

“What’s New? You Are!”

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

It’s always eye-opening when we compare our Christian ‘language’ or practices with Scripture and find that some of the things we say aren’t found in the Bible at all or very often. For example, how often have we used the expression ‘invite Jesus into your heart’? Many times and yet, this phrase is not found in Scripture. How often have we used the phrase ‘make a decision for Christ’ yet it is nowhere to be found in the Bible. Jesus only used the phrase ‘born again’ once and Peter was the only other person to use that phrase.

Nothing wrong with using these phrases but wouldn’t it be wiser to use actual biblical phrases and terms more often? We describe ourselves most often by the term Christian yet it occurs only 3 times in the Bible. Twice in Acts, once in Peter, never used by Paul.

A phrase that we should use more often for ourselves is “in Christ”. This is found over 100 times in the New Testament to describe how to live but it is used about 30 times directly to describe the followers of Jesus as being those who are “in Christ”. You and I who accepted Christ (zero times in the bible) are told that we are “in Christ”. What does it mean that we are ‘in Christ’? This speaks of intimacy and belonging to Jesus Himself. Jesus Himself dwells in us too. So to be in Christ means that Christ is in us also. You can’t have one without the other. We want to explore what this means for us to be ‘in Christ’ and how we should live for Christ now as we look forward to the day when we finally dwell in His presence.

The phrase ‘in Christ’ talks about our identity. Before we believed in Jesus our identity was totally wrapped in who we are in all our sinful nature’s characteristics. But once saved we are described as being identified as ‘in Christ’. A good place to understand this is in 2 Corinthians 5 because in 2 Corinthians Paul had to defend his identity. Everywhere Paul went, Judaizers followed him, undermining his character and ministry. Paul used to be one of them until he encountered Jesus on the Damascus road. Naturally his former Pharisaic friends were not happy with this so they would go around to the synagogues in towns where Paul had been and say Paul was a lawbreaker or call him a false apostle or attack his physical characteristics or his speaking abilities.

Paul’s ministry in Corinth began in Acts 18 where he was there for a year and a half. Later Paul travelled on his third trip mostly in Ephesus but hoping to get back to Corinth. While in Ephesus he gets a letter from Chloe telling him that the Corinthians were very divided over many issues. So Paul writes 1 Corinthians, ending the letter saying he hoped to come to them and spend a season there but first he wanted to go to Macedonia through Troas and then make his way back down to Corinth. Knowing it would be a while to get back there he sent Timothy and Titus ahead to make sure the Corinthians were okay with his first letter.

But they weren’t happy with Paul because he had to address an immorality issue in 1 Cor. 5. When he heard they were unhappy about this he sent a clear letter through Titus spelling out how church discipline should look. Then he heard that the church responded too harshly which saddened Paul. At this time some of Paul’s opponents came in and sowed seeds of doubt, attacking Paul’s character. 2 Corinthians is Paul’s response to these attacks and affirmation that what he was doing was the work of God.

He defends himself by stating this is who I am in Christ. This is what 'new creations' should do and look like. I will not attack my attackers and play their game rather I will defend myself by defending the gospel. V.17 is the key here and I believe the framework for how to see the passage:

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

"New' speaks of new in quality, our characteristics. If we are in Christ God has created a new us, a new us that should reflect His characteristics, since He only creates us in His image. Now the old characteristics should be gone since the new work has begun in Christ. What did Paul say that should look like? V. 11 begins with "therefore" or "since then" making a summary statement about what he just said. In vv.1-10 Paul explained how being in Christ gives us the security of knowing where we'll be when we die – in God's presence – and yet, it also means we still have to give an account of how we lived as believers in Christ.

⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

¹¹ Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. 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, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

So what's new once we're in Christ?

We Have a New Understanding of God **(5:10-13)**

One of the big things about becoming a follower of Jesus and in Christ is we're

No longer afraid of God but amazed by God (vv.10-11)

We talked about what it means to fear the Lord a few months ago. Believers in Christ no longer are afraid of God's judgment because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. It is our desire to please God with our life. We want to please God out of a healthy fear of God. Knowing that God will assess us and reward us in eternity as followers of Christ, we want to serve Him live for His glory. One of the best biblical illustrations of this is in Ex. 20 after Moses received the 10 commandments.

Ex. 20:18 When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance ¹⁹ and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

²⁰ Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

²¹ The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

The fear of God is a good thing. It means to be amazed and in awe of God, wanting to be in His presence and to be used for His purposes. Fear God so as not to sin because it can result in loss of rewards. God, as our Father, will always be our Father but there are times like earthly fathers

where He is unhappy with us because we don't take obeying His words seriously enough. And temporarily rebel against Him when we make it our goal to please ourselves more than God.

Paul didn't understand what it meant to fear the Lord until he knew Christ. Now his confidence was in God so he desired to persuade people with God's good news of Jesus. 'Look at us', Paul says to the Corinthians. Is it not plain that that is what we have always been about? 'I won't apologize for wanting to please God and help you know Christ and grow in Christ.' Paul's defensive strategy is not to attack his opponents but to reiterate his reason for what he does; I'm here to please God. I fear God so I want to please Him.

This knowledge of God doesn't make him arrogant, rather he is

Humbled by God's grace towards himself (vv.12-13)

As we should be too.

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, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

People attack us to make themselves look good. Paul says 'We're not playing that game. You know exactly who I am from what I've said and done. Paul said that alone is all the defense we need and you can trust that. The word for "opportunity" means the center for military operations. The source of our strength. So all you need to do to respond to your opponents is tell them to check what you speak with the truth of the Operations Manul. Obviously these opponents claimed Paul was 'out of his mind' and Paul says 'Sure. But that's God's way if you don't like it.' And if we're in our right mind our goal is to serve you. Either way, you Corinthians win.

Our new identity 'in Christ' means we have a new understanding of God and

A New View of People **(5:14-18a)**

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, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ

We now see people through Jesus' eyes.

Our love for Christ (vv.14-15)

'Compels' us to share the gospel because we now see people as Jesus sees them – lost. This is a constant challenge for us to look at people through the eyes of Jesus. That co-worker/ neighbour/teammate that rubs you the wrong way, they are like that because they are lost and have no resources other than their own efforts, to be different. That jerk who cut you off on the road, that clerk who can't count change fast enough for you, that community member who blasted you on Facebook – they are all lost and need Christ. To respond impatiently or critically means you're acting

as if you don't have Christ, as if you're not a new creation. That's one of the old things that should be passing away.

Does that not apply to each other also, fellows members of the "in Christ" family of God who sometimes for-get we're new creations and the old nature reveals its ugly head now and then? Should not Christ's love compel us to serve one another so we can live out this 'new creation' life? V. 15, he died for us/ Our response? We 'die' for each other. We give up the right to self-rule. The fruit of the Spirit is evident in the control of self and the demonstration of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc. Before, when the old things ruled we had no other view. Now,

We have a clear view based on Christ (vv.17-18a)

At one time we regarded Christ not as our Saviour but as a religious teacher or a good role model or we just ignored Him. Now, however, we are eternally grateful and want His love to compel us, drive us, guide us to what He wants us to do. We are a new creation now. New things "have come". Sometimes there is no clear English equivalent to what the Greek says and this is one place. The new came at salvation and continues to come today and will continue to come until we're in God's presence. All that from 'have come'.

See, again we wrongly assume salvation is the goal. Salvation is the new birth. You don't remain a baby believer any more than you stay a physical baby. We're supposed to grow. We're supposed to let the sacrificial love of Christ (my life for yours) compel us to treat people in our 'new everyday' in Christ life! God made us a new creation at salvation. He made us newer yesterday. He's making us newer tomorrow. We let Him when we tell ourselves the old has passed away and I need to tell myself again tomorrow. We see all this because Jesus died for us. "All this is from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ"

And now we have

A New Purpose **(5:18b-21)**

¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We 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. ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

When we were created new at salvation, placed in Christ

We were made ministers of reconciliation (vv.18b-19)

This is not optional. If we're in Christ we're reconciled with God because we understood we were separated from God and needed reconciling. Jesus alone makes it possible by dying for our sins. By believing in Him we are joined to Him. We are in Him. That's our new identity. Our identity isn't our family responsibility or our jobs or our awards or position in the community but ministers of reconciliation at home, at work, at school and in our neighborhoods and communities.

Once we are saved and given the Spirit of Christ, we see people differently. They are separated from God. They need to be reconciled. We need to send someone qualified to get them

right with God. But we're all qualified if we're in Christ. If you've been reconciled to God, you're qualified. And to help us see it from another angle Paul uses this illustration; we're

Ambassadors speaking on Christ's behalf (vv.20-21)

Jesus went to be with the Father yet sent us His Spirit when we believed in Him. Now that we're in Christ, this is our new identity. You and I represent Him. My actions, and my words all represent Him. That's what Christian means. I looked up Merriam-Webster's Dictionary for Christian and under the etymology of the word it says this:

Latin *christianus*, adjective & noun, from Greek *christianos*, from *Christos* — see [CHRIST](#)

Christian means 'Christ one'. It's supposed to mean if you see a Christian you see Christ.

Is that who people see when they interact with us? We are 'in Christ' positionally once we're saved. We are now 'new creations'. God is constantly making us new each day by conforming us into the image of Jesus. Our identity is in Him and He is entrusting us with the responsibility of speaking on His behalf. Yet, we all fail at this at times by our negative "old way" worldly reactions and attitudes. How can we show the new us more?

Remembering our identity – we're "in Christ" now.

Reviewing our new perspective – see people as Christ sees.

Recall our purpose in life – reconcile people to God through Christ.

Let's come to the communion table and renew our commitment to live an in Christ life.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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