

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

Title: A New Perspective and New Creation

Truth: Christ's death changes our outlook on people and puts us into a new-creation standing before God.

Date/Location: Sunday March 8, 2026 at FBC

Introduction

Jesus loved us and died for us so that we would live for Him. This life-for-Christ replaces our old way—living for ourselves. And that should be so even if others think we are strange because of it. We do not fear people nearly as much as we fear God because we face the judgment seat of Christ.

Verses 14-15 in turn have two consequences, denoted by “therefore” at the beginning of each of verses 16 and 17. The first consequence has to do with to how we regard people. The second consequence concerns anyone who in faith follows Jesus because that person becomes a new creation.

I. The New Perspective on Others, v. 16

- A. The first consequence of the work of Christ we learn in verse 16. It is a negative implication concerning how we know or think of other people, and of Christ Himself.
- B. The important and repeated idea in this verse is “according to the flesh.” It is a way of thinking about people, of considering them, of looking at them. According to the flesh means from a sinful standpoint, from an “ego” centered viewpoint. Paul is not speaking of “Christ in the flesh” as if it is an adjective describing Christ or people in their humanity. It is instead an adverbial phrase describing the way Paul “knew” or thought of people.
 - 1. Paul does not explicitly mention the opposite of “according to the flesh.” But can you surmise what he is thinking in that regard? The opposite of according to the flesh is...according to the Spirit. We are thus reminded of the need to walk in the Spirit and be filled by the Spirit. We must walk in obedience to the Scripture, sensitive to a conscience informed by the Bible to do God's will.

2. According to the Spirit means from God's perspective as opposed to from a merely human, sinful vantage point.
- C. Paul says that in his past, he considered Christ from this standpoint. He was probably like the San Hedrin council, seeing Jesus as a troublemaker, a blasphemer, a false teacher, perhaps a liar or a lunatic, certainly as a regular human being but not as Messiah. They wanted a secular, political conqueror for a Messiah, but instead got a carpenter's son, a Nazarene, a crucified Savior and they thought he was a nobody, a nothing.
- D. His perspective changed entirely on the way to Damascus (Acts 9). He now sees Jesus as the Messiah promised in the Hebrew Scriptures, as the Son of God, as God in the flesh, as Savior, as resurrected Lord and Christ, as King and Judge, and as coming again.
- E. That perspective-change then altered how he viewed everyone and everything. He no longer looks at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen (2 Cor. 4:16-18). He wants to see things as God sees them—in the heart, not in the flesh, as potential subjects of reconciliation with God.
- F. Before, he looked at people like the Pharisees did. Probably he saw an entire class of people who were just accursed (John 7:49) or as "tax collectors and sinners" (Matthew. 9:11). He had some tendencies like the Corinthians might still be struggling against, to consider false teachers who take pride in what is seen. They looked at people from a human standpoint, from a worldly point of view, superficially. They might be impressed with how the person speaks or looks, how wealthy they are, their race, whether Jew or Gentile, their personality, their culture, intelligence, credentials, degrees in education, physique, or other externals that are passing away.
- G. Now, he sees people in terms of spiritual state, as precious souls for whom Christ died. Every person is on the same level playing field as sinners, and then either in Christ or not in Christ. That is all that really matters.
- H. Here is a good example of what I am talking about: Barnabas received Paul, not according to the flesh (Acts 9:26-27). There is

likely a good deal of the same idea in Barnabas concerning John Mark in Acts 15:37.

- I. To apply this “new perspective of Paul” to yourself, stop and think for a minute.
 1. How do you think of Jesus? As a good teacher? As another religious figure in history, perhaps important or not, just another one like Mother Theresa or Mahatma Gandhi or Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) or Confucius? Or as the lone way to God and the only provider of forgiveness of sin? As the Son of God, second person of the Trinity, as Savior and Lord?
 2. Once you think that through, then ask yourself how you look at people. Do you see anyone with animus in your eye (ill feeling or hostility)? Do you have a particular aversion to some people? Have you ever said a person is less than a person? God is looking to transform your perspective so that you do not think of people that way anymore. Instead, you look at them like God looks at them, either in Christ or outside of Christ, either a brother/sister or a potential brother/sister. As beloved of God, as a creation of God.

II. The New Creation in Christ, v. 17

- A. The second consequence of the work of Christ in verses 14-15 is in verse 17. It is a positive consequence that has to do with the fact that anyone who is saved becomes an entirely new creature.
- B. A plain reading of the text indicates that Paul is speaking about individuals and comparing their condition before they are Christians to their condition after they become Christians. He is not, as some suggest, speaking about cosmic realities or ages of history. For example, someone could say that Paul is saying that the world was an “old creation” before Christ came and then when Jesus came everything became new. That is not true because even though a new era began (the dispensation of the church, we could call it), it does not begin in any real sense for people until they become followers of Jesus.
- C. The original language is wonderfully terse: “If anyone in Christ, new creation. The old passed, behold new has come.”

- D. The “if” is all encompassing, standing in the text as an invitation to “whosoever will.” Let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him or her come to Jesus. It urges you to follow Jesus if you have not already done so.
- E. If you do come to believe in Jesus because He loved you and gave Himself for your sins, then the text says you have been changed. Your old life ended with a full stop. Not in a mystical way where you became not-you, but your connection to Adam and sin was severed. God ended the terrible reign of sin over your heart and mind. Death no longer has dominion over you.
- F. At the same moment, God also brought you into a new realm, placed you into a new sphere of existence in Christ and in the Church. He delivered you from sin and death to life and righteousness. He opened your eyes to the truth about Him, about Jesus, about the Holy Spirit, about the real meaning of life. Paul writes about the coming of the new in the perfect tense, meaning that after the old passed and was done, the new came and has a continuing powerful impact.
- G. Paul adds “behold” to the last phrase. It is like “Look!” It calls attention. It is exciting. It is triumphant. “Look at what God has done!” “Behold what God has done in my life!”
- H. The change wrought in my heart and yours at this point is both objective and subjective.
1. Some of it we cannot see or feel—but it is still objectively true. Our standing before God, our so-called “position in Christ,” is changed. The things I mentioned above about being in Adam/Christ, under sin/righteousness are largely objective.
 2. There are also subjective changes in your life as well. You no longer live merely for yourself as before. You love God. You love God’s people.
- I. We should spend more time thinking about the simple phrase “in Christ.” It occurs dozens of times in Scripture, it is central to Paul’s theology, and as we dig into what it means, it quickly becomes apparent that it is not so simple after all.

1. How to get “in Christ.” Despite the richness of the truth of it, and how many theologians have spent a lot of time thinking about it, it is easy to get in Christ—by simply turning away from your old loves and turning to Christ. Believe in the Lord, His death and resurrection for you, and you will be in Christ.
 2. What does it mean to be “in Christ”? It has to do with our personal and saving union with Christ. It has an individual aspect to it, as well as a corporate element. It is the opposite of being in Adam. It connects us to Christ’s body, which is the church.
- J. In *Christ*, all is new. In *me*, however, God is still at work. But take careful note that this ongoing nature of God’s work means that it has to be evident that God *is* at work. If you are a new person, then there will be new fruit.
1. This is the problem when a person says, “I believe in God” but there is no real difference between that person and a “nice person in the world.” This is why someone may question your profession of faith. If you live like the world, and what you say about God does not really matter to your life, then does what you say matter to God?
 2. Saying, “I am a good Christian” and then not having any proof to back it up is like saying, “I am a good employee” but you are on probation all the time. Or like saying, “I am a good student” but you are getting Ds and barely showing up for class. The external standards—performance review or attendance or grades—show a different reality than what you claim. If you are never in school or never show up for work, are you even a student or employee at all? In the world, the objective standard is the performance review and the grades. In the Christian life, the Bible is the objective standard. “You will know them by their fruits.” If there is no new fruit, then there is no “in Christ.” If we say that we have fellowship with God, yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. If I never show up for church and do not live in any way different from the world, then I have a major problem “in me” and I likely may not be “in Christ.”

Conclusion

Paul gives two consequences of Christ's death for us. The first concerns the Christian's perspective on others, and the second has to do with the transformation that a person experiences when they become a Christian.

These things make all the difference in how we live every day. You see and think about people quite a bit of the time. Your family members, random people out on the street, at work and school, at entertainment venues. Do you focus on the flesh, the outward appearance? Do you rank and sort in your mind? Or do you consider them like "sheep without a shepherd," those whom God loves, in need of a Savior, as part of the potential harvest for the Lord?

We were in our "old man" in Adam, dying in sin, with a worldly outlook on everything and everyone. Now, Christians are new creatures in Christ, alive to God, with a Spirit-filled outlook.

What I want from this message is that you will let these two consequences of the death of Christ sink in and cause you to live in His way—in how you regard people, and in how you live in Christ, as a new creation.

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