course, to the human body (see 85.77).

The phrase “is torn down” includes the word⁵ that refers to striking down a tent. The New Bible Commentary says,

“Aware that the earthly tent could be so easily destroyed, [Paul] reminds his readers that we have a building from God, a house that is eternal in heaven. An important factor in determining Paul’s meaning here is the parallelism in the verse. What is earthly and threatened with destruction is to be replaced by something corresponding to it which is eternal. If the former denotes the earthly body of the believer, it seems that the latter refers to another body, *i.e.* the resurrection body of the believer.”⁶

Peter wrote,

2 Peter 1:13 I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, 14 knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.

The King James Version translates Peter’s “earthly dwelling” as a tabernacle. This body is a temporary dwelling.

In his Corinthian letter Paul alludes to the physical appearance we have as descendents of Adam. He wrote,

1 Cor. 15:49 Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. 50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh

⁵ (καταλυω [kataluō])

⁶ Kruse, C. G. (1994). 2 Corinthians. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1196). Inter-Varsity Press.

and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God;
nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Since in this body we have inherited the sinful flesh of Adam, and look physically like the children of Adam, we must realize that in our present bodies we cannot enter the kingdom of God. But in Christ we expect to bear his image, and so we expect to be suited for the kingdom of God.

Present Travail

In the second verse, Paul speaks of the painful toil and struggle we have in the flesh, and the desire to receive the perfect dwelling that God promises to the redeemed.

2 Corinthians 5:2 For indeed in this house we
groan, longing to be clothed with our
dwelling from heaven,



“This house” refers to the human body.

Robertson wrote concerning this verse,

We long to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven -- the meaning is to put upon oneself [the heavenly body]. Such as [what one might do] for a

fisherman's linen blouse or upper garment (John 21:7).⁷ The word is used here of the spiritual body as the abode of the spirit. It is a mixed metaphor (putting on as a garment the dwelling-place). The word "house" has no counterpart in the Greek of the original document; it is implied by the surrounding language.⁸

Paul wrote,

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

In general, the life in the flesh is a continuous experience of suffering. The suffering attends the circumstances of dwelling in a body of flesh because that is the nature of the present world. Even so, there are worldly pleasures. Yet, if a person should be able to enjoy every pleasure the world of this life has to offer, it cannot compare to the life God offers to those who attain to His eternal kingdom.

Not to be unclothed

2 Corinthians 5:3 inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked.

Facing God in the body of flesh in which we now dwell is the equivalent of being naked before Him. This is

⁷ Οικητηριον [Oikētērion]

⁸ Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (2 Cor. 5:2). Broadman Press. Here, "dwelling" which is the corresponding word in the next phrase is οικητήριον [oiketerion /oy·kay·tay·ree·on/] which the Authorized Version translates as "house" once, and "habitation" once. 1 a dwelling place, habitation. 1a of the body as a dwelling place for the spirit.

reminiscent of the reply of Adam to God in the Garden of Eden after the man had sinned,⁹

Genesis 3:10 He said, “I heard the sound of
You in the garden, and I was afraid because
I was naked; so I hid myself.”



Because of sin the descendants of Adam—in this life—are ashamed, conscience stricken and cannot bear to be in the presence of a holy God. P. L. Tan put it this way,

Have we noticed that man is the only being in the world who does not naturally furnish his own clothing? Every stitch of clothing we wear speaks in one way or another of death. An animal had to die before we could be provided with shoes. The wool had to be severed from the sheep’s back, the place from whence it drew life to make our garments. Even the cotton had to be pulled from its place of life if it were to become clothing for us. The animals and the birds furnish their

⁹ Ibid., A.T. Robertson. Being clothed (ἐνδύσαμενοι - having put on the garment. Naked (γυμνοί [gumnoi]). That is, disembodied spirits, “like the souls in Sheol, without form, and void of all power of activity” (Plummer).

own clothing, but man is dependent upon others for his. All animal clothing was put on from within, but man's from without.

The truth I wish to point out is that sin left man naked and he must be clothed by another, even in the righteousness of Christ if he is to be fit to appear in the presence of God. It is God who provides the covering for us, otherwise we stand naked before Him.¹⁰

Have you ever noticed that the places are typically dark where vice is practiced; i.e., bars, night clubs. The people involved in vice like to cloak themselves in darkness and don't want to be seen.

This Tent



¹⁰ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 1196). Bible Communications, Inc.

Speaking of the human body as a “tent” refers to its temporary nature and its inferiority. Paul wrote,

2 Corinthians 5:4 For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.¹¹

In this tent we suffer, for that is the way of the world of flesh. Yet, even though living in the flesh is painful and burdensome we are reluctant to give up life in the tent. But even suffering has its purpose.

“Bisogna soffrire per essere grandi.” That was the favorite expression of the great singer Enrico Caruso. The words mean, “To be great, it is necessary to suffer.”

After years of difficulty, Caruso achieved fame; but the man communicated more than beautiful music through his voice. A music critic observed, “His is a voice that loves you, but not only a voice, a sympathetic man.” Tribulation does that for a person who accepts life’s difficulties in the proper spirit.¹²

Peter wrote,

1 Peter 4:1 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has

¹¹ Strong, J. (1995). In *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship. 4636 σκηνος [*skenos /skay·nos/*] n n. From 4633; TDNT 7:381; TDNTA 1040; GK 5011; Two occurrences; AV translates as “tabernacle” twice. **1** a tabernacle, a tent. **2** metaph. of the human body, in which the soul dwells as in a tent, and which is taken down at death.

¹² Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 1510). Bible Communications, Inc.

suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2
so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh
no longer for the lusts of men, but for the
will of God.

Even so, life in the earthly body is difficult. And we
would prefer to be clothed with our body from on high.¹³

The provision of Christ

The purpose of God is that we possess that heavenly
mansion; that is, the spiritual body God has promised in
Christ. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the guarantee that we
will receive it.

As Paul wrote,

2 Corinthians 5:5 Now He who prepared us for
this very purpose is God, who gave to us
the Spirit as a pledge.¹⁴

The God who prepared us for eternal life is the same
God who gave us the Spirit as a down payment on the
ultimate glory of being clothed in life. Jesus said,

John 6:63 “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh
profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to
you are spirit and are life.”

And Paul wrote,

¹³ For this verse the King James reads, “Not for that we would be
unclothed” - Rather, it should read, “For that we do not wish to put
off the clothing, but to put it on.” Paul does not wish to be a mere
disembodied spirit without his spiritual garment. A. T. Robertson, 2
Corinthians 5:4

¹⁴ pledge - ἀρραβών [arrhabon /ar·hrab·ohn/] n m. Of Hebrew origin;
Three occurrences; AV translates as “earnest” three times. 1 an
earnest. 1a money which in purchases is given as a pledge or down
payment that the full amount will subsequently be paid.

Ephesians 1:13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.

And,

Romans 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

The new body

Paul wrote in his first letter to Corinth his explanation of the new body the Christian can expect to receive. He said,

1 Cor. 15:35 But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?”

The person who denies that God works miracles insists that there must be a natural cause for everything that happens. And so, when they ask for “how” a person is raised from the dead they are demanding to know the process involved. Secondly, the skeptic insists that he be told the kind of body with which the resurrected person emerges from death.

Paul's answer is the analogy of planting seeds. One does not plant a seed in the expectation of seeing a seed emerge from the one he planted; rather, a new plant emerges. Paul wrote,

1 Corinthians 15:36 You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; 37 and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else.

A T Robertson wrote,

The seed dies in the planting, but death itself is the way of resurrection as in the death of the seed for the new plant. With what manner of body does it come? This is the second question which makes plainer the difficulty of the first. The first body perishes. Will that body be raised?¹⁵ No. The person rises in the new body in a way that is analogous to the planting of seed and growth of the new plant that is different from the seed.

1 Cor. 15:38 But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.

Paul proceeds with his analogy showing that the resurrection is similar in many ways to the process that operates in the natural world.

1 Corinthians 15:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a

¹⁵ Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (1 Cor. 15:35). Broadman Press.

spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Paul put it in different terms in his letter to the Philippians,

Philippians 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

And John wrote,

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

- We will be like Him.

The practices of the redeemed in the new body differ from life in the present body. Jesus said,

Matthew 22:30 “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

Resurrection Appearances

In the resurrection appearances of Jesus the Savior appeared to witnesses in a form they could recognize. This was necessary so that they could see that the resurrected Jesus was the same one they had known before His crucifixion.

Peter said of Jesus,

Acts 10:40 “God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

Luke wrote about Christ’s post resurrection appearance in which Jesus told the apostles of his identity—He was not a ghost, or a disembodied spirit,

Luke 24:39 “See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” 40 And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. 41 While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” 42 They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; 43 and He took it and ate it before them.

The flesh separates from Christ

Because we remain in the flesh we do not have direct fellowship with Jesus. We expect that to change, but for now the dwelling in flesh keeps the Christian away from the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—

The Lord is spirit and we are of flesh. The human body is a “home” for the soul, but a humbler one than that promised to the Christian. It is also corruptible.

More importantly, this present bodily home – the flesh – is not qualified to allow us to be present with the Lord. Flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God.

In the parable of the king who gave a wedding feast we read,

Matthew 22:11 “But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, 12 and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless.

This guest was not properly clothed; therefore, he was thrown out. Proper clothing for the elect is Christ. See Galatians 3:27.

The present walk

2 Corinthians 5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight¹⁶—



¹⁶ εἶδος- active seeing, sight.

The principle that is to guide the Christian's manner of life is faith; that is, confident trust in Jesus. We cannot see the proper path of life while in the flesh and must, therefore, believe in the guidance of the Savior, while placing complete confidence and reliance upon Him.¹⁷

When Peter attempted to walk on the water he allowed what he saw in the effects of the storm to influence him to doubt. He was not walking by faith, so he began to sink.

Matthew 14:28 Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Peter had allowed himself to walk by sight at first, but then the storm, the wind and the waves distracted him and he fell into the danger of drowning, but when he returned his attention to the Lord he cried out in faith to the one who could rescue him, and Jesus saved him.

¹⁷ Heb. 11:1 defines faith (πίστις) as the assurance of what we hope for, the proving of (or a conviction about) what we cannot see. Paul contrasts walking by faith with walking by sight—sight (εἶδος) is that which strikes the eye; that which is exposed to view; it signifies the external appearance, form or shape. The main elements in faith (πίστις) in its relation to the invisible God, as distinct from faith in man, are especially brought out in the use of this noun and the corresponding verb, *pisteuō*. See Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words: "appearance," "faith."

The point for the Christian living today is that while we are “at home” in the earthly body we cannot see the Lord, so we walk by faith.

Longing for home

2 Corinthians 5:8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

The greater good—and the one we actually prefer—is to be with the Lord even though we would have to abandon our earthly tabernacle.

The constant ambition

2 Corinthians 5:9 Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

Ambition is the desire to do or to accomplish something, such as, take a cruise to Alaska, win a Superbowl, graduate from college or tech school—become a professional (something). It is a desire to achieve something like success, wealth or fame.

The appropriate ambition of the Christian is to please the Lord.

Paul expressed his ambition in his letter to the Philippians,

Philippians 3:7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found

in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

About one hundred years ago a man in some way fell overboard from his vessel and was swept down the Niagara River toward the falls. Just above the falls, on the American side, there juts out of the water a black rock. The man managed somehow to secure a foothold on that rock. Soon people on the shore observed his terrible plight. Hundreds gathered together, watching in horror the predicament of the man on the rock and planning to do what they could to deliver him. They did manage to float food down the river to him. But as the hours and the days went by his strength began to ebb; and at length, in sight of the horror-stricken multitude, he was swept over the thunderous cataract to his death in the waters of the Niagara.

In this incident a man's body was in danger of being swept over the falls, and thousands were concerned over him and gathered together to do what they could to deliver him. But if it had been announced that at Niagara Falls a man's soul was in peril, very few of that same crowd would have gathered together. And yet the soul is the immortal part of man, and the disaster which befalls man's body is as nothing compared with that which can overtake his soul.¹⁸

¹⁸ Clarence E. Macartney, *Macartney's Illustrations*, Abingdon Press, New York – Nashville, 1946. p. 358.

People easily forget what Jesus said,

John 6:63 “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”

His words are spirit and are life. The Lord has promised a mansion to those who love Him. Why would a man pursue life in a tent?