

## **A Message of Healing and Hope: Seeing Yourself and Others in a Different Light**

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### **Scripture Reading** (NIV) 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

<sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

<sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

<sup>20</sup> We 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.

<sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Our focus is on verse 17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

### **Introduction**

What immediately stands out for me is that verse 17 is written in the present tense, meaning its content is not a future event, but a present reality.

The next thing that stands out for me is the “if...then” statement. It reminds me of computer programming many years ago: if the following conditions are met, then do this, else do something else.

It also reminds me of the way some people think... “if this or that changes, then something will be different or will happen.” And once something is different or has changed, then all will be well. So instead of chasing down a goal, they spend ages waiting for the “if.”

What I love about this morning Scripture is that for you and me, the “if” has already happened. We are already in Christ. Therefore, as the second half of verse 17 reads, “...*the new is here!*” We need to realize and live this out to the glory of God.

Why then, do we not always live and see ourselves and others in the new?

## **Body**

### **Total Depravity**

To answer these questions, I need to quickly discuss with you, a theological doctrine, called “total depravity.” Total depravity is what the Bible teaches about the condition of the fallen man. Hold onto the thought of “fallen man” for a few moments while we develop the idea of “total depravity.” Total depravity refers to our total inability or righteous incapacity or radical corruption – through all our body, mind, emotions, and spirit – to do something about our salvation because of the extent of sin in us – the fallen man. Because of our total depravity and therefore inability to save ourselves, God became man and Jesus died on the cross in our place and conquered the grave. Our destiny changed from “condemned to death because of sin” to “alive in Jesus forevermore because of love, forgiveness, grace and mercy!”

Read with me, Romans 3:9-11 and 3:23-24 “*What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.’”*

As a footnote, I must mention that some understand total depravity to mean utterly or completely – in other words, a person is as bad as he/she can possibly be. This is a misunderstanding, correctly understood it means that the fall was so bad that it affects the whole person, in other words, as we have said, sin affects the body, mind, emotions and spirit so badly, that we are unable to save ourselves.

## **The New is Here**

With “total depravity” in mind, we again read verses 17 and 18, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.*”

You, I and other brothers and sisters in Christ are not what we once were. We need to not only start to see ourselves as God sees us, but we need to let it show!

If you see a brother or sister differently from how God see him or her, the problem is not with that person and the problem is definitely not with God.

If a brother sees you differently from how God sees you, the problem is definitely not with God, but it might be with you.

If you see yourself differently from how God sees you, the problem is definitely not with God, but it might be with you.

Let me explain. We are born again and have a new nature, but at the same time, we are still on planet earth residing in our own fleshly body and these two are at war with each other. Evil and sin are still present, but the new is here, so we see evil and sin in a new perspective. Evil and sin are no longer in control, Jesus is. Through Jesus, we can choose to resist sin; our old nature did not have this choice. We now have the choice to either feed the new nature through the Word, prayer, and obedience, or to feed the flesh by neglecting these things. This is why I said that the problem *might* be with you.

Choose to see others as God sees them and encourage them to live that. Choose to see yourself as God sees you and be determined to live it!

## **Be the New**

It is going to take more than small adjustments before we are conformed to the image of Christ. Modifying behaviour is also not enough. If sin was in the very core – the heart – of the unregenerate, then it is the heart that must change and from this point, influence the whole being. That’s what verse 17 is saying, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*”

Your change began when you became born again because the Holy Spirit changed your core – the heart – because of the work of Jesus. Not only did God give you a new heart, but He

empowers you to grow in Him. In this regard, there is nothing standing in your way that God cannot remove. Let's again turn to Scripture:

- Romans 8:37, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." In Him...more than conquerors.
- Philippians 4:13, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength." Through Him.

These Scriptures are not speaking of self-gain or self-glorification, but to the glory of God alone and the purposes of God alone. We live for Him and we live through Him knowing that our new heart is aligned with His will. And this is why evil and sin have gone from feeling "comfortable" in the old self to "uncomfortable" in the new self – the Holy Spirit is at work! It is only when our body, mind, emotions and spirit are in alignment with the will and purposes of God, that we experience the peace of Christ, even during persecution.

### **Who Is the New?**

There are two Greek words translated to "new." The first word, "*neos*" refers to something that has just been made, but it is not unique. The second word, "*kainos*" refers to something that has just been made, but is unique. The "new" in 2 Corinthians 5:17 is "*kainos*." In Christ, we are made an entirely new creation, not simply a beautified or repaired or reconditioned version of the old self.

One of the greatest blessings about our newness in Christ is the grace we're given to grow into a spiritual maturity that reflects our new identity (Philippians 1:6).

All of us have a past, present and future. I am saddened that so many of us identify with our past. Perhaps "identify with" is too light a phrase in that many allow the past to define our present and future.

It is as if we are bogged down by previous hurts, the lies we believe about ourselves, the mistakes we have made, the regrets we can't fix, the emotional baggage that we just can't seem to deal with and the pain we have caused others. It is as if we are reminded of these things every time we look in the mirror and every time we get on our knees before God. The past may cause you to feel unworthy and inadequate and because of this, you are not stepping out into who you are in Christ Jesus.

You, my brothers and sisters, are forgiven! Psalm 103:11-12 reads, “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

God loves you and He has removed your sin from you. That which is no longer with you cannot define you, unless you hold onto it, define yourself by it or constantly remind yourself of it.

Now, there may be some things from your past that you need to address so that your mind, emotions, body, soul and spirit can find the healing it needs. Our conversion – being born again – is supernatural, but healing from the past, we must understand is:

- Possible, because you are in Jesus, and He is in you.
- A journey, because in most instances, we may need to work through some challenges, memories, acts and emotions with the help of God.

## **Conclusion**

Close your eyes for a moment, and as Habakkuk writes, “The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.” Once you have found that silence, read/listen:

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:28-31).

You belong to God. You are a new creation. You are loved. You are valuable to God, your heavenly Father. You have a large and loving family in Christ. You are not alone.

Choose to see yourself as God sees you and be determined to live it!

I close, in prayer, with an adaptation of Psalm 121:

- Brother, sister, your help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.
- The Lord will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not become drowsy;

- The God who watches over Israel and you will not become drowsy or sleep.
- The LORD is watching over you— the LORD is your shade at your right hand;
- The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.
- The LORD will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life;
- The LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

You are safe.

Amen.