

A New Creation in Christ

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 15:42-57 **Devotional Reading:** 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5

Background Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21.

TIME: A.D. 56 **PLACE:** from Macedonia

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

¹¹ Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. ¹² We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. ¹³ If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to see what Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the tremendous changes that take place when sinners become new creatures in Christ.

Principle: to be aware that believers have an obligation to work for Christ in reconciling sinners to Him, even as God through Christ reconciled them to Himself.

Application: to urge Christians to include in their new way of life efforts to bring sinners to righteousness by faith in Christ.

INTRODUCTION

Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians was likely written in A.D. 55, a few months after he penned his first letter to them.

Apparently, a number of problems Paul addressed in his first communication continued to plague the Corinthian church. Added to this was the fact that some false teachers had wormed their way into the fellowship and were challenging Paul's authority and integrity.

Arriving in Macedonia from Ephesus; Paul was greatly relieved to learn from Titus that the situation in Corinth was more encouraging than he had previously thought (2 Cor. 7:5-9). Nevertheless, Paul devoted a considerable portion of this letter to teaching the Corinthian church. In doing so, the apostle revealed much personal information concerning both his struggles and his goals in ministry.

In the first part of 2 Corinthians 5, Paul dealt with the resurrection body, a theme we considered in last week's lesson. Unlike the earthly tent in which we now reside, Paul longed for "*an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands*" (v. 1). Once we depart this earthly body, we will be "*at home with the Lord*" (v. 8) and "*must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*" (v. 10).

Paul's Effort (2 Corinthians 5:11-13)

The word translated "terror" is the Greek word phobos and is usually rendered "fear" in the New Testament. Having just spoken of one day standing before the judgment seat of Christ (v. 10). Such a thought should terrify anyone who is not obeying God. But Paul, as a Christian, faces the thought of judgment without terror. Instead, he has a deep reverence that usually is referred to as "the fear of God" (e.g., 2 Corinthians 7:1).

Since believers will have to answer concerning the use of their talents and opportunities to serve God (1 Cor. 3:13-15), this is a strong motivation to "*persuade others*" (2 Cor. 5:11) to follow Christ.

Leading others to Christ involves persuading them to forsake sin and confess Christ; thus we must appeal to both head and heart when involved in the evangelistic task (cf. Acts 17:2; 18:4; 24:25; 26:28). Perhaps our greatest challenge is to get people to see their need for repentance, for many do not even view themselves as lost in sin (2 Pet. 3:9).

Although some might have thought that Paul had goals other than winning the lost, this fact was known by God-and should have been recognized by the Corinthians as well. Paul had no hidden agenda and was not "*handling the word of God deceitfully*" (2 Cor. 4:2). Since he had planted the church in Corinth, these saints should have had no doubts concerning his motives. Even so, they had become enamored of the false teachers, who were casting doubt on Paul's character.

1. What future event motivated Paul to persuade others to accept Christ (2 Cor. 5:11)?

Paul was not commending himself as might be supposed. Rather, Paul was giving the Corinthians an opportunity to be right-fully proud of his ministry, which had brought them the message of salvation.

This, of course, was quite a contrast to the false teachers, who were prone to "*take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart*" (v. 12). While Paul's opponents might have been questioning his sincerity, he questioned the hearts of those who were concerned only with outward appearances. If, as some suggest, these teachers were Judaizers, we know that they were particularly concerned with outward ritual (cf. Acts 15:1; Col. 2:16).

"If we live only for the praise of men, we will not win the praise of God at the Judgment Seat of Christ. To live for man's praise is to exalt reputation over character, and it is character that will count when we see Christ" (Wiersbe, Bible Exposition Commentary, Victor).

2. Why is it wrong to "take pride in what is seen" (v. 12)?

Paul received the gospel he preached from Jesus (Galatians 1:11,12). And Paul received those things after Jesus died, rose, and ascended to Heaven.

Hearing of such things, opponents of Paul say that he is beside himself, out of his mind, crazy (e.g., Acts 26:24). In response, Paul points out that the things that cast doubt on his sanity are between him and God. When Paul talks with his fellow humans, his talk is sober, reasonable, with no indication of insanity. For example, when he tells of Jesus' resurrection he points to credible witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

Paul's preaching is plain and direct. He simply presents the gospel, the good news, and urges the hearers to accept the opportunity it offers. That is what makes sense!

3. What are some possible reasons some might have thought Paul was crazy (v. 13)?

Love's Control (2 Corinthians 5:14,15)

The real reason Paul served the Lord was the love of Christ. The word for "compels" can be translated "controls"

or "causes," thus indicating that Christ's love was the primary motivation for Paul's ministry. The construction can mean that Paul was talking about either Christ's love for him or his love for Christ (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:9). The former is more likely than the latter.

If Christ died for all – and He did – “*therefore all died*” (2 Cor. 5:14; cf. Heb. 2:9). The idea is that all of us, because we are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). were represented on the cross, where Christ offered Himself as a substitute on our behalf (1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 1:18,19; 3:18; 1 John 2:2). "In all his redemptive actions Christ was a representative of humanity, so that what was done by him for the race could be viewed as done by the race in him" (Allen, ed., Broadman Bible Commentary, Broadman).

4. What was the primary motivation for Paul to serve Christ (v. 14)?

As Paul said elsewhere, we are crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20), buried with Him (Col. 2:12), and raised to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). The proclamation of this message includes a call to believe the good news and so be united to him who died and rose for them. Then they will know in their own lives the power of his death for their sin and the power of his resurrection for their living" (Allen).

Since Christ died to give us a new life, it behooves us to dedicate our lives to serving Him. As Paul felt constrained to proclaim the message of redemption, so those who have responded to that message should commit their lives to serving Him. We have indeed been saved to serve!

5. Because Christ "died for all" (v. 15), how should we live?

Changed By The Power Of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:16,17)

To know someone "*from a worldly point of view*" might indicate looking at someone purely from a worldly standpoint. As a Pharisee, Paul likely viewed both people and positions in such a manner (cf. Phil. 3:4-7). Having come to know the Lord, however, led Paul to a new perspective.

Paul's own mistake had been to think of Christ as an enemy of God and of God's people. But Paul resolved to make that mistake no more.

Really knowing anyone involves acquaintance with that person's thoughts and feelings, values and ambitions, as well as desires and motives. Paul wanted to see people as Christ saw them. As Jesus was willing to dispose Himself of great privilege to come to earth, so believers must share a similar attitude (2:5-11).

6. What does it mean to know someone "from a worldly point of view" (v. 16)?

The expression "*in Christ*" is a favorite of the Apostle Paul. It denotes our union with Christ and our incorporation into His spiritual body (1 Cor. 12:13). To be in Christ is to be a Christian; it is to be changed by His power into a completely new person.

So great is the change that Christ makes that Paul could describe it as becoming a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), or new creature. The same concept was expressed by Christ when He said, "You must be born again" (John 3:7).

This new birth affects not only the inner person but also all things related to that person. "Adam was the head of the old creation, and Christ is the Head of the new creation. The old creation was plunged into sin and condemnation because of the disobedience of Adam. The new creation means righteousness and salvation because of the obedience of Jesus Christ. Because we are a part of the new creation, everything has become new" (Wiersbe).

Being new creatures in Christ, however, does not mean that we will no longer struggle with temptation and sin. If we yield to the power of the Spirit, we can find victory over the forces of evil (Rom. 7:24,25). The

saints in Corinth certainly knew that the power of God could deliver them from sin. Prior to accepting Christ, some of them had led very sordid lifestyles (1 Cor. 6:9-11). They also knew that the battle with sin was not over, as the two Corinthian epistles certainly indicate.

7. What does being "in Christ" (v. 17) mean for us?

Called To Share The Message Of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)

The phrase "all things" refers to those things Paul had been discussing. The change from the old to the new was, in fact, the work of God. Salvation is of the Lord, from start to finish. This being so, we cannot boast as if we achieved salvation through our own efforts; it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8,9).

The word "reconciled" (2 Cor. 5:18) speaks of a change from enmity to friendship. By our sinning we made ourselves to be God's enemies (Colossians 1:21). We could not end our enmity, but God could. He sent Jesus, who died to pay sin's penalty. As a result, God could forgive us. "Just as sin involves man in a dual estrangement, from God and from his fellow man, so reconciliation is God's work in bringing man into proper relationship with himself and with his fellow man" (Stagg, *New Testament Theology*, Broadman). Now that we have been reconciled to God through Christ, we must carry on the "ministry of reconciliation" to others.

8. What is the "ministry of reconciliation" (v. 18)?

"Not counting people's sins against them (imputing their trespasses unto them-KJV)" (v. 19) means that God was not counting sins against those who come to Christ for salvation. However, if we refuse to receive Christ, we will die in our sins, thus facing the consequences of that dreadful choice (John 8:24).

The "message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19) was the gospel Paul preached. It is still proclaimed today by faithful servants of God.

9. What does "not imputing their trespasses" (v. 19) mean?

An ambassador has a dual role: he is a messenger and a representative. In actuality, he has no authority of his own. His authority derives from the one who sent him. In this case, Paul viewed himself as an ambassador for Christ. This was particularly true with regard to his apostolic ministry (Gal. 1:11,12).

All Christians, however, should view themselves as the Lord's ambassadors. There are not enough ministers and missionaries to reach everyone. All believers must take seriously the privilege of witnessing for Christ. We do not carry our own message but the reconciling message of the Lord Jesus.

"No graver issue can be set before man than for him to learn of the reconciliation achieved by Christ and the necessity for him to end his rebellion against God. The reason for this gravity is clear: the reconciliation between God and the individual is incomplete so long as the individual withholds repentance, maintains his resistance to God, and declines to acknowledge Christ as Saviour and Lord" (Allen).

10. How can we be "ambassadors for Christ" (v. 20)?

As the holy Son of God, Jesus Christ "knew no sin." This was in spite of the fact that He "was in all points tempted like as we are" (Heb. 4:15). That He never succumbed to the allurements of the devil uniquely qualified Him to be our Savior, the One who "was wounded for our transgressions, [and] bruised for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5).

That God "made him to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21) means that Christ became a sin offering on our behalf. This should not be taken to mean that Jesus became a real sinner; rather, He took the place of sinners on the cross. His substitutionary atonement made possible our righteousness and thus our right standing before God (cf. Rom. 5:17). This is not based on what we have done but on what He has done for us!

Even if we believe in Jesus the Savior, God will not make us new if we prefer to go on sinning—we must repent. Then it must be our intent to be free from sin throughout our lives. But sometimes we fail to live up to our intention. Every Christian can sin.

The apostle Paul did (Romans 7:19-25), and not many of us are better than he! But we can praise God for His continuing forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

11. How did Christ become "sin for us" (v. 21)? What results because of His sacrifice?

CONCLUSION

Reputations Count

It's important to have an honorable family name, isn't it? And it's good to add honor to that name by what we do. This is especially true for those of us in "the family of God" (cf. Mark 3:35).

Christians are privileged to have both eternal life and the chance to offer that privilege to others. But the example we set is important to the credibility of our message. The way we "live down" a sinful past is to "live up" to the high standards of being a new creature in Christ. Are you making progress in this regard?

PRAYER

We do love You, Father, and we love our brothers and sisters in Your family. We treasure the companionship, the joy, the learning, the help, and the encouragement that we find in our association with the church.

Help us to make our witness for the church reflect the benefits we receive—even the benefit of eternal life. May we guard the worthy reputation that Christ has given us. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"Live down" your past by "living up" to God's Word.