

As we begin a new year, it is fitting that we have come to this passage that instructs us to realize that in Christ we are new creations. That also means that we look past any expressions from the flesh and with eyes of faith see the new life in our brothers and sisters.

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. 2

Corinthians 5:16 To understand this verse we must go back to the previous verses to catch the flow of thought. In verse 14ⁱ Paul tells us that the love of Christ controls us. That means it presses, compels, and stirs us to serve others in an expression of His love. Paul tells us the reason it does so is the result of us knowing that Jesus died for us all. The sinfulness of all mankind died with Jesus on the cross. As we will see at the end of the chapter, He paid our debt and offers us His righteousness. For those who will accept this great exchange, a transformation takes place. We no longer live for self. The foundation of our lives becomes the love of Christ. Our lives become dedicated and focused on living for Him who died for us and was raised. But sadly, most people will reject this great offer and go on living selfishly.

That is why we who are in Christ no longer regard anyone according to their flesh. We do not hold their past against them. We do remember our past because it recalls the greatness of God's grace, mercy, and love, but we do not judge a believer by their past (1 Corinthians 15:9,10ⁱⁱ). When a brother or sister stumbles, we do not write them off. The old self's death throws are just a desperate attempt of the flesh to retake control and cause us to be unfruitful (Matthew 13:22ⁱⁱⁱ; 2 Peter 1:8^{iv}). But it is the love of Christ that controls us (Titus 2:14^v).

Paul had judged Jesus according to the flesh with judgmental Pharisee eyes that saw Him eating with sinners and assumed that He condoned their sins (Mark 2:16^{vi}). Paul heard of Him hung on the cross and considered Him cursed by God according to the Law (Deuteronomy 21:23^{vii}). He thought Jesus was just one more self-proclaimed messiah, a heretic, deceiving the people. He saw Jesus' followers as people deceived and misguided, leading others astray. He rounded them up to be imprisoned to try to stop what he thought was the ruination of his people (Acts 26:9-11^{viii}).

But after encountering the glorified Christ, Paul could no longer consider Jesus according to the flesh. Paul's eyes were opened. He could then see that Jesus was with sinners to redeem them. He could see that Jesus was cursed because He loved us so much that He took the curse we deserved upon Himself (John 3:14,15^{ix}). His impression of Jesus and His followers was instantly transformed. He realized that he was the one who was deceived and ruining his nation. The tables flipped. That is what happens to many who come to Christ. The people they once thought were ignorant followers of a deceptive system they suddenly see as people who follow the truth and tried desperately to share that truth with them.

There are those today who still judge Christ after the flesh. They ignore the hundreds of prophecies He fulfilled just as Paul ignored the stories of Jesus' miraculous signs. They refuse to believe the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14^x). They count Him as an enlightened man, but they cannot accept the fact that He spoke the truth when He said

that He came to give His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28^{xi}), or that no one can come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6^{xii}). They judge Him after the flesh because they realize that to see Him as Lord and Savior means they should no longer live for themselves but for Him. They instinctively know His love will take over their lives (Romans 14:9^{xiii}). The result of rejection is a hardened heart that will not hear Jesus' words, nor do they desire to be a new creation with a heart after God.

Allow me to make an application regarding judging no one according to the flesh. We have been looking at how Paul changed his view of Christians, but it can apply to how we see those who are lost. When you meet someone, what do you see? What does your sight have to do with judging who the person is? Do you see them as a person made in the image of God who will one day either be more glorious than you can presently imagine or condemned to eternal torment for refusing the gracious gift of the righteousness of God in Christ? Do you see them as a person that God sent His only Son to die because of His great love for them? Remember that God told Samuel to not judge by the outward appearance, for God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7^{xiv}).

This was part of the struggle that Paul had in Corinth. His words were anointed, divinely inspired, but his appearance was far from what Corinthians thought was appealing. His delivery of the message was not as polished as the Greek speakers of his day, but they were packed with eternal truth. The false apostles were trying to get the Corinthians to focus on his outward appearance (4:18^{xv}; 5:12^{xvi}). Paul was pointing them back to his heart that was fixed on the love of Christ. Paul was compelled not by outward things but by the love of Christ whom his heart had come to know and embrace. That is what changes us, compels us, presses us onward. That is what causes us to love others.

If I could be personal for a moment, it is what I admire in my wife. She looks past the outward and looks at the heart of people and sees their eternal worth and great potential. She will drop everything to pray with a hurting soul whether they are in Christ or on the journey to Him, whether they wreak of alcohol or are finely dressed. May God help us all to be so compelled, for that is how our Savior is toward us. That obligates, compels us, to be so toward others. That is soul winning at the core, loving people because God loves them and sent His Son to the cross to save them.

That is why I cringe at methodology. Love is what wins our hearts, for God is love and everyone who loves comes from God and knows God (1 John 4:7,8^{xvii}). *Agape*, God's kind of love, expects nothing in return but sees the value in the person one chooses to love; and we choose to love because the love of Christ compels us. We know that just as Jesus was the Word that made the visible from the invisible, in the same way He can speak life into their spirits and make them new creations, just as He did in us.

I am blessed to have had a couple of mentors who regarded no one after the flesh. Whoever they were with was the most important person in the world to them at that moment. They were soul winners because people sensed their genuine concern for them. People can sense when you are genuine. They will listen to someone who they believe really cares. And how will they believe Jesus cares for them if they do not see it in us?

^{17a} Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17a Paul is expressing the wonder of salvation in this brief phrase. He has expressed it in a different way in his first letter: *³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,* 1

Corinthians 1:30 Since Christ died for all and all can share in that death, which gives all who will receive Him forgiveness, and we are no longer to be considered mere fleshly beings... Therefore, if a person is in Christ - BOOM - new creation! That is how the Greek expresses it. It is written in an explosive way.^{xviii} It is not reworking of the old, it is a totally new work of God's creative power (Galatians 6:15^{xix})! **"Kainos (new) means new in quality, not just in sequence;** believers' 'old self was crucified with Him' (Romans 6:6^{xx}); they have therefore laid 'aside the old self ... and put on the new self' (Ephesians 4:22^{xxi}, 24^{xxii}; Colossians 3:9,10^{xxiii}).^{xxiv} We need to understand this. It keeps us from looking back and identifying with our former life. That life is over when you are in Christ (Isaiah 43:18,19^{xxv}). The old life died with Jesus on the cross. Now we live by faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20^{xxvi}). We believe His declaration that we are new creations. In addition, it gives us faith that we can obey the Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit because in Christ all things are possible. The resurrection power that raised Jesus is now at work in us (Ephesians 1:19,20^{xxvii}). We need fear only God, not death, or persecution, or hardship, for our old being has been swallowed up by life (5:4^{xxviii}).

17b The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:17b Old is gone! Look! New creation! Believe it. Act on it. Refuse to go down the old paths. Call on the strength of the Lord and yield to Him when the old knocks on the door of your heart. **Ask Jesus to answer the door and watch the old nature cower before Him!** If you are in Christ, have a constant awareness of His presence and power that is available to help you; walk in the Spirit and resist the zombie – that old crucified nature. It only has power if you yield to it. The love of Christ controls us now.

My experience of this was when I was just five-years-old. Growing up as the son of a Baptist preacher I heard about hell almost weekly. I certainly did not want to go there, and Jesus offered a way out. So, I prayed every night that Jesus would save me. One night He spoke to my heart and asked me a question, a very Jesus like thing to do. "Do you want me because I love you?" That caused me to pause and reconsider why I was asking for Him to make His home in me (John 14:23^{xxix}). I decided that was a much better reason. I said yes, and just like the Scripture declares, BOOM, as young as I was my life was now headed in a new direction.

It was not that I became perfect, on the contrary, I was a rascal. But an instantaneous miracle took place, which was the beginning of a lifelong process, the beginning of an increasing conviction of sin, of starting to learn the difference between flesh and spirit. It was the beginning of God working in my life to change my thoughts, desires, and actions. It continued with a hunger for the Word, but also of learning not to manipulate the Word to do what permissible but not expedient. It has been a process of learning to completely surrender. I often find that God allows me different choices but lets me know which one is most pleasing to Him. What started 65 years ago continues to this day, but with more of the fruits of the Spirit, more faith and confidence in God's faithfulness. As Paul declared to the Galatians, Christ is being formed in us (Galatians 4:19^{xxx})

Most of you who are here today can tell the same story with a few different details. The famous line from The Chosen series is: ***I was one way, and now I am different. And what happened in between was Him.*** We can say that almost daily as He continues transforming the outer life to the reality of the new creation within.

The world needs to see new creations to believe it is possible for them to be changed too. The ones who realize their life is a mess are often the ones God is preparing to receive a soul crucifixion and new spiritual life. But it helps to see and hear of our transformation. Love is the evidence. All the fruits of the Spirit declare a new life has begun (Galatians 5:22-24^{xxxi}).

I am often reminded of one of the songs popular in the Promise Keeper movement. *Rise up O men of God, have done with lesser things, Give heart and soul and mind and strength to serve the King of kings. Rise up O men of God, tread where His feet have trod, As brothers of the Son of Man rise up O men of God!*^{xxxii} Live radically for the eternal. Do not fall for the dangling lures of this temporal world. Their satisfaction is temporary, and their price is costly, way more than you imagine. We have a much greater satisfaction in living under the control of the love of Christ, and eternal rewards as a bonus. Open your eyes of faith and your heart to the great love of God and truly live!

This newness is a part of the new heavens and new earth, already ours in advance. We have in part what will be for all things when Christ returns. Paul wrote about it in Romans 8:19-23. ¹⁹ *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* ²⁰ *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope* ²¹ *that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* ²² *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.* ²³ *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* This is what the first five verses of this chapter were referring to. The worn out fragile tent of these bodies will be swallowed up by life, a permanent building (5:4^{xxxiii}). All of creation is waiting and watching for this moment to come, for when it come the curse on creation will be lifted. The whole world will be a Garden of Eden.

Isaiah predicted this future age. ¹⁸ *“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old.* ¹⁹ *Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.* ²⁰ *The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people,* ²¹ *the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.* Isaiah 43:18-21 ¹⁷ *“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.* Isaiah 65:17 This new world is coming, and we are assured that we are part of it by the Spirit of God in us, the new creation that has begun in our own hearts. That is what Paul was declaring in verse 5: ⁵ *He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.* 2 Corinthians 5:5

We often quote verse 17 regarding salvation, and we should, but we need to see it in the context of this passage and all of Scripture. It points to the fall and the final restoration. It shows us how it has already begun in us. It assures us that we are a part of the kingdom of God. In that day there will be no more battles with the old nature. As Jesus declared in the last chapter of Scripture, *“Behold, I am making all things new!”* Revelation 21:5^{xxxiv}

This newness has already begun its work in the hearts of everyone who accepts the forgiveness that is offered to them in Christ’s work on the cross. Old beliefs, desires,

plans, ideas, and motivations die with Jesus on the cross. The new has come. The Greek tense is that at a point in time it happened and continues to the present. As we read the Word, pray, worship, and have fellowship, God continues to implant in our hearts new passions, beliefs, convictions, direction, and purpose. We begin to desire to live to please God and start to recognize our selfish ways must go. As we continue to feed our souls with the Word, we nourish that nature. Always be mindful that what nature you feed is what will grow stronger. If you are surprised at how strong your flesh remains to be, it is probably because you are continuing to nurture it with thoughts and actions. **If you want your new life to grow stronger you must feed it!** In Paul's final letter he told Timothy, ¹⁵ *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.* 2 Timothy 2:15 The Word of God is our daily manna. The picture presented to us in the Jews in the wilderness was to gather our sustenance daily. Just as they needed physical food each morning, so we need spiritual food. That is why Jesus, the Word made flesh, said, ⁴⁹ *Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.* ⁵⁰ *This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.* ^{51a} *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.* John 6:49-51a

All things continue to become new when you feed the new nature. We must allow the Holy Spirit to change our thought patterns. He is working on us with conviction, but we must cooperate and choose to obey. We need to be open with the family of God and ask for prayer when we struggle with the old. We live in the world, but the fact that we are a new creation means we have a completely different perspective, heaven's perspective. Let us encourage our hearts in the midst of this cosmic battle. We are of the new creation, the evidence that the kingdom of God is coming, and that *all things* will be made new.

Paul has defended his integrity for the sole purpose of continuing to convey the pure gospel. He has pointed the Corinthians and us to the promises of God and the evidence of what is to come. This is to help us walk by faith and not by sight (5:7^{xxxv}). By God's grace, let us take this teaching to heart as we look forward, feed our spirit daily, and live to please God, controlled by the love of God (5:8^{xxxvi}).

Questions:

- 1 How does verse 16 correct our attitudes toward others?
- 2 How does it correct our view of Jesus?
- 3 How did Paul's view of Jesus and His followers change?
- 4 Why do people still judge Jesus after the flesh?
- 5 What should we see in the eyes of the lost?
- 6 How does 17a express salvation?
- 7 What makes the expression explosive?
- 8 What does the Greek word "new" imply?
- 9 What is this "new creation" a part of?
- 10 How do feed our spirit?
- 11 Which nature are you feeding?

ⁱ **2 Corinthians 5:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;

ⁱⁱ **1 Corinthians 15:9-10 (ESV)**

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Matthew 13:22 (ESV)**

²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

^{iv} **2 Peter 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

^v **Titus 2:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

^{vi} **Mark 2:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

^{vii} **Deuteronomy 21:23 (ESV)**

²³ his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

^{viii} **Acts 26:9-11 (ESV)**

⁹ "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

^{ix} **John 3:14-15 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

^x **Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

^{xi} **Matthew 20:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

^{xii} **John 14:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

^{xiii} **Romans 14:9 (ESV)**

⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

^{xiv} **1 Samuel 16:7 (ESV)**

⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

^{xv} **2 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

^{xvi} **2 Corinthians 5:12 (ESV)**

¹² We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart.

^{xvii} **1 John 4:7-8 (ESV)**

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

^{xviii} Kent Hughes

^{xix} **Galatians 6:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

^{xx} **Romans 6:6 (ESV)**

⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

^{xxi} **Ephesians 4:22 (ESV)**

²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

^{xxii} **Ephesians 4:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

^{xxiii} **Colossians 3:9-10 (ESV)**

⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

^{xxiv} John F. MacArthur Jr., [2 Corinthians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 196.

^{xxv} **Isaiah 43:18-19 (ESV)**

¹⁸ “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. ¹⁹ Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

^{xxvi} **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

^{xxvii} **Ephesians 1:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might

²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,

^{xxviii} **2 Corinthians 5:4 (ESV)**

⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

^{xxix} **John 14:23 (ESV)**

²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

^{xxx} **Galatians 4:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

^{xxxi} **Galatians 5:22-24 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

^{xxxii} Text: William Pierson Merrill, 1867–1954

^{xxxiii} **2 Corinthians 5:4 (ESV)**

⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

^{xxxiv} **Revelation 21:5 (ESV)**

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

^{xxxv} **2 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)**

⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.

^{xxxvi} **2 Corinthians 5:9 (ESV)**

⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.