

FBC Service Sunday September 1, 2024, 2 Cor. 5:15-21 All Things New – The New Life

A ragtag hillbilly and his wife and son came to a large city for the first time in their lives. He was blown away by everything he saw in the bustling stores and streets. In the lobby of a plush hotel, he stood in amazement in front of the elevator, because he had never seen anything like that before.

He observed the door opening and closing. Then he saw an old lady entering the elevator what seemed like a box to him, and the door closing. Fascinated, he noticed that the numbers on top of the elevator door begin to change, from 1 to 2 to 3, all the way to 10. And then all the way back down, from 10 to 1.

He watched as the elevator door opened and out came the most stunningly beautiful woman he had ever seen. The man's mouth dropped open in astonishment. He exclaimed to his son, quick, go get your mum. **This is amazing, she needs to get into this box too.**

Okay folks, you may not get it. But what an amazing transformation that looked like to this man.

Today's Scripture is talking about the subject of change and transformation, as we come to what is arguably one of the greatest texts in the Bible.

In 2 Corinthians 5:16-17, Paul explains how he changed his mind about others, Christ, and himself. **When we do what he did, our lives are changed forever.**

Using the example of his own life, Paul gives us a glimpse of how saving faith in Jesus, brings about an incredible transformation in lives committed to Him.

He outlines for us a before and after scenario in the life of a believer.

"We have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view." (v. 16a).

In context, Paul means something like this: "Before I came to Christ, I took pride in my Jewish background. I constantly compared myself with the other young men I grew up with to see how I stacked up against them. I didn't have much use for the Gentiles and none at all for the Christians I knew.

But now all that has changed. The things I once bragged about, I count as a loss." (Philippians 3:4-8).

If we allow our vision to be narrow, we confine ourselves to those who look and think and act like us. That robs us of the beauty of the whole body of Christ. I made that mistake in my early Christian days.

So we ought to pray, "Lord, help me to see others through your eyes." He continues.

"At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now" (v. 16b).

Who was Jesus to Paul before his conversion?

He thought of Jesus as a renegade upstart rabbi who made blasphemous claims about himself.

He thought of Jesus as coming from a questionable family background, someone who gathered a ragtag band of troublemakers around him, and tricked people into thinking he was the promised Messiah.

Paul was a religious fanatic. A bigot. A zealot. A man wholly given over to his hatred of Christians. He would stop at nothing to prevent this new movement from spreading.

Paul was someone who viewed Jesus Christ very differently in the past. At best, I think he thinks that Jesus Christ is a carpenter's son, a poor man's son.

He thinks of Jesus as a fraud, a pretender, because Jesus said that He is the Messiah, the Son of God.

In Paul's eyes, Jesus was found wanting, because he was sentenced to crucifixion. He was a hoax, a scammer, a cheat, he was not the real deal,

That's probably what Paul thought as he went about persecuting the followers of Jesus Christ. He wanted to haul them away and throw them in prison and for them to be executed.

He absolutely despised and rejected Jesus.

His heart was full of rage against anyone who claimed to follow Jesus of Nazareth.

He was *"breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples"* when he was on his way to Damascus to root out the fledgling Christian movement (Acts 9:1-2). He thought the best way to defeat Christianity was to kill all the Christians.

In his zeal he had no peer as a fierce opponent of the church of God.

His religion satisfied him in every way, and he saw no need for anything else.

Before Paul came to Christ, he was perfectly happy in his career as a rising Jewish leader and an avid Christian-hater.

He felt no remorse over his persecution of the followers of Christ, and in fact regarded it as his service to God. He had no desire to come to Christ and felt no need in his heart.

Acts 8:1-3 tells us that Saul (Paul's Hebrew name) went from house to house in a sort of reverse evangelism. **Knock, knock. "Any Christians here?"** If the answer was yes, he dragged them out of their homes and had them put in prison.

Was Paul interested in becoming a Christian? **How many ways can you say no?** He wasn't looking for Christ, but Christ was looking for him. Only God could save a man like Paul. And that's exactly what He did.

Jesus came looking for Paul.

And then one day on the road to Damascus, God laid hold of him and he was never the same again.

Paul now sees Jesus totally differently, no more a pretender, no more a charlatan, no more a fake, but the Lord and Saviour of his life. Now Jesus becomes the centre of Paul's life, everything changed. His perspective changed.

That's what Paul means when he says he no longer looked at Jesus from a "human point of view. How differently we know him now".

Before his Damascus Road conversion, he looked at Jesus “*from a human point of view,*” and saw a rabbleroising troublemaker who needed to be stopped.

Not every unbeliever looks at Jesus that way.

Some see Jesus in a more positive light, as a good example and a great moral teacher. Some would even say he worked great miracles.

But they would not say he’s the Son of God from heaven who came to earth to be the Saviour of the world. They view him as “**a**” way to heaven but not “**the**” way to heaven.

There’s no room in the middle for people who say, “He’s just a great teacher.” Jesus didn’t leave us with that option.

So we ought to pray, “Lord, help me to see you as you are—the Son of God who gave yourself for me.”

According to Galatians 1:23, the news of Paul’s conversion completely stunned the early Christians.

They heard that “*the man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.*”

It was a miracle only God could perform.

Once he hated believers. Now he seeks their fellowship.

Once he hated the truth. Now he lives by the truth.

Once he hated the gospel. Now he preaches the gospel.

Christ has made all the difference in his life.

But then we come to the crucial question. How does a man like Paul move from being a spiritual terrorist to a sold-out follower of Jesus? We find the answer in verse 17.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!”

This is a life verse for many believers! How many times have we heard the testimony of those who have proved this verse true in their lives?

When I came to Christ, I still looked the same 17-year-old as I was before. **Lightning didn’t flash or rockets streak into the sky that cold December night as I headed home to tell my parents.**

I still loved rock and roll music.

But as time went by, God replaced that love with a new love for His word, His work, His people and gospel music. Quote Psalm 40:3 – **“he put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.”**

The truth of 2 Corinthians 5:17 had now dramatically changed me.

My perspective changed. The old passed away. I'm sure it was the same in your life.

We still look the same and a lot of things remained the same. **So what then has changed?**

The old has passed away, the way you regard Christ, the way you regard people has changed, the new has come.

I know that a lot of people say oh, when you become a Christian, everything changes at once. **Well for me it was a slow process.** As more and more I was beginning to understand just what the Lord had done for me.

The way I regarded Jesus, the way I regarded people had changed as the new life took hold of me.

My eyes were different, my mind was different. I had peace with God knowing my life was right with God through sins forgiven.

That's the central message of the Bible.

I'm sure someone has asked you from time to time, how do you know for sure God has changed you? How do you answer them?

The words of this old quartet song ring true for me. I Remember the Time

I remember the time when in darkness I wandered

On the mountain of sin, I had travelled so long

But the Saviour came down and He gave me His favour

Now I'm singing His praise For He saved me that day

Chorus: I can tell you now the time, I can take you to the place

Where the Lord saved me, by His wonderful grace

But I cannot tell you how, for I know not the how

But He'll tell me all about it in the by and by

Quote 2 Corinthians 5:17.

The only way to be a new creation is to be in Christ. Paul is not talking about creating a "brand-new you" through some sort of self-improvement.

Note the way Paul puts it. If anyone is "in Christ." There's a world of truth hidden in those two words. We can divide the human race into two categories:

You are either in Christ,

Or you are not in Christ.

A Christian is a person in whom Christ now lives.

As long as Christ is **outside** of us, all he has done for the human race is of no value to us. It's not enough to say, "I attend First Baptist Church," or "I love to sing the hymns." It's not enough to say, "I believe there was a person named Jesus who lived and died 2000 years ago."

We only experience Christ in us as we commit ourselves to him as Lord and Saviour.

This new creation that Paul is talking about starts on the inside, **in the heart**, where life makes up its mind. God gives us a "new heart" in place of the old one.

That **"new heart"** gives us a new desire to serve God and results in new affections where once we only desired to please ourselves.

When we come to Christ, we have eyes to see what we never saw before. **Quote Hymn here!**

That's the difference Jesus Christ makes. Suddenly we see all things new. As the blind man healed by Jesus said, "Once I was blind, but now I see."

We now view people through God's eyes and see **that ALL people matter to God.**

It doesn't matter what a person looks like, how much they earn, what title they hold, what job they do, where they have failed in the past or where they struggle in the present. God sees past these superficial things and sees people of value and importance. He sees the treasure He created each person to be.

When we begin to see people with the eyes of Jesus we look past surface things. We see people as those who have worth and dignity.

We understand that no one is beyond hope.

That the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient to save the most stained or most rebellious of people.

God save atheists, child molesters, war criminals, adulterers, thieves, gang members, and the most offensive and obnoxious person you know!

We know this: it's not what we have done . . .but who we turn to that matters. When the person you turn to is Christ your past can be forgiven.

God is still in the business of transforming lives. He does not just transform us at the moment of conversion (when we first believe), He continues to transform us.

All the changes necessary do not happen overnight. Much of the change will take a lifetime . . . but we will change degree by degree as God fashions us into the likeness of Christ.

In summary:

The new creation in Christ sees things very differently. We have a fresh pair of eyes. We have a new perspective.

We don't look at people the same way we used to see them anymore.

We see them with regards to their relationship with God. Are they in the kingdom, or are they out of the kingdom? We see them as people who we need to serve and to love.

We see Christians in a very different way now. We see Christians as our brothers and sisters who we are to love.

God help us to live like new creations because Christ makes all things new.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. Old, the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.”

Prayer: Let our lives outwardly demonstrate that we are brand-new creations, and live lives that reflect your saving grace in our lives.

May the way we speak and act show clearly whose we are and who we serve.