

MSB 211  
*BRIEF BIBUCAL MESSAGES FROM*  
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**ABSENT FROM THE BODY**

by Otis O. Sellers ,A Summary by M. B. Hammond

The monograph *Absent From The Body* was written by Otis Sellers in 1966. It is an in-depth treatise on the passage in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, where the statement, "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" is fictitiously quoted. Sellers' first point was that there is no word for absent or present anywhere in this passage. Further the statement is a misquotation of 2 Corinthians 5:8 which states (KJV), "**We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.**" The words translated present and absent are the Greek words **endomeo** and **ekdomeo**, respectively. Sellers went on to show these words were derived from the Greek root *demos* which means people, and should have the translations of "among my own people" and "away from my own people". Thus the concept is not about the human body, but refers to a body of people.

In 2 Corinthians 5:1 it says (KJV), "**For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.**" He made a Translator's Revised Version (TRV) in this fashion, "**For we are aware that if our elementary house, that is to say this tabernacle should be demolished, we have a dwelling out of God, a house not made by hands, eonian in the heavens.**" This could not be the human body because the "we" is a plural reference while "house" is always singular. Also, the word "tabernacle" (Grk. *-skenos*) refers to the center of activity, or a ... headquarters for the apostles' service to God.

In his explanations of this passage, Sellers points to two important facts that were not noticed by the translators. The first fact is that figures of speech abound in this portion of Scripture. Nothing is called by its literal name.

Metaphor follows metaphor: "tabernacle," "building of God," "house not made with hands," "clothed upon," "house which is from heaven," and "naked". None of these has the literal meaning that normally comes to mind. Sellers also said, "There is probably no other short portion of the Bible where one thing is used to represent another so many times. This places upon the interpreter the task of finding what is meant by these terms. " The second fact that must be faced is that this portion has a subject. He studied the subject of the passages from 2 Corinthians 2:14 to 5:21 and found that they all had to do with Paul's ministry, that is, Paul's divine service carried out under God's direction. Sellers provides separate summaries of each of these paragraphs and they are all clearly related to Paul's divine commission. Each paragraph relates to a different aspect of his service and thus the present passage must also have to do with his service for God.

Expounded below is 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 (TRV)

**5:1-For we are aware that if our elementary house, that is to say, this tabernacle, should be demolished, we have a dwelling out of God, a house not made with hands, eonian in the heavens.**

In this passage, "to be aware" means to have a full understanding, and the elementary house is explained by the word "tabernacle" which translates the Greek word skenous. This word means a tent, but in ancient Greek usage the tent was the center stage, the scenery and backdrop of the famous Greek thespian productions, and in ancient armies the tent was the general's headquarters or center of activity. An exact analogy of Paul's desire is found in Isaiah 33:20 where Jerusalem is called "a tabernacle that shall not be taken down," He also refers to the "two Jerusalems" in Galatians 4:25.26, speaking of one as "the Jerusalem that is now", and the other as "the Jerusalem that is above." Paul is thus referring to the Temple and Jerusalem which were in dire danger of being destroyed at the time of his writing, about AD. 57 (and were destroyed by the Romans in AD. 70). Paul recognized that the coming of the kingdom would herald a new temple that could not be destroyed and it is this new temple he was looking for. Jerusalem, in the kingdom, is to be a great divine center for all the world (see Isa. 2:3, 52:9, 62:7).

**5:2-For in this we are groaning, earnestly desiring to be clothed in our habitation which is out of heaven.**

Paul was a patriot and he was groaning about what might happen to Jerusalem and the faithful there. The word "this" is neuter and therefore refers to the tabernacle. Note that even Christ (Matt. 23:37,38) lamented over Jerusalem. Paul strongly desired for the kingdom to come with a new Jerusalem and the glory of God being seen by all the nations. If this happened, the invasion of the Holy Spirit would quiet the opposition and ease the constant travail of Paul and his associates by imposing the rule of Christ and eliminating war, conflict and Satan's attempts to destroy Paul's message.

**5:3- If so that being clothed we shall not be found naked.**

Paul was concerned for his converts and the body of the out-called ones in Jerusalem. In Romans 13:12 Paul attests to this by saying "the night is far spent, the day is at hand," so strongly did he think that the kingdom would come in its fullness, and shortly. Their ministry needed the support of the Holy Spirit so these believers would not be out-numbered, exposed and unsupported because they would have the protection of heaven's government. Paul had no foreknowledge of the dispensation of the grace of God which we live in today, and which he announced at Acts 28:28 about 5 years after this epistle.

**5:4-For we who are in this tabernacle are groaning, being burdened, on which we are not wanting to be stripped, but to be dressed, that this mortal may be swallowed up by life.**

Because the "we" is plural and the "tabernacle" is singular this could not refer to the human body. In his position of service Paul is groaning along with all loyal Jews, because of the constant pressure by Satan and imminent possibility of the destruction of Jerusalem. Paul could have divorced himself from Jerusalem, but He uses the metaphor of "being stripped" to indicate that the distress of Jerusalem greatly weighed on him. Further, his ministry is burdened and his influence seemingly becoming less and less even though he has the direction of God. Paul uses the concept of "being dressed" to indicate that having the Holy Spirit invading the world would give a life full of blessing to his followers and make his service into a life giving blessing. The idea of "this mortal being swallowed up by life" is in harmony with Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones (Ezek. 37) where the prophet looked upon a scene of death, but saw it swallowed up by life. Likewise Paul desired to see this.

**5:5-Now He who produces us in respect to this very thing is God, who also gives us the earnest of the Spirit**

God has called Paul to this ministry, and Paul has tough opposition, but he is faithfully working to follow God's direction. He acknowledges that in spite of all the turmoil, God has provided them with the Holy Spirit as a pledge and guarantee of His purpose to establish His kingdom.

**5:6---Being then always courageous and fully aware that while we are among our own people in the body, we are separated from our own people, being from the Lord.**

Paul's determination and endurance are confirmed, and he also states a condition that he knows he is among his own people; the converts to Christ out in the dispersion, Jews and Greeks, where "in the body" means "in reality." He was separated from his own people, the Jews, because his work is directed by Christ whom they did not see as Messiah. He was a Jew by birth, but his service was in foreign lands as a "sent one" or "ambassador," authorized by the Lord (2 Cor. 5:20).

**5:7-For we are walking by faith not by sight.**

Paul did the Lord's bidding without questioning; his faith was enough. The Lord didn't have to explain His reasons for his ministry; Paul took God at His word and acted upon it.

**5:8- Yet we do not lack courage, and we are delighting all the more to be separated from our own people, out of the body, and to be among our own people in relationship to the Lord.**

Paul reasserts his endurance and determination once again saying he delights, and really enjoys being separated from his own people, where "out of the body" means "not in reality." He was really among his own people, the believers, in service to the Lord. In fact he was operating far distant from the Jews and Jerusalem, which was the center of the out-called activities. Paul always was happy to be among his own people in relationship to the Lord, even if these were Jews and people of the nations living in far distant places and having little or none of the Jewish laws, precepts, customs and culture.

**5:9--And for this reason also we are ambitious** (i.e. acting from love of honor), **that whether we are among our own people, or whether away from our own people, to be well pleasing to Him.**

Paul speaks in a condition in which he was not acting or speaking as an ambassador of Christ, such as when he was working with Aquila and Priscilla as a tentmaker. He states a second condition in which he is not physically separated from them, but rather set apart to serve the Lord. It was Paul's earnest desire, no matter what the conditions, that the Corinthian believers would know his motives came from God and were not self-serving.

**5:10-For it is binding for all of us to be manifested before the tribunal of Christ, that each one may receive for that which he does through the body, whether good or bad.**

This confirms that Paul placed his service for God in the highest priority, and that he is not afraid to be judged because his service is truly what God had sent him to do. Paul says to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:1), "I charge you therefore before God, even Jesus Christ, who shall determine what is right for the living and the dead, at His shining forth (epiphaneia), even His kingdom." Paul is placing his ministry right in the hands of God so the Corinthians can clearly see he is without any personal egotism or self gratification in his service to Christ.

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The complete 42-page booklet by Otis Q. Sellers, titled (Disc #SS12 ) **Absent From The Body** is available from the Word of Truth Ministry.

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