

## **BECOMING NEW**

2 Corinthians 5:16 - 6:2

All of us have noticed the increase in what might be termed “hyper-adversarialism” throughout the world and especially in anything that might be even slightly related to political agendas. It is not surprising to find such an adversarial or competitive attitude among nations or even major systems of religious beliefs. We are also seeing intransigent extreme positions within given countries, within the various political groups that find factional separations in the major political parties, and even in various church denominations. We have “progressed” from being incapable of agreeing and getting along with others to the point of being unable to agree among ourselves.

We find an increasing use of prefixes such as “pro” and “anti” being applied to the way we regard almost any subject we can think of. We have pro and anti abortion, pro and anti life, pro and anti guns, pro and anti “gender” issues, pro and anti “religious” terms, pro and anti “economic” philosophies, and the lists go on and on. The result is that we are fragmented, weak and falling apart with nothing to provide cohesiveness to various organizations, political parties, nations and even the world.

If we were to bring the issues down to an individual basis and start with those closest to us, then we might ask the question if what I am doing will help me and my wife. We could expand that to whether a particular thing will help my wife and me and the rest of the family. Take another step and expand the influence from my family to include the neighborhood. We could then expand our view from neighborhood to city, to state, to nation and world. We realize that not everything we do impacts the rest of the world, but many times the decisions we make do impact others and a broader perspective may be needed as to how we regard things.

Of course, the broadest perspective is the way God sees things and this is expressed so well in John 3:16 where we read “God so loved the world, that He gave . . .” We see how Paul used this “big picture” in describing the change of view that Christian should have with regard to others.

### Reborn – 5:16-17

<sup>16</sup> Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 2 Corinthians 5:16–17 (NASB95)

Paul knew and taught the reality of a “new life in Christ.” If we are “in Christ” and Christ died for all, then we are also dead to the things of this world. Of course, the things of this world are all those issues that produce the adversarial relationships that find their expression in “pro” and “anti” whatever. Our new life finds its focus (imprinting) in the One Who is the Source of the new life.

When we see other people, we should not be seeing them only as human beings with various “worldly distinctions” but primarily as souls for whom Christ died to save. We must view others from the threshold of eternity. Our every action should be motivated by the love that God placed in our hearts when He saved us. Just as our opinion about Jesus changed from seeing Him just as “a great teacher and historical figure” to that of His being the “sinless Son of God, the Savior of the world and Lord of ALL,” so also our outlook on the world and people must change.

A consequence of “knowing Christ ONLY according to the flesh” is in being deceived with regard to salvation. Having information about Jesus – even the correct information – will

not produce a change in a person from self-centered carnality to spiritually motivated selflessness. One could reasonably argue that the Jewish leaders who were responsible for delivering Christ to be crucified and who perpetrated the cover up of His resurrection knew the facts but refused to trust in the truth and were, therefore, excluded from God's salvation by grace through faith associated with the new birth.

If there has never been a time in a person's life in which he or she could say, "I am now a new person, in Christ," then that person has some serious business to conduct with God. If there is any concept in the Scripture that should be interpreted literally, this is one that absolutely should. Notice what the Scripture says: It is NOT "as if" he is a new creature; it is "he IS" a new creature. Everyone who is "in Christ" has been begotten of God the Father. Jesus was the uniquely begotten of the Father but listen to what Peter tells us:

Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath **begotten us** again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3).

When we have become new, then everything we experience is new to us. All things are new. Every life experience takes on new meaning. We realize that we are children of God and that nothing can get through God's protective love to us unless it is for our good. This realization reminds us of God's promise to the captive Jews in Babylon that was penned by Jeremiah in 29:11-12. [*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you."*] We will not necessarily understand nor see "the good" that God intends, but we can KNOW it by faith IF we trust in His word that tells us "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to [His] purpose." (Rom 8:28)

We can easily see the similarity of verse seventeen with the words of Revelation 21:5 "And He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' And He said, 'Write, for these words are faithful and true.'"

### Reconciled – 5:18-21

<sup>18</sup> Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup> namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 (NASB95)

Notice also the continuation of the use of "all things." *All things* are new, *all things* work together for our best, and *all things* are of God. The Source of our new life is God. It is He who took the initiative and provided a means for us to be restored to Himself. That restoration was a result of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Now that we have been restored to a right relationship with God (reconciled), we are to be about the business of leading others to discover this same restoration. Sin had caused a separation and loss of fellowship between man and God. Only God could bridge the chasm of this separation. Man's part is essentially "to hear by faith, turn to God (repent) and believe the promises that God has given." When we believe God, then God counts (imputes) that as righteousness. The other possibility is that we do not believe what God has said and then we have our *trespasses* imputed to us.

As God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, Christ is in us reconciling the world to Himself. We are agents or ambassadors for Christ to share His invitation to all the world to come to Him and be saved. If we are to faithfully represent Christ, then we must view the world and those in it as He views it (no longer seeing according to the flesh). Though the

call goes out to all, all will not choose to accept that gracious invitation as Jesus illustrated in the parable of the wedding supper in Matthew 22.

Again, we can see a similarity with John's report of Christ's revelation to him in Revelation 21:3 "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.'" It is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that empowers us to carry out the ministry of being an ambassador for Christ. This is the work of the church in the world today.

The magnitude and quality of God's love are seen in that a Holy God became sin (took on our sin) for us so we might become holy (take on His righteousness) in Him. Our confession should be "I AM the righteousness of God in Christ, I AM a new creation in Him." Our actions toward others should then reflect who we ARE in Him. The sobering truth is that our lifestyle (actions) WILL reflect who we really ARE. In fact, Jesus told the disciples at the Last Supper, "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, that you have love for one another." It is very difficult to conduct our lives in agreement with this "new commandment" that Jesus had just given them if we continue to view others and ourselves "according to the flesh."

The reality that we experience is that we don't always make decisions and take actions that are representative of being righteousness. While the part of our salvation of being "justified by God" is immediate, there is a "becoming" part that is an ongoing process of transformation. We recognize and are thankful for the fact that it is God Who is at work in us (to will and to do of His good purpose) during this process, nevertheless, we have a responsibility to cooperate with Him in that work. When Paul wrote in Roman 12 "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds," that was an "imperative" statement or something that we are instructed to do. We have choices to make and actions to take that allow us to "walk out" in our lives what God is "working in" our very being. Just as Paul admonished us to "not recognize others according to the flesh," we should apply that same advice to the way we see ourselves.

#### Ready – 6:1-2

<sup>1</sup> And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain— <sup>2</sup> for He says, "AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU." Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION"— 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 (NASB95)

An ambassador who represents a king must work in cooperation with the one he represents in order to have the objectives and purposes of the king communicated to others to whom he is sent. We must "work together with Christ" in the work that He has called us to do. That means that we operate according to His commandments and His will and His character. This cooperation applies to our ministries to others and to our own individual growth in becoming more like Christ.

In these quotes from Isaiah chapter 49, we see prophetic words that YHWH (God the Father) was speaking to the Messiah through Isaiah. Starting in verse six of chapter 49, we see the clear intent of God's salvation being extending to all people and not just the physical descendants of Abraham through Jacob. Looking beyond the promise of "help" or God enabling the Messiah to carry out the work of redemption in His earthly ministry, we see Paul repeatedly using the words "time" and "now" with regard to the fulfillment of the work of salvation.

How could anyone receive God's grace in vain? One sure way would be to simply not believe the message that Christ has become sins for us so that we could become the righteousness of God in Him. False teachers in Corinth preached a message different from Paul's gospel. Some were Judaizers who denied that the righteousness of God was obtained only

by faith. There are still people who teach that you have to do something to be saved. If our justification is dependent on something we do to obtain it, then it is no longer of grace, but it is of works.

Another way to “receive God’s grace in vain” would be to “believe it” in our minds but to not accept it in such a way that it impacts our lives in the way we think and what we do. This may be the situation with a lot of people who have grown up hearing the gospel. They believe it to be the absolute truth but they have never been transformed by the truth of the message. Sometimes this is described as “head knowledge” rather than “heart knowledge.”

A third concern that Paul was apparently emphasizing was simply realizing that the Kingdom HAS come and that we are to be appropriating the promises association with salvation in our everyday lives and actions NOW. Sometimes we fail to see ourselves as God sees us (now) as expressions of His righteousness in Christ, and we think that this is something that will come about “when we all get to heaven” or when we are part of the future “millennial reign of Christ.” This would be like receiving a tremendous gift and just storing it on a shelf. If we don’t open the gift and use it, then we can’t enjoy the benefits of the gift.

NOW is the day of salvation. We must believe it, incorporate it in our lives, and walk it out in all that we think, say, and do.