

What Happens When We Die?  
II Corinthians 5:1-10

Sermon

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## **II Corinthians 5:1-10 NLT**

**5:1** Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. <sup>2</sup> Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, <sup>3</sup> because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup> Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

<sup>6</sup> Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. <sup>7</sup> We live by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup> So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (2 Co 5:1). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

## INTRODUCTION:

### I. SOME OF YOU HAVE BEEN ASKING ABOUT “WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?”

#### A. WE HAVE HAD SOME VERY DEFINITE IDEAS IN THE PAST.

1. What is the life beyond death Jesus, and Paul and the other Biblical writers talk about?
2. Let's take some time to study into what happens when we die

#### B. PRAYER

## BODY:

### II. THE COMMON BELIEF IN THE WESTERN WORLD

#### A. HAS BEEN THAT YOUR SOUL LEAVES YOUR BODY WHEN YOU DIE.

1. The first person I knew as a child that died was my grandmother;
  - a) I was told her soul had gone to heaven
  - b) And I had this picture of some part of her insides breaking out from her and wafting up into the heavens
  - c) And then there was the picture of all the dead floating around up there somewhere looking down on the rest of us
  - d) Thinking oh, I hope grandma isn't looking or listening now

#### B. I READ A BOOK A FEW YEARS AGO ABOUT A YOUNG IRISH BOY'S LIFE SET IN THE 1930'S,

1. In it he talks about his ideas of heaven and hell; P.84-

When Indians died – Red ones – they went to the happy hunting ground. Vikings went to Valhalla when they died or they got killed. We went to heaven, unless we went to hell. You went to hell if you had a mortal sin on your shoulder when you died, even if you were on your way to confession when the lorry hit you. Before you got into heaven you usually had to go to Purgatory for a bit, to get rid of the sins on your soul, usually for a few million years. Purgatory was like hell but it didn't go on forever.

--There's a back door, lads.

It was about a million years for every venial sin, depending on the sin and if you'd done it before and promised that you wouldn't do it again. Telling lies to your parents, cursing, taking the Lord's name in vain - they were all a million years. ....

Robbing stuff out of shops was worse; magazines were more serious than sweets. Four million years for Football Monthly, two million for Goal and Football Weekly. If you made a good confession right before you died you didn't have to go to Purgatory at all; you went straight up to heaven.

--Even if the fellas killed loads of people?

--Even.

It wasn't fair.

--Ah, now; the same rules for everybody.

Heaven was supposed to be a great place but nobody knew much about it. There were many mansions.

--One each?

--Yes.

--Do you have to live by yourself?

Father Moloney didn't answer quickly enough.

--Can your ma not live with you?

--She can, of course.

Father Moloney came into our class on the first Wednesday of every month. For a chat. We liked him. He was nice. He had a limp and a brother in a showband.

--What happens to her mansion, Father?

Father Moloney raised his hands to hold our questions back. He laughed a lot and we didn't know why.

- In heaven, lads, he said, and waited. – In heaven you can live wherever and with whoever you like.

James O'Keefe was worried.

- Father, what if your mother doesn't want to live with you?

Father Moloney roared laughing but it wasn't funny, not really.

- Then you can go and live with her; it's quite simple.
- What if she doesn't want you to?
- She will want you to, said Father Moloney.
- She mightn't, said James O'Keefe. – If you're a messer.
- Ah there, you see, said Father Moloney. – There's your answer.

There are no messers in heaven.

The weather was always nice in heaven and it was all greass, and it was always day and never night. But that was all I knew about it. My Granda Clarker was up there.

- Are you sure? I asked my ma.
- Yes, she said.
- Positive?
- Yes.
- Is he out of purgatory already?
- Yes, he didn't have to go there because he made a good confession.
- He was lucky, wasn't he?
- Yes.

I was glad.

My Sister was up there as well, the one that died, Angela. She died before she came out of ma but they'd had time to baptise her, she said, otherwise she'd have ended up in Limbo.

- Are you sure the water hit her before she died? I asked my ma.
- Yes.

- Positive?
- Yes.

I wondered how she managed, a not-even-an-hour-old baby, by herself.

- Granda Clarke looks after her, said my ma.
- Till you go up?
- Yes.

Limbo was for babies that hadn't been baptised and pets. It was nice, like heaven, only God wasn't there. Jesus visited there sometimes, and Mary his mother as well. They had a caravan there. Cats and dogs and babies and guinea pigs and goldfish. Animals that weren't pets didn't go anywhere. They just rotted and mixed with the soil and made it better. They didn't have souls. Pets did. There were no animals in heaven, only horses and zebras and small monkeys.<sup>2</sup>

2. This young boy's ideas about heaven and hell are based on the ideas that he had heard and been taught, which were based on the belief that we have an immortal soul that is separate from the body
3. That our bodies are just a receptacle, a physical container for us to live in while we live this earthly life
  - a) This again fits in with the Greek idea called dualism in which matter and spirit are in many senses seen to be opposed

### **C. THE SCRIPTURES INDICATE THAT WE ARE ALL SUBJECT TO DEATH**

1. And that immortality is a gift, not something we have inherently
  - a) We aren't immortal spirits trapped inside bad physical containers
  - b) Again, that idea comes from Greek philosophy, and crept into Christian thought from there

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<sup>2</sup> Roddy Doyle, Paddy Clarke, Ha Ha Ha. Minerva, London, 1993, p.84-87

2. We are “mortals” physical, flesh and blood subject to death.

### **I Timothy 6:15-16 NIV**

God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> who alone is immortal <sup>3</sup>

3. Clearly only God is immortal

4. But Jesus has brought us new life and immortality (II Timothy 1:10)

a) It isn't something we have, it is something we are given freely through the good news of Jesus being our Saviour

5. Robert Capon;

...on the face of the Scriptures, there's nothing here about the “immortality” of the soul... [the soul is] simply what makes animals animate *rather than* inanimate *beings*.

...the notion of the deathlessness of man's soul has now been around so long that most Christians think it's a biblically revealed truth. But it's not. ...it just waters down the resurrection of the dead and makes Jesus a Santa Claus helper rather than the Incarnate Lord by whom all things are made. Jesus is the Word of God, for crying out loud. He made all things out of nothing in their beginning; and as the Resurrection and the Life, he raises all the dead from the nothing of their death. Nothing is his favourite material. So if you've been deluding yourself with the notion that after your death you'll only be half-dead (that is, dead in body but not in soul)—or if you're afraid that if your soul dies, God won't be able to help you—just stop all that anti-Gospel nonsense.<sup>4</sup>

6. NT Wright;

...do we have immortal souls, and if so, what are they? ...much Christian and sub-Christian tradition has assumed that we all do indeed have souls

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<sup>3</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (1 Ti 6:13). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Farrar Capon, *Genesis—The Movie*, Eerdmans, 2003, p. 210

that need saving and that the soul, if saved, will be the part of us that goes to heaven when we die.

All this, however, finds minimal support in the New Testament, including the teaching of Jesus, where the word *soul*, though rare, reflects when it does occur underlying Hebrew or Aramaic words referring not to a disembodied entity hidden within the outer shell of the disposable body but rather to what we would call the whole person or personality, seen as being confronted by God.

...the idea that every human possesses an immortal soul, which is the “real” part of them, finds little support in the Bible.

### III. II CORINTHIANS 5:1-8

**5** 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. <sup>2</sup>We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. <sup>3</sup>For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies.\* <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit.

<sup>6</sup>So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord. <sup>7</sup>For we live by believing and not by seeing. <sup>8</sup>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.

#### **A. IN A WAY IT DOES SOUND AS IF PAUL IS TALKING ABOUT AN IMMORTAL SOUL**

1. A soul that is “at home in the body” that like a separate spirit will rise up to heaven and exist free and be “away from these earthly bodies” and at home with the Lord

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\* Greek *we will not be naked*.



a) But it is important to remember that Paul's main emphasis has continuously been on the resurrection of the dead.

2. Remember especially I Corinthians 15:

### **I Corinthians 15:19-21**

<sup>19</sup> And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.

<sup>20</sup> But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

<sup>21</sup> So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. <sup>22</sup> Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. <sup>23</sup> But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.

**V 35-38**

#### *The Resurrection Body*

<sup>35</sup> But someone may ask, "How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?" <sup>36</sup> What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn't grow into a plant unless it dies first. <sup>37</sup> And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting. <sup>38</sup> Then God gives it the new body he wants it to have.

**V 42-55**

<sup>v42</sup> It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. <sup>43</sup> Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. <sup>44</sup> They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.

<sup>45</sup> The Scriptures tell us, "The first man, Adam, became a living person."\* But the last Adam—that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit. <sup>46</sup> What comes first is the

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\* Gen 2:7.

natural body, then the spiritual body comes later. <sup>47</sup> Adam, the first man, was made from the dust of the earth, while Christ, the second man, came from heaven. <sup>48</sup> Earthly people are like the earthly man, and heavenly people are like the heavenly man. <sup>49</sup> Just as we are now like the earthly man, we will someday be like the heavenly man.

<sup>50</sup> What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.

<sup>51</sup> But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! <sup>52</sup> It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. <sup>53</sup> For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

<sup>54</sup> Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.

<sup>55</sup> O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?\*

## **B. THE CLEAR TEACHING IN I CORINTHIANS 15**

1. We will be like the resurrected Christ, not bodiless, but with immortal, spiritual bodies, that never die, that become part of God’s kingdom, his eternal family
2. And as many scriptures point out, that kingdom will be on earth
  - a) Heaven and earth will become one
3. Everything will be as it was planned from the beginning
  - a) We will be like him
4. We will be with him and he will be with us,
5. We will have died and been buried in Christ, and also resurrected and ascended with him the second Adam

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\* Hos 13:14 (Greek version).

### **C. BUT THERE IS STILL THE TIME BETWEEN DEATH AND THAT RESURRECTION TO ACCOUNT FOR**

1. Let's go back to II Corinthians 5

#### **IV. II CORINTHIANS 5:**

**5** 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.

1. "a house in heaven, an eternal body" is referring to the fact that our glorified human bodies are as it explains "made for us by God himself and not by human hands."
2. This can sound like an immortal soul going to heaven if we fail to read it in the light of I Corinthians 15 and the transformation of our mortal bodies to spiritual, heavenly bodies at the resurrection
3. Rather than a temporary, mortal body, we will be changed.
  - a) Our old bodies will be left behind, and we will be given new eternal bodies.
4. But it will still be us, just a transformed us, not an immortal, bodiless spirit or soul

<sup>2</sup>We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. <sup>3</sup>For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies.\*

5. As he says, we will not be bodiless, spirits without a form or body
6. NT Wright talks about our new bodies

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\* Greek *we will not be naked*.

Why will we be given new bodies? According to the early Christians, the purpose of this new body will be to rule wisely over God's new world. Forget those images about lounging around playing harps. There will be work to do and we shall relish doing it. All the skills and talents we have put to God's service in this present life—and perhaps too the interests and likings... will be enhanced and ennobled and given back to us to be exercised to his glory.

The new body will be a gift of God's grace and love.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit.

7. This has been God's plan all along, he has been preparing us to give us this life forever with him, in Christ

a) It is guaranteed by his presence in us through the Holy Spirit

b) He is present with us, and will not be separated from us from now on, even by death

<sup>6</sup> So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord. <sup>7</sup> For we live by believing and not by seeing.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him.

8. So here we have Paul talking about a state in which we are away from this body and home with the Lord, but seem not yet to be resurrected into our new glorified bodies

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<sup>5</sup> Wright, p.161

a) There is no thought that we will be separate from God at death, rather he sees in death (v8 away from these earthly bodies) the blessing of “being at home with the Lord” (v8)

9. But this “being at home with the Lord” here doesn’t seem to be the resurrection

10. Paul says much the same thing in

### **Philippians 1:21-23**

<sup>21b</sup> For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. <sup>22</sup> But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don’t know which is better. <sup>23</sup> I’m torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me.

### **B. SO THE QUESTION MANY HAVE IS; “WHAT HAPPENS BETWEEN OUR DEATH AND THE RESURRECTION AT JESUS’ RETURN?”**

1. This time is termed the “intermediate state”
2. The time in between our death and our bodily resurrection as glorified human beings, between dying and getting rid of these bodies that clothe us and having them swallowed up by the new bodies, the new life of the resurrection.
3. Paul is emphasising being with the Lord, so it sounds like after death that whatever state we may be in, we will never be away from God
4. In fact separation from God is the whole problem Jesus came to rectify

## V. THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

### A. MICHAEL MORRISON WRITES ABOUT IT;

In 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 Paul seems to refer to the intermediate state as being "unclothed" in verse 4, and as being "at home with the Lord" in verse 8.

In Philippians 1:21-23 Paul says that to die is "gain" because believers depart "to be with Christ." This does not sound like unconsciousness.<sup>6</sup>

1. Some passages in the OT use the metaphor of sleep for this state, and it could just be referring to the obvious point that without God death is it, that we cease to exist.

a) But even "sleep" doesn't mean total non-existence, total death

b) It may imply a different level of consciousness where we are alive, but not fully conscious

2. We have to be careful of just relying on Old Testament passages about the dead being asleep, or unconscious

a) As at that time the Israelites had no real information or belief about an afterlife or resurrection

b) It was only closer to the time of Jesus that such beliefs arose among groups like the Pharisees

3. It is only with Jesus and the NT teachings that we gain some understanding about life after death, and those teachings focuses almost entirely on the resurrection at Jesus' return

### B. SO IT IS HARD TO KNOW WHAT PAUL IS REALLY SAYING IN II CORINTHIANS 5

1. Especially when he talks about in verses 1 & 9 about leaving and being away from this body.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Morrison, Intermediate State, article; <http://www.wcg.org/lit/prophecy/intermed.htm>

2. Most Christians down through the ages have interpreted this to mean our life with God will go on uninterrupted after death as we await the resurrection
  - a) That somehow we will be held by God in this intermediate state, at some level of existence, perhaps fully conscious, perhaps more like in a dream state

**C. SOME OTHER PASSAGES DO SEEM TO IMPLY THAT**

1. We won't cease to exist at any time, if we believe, if we are in him.

**John 11:26**

— "He who believes in me will never die."

2. What does Jesus mean by this?
3. Does it mean that in some sense we will continue to live after we die physically, and leave this mortal body, even while awaiting the resurrection of the body?
4. We didn't have an immortal soul, but now, through Jesus, we will not perish, but have been everlasting life as we read in John 3:16.

**D. LUKE 23:43**

1. Jesus told the thief on the cross,

"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

2. It doesn't sound like he meant the thief is going to be dead until the second coming
3. The Greek is clear and translated correctly.
  - a) Sometimes people want to play around with the text and change its meaning by adding commas. But they didn't have punctuation in the Greek writing, and certainly not in this passage.
4. Jesus clearly reassured him that he would be with him after his death

a) Being unconscious, completely dead in the grave after the thief died on the cross would make Jesus' statement untrue

### **Revelation 6:9-11**

— I saw under the altar the souls of all who had been martyred for the word of God and for being faithful in their testimony. <sup>10</sup> They shouted to the Lord and said, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?” <sup>11</sup> Then a white robe was given to each of them. And they were told to rest a little longer until the full number of their brothers and sisters\*—their fellow servants of Jesus who were to be martyred—had joined them.

5. These souls in heaven are able to speak and are aware of time and events before the resurrection.

### **E. JOHN HALFORD GIVES A HELPFUL ANALOGY ABOUT WHAT THE INTERMEDIATE STATE MAY BE LIKE**

Here is an analogy that might help. If you have ever visited one of the great theme parks on a holiday weekend, you'll know that the journey to get there is the worst part – crowded motorways, hot car, fraying tempers. But finally, you get to the car park.

The car park is still not the theme park, but you do feel you have arrived. There is upbeat music coming from speakers, and helpful attendants to guide you to a parking space and the transportation to the main gate. In the mid-distance you can see the tops of some of the rides, and hear the sounds of people enjoying themselves. It is a foretaste of what you too will soon be experiencing.

You have not yet arrived at the final destination, but you are no longer outside. The hardest part of the journey is over. Perhaps you are eager to get started, and your children are tugging at you, asking, like those souls under the altar John saw in Revelation, ‘Can we go in now?’ And the answer is ‘All in God's good time.’

In God's good time, the new heavens and the new earth will be revealed. There may be some surprises, but surely no disappointments for those who have eagerly awaited the fulfilment of our destiny.

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\* Greek *their brothers*.



**F. WHATEVER THE STATE WE ARE IN AT DEATH, ROMANS 8:38-39 IS REASSURING**

<sup>38</sup> And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,\* neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. <sup>39</sup> No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1. We are not separated from God's love at death
2. So we have no need to worry about what may happen in any intermediate state, God won't abandon us



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\* Greek *nor rulers*.

## CONCLUSION:

### **G. MICHAEL MORRISON;**

Ultimately, the doctrine of the intermediate state is something God has not chosen to describe explicitly and dogmatically in the Bible. Perhaps it is beyond human capacity to grasp even if it could be clearly explained. This doctrine is certainly not an issue over which Christians should fight and divide.

As the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* states, "Speculation on the intermediate state should never diminish the certainty that flows from the cross or the hope in the new creation."

If we are conscious with God after death, who will complain about this to God, saying, "I'm supposed to sleep like Rip Van Winkle until Jesus returns—why am I conscious?" And, of course, if we are unconscious, we won't be able to complain. Either way, at death, our next conscious moment is with God.<sup>7</sup>

### **H. PAUL'S FOCUS IS ON THE ULTIMATE CHANGE;**

1. The resurrection from mortal to immortal
  - a) From mortal bodies, that are metaphorically naked bodies, to heavenly bodies that are immortal, no longer subject to corruption, sin or death.
2. The main focus of Paul is our inheriting the Kingdom of God through the resurrection when Jesus returns, and our receiving of heavenly, immortal bodies
3. But there is a time after we die, when we will have gotten rid of our present early bodies, yet not yet have been clothed in our new bodies.

### **I. AT THE END OF OUR PASSAGE ABOUT BEING AWAY FROM THE BODY AND WITH THE LORD;**

1. Paul says in v6;

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Morrison, The Intermediate State, <http://www.gci.org/prophecy/intermediate>

<sup>6</sup> So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord. <sup>7</sup> For we live by believing and not by seeing. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him.

2. In the end we are confident, we are at peace, we don't fret and stress about these issues

3. Because we live by believing, by faith in God, rather than by having to see and understand every detail

#### **J. THE SCRIPTURES ARE THERE TO SHOW US GOD, WHO HE IS, AND WHO HE IS FOR US**

1. That he wants to include us in his life, to share who he is with us

2. To bring us home with him

3. To make us again in his image, as he always intended  
a) To give us life in him, now,

4. And as Paul has been discussing, to give us life more fully in him, with new spiritual bodies, like Christ's, in the resurrection

#### **K. SO LET US LIVE WITH HIM IN FAITH**

1. Confident—even though we may not “see” all the details of the how's and when's—that eventually we will be resurrected with new bodies, that will never die

a) And in which we will fully at home with the Lord, forever

#### **L. PRAYER**