

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 5:6-17

My dad owned his own business building homes when I was growing up. He built quality homes. Quite honestly, if you wanted a cheap home, you didn't come to him to build your home. He didn't use prefab materials. He used plaster instead of drywall. Many people came to him when they wanted to build their dream homes; and sometimes dad would build spec homes to sell.

Many weekends our family loaded up in the old station wagon he had and drove from house to house to see the homes and the progress made on building them. I was too young to appreciate the workmanship and the process of building homes at the time, but when I look back now, and remember how we would look at the blueprints for a house, and see all the individual pieces that came together, little by little, to turn the blueprints into a completed house, I realize how remarkable the process is.

Sometimes dad built a house for our family; and sometimes we moved into a spec home that he built. It was fun when I had the opportunity to choose the carpet, the paint and/or the wallpaper for my bedroom. Unfortunately, we never lived in any of the houses for very long. Most times we lived in a house for not more than three years. Mom never really emptied all of the boxes she packed for moving, probably because she knew we would likely be moving again, not necessarily because she wanted to move, but that's just the way it was. This is probably one reason why I don't like moving.

I can honestly say that I was always proud of my dad for his workmanship in building quality homes. I'm sure he felt great satisfaction in the work he did, he dug deep within himself and rose to any challenges that arose and overcame them. He set his sights on the goal and accomplished more than he dreamed possible. He has helped people leave behind their old homes and move into new homes. ("The old is gone, the new is here.") I know dad found satisfaction and joy in helping people begin a new life in a home that met their needs and was sound.

The Christian experience is very similar. Those who choose to follow Jesus, those whose goal it is to please the Lord, to personally experience and help others to experience the passing of the old and welcome the arrival of the new, is a wonderful thing. The apostle Paul wrote about this in his letter to the church in Corinth, a portion of which was read for you this morning.

Let's begin by looking at verses 6-10. We hear in those verses, Paul acknowledging that it was definitely not easy being a follower of Christ, especially not in this world. He knew there would be a better life, an easier life, that he would live when he would be free of his current physical body and moved on to live in the spiritual kingdom in the lifetime to come. Paul goes on here to acknowledge it would have been preferable for him to skip past the hardships in this world and be with his heavenly Father sooner than later. But that's not how it was to be, nor would it be acceptable for him to wish away the time and the call from God in this lifetime.

Paul endured much suffering and pain as he was imprisoned, beaten, and ridiculed. His was not an easy life; but his goal in life was not to live a comfortable private life by avoiding challenges and things that just might get him in trouble. Paul's purpose for doing what he did in this life was not merely for reaching the goal of getting to heaven. Paul's goal was to please God!

So, Paul's words come to us as a reminder that the life that God has given each of us, is a gift to be valued, respected and honored; and therefore, should be lived as such, not just for our

own benefit, but also for the benefit of others. As Christians, our ultimate goal in what we do and say should be to please God.

There's a sentence in today's scripture that, I believe, sheds light on how we know whether we are moving in the right direction towards achieving this goal. Paul wrote, **"as long as we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord."**

What does it mean to be "at home in the body"? Is he talking about something more than just our life in our flesh and bones? Could it mean choosing to do only what makes us feel good? Could it mean indulging in materialism and self-gratifying activities? Could it mean doing only that which makes us comfortable and turning a blind eye to others in need? Could it mean that we play it safe...surrounding ourselves only with others who believe as we do?

Yes, yes, yes and yes! It does mean these things. And Paul warns us that should we make our home by living this way, these socially acceptable ways in our society, we have chosen a path that leads us away from God. The fact is that when we engage in living in a manner contrary to the priorities of God, day in and day out, without even thinking about it, and we get really comfortable doing that, we are doing something even worse than just going through the motions of being a Christian.

Being "at home" in something means taking it to a deeper level, a more internal spiritual level. You've surely heard it said that any family can live in a house, but not every house is a home. If we do an honest personal assessment and find ourselves "at home" in these worldly preferences, then we are moving away from God, and if we are moving away from God, the obvious conclusion is that we are not pleasing God.

As Christians seeking to please God, we make our home in God. It's our faith in God that moves us into God's home. Here we find grace that sets us free from sin. We are fed with spiritual food that gives us hope and perseverance to overcome trials and sufferings. We are wrapped in the warmth of comfort when pain and grief strike us down. We find the love of God in the fellowship and friendship of other believers.

When our home is in God, all of what we find there nurtures and shapes us to have Christ-like hearts. That's important because pleasing God is not just about doing and saying all the right things. God looks at what is in our heart, he sees what motivates what we say and do. Our hearts are shaped in God's home by his love. It's here then that we choose to live a life of love, Christlike love. Love, that is solidified in our hearts by our faith in God, not by what we see and feel in this world.

The late Archbishop Temple, when he was primate of England, once told this story. One morning, in a house where he was a guest, he heard the cook singing, "nearer, My God to Thee." He was impressed that she was singing hymns, and he spoke of it to his host. The host replied, "Oh, yes. That's how she boils eggs – three verses for soft boiled and five for hard." The archbishop thought that the cook was expressing her faith. All she was doing was timing her eggs.

Unlike those around us who cannot see into our hearts and know our motivations for what we do and say, God can. So, we can't fake it with God. We can't use what we do and say to manipulate God into giving us brownie points for making him happy with us. God knows, God knows what is in our hearts. Our goal than should not be to get too comfortable in our skin, but instead, draw closer to the heart of God so that God's love lives in us. And so that God's love lives through us.

Paul wants us to know that we were not given this life, and Jesus did not give his life, just for us to earn brownie points to get into heaven. There's more to this life. If it means that we

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need to do some inner housecleaning to make sure our home is in Christ, then we should get to it, now.

We can be at home, with all the furnishings of God's glorious promises, now. We don't need to wait for the next lifetime to have everything that is of God and is good. The passing of the old and the arrival of the new begins in this lifetime, when we choose to make our home in Jesus. But those who are not at home in him, do not know that. Where does your heart call home? Where is your home? Amen.