

2 Corinthians 5:1-10June 21, 2015 – 4th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, Father's Day**We Are Always Confident**✦ **Groaning, yet guaranteed.** (vv.1-5)✦ **Fearing, yet we walk by faith.** (vv.6-10)

Dear fellow *“jars of clay”* in whom God has hidden His treasure of the Gospel:

With Father's Day this Sunday, I started wondering, “Do we know anything about Paul's family, his father and mother? Paul was called by Jesus to be His Missionary to the Gentiles. Yet the only family member of Paul ever mentioned in the Bible is his sister. Her son, Paul's nephew, helped rescue him from a Jewish hit squad after he was arrested in Jerusalem. But beyond that, all we know was that he was born in Tarsus, then educated in Jerusalem under one of the most respected rabbis named Gamaliel. Back when his name was still Saul, the young man fanatically persecuted followers of Jesus Christ, even guarding the cloaks of those who stoned to death the first Christian martyr Stephen. For all the evil things he did and later regretted, one thing you never hear Paul do is blame his parents. Paul took full responsibility for his actions. Now doesn't that make you curious? How could a former flaming unbeliever, a violent persecutor of Christians, say twice in this text: **We Are Always Confident?**

✦ **Groaning, yet guaranteed.** (vv.1-5)

He started to answer back in 3:4-6: *“Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”* (NIV84) In his former way of life Paul followed the self-righteous attitudes of the Pharisees. He was convinced he could keep God's law by trying hard. Many Americans are like them today. Even if they have no use for the Bible, they're sure their morality is higher than everyone else. They demand no one else judge them, but they stubbornly judge everyone else – by their personal opinions. Sadly, the Pharisee in each of us wants that too. We think we can keep *“the letter”* of God's law or at least get credit for trying. Our sinful heart feels we're better than others.

When Jesus appeared on the road to Damascus and convinced Saul that He is indeed the crucified, risen and ascended Son of God who will judge the world in righteousness, the scales literally fell off Saul's eyes. As commanded by the Lord's disciple Ananias, Saul got up, was baptized and washed his sins away. The Holy Spirit gave him a whole new outlook on life. (Acts 9:17-19; 22:14-16) Now Saul's name was changed to Paul to take God's message of peace in Jesus, the *“new covenant,”* all the way to the Gentiles at the ends of the earth. In that *“new covenant”* of pure grace, all our sins were washed away. God promised competence that only the Holy Spirit can give. You have it too in your baptism: God's Name on you, God's forgiveness of all your sins, God's grace to help you in every time of need.

So why are we **Groaning**? It's the sad effects of sin on the human body from Adam's rebellion in the Garden. Life can be so hard, it's hard to wait for heaven. Paul writes: *“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. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. 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.”*

This body is like a tent. Even the secular world can sense this. Nobel Prize-winning Biologist, Dr. Baltimore, once said, “We are prisoners of our own physiology.” Sickness and age make you feel trapped in a body that won't run and jump and play the way it used to. Especially frustrating if you were an

athlete in your youth. True, some of my pastor friends started running marathons in middle age. But for everyone it eventually goes the other way. The husband of one of our charter members complained that he ruined his legs wading through icy waters as a trapper. Some injuries just don't heal.

One Christian pastor described the day he "died" from a heart attack, then revived: "Everything we've learned about the blessings of dying in faith while trusting in Jesus – it's all true. I felt such a tremendous peace when my spirit was set free from the confines of my body." Paul is also describing this freedom when the spirit is set free from the narrow confines of this body. He sees the glorified spiritual body God has promised us in heaven. With bodies like Jesus' "**glorious body**" (Philippians 3:21), we will no longer be earthbound by time and space, but will meet the Lord Jesus in the air. Our glorified bodies will be able to eat, but unable to die or ever get sick and weakened by disease again. No more **Groaning**.

How do we know we're **guaranteed**? "*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.*" All who were baptized in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit received God's Spirit there. Can you imagine Paul smiling as he wrote this to Pastor Titus? "*At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*" (Titus 3:3-7 NIV84)

✦ **Fearing, yet we walk by faith. (vv.6-10)**

"Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight." People just don't get it. Saw a two stickers on the same bumper coming to church Thursday evening. Does this make sense? "Got Hope?...Vote No!" Some hope is empty and useless like a church sign: "Wish Noah killed those two mosquitoes!"

Our confidence comes from looking forward through the Spirit. It helps to know that the troubles of this life are caused by being away from the Lord. Late in the day maybe you're too tired to make any major decision. Might be better to wait for fresh eyes tomorrow. Little kids can't see this yet. They'll be tired and crabby, not wanting to go to bed. But their parents are confident that a little sleep will restore the sweetness of their little ones. So God assures us that spiritual fatigue and stress are part of the here and now, but not the hereafter. Because Jesus died and rose again, we boldly press on to better things with God. "*We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*"

We don't go by what we see and feel. That will rob you of hope in a heartbeat. But to walk about and "*live by faith, not by sight,*" that's true confidence because it relies on God's Word instead of human feelings and opinions. And you can have that whether you were blessed with believing parents or still pray God will lead them to repentance. No blaming on your past; you have too bright a future for that.

"So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 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." We know we're saved by grace alone under the "*New Covenant*" that says, "*Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.*" But now we're so thankful we want to "*live up to what we've already attained.*" (Philippians 3:16) So it's not just *WWJD* – *What Would Jesus Do?* But *What Would Jesus Want?* No need to keep track. Jesus will give you credit for everything good as done for Him. (Matthew 25:40) Don't let your right hand know what your left had is doing. Just be a kid for Jesus. Or raise your kids and bless your nephews and grandkids – all for Jesus. "Faith alone saves, but faith is never alone." (Franz Pieper) **We Are Always Confident** – in Christ. Amen.