

367 Tom Wright or Jim Reeves?

After my comments spurred on by reading Tom Wright's translation of 1 Corinthians, I moved to the sequel, but nothing really came alive until I hit 2 Cor 5:1-5. Bang!

But first, remember how I keep saying that when a scholar seeks to translate a passage, they have to keep in mind their overall understanding of what the Old and New Testaments teach? They then work out what the current author (here, Paul) is saying and they translate it for us so that we too can (hopefully) understand what Paul was trying to get across to his hearers + what God is trying to get across to us.

So Tom has used his extensive (and that's a massive understatement!) knowledge of Paul's teaching, and he has worked out what he thinks Paul is trying to get across in my five verses. Then he has decided what actual English words would best express that meaning.

Even then, when I read Tom's words: I can see what Tom is saying, but what does Tom actually mean? The communication chain is God → Paul → Tom → me. How desperately we need the Holy Spirit's help because 'the word of God' comes through the filter of Tom Wright – or whichever translation we 'like'.

So what did I see in 2 Cor 5:1-5 that so exploded in my brain?

Since I have tried to rebuild my faith from scratch, the main thing I've picked up – largely through Tom, I think – is realising the completely unbiblical view that I have swallowed since I came to faith in 1968. It is well expressed by this chorus that I sang at that time on a CPAS boys' camp, which I helped to run in the Lake District (a song by Jim Reeves).

This world is not my home
I'm just a-passing through
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue

*The angels beckon me
From heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home
In this world anymore*

Oh Lord, you know
I have no friend like you
If heaven's not my home
Then Lord, what will I do?

*The angels beckon me
From heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home
In this world anymore*

What's wrong with that?! Isn't this what Paul talks about, quite often? He longs to be away from this troublous life, here on earth, and back at home (in heaven) with the Lord?

But no! Tom and I both believe in 'the resurrection of the body', as the creeds say. While it's not entirely clear (to me, anyway) quite what will happen to me when I die, I am now

sure that when Jesus returns, in his awesome majesty, to (some sort of) 'new earth', I will have (some sort of) a new body. I'll be able to recognise you and you me (sorry!). We will not be disembodied spirits. We will 'put on our heavenly building' (NTW), i.e. our new bodies, 'on top' of these present bodies that are 'doomed to die'.

I'll let Tom speak for himself, and you can see if it strikes you as powerfully as it did me. At least it gives the lie to the Reevesian philosophy, I think. This world matters.

What is Paul's 'building'? Is it the *place*, 'heaven', or is it Paul's (and the Corinthians') new *bodies*?

(I've highlighted alternate verses, only to aid comparison between Tom Wright and NIV.)

NTW: For we know that if our earthly house, our present 'tent', is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house no human hands have built: it is everlasting, in the heavenly places. ²At the present moment, you see, we are groaning, as we long to put on our heavenly building, ³in the belief that by putting it on we won't turn out to be naked. ⁴Yes: in the present 'tent', we grown under a great weight. But we don't want to put it off; we want to put on something else on top, so that what is doomed to die may be swallowed up with life. ⁵It is God who has been at work in us to do this, the God who has given us the spirit as the first installment and guarantee.

NIV: 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. ²Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, ³because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴For 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. ⁵Now 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.

Paul Bev. 8.2.24