

ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

In all wisdom and prudence making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him the plan for the fullness of the times

**TO HEAD UP THE ALL THINGS IN THE CHRIST,
the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, in Him....**

(Ephesians 1:8b-10)

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Article #47

What Did Paul Mean?

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(14) Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, (15) and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, (16) as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:14-16 NASB)

Peter found some of Paul's writing hard to understand, which led to distortion of Paul's message. In the place of the word *distort*, other translations use the words *wrest*, *pervert*, or *twist*. The Greek word for *distort* has the meaning of "to *wrench*, that is, (specifically) to torture (by the rack)." We could say that the untaught and unstable *torture* Paul's message.

Paul himself warned of such distortions of Scripture; some translations refer to it as a systematized error or systematizing of the deception (CV).

In order that we may be no longer babes, tossed and carried about by every wind of that teaching which is in the sleight of men, in unprincipled cunning with a view to systematized error [systematizing of the deception].... (Ephesians 4:14 DNT [CV])

So that we may be no longer children, sent this way and that, turned about by every wind of teaching, by the twisting and tricks of men, by the deceits of error.... (Ephesians 4:14 BBE)

However, Peter's heart was not to call out the unstable or cunning ones but rather to warn the brethren of like faith to be patient, on guard, and steadfast, growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as they waited for the Day of the Lord and salvation. Peter warned that some would say, "***Where is the promise of His coming,***" but this should not throw off any of us, for the Lord is not slow in keeping His word. He will come; be patient!

Now, this article is not about Peter's warning but about Paul's encouragement regarding our *future hope* as believers in our Lord and Savior Jesus. We need to wait for Him to come in order to receive all that is promised, especially the promise of immortal bodies in His image that comes about only through resurrection and transfiguration and not at physical death of our mortal bodies. We don't "die and go to heaven"; we are waiting for the One to *come out of* or *from heaven* to transfigure us into His image, giving us our dwelling *from* heaven.

I realize that this last sentence goes against the grain of the mainline teaching of our day; however, just because something is mainline does not make it truth, any more than the tradition of men is truth, which both Jesus and Paul warned against (Mark 7:8; Colossians 2:8). Likewise, just because I write something contrary to the seminarians of the day does not make it truth either. This is why we must go to Scripture, asking the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth and to open our eyes to any systematized error into which we might have been led. As I have done this, I have come up with understanding that is contrary to mainline understanding. It is left to you, the reader, to decide.

Life is Christ

Paul the apostle had an all-consuming passion and desire for Christ. He saw himself *in* Christ, and he saw Christ *in* him. Through his epistles, Paul tells us that he had no life apart from Christ, the One who appeared to him on the road to Damascus and called him to be an apostle to the nations.

I am crucified with Christ, and no longer live, I, but Christ lives in me... (Galatians 2:20 DNT)

These four words "**Christ lives in me**" pretty much sum up Paul's life.

Spiritually speaking, apart from Christ, Paul was a dead man. At the cross of Calvary, he died with Christ, and for this reason, Paul declared that he no longer lived. He was *in* Christ when He died and when He rose from the grave. How else can a dead man live unless he is given a new life? Consequently, the only way that he had life was by Christ living *in* him. It had to be His life. No longer *I live, but Christ lives in me!*

Paul elaborated on this same truth as he wrote to the Philippians and the Colossians: **For to me, to live is Christ** (Philippians 1:21); **Christ in you, the hope of glory** (Colossians 1:27); **Christ, who is our life** (Colossians 3:4). Further, he greeted his beloved Timothy with the encouragement of **Christ Jesus, our hope** and **the promise of life in Christ Jesus** (1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1).

Paul was so caught by Christ that his whole life was devoted to Him. His sole purpose was that Christ would be magnified in his body, whether through life or through death. The only life worth living is a life *for* Christ and a life *in* Christ. But it is even more than this, for life itself *is* Christ. Do you see the difference? Life to Paul was Christ; there was no other life. Paul knew the One who is the Resurrection and the Life, whose name is Jesus!

As Paul tells us, the life we live once we are given the faith of the Son to believe in the Son and His work on the cross is a life not lived for our self but for Christ. It is no longer to be an *I*-centered life (everything focused on self) but a *Christ*-centered and an all-*Christ* encompassing life.

This does not mean that there is no longer an *I* in our life; it just means that our *I* is refocused on the Lord rather than on self. After all, Paul said: **The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God** (Galatians 2:20).

Pressed Out of the Two

Now, in his very personal and revealing letter to the Philippians, Paul expressed more of his heart on the matter of Christ in him as he declared: "***For to me to be living is Christ.***"

(19) For I am aware that, for me, this will be eventuating in salvation through your petition and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ, (20) in accord with my premonition and expectation, that in nothing shall I be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death. (21) For to me to be living is Christ, and to be dying, gain. (22) Now if it is to be living in flesh, this to me means fruit from work, and what I shall be preferring I am not making known. (23) (Yet I am being pressed out of the two, having a yearning for the solution and to be together with Christ, for it, rather, is much better.) (24) Yet to be staying in the flesh is more necessary because of you. (Philippians 1:19-24 CV)

The *Concordant Literal New Testament* (CV) is a strange read from most; nevertheless, its rendering of verse 23 may offer valuable insight into Paul's heart.

Without doubt, many see verse 21 as proof that when a believer dies he or she goes to be with the Lord; that is, Paul's gain was to die and go to heaven to be with the Lord in that instant. However, if this were true, then where is Paul's hope of resurrection, the hope of glory, for which he longed that he later expressed to the Philippians?

If somehow I should be attaining to the [out] resurrection that is out from among the dead. (Philippians 3:11 CV [WAET])

There is no indication in Paul's epistles that he saw any other way into the presence of the Lord. Christ's way out of death was through resurrection, and so it must be for His loved ones as well. The *out*-resurrection was the very much better way, which is the *first* resurrection that John saw (Revelation 20:6) and the *better* resurrection that the ancient ones of faith sought (Hebrews 11:35).

(17) Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in [the] clouds to meet the Lord in [the] air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. (18) Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18 NASB)

So we shall always be with the Lord is linked with coming into His presence or *parousia* following the resurrection of those asleep in Christ and not before. This is the comfort that Paul gave the nations or ethnics (*ethnos*). It was *not* death and then immediately going to heaven. It was death, resurrection, transfiguration, and glorification in the presence of the Lord. Notice that Paul never mentions "going to heaven." The air is not heaven!

No doubt Paul wanted to be with the Lord, and he comforted the brethren with this grand hope. However, he never stated that he was going to be with Him immediately upon his death. This is what many read into Paul's words based on the mainline template, but this does not

necessarily mean this is what he meant. Paul's desire to be with the Lord cannot conflict with his desire for the resurrection when all will be changed.

So, let us follow Paul's thought as shared with the Philippians.

Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death. For to me to be living is Christ, and to be dying, gain. ... Now if it is to be living in flesh, this to me means fruit from work, and what I shall be preferring I am not making known.

Paul contrasted two conditions, life in service or death, both of which would bring glory to Christ. Notice that Paul saw Christ being magnified in his body, either in life or death.

If Paul lived, his life would be gain for the cause and glory of Christ; if he died, especially as a martyr, this too would be gain for the cause of Christ. Throughout his epistles, Paul never wrote of seeking gain for himself; it was always for Christ and His people (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15:31; 2 Corinthians 8:23; 11:23-29; 2 Thessalonians 1:12; 2 Timothy 2:10). Paul died daily and suffered tremendously for the cause of Christ with a desire to bear fruit for the Kingdom through his work.

In spite of all his trials and even being jailed at the end of his life, Paul remained fruitful in the work of the Lord, and all of us are recipients of that fruit, even after nearly 2,000 years.

He desired that in life or in death he would bring glory to Christ; he never desired glory for himself. If he lived, he would be fruitful in Christ's service; if he died for the cause and advance of Christ, this too would bring glory to Christ. Another way of stating this is that Christ alone would get all the glory. Yet, another way of stating this is death to Paul was for the glory of God and not for some benefit to himself. For Paul, the heart of the matter was that all the gain would go to Christ and not to him. To believe that Paul sought gain for himself is totally out of character for this beloved apostle, and all who see him seeking gain for himself miss Paul's heart. This is what Paul meant when he questioned which he preferred.

However, Paul also had a personal goal that he sought to achieve and that is discovered in the context of the out-resurrection.

(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 [out] resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:10-11 NASB [WAET])

Paul desired to be conformed to the death of Christ. Why? He purposed in his heart to be found worthy of the *out-resurrection*, and this is what he meant when he wrote: ***I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*** (Philippians 3:14 NASB). The *out-resurrection* was Paul's solution, the much better, the prize.

Yet I am being pressed out of the two, having a yearning for the solution and to be together with Christ, for it, rather, is much better.

Paul was pressed out of the two, life or death, and yearned for the much better which was to be together with the Lord. In other words, Paul injected **a third option** to remaining alive or to die. The better option was to be together with Christ, which according to Paul's teaching only comes at the resurrection, transfiguration, and the snatching away to meet the Lord *in air*. Paul's solution was the resurrection, for this was and is the hope of the evangel that he was entrusted with to take to the nations. This is the better solution with which Paul very clearly encourages us.

Paul looked forward to the **Day of Christ** (Philippians 1:6, 10; 2:16; 2 Timothy 4:8), **so that what is mortal will be swallowed up in life** (2 Corinthians 5:4), and this takes place at the resurrection when **this mortal must put on immortality** (1 Corinthians 15:53).

Truly, Paul longed to be with the Lord, but he never taught that Christians bypass the resurrection to be with the Lord. Again, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 proves the point. **So we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.** To what did the comforting words refer? To those who are asleep in Jesus rising up from among the dead in resurrection!

Some commentators have tried to make Paul's desire for resurrection into something spiritual and not physical; however, in all his epistles, when he used the word *resurrection*, Paul always used the word in reference to **the redemption of our body** (Romans 8:23).

Paul desired to be with the Lord in glory. This was very much better than either of the options of living or dying. Again, he was reinforcing what he had written to the Thessalonians and the Corinthians regarding the resurrection.

Paul faced his imminent death with triumph and a shout of victory. What greater legacy could he leave to his beloved brethren than to remind them that there is a glorious hope on the horizon? There is "a better" coming and all should set their hearts on this, as Paul did. Consider Paul's testament to his beloved son of the faith, Timothy.

(6) For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure [dissolution] has come. (7) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; (8) in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing [advent]. (2 Timothy 4:6-8 NASB [CV])

His death was imminent; his departure (dissolution) had come, which simply means he was about to die. Paul knew he would receive a reward on *that day*, which is the future Day of Christ, not the day of his death. Paul joined *that day* to *His advent*, which refers to the return of the Lord. All who love His advent will be rewarded as Paul will be rewarded in that day.

In concluding his letter to Timothy, Paul brought the expectation into view again: **The Lord will be rescuing me from every wicked work and will be saving me for His celestial kingdom** (2 Timothy 4:18 CV). Paul and all who love the Lord will be saved for His celestial Kingdom, which comes at His advent for His faithful conquerors.

This is *the better*, and this is what we are encouraged to long for and to expect, as Paul did.

Longing to be Dressed

Let us consider another set of verses from Paul in which he longed to be clothed.

(1) For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house [terrestrial tabernacle house] is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal [eonian] in the heavens. (2) For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed [dressed] with our dwelling from heaven [habitation which is out of heaven], (3) inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked [stripped]. (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 [dressed], so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. (5) Now He who prepared us for this very purpose [longing] is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge [the earnest of the spirit]. (2 Corinthians 5:1-5 NASB [CV])

These verses are most often quoted as proof Paul taught that believers go to heaven immediately *in* death, as if Paul wanted to put off his earthly body so he could go to heaven and be with the Lord. To be sure, Paul desired to be with the Lord, as we should all desire, but what did Paul mean in these verses?

Notice that Paul placed *no immediacy* between being in the earthly body and dressed with the heavenly body. He was expressing what should be the desire of every chosen believer. In fact, Paul stated that God Himself produces this longing in us, which is confirmed by the Spirit.

While on this earth, we live in bodies of death (Romans 7:24), and the spirit within us groans for the heavenly body of glory, which, according to Scripture and, uniquely, Paul's evangel, only comes at the resurrection. We must put off corruption and put on incorruption, and we must put off mortality and put on immortality; this occurs only with the resurrection and transfiguration about which Paul taught. A heavenly body is beyond death, and we are only beyond death through resurrection and transfiguration into immortality.

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul devoted much space to defending the resurrection of the Lord and the resurrection of believers. We shall all be changed at the last trump, which means that a day will come when Christ will raise up all from the state of death.

Paul saw death simply as a sleep, which is exactly what Jesus made clear to His disciples when they didn't understand Him: **"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. Lazarus is dead"** (John 11:1, 14).

Paul obviously saw himself falling asleep in Jesus and one day waking up and being snatched away into the presence of His Lord and Savior. Any other view contradicts Paul's defense of the resurrection and makes the resurrection some secondary and less meaningful matter to the believer. After all, if at death a believer is already in heaven enjoying the eternal bliss of glory, then what is the purpose of the resurrection?

The longer we live, the more we take on the groan that Paul described, even more so as the eyes of our heart are opened to see more clearly our celestial [heavenly] calling in Christ. We begin to groan to be clothed with a spiritual body that can live among the celestials in Christ as well as live among mortals on earth; a body that is not of flesh and blood but one energized by spirit; a body that does not require oxygen to energize the blood; a body that does not necessarily require food; a body that knows no disease, illness and death. It is a body like our Lord Jesus' body.

There can be no inconsistencies in Paul's writings. The heavenly body comes into view only at the resurrection and snatching away of believers.

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

Notice that we are to be eagerly waiting for a Savior to transfigure us into His body of glory. We belong to another realm, the realm of our God, and it is from this realm that we will be given a new body in order that we will be able to traverse the spirit and the natural realms. We are waiting for new bodies. Like Peter, Paul emphasized and reinforced that we all are waiting, something for which he commended the young Thessalonian ecclesia.

(9) For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, (10) and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 NASB)

This young ecclesia was waiting expectantly for God's Son to come from heaven. They were not waiting to go to heaven.

However, the proof lies within what Paul taught the Corinthians. In his first epistle, Paul presented to the immature Corinthians the truth of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15). In his defense of the resurrection, Paul contrasted for them the earthly or soulish body with the heavenly or spiritual body that the believer receives with the resurrection. ***We shall all be changed*** is Paul's declaration. We must put off the old corruptible body and put on the new incorruptible body.

Notice how Paul connected the verses under discussion (2 Corinthians 5:1-5) with the closing words of his defense of the resurrection.

(53) For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality. (54) Now, whenever this corruptible should be putting on incorruption and this mortal should be putting on immortality, then shall come to pass the word which is written, Swallowed up was Death by Victory. (1 Corinthians 15:53-54 CV)

We are not wanting to be stripped, but to be dressed, that the mortal may be swallowed up by life. (2 Corinthians 5:4 CV)

So, according to Paul, his longing to be dressed in our habitation, which is out of heaven, must be joined with the end of mortality, which is putting off mortality and putting on immortality.

It is taught by some that the *soul* goes to heaven immediately. For this to occur, a believer would have to go to heaven unclothed because the clothing only comes at the resurrection and transfiguration. This means that the believer would be naked before God, for the soul does not exist apart from the body, which is the way that mankind is constituted. When the spirit of life was breathed into Adam, he became *a living soul*. Soul is not given by God; it comes about when life comes into the body. Soul relates to the sensations of the body; thus, it is nothing apart from the body.

Many preachers work around this difficulty by teaching that the soul (some say the spirit) is clothed with some intermediary covering. Their reasoning is based on *the parable* (not a literal story) of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31). However, this is based on a faulty understanding of this parable.

See Article #40, February 2012, *Rich Man & Lazarus – A Parable*.

Apart from this one parable and one story in the Old Testament about Saul and the medium, there are no other Scriptures that indicate the soul must receive some intermediary covering. It is simply borrowed from paganism and incorrectly institutionalized as truth within Christendom and repeated countless times from the pulpits until no one questions its validity as presented in Scripture. It has led many to wrongly believe that the soul is something that can exist by itself, and thus is immortal. The pagans believed in the immortality of the soul and so do many believers.

Now, returning to the text in question, Paul states: ***For in this also we are groaning, longing to be dressed in our habitation which is out of heaven, if so be that, being dressed also, we shall not be found naked.***

Death strips us of our earthly tent. We have no heavenly tent in which to reside at death. Why? Because Paul places the heavenly tent as something that we receive with the resurrection and snatching away! We groan as long as we are in these bodies of humiliation waiting for our transfiguration when our Savior comes out of heaven, so that we can enter the celestial realm with new glorified bodies like His. Death is merely a sleep time for believers. One day, we will be awakened from our sleep to rise and meet the Lord. The period of sleep will seem like a night, even though it might be a very long time.

Scripture refers to only two types of bodies: the natural body of flesh and blood (of the soul and from the soil of the earth), and the spiritual and celestial (heavenly) body of flesh and bone out of [not in] heaven.

(40) There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. (41) There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. (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 spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (45) So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. (46) However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. (47) The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. (48) As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. (49) Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. (1 Corinthians 15:40-49 NASB)

Nowhere in these verses are we told that there is an intermediary heavenly body for either the spirit or the soul. Simply, there is a natural or physical body and a spiritual and celestial body that Paul indicates is not of flesh and blood.

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (1 Corinthians 15:50 NASB)

Using Jesus as our example, after His resurrection and before His final ascension to the throne, we could assume that the spiritual body can take on many forms, one of which is flesh and bone that can appear and disappear at will and can consume food (Luke 24: 39-43; John 20:19-21:14). But it must be emphasized that the body Jesus displayed to His disciples was a resurrection body that came about through death and resurrection, not simply through death. Jesus is the prototype of how it will be for us as well.

At Home in the Body, Absent from the Lord

Now, continuing with Paul's thought, the following verses are also often used by many to prove that Paul expected and taught that when we die we immediately go to be with the Lord; that is, *in* death, believers go to heaven apart from resurrection and transfiguration. Let us be very clear that Paul did not change his message; he simply elaborated on it.

(6) Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—(7) for we walk by faith, not by sight—(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. (9) Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. (2 Corinthians 5:6-9 NASB)

Years ago, there was a pastor who had a daily radio ministry, and, practically during every show, he used these verses to tell his audience that they will go to heaven immediately when they die, if they believe. He stated something like this: "Paul taught that to be away from the body is to be with the Lord; therefore, you go to heaven when you die. This is what Paul taught."

This is not what Paul taught. Let us look carefully at what Paul stated, which, again, is merely an extension of what he stated in the previous verses that we just looked at. Paul did not change his message.

The first part is very obvious: if we are in the body, which is our earthly home, we are away from home from the Lord. In the meantime, the earnest of the spirit leads us to walk by faith. Faith says that one day we will be with the Lord. On the basis of faith, Paul encourages us that our delight is rather to be away from these bodies of humiliation and to be at home with the Lord. Notice that Paul in no way stated that death is the way that leads immediately to being at home with the Lord. One must read this into his words.

Herein is the problem. This verse is often misquoted by changing the word *and* to the word *is*. I have heard it preached many times: "Paul taught that to be absent from the body *is* to be with the Lord; therefore, you go to heaven when you die." Listen carefully next time this verse is recited from the pulpit and note if this is how it is stated.

Notice that when Paul stated that *we are delighting rather to be away from home out of the body and to be at home with the Lord*, he joined the two thoughts with the conjunction **and**.

The verb *is* is not in Paul's words, and with its use, the meaning, that is, the timing of the phrase changes. Paul made no such connection, as if one immediately leads to the other. Absent from our mortal body means we are dead or asleep in Jesus until the resurrection, which leads to being at home with the Lord in our spiritual body. Simply, we must be absent from our mortal bodies in order to put on our immortal bodies in the image of the Son of God.

Paul's final words of this section refer back to verse 6. We are ambitious, whether at home, that is, *at home in the body*, or away from home, that is, *away from the Lord*, to be well-pleasing to Him. It is merely the same thing expressed from different angles. Being ambitious and well-pleasing can only refer to our current walk of faith and not to life after death.

Snatched Away to the Third Heaven and Paradise

(1) If boasting must be, though it is not expedient, indeed, yet I shall also be coming to apparitions and revelations of the Lord. (2) I am acquainted with a man in Christ, fourteen years before this, (whether in a body I am not aware, or outside of the body, I am not aware—God is aware) such a one was snatched away to the third heaven. (3) And I am acquainted with such a man (whether in a body or outside of the body I am not aware—God is aware) (4) that he was snatched away into paradise and hears ineffable declarations, which it is not allowed a man to speak. (2 Corinthians 12:1-4 CV)

This is another set of verses used by some as proof that a believer, upon death, is caught up to the third heaven and to paradise. But this cannot be the proper understanding of these verses.

First, Paul was snatched away, but he did not know how this occurred, whether in the body or out of the body. In other words, he did not claim that this event was linked to anything he or

anybody else had taught. He simply was snatched away to these places and heard things that were unutterable that man is not allowed to speak.

Second, note that he was snatched away *to* the third heaven and snatched away *into* paradise. Some translations place a bias into these verses by stating that Paul was caught *up*, not *to* or *into*. This has led to the teaching that Paul was caught up from this earth, which for some people it refers to either the experience at death or the "rapture." However, this cannot be determined from Paul's description of his experience. He did not know if he was in the body or in the spirit. He simply had a powerful experience.

Third, Paul was obviously snatched away to something not of this earth and time. It is most probable that he was snatched away to the third heaven, and it was there that he saw paradise.

Paul was the only one of all the inspired writers to refer directly to the third heaven. Most commentators view the third heaven as a third level in the heavens that currently exists and to which believers are taken when they die. It is seen as the place of the throne of God.

However, although John did not use the terms, he most definitely saw what Paul saw. As John was caught away in spirit to perceive the Lord's Day, so was Paul caught away in spirit to see the Lord's Day, which John also saw, as recorded in Revelation 21-22. In other words, Paul saw beyond the coming millennial Kingdom to the eon of the eons in which there is a new heaven and a new earth when New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven.

Could we not conclude that the third heaven refers to the new heaven that comes into view when our current heavens and earth pass away with a roar, and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat (2 Peter 3:10), meaning they are purged of all evil and corruption?

If so, then the third heaven is actually the third one in a row or chronologically as presented in Scripture. According to Peter, there was an original heaven (the *first* heaven of old) before the disruption; there is a current heaven (the *second* heaven now reserved for purging by fire); and there will be yet another heaven (the *third* heaven after the present passes away, or is cleansed and purged) as declared by John and which Paul was allowed to see (2 Peter 3:5-13).

Since Paul was snatched away to the third heaven, the paradise that he was caught away to must be in relation to the time of the third heaven as well, for this coincides with John's vision on the isle of Patmos. While he was caught away to the third heaven, he saw paradise.

But there is one more thing to note. Although we so often think in terms of time and chronology, Paul's experience must also be viewed in light of his revelation about the Body of Christ being among the celestials. The third heaven is not so much about time and space as it is about Christ's Body entering the realm of God, which is both spiritual and celestial. Is this not the heaven of God?

Now, what is paradise? Paradise refers to a park, which is what the Garden of Eden was before Adam disobeyed God's one command. In the book of consummation, the Revelation, we discover a garden as well, but there it is described as a city-garden (note the trees of life and

the river of life), and it is called New Jerusalem. As the new heaven and earth came into view, John saw this city coming down out of heaven, having the glory of God. Undoubtedly, Paul saw this same view, but there is a difference in their experiences. John was called up hither and saw it, but Paul was snatched away to it and heard it.

New Creation

There is one more matter relating to Paul's experience, and that relates to the *new creation*. Paul alone referred to the Body of Christ as a **New Creation in Christ** (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15). Being snatched away to the third heaven and to paradise refers to being snatched away to the New Creation, when all things are new (Revelation 21:5), which comes into view with the last eon.

Paul saw a truth that has been lost among the countless teachings of Christendom; the Body of Christ is joined with the last of the eons when there is a new heaven and a new earth. As glorious as the next eon will be, the millennial Kingdom on earth will pale in comparison to the glory of the last eon when God makes all new. Paul saw the destiny of all the saints, and although he could not speak what he heard, he could nevertheless proclaim that he saw the New Creation, which is in Christ. Ultimately, this new creation will extend to all mankind, to the praise and glory of God.

Thus, we could conclude that Paul was given great revelation of the future destiny of mankind, which has nothing to do with what happens when one dies but rather has everything to do with when one lives.

Until that glorious day, **to be living is Christ** should be the reality for every blood-bought saint of God. We have no life apart from Christ. Apart from Christ, we can do nothing (John 15:5). But thank God; we can do all things through Him who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). Every provision has been made for us to reach the goal of the upward call of God because we are in Christ and He is in us—to be living is Christ.

Is Christ Jesus your passion, the very love of your life? The secret of the Christian life is already in you—Christ in you! He loves you. We need to have our eyes continually opened and, by faith, let Christ live!