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I HATE PACKING

An aunt of mine was recently preparing to go to California for a few weeks. In frustration at the preparations she made the comment, "At least we don't have to pack to go to heaven." Those of us who have frequently had to move understand the pain in her voice. But we can also understand the joy there, too. For she was right. We don't have to pack to go to heaven.

First of all, what could we pack? They say you can't take it with you. What is there of earth, other than beloved people, we could take with us? We won't even take our bodies as they are.

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. (1 Cor 15:42-44, 49-50)

We would not want to take anything that causes pain or frustration in this life; and what is there that doesn't? Money? If we don't have enough we are frustrated. If we have too much we put locks on the door, "afraid somebody gonna rob [us] when [we're] out a-makin' more. What for?" (Ira Gershwin, *Porgy and Bess*) Prestige? That can be, as many learn to their regret, a relative and fleeting thing. I knew a man who for many years was the mayor of my hometown. He did not try to become governor, congressman, or senator. "Better to be a big frog in a small pond than a small frog in a big pond." When we get to heaven we will be in God's pond, and to him "be glory for ever. Amen." (Rom 11:36) Things? What is more frustrating than things? As soon as you get it, somebody has a newer, better one. And what you have is sure to break down. (Yes, all you Mac users, even your computers can malfunction.) At some point you will be stranded on the highway (or the information superhighway) of life if you thing things are worth taking.

How would we decide what to pack? Many the person has had the dilemma of trying to pack for Chicago

in the spring. Do you take warm clothes, or light? Will it be cold, or warm, or both? What from this earth are you going to need in heaven? How do you know? What can you pack for a place you have never been and cannot begin to imagine?

The great thing about heaven is that you don't need to bring anything with you, even if you could. Like Orphan Annie when she first visits Daddy Warbucks, you don't need anything because your host will provide anything you need. Haven't you ever dreamed of going somewhere, and just buying what you need when you get there? Since we will be going to spend eternity with the one who owns everything in the first place, we can just let him "buy" what we need when we get there. "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof." (Ps 50:10-12)

If there is anything that you will need in heaven, you don't need to pack it anyway. Instead send it ahead by a spiritual UPS. "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:20-21) The only treasures you can take to heaven are those that you can send ahead.

No, we don't have to pack to go to heaven. One suitcase wouldn't be enough anyway; or a planeload of suitcases. We would have to pack for eternity. (And I suspect we won't have to do the laundry while there, either.)

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THE SENTENCE IN EPHESIANS

Paul could be very wordy at times. Perhaps the best known is one sentence which can be found in Ephesians 1:3-14. This whole passage is one long sentence, full of clauses and sub-clauses (and since he talks about Christians, even santa-clauses). Most modern “translations” break this up into several sentences, thus becoming paraphrases rather than translations. (I have a basic objection to those who unnecessarily change the inspired word just for some sense of their own propriety.) Perhaps they are, in some ways, more readable, but at the cost of a sense of Paul’s style and logic.

Below is the entire sentence (from the King James Version). Every time I change a level of indenting at the beginning of a phrase or phrases, that level refers back to the underlined words in the previous level. To make it easier to see the changes I have changed the symbol at the beginning of each line for each new level. I once thought of diagramming the sentence as I was taught in the second or third grade, but that became too cumbersome.

Maybe this chart will make the sentence easier to understand; but probably not so much as those modern versions. To me it is of value because it shows both the level of complexity of Paul’s thinking, and that Paul, like other great writers, was not constrained by the common concept of what constituted proper grammar. This sentence alone proves what Peter said about Paul: “in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” (2 Pet 3:15)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

❖ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

❖ According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,

☐ that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

☐ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself,

▪ according to the good pleasure of his will,

▪ To the praise of the glory of his grace,

● wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved,

◆ In whom we have redemption through his blood,

❖ the forgiveness of sins,

❖ according to the riches of his grace;

☐ Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

▪ Having made known unto us the mystery of his will,

● according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

● That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things

❖ in Christ,

❖ both which are in heaven, and which are on earth;

❖ even in him;

☐ In whom also we have obtained an inheritance,

▪ being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

● That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ,

◆ In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation:

◆ in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

❖ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

OUCH! THAT HURTS

Warning: the next two paragraphs of this article describe graphic violence. If you do not wish to read these paragraphs you may skip them to get to a biblical description of equally graphic violence.

Flaying is the act of removal of the skin of a person for the purpose of torture or execution. A particularly adept torturer could keep a body alive for long periods of time as he removed most of the skin in one piece. Tradition says that the apostle Bartholomew was flayed before he was executed by crucifixion. The prominent scholar of the Torah, Rabbi Akiva, was flayed by the Romans, either for teaching Torah in public or for his part in the Bar Kochba rebellion.

Scalping is a partial flaying. It was practiced throughout time and in many places, although it probably gained its greatest notoriety in the practices of some Native American tribes. It was practiced by the English and French during America's French and Indian wars. One Frenchman, known only by his initials described the practice. After immobilizing his victim, the scalper, "quickly seizes his knife, and makes an incision around the hair from the upper part of the forehead to the back of the neck. Then he puts his foot on the shoulder of the victim, whom he has turned over face down, and pulls the hair off with both hands, from back to front . . . This hasty operation is no sooner finished than the savage fastens the scalp to his belt and goes on his way." (J. C. B., *Travels in New France*)

"And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." (Gal 5:24) Crucifixion was one of the cruelest forms of execution. A person might take days to die, particularly if his

hands were tied rather than nailed to the cross. Pilate marveled that Jesus was dead in just a few hours (Mk 15:43). And yet this is what we are to do to our fleshly nature. Imagine scalping yourself as described above. Picture yourself flaying your body. Not a pretty picture, is it? And yet Paul tells us to do something just as difficult and painful.

If we crucify the desires and lusts of the flesh it will not be easy. It will not be pleasant. God does not ask us to violate the nature he created us with. Nevertheless, he does ask us to control our flesh. He does not ask us to become celibate, but he does ask us to crucify that nature that gives free reign to our desires. He does not ask us to be paupers, but he does ask us to make our living honestly.

It is the unbridled expression of our desires that we are to crucify. We know that it is those unlimited desires that are wrong, not the same desires kept within God's original plan. "Whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" (Jas 4:1-2) James says lust—uncontrolled passion—is at war with our normal desires. It is these lusts that we must crucify. It is these desires that we must remove.

Suppose that you heard about a man who spent his days cutting people. While they are asleep he comes and slices away chunks of flesh, possibly even scalping them. Normally we would expect such a person to be arrested and punished. But if the same person has a medical degree and is removing cancerous skin we consider them to be a blessing. When we crucify the flesh we are removing the tumors of lust. It may be painful, but it sure is healthful.

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