

***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.***

***17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.***

***18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;***

***19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.***

***20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.***

***We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.***

***21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***

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## **INTRODUCTION**

We concluded last week with Paul’s statement “<sup>15</sup> and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”

With this summary statement, Paul lays out a **fundamental principle** of the Christian faith: that a primary purpose of our redemption from sin and God’s wrath is that we should live for a new Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In our text this week, he is addressing a particular area of Jesus’ mastery in the life of the Corinthian church, that of **reconciliation**.

[Note: while Paul uses the pronoun “we” throughout this section, I take it primary as what is known as an **authorial plural**. While he certainly includes others of his companions in what he is writing, he is predominantly talking about himself]

### **Flesh Judgment (v.16)**

***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.***

In this verse, Paul is talking about **two different ways of thinking** about people (particularly the church) and of Jesus. The one is according to the flesh, and the other is not according to the flesh.

The word “**flesh**” is used in several ways in the Scriptures. As Paul uses it here, he seems to be speaking of the idea of appearance according to human and worldly wisdom. This is in contrast to sight or wisdom that is of the Spirit.

By saying “**from now on**” he doesn’t view people in this way, he admits that at one time he did. But he now does so no longer. Because of the work of Jesus, he views the Corinthian church and Jesus Himself differently than by outward and worldly standards.

If Paul had viewed the Corinthian **church** by worldly standards, then he would have been done with them a long time ago. The bad doctrine, the sectarianism, the infighting, their arguing about spiritual gifts, and their tolerance for immorality would have had him done with them. Also, there was their allowance of false teachers and undermining of his Apostolic ministry. But because of the work of Christ in for them, he is not finished with them, but continues to view them as the bride of Christ and continues his work.

At one time Paul viewed **Jesus** similarly. He considers Him a false prophet, pseudo-Messiah, working miracles by the power of Satan, a charlatan and leader of people into damnation. And the final evidence of the falsehood of Jesus was the fact that He was crucified by the Roman government, and according to Deuteronomy 21:22-23 was cursed by God Himself because He had been hung on a tree...rejected by God and men.

But then Paul **encountered Jesus**. He could no longer write Him off as a false Messiah, but recognized that there was more to Jesus than met his worldly eyes. Jesus’ teaching, humility, servanthood, acceptance of the outcast and marginalized were not indications of His weakness, but the presence of God who humbled Himself. In fact, God had moved into the neighborhood by becoming the man Christ Jesus.

### **Application**

We see things and people correctly when we do not judge by mere outward appearance and worldly measures, but with the eyes of faith. This includes both the church and Jesus. In one another, despite the troubles, failures, and difficulties, we see God’s work. And with the eyes of faith we see in Christ God’s personal presence and work.

He then comments on the work of God in fellow Christians...

### **The New Creation (v.17)**

**17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, [he is] a new creation.  
The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**

Paul writes four “crisp” antithetical statements. He refers to **anyone** who is in Christ. This opens the door for slave or free, male or female, young or old, Jew or Gentile.

Paul’s use of the term “**in Christ**” is incredibly robust in His letters. It is perhaps the richest and most compact phrase in the New Testament for what it means to be in a saving relationship with Jesus.

Being “in Christ” includes a network of truths held together by God’s grace. Paul’s focus here is on one of those truths: **the new-creation**. To understand this, we have to remember the big story of the Bible: God makes the original creation, humankind corrupts it through sin, and God promises one day to make it new. While it hasn’t been brought fully yet, those who are in Christ are already a part of what is to come despite the current experience. By the Holy Spirit, we have been born again as a foretaste or downpayment of the new creation to come.

In the believer, what we were in our corrupt and fallen condition, and the dominion of sin in our lives, has **passed away**. It has died. It has been buried with Christ. And, Paul says, “look at this!” The new has already come. The New Creation is already present in those who are in Christ.

This is the reason the New Testament puts such an emphasis on our **new life together as a community**. This is the reason for the emphasis on relationships of love for one another in love for Jesus. We can’t separate love for Him from love for one another.

So while we are still living in this messed-up world, the “**old age**” of fallen creation, we are living in it as a new humanity who have already been transferred to the new world that God has promised.

It appears that Paul has picked up on a major motif or theme from the book of Isaiah:

*42:9 Behold, the former things have come to pass,  
and new things I now declare;  
before they spring forth  
I tell you of them.*

*48:6 “You have heard; now see all this;*

*and will you not declare it?  
From this time forth I announce to you new things,  
hidden things that you have not known.*

### **Application**

This is what we are as a local church. This is what the church around the world is in fact. Notwithstanding all the mess that we are and the church has been, anyone and everyone who is in Christ has died with Him, and is raised from the dead with Him as part of the new creation. Let this form our fundamental view of one another, and things change.

What then does it mean to live as new creation humanity? It means we live differently as a foretaste of the world of peace and love which is to come.

### **Mission: Reconciliation (v.18-19)**

***18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself  
and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;***

***19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,  
not counting their trespasses against them,  
and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.***

Paul **never writes theology for its own sake**. He never gives theological truths disconnected from our day to day lives and behavior. This letter isn't a treatise on the new creation, but a reminder of what we are so that we would be persuaded to live differently.

Throughout the letter we have seen that the major problem Paul is dealing with is disunity (i.e. judgments and accusations...all of which disrupt what the Spirit intends to do with His church. Paul is giving theology to disrupt the devil's schemes in the church. The theology he emphasizes is God's work in reconciliation.

In regards to reconciliation, Paul writes that “**all this is from God.**” He reminds us that Christianity is not a manmade religion created so that we can find our way to God, a path by which we can find Him, by reforming our lives and working our way back.

Rather, Christianity is all what God has **already done** so that we can be reconciled to Him. He is the one to whom we must be reconciled (due to our sin), and also the one who has accomplished all the conditions needed for us to be reconciled. We should have fixed it, couldn't fix it, and so He does it Himself fully and completely.

The Gospel isn't an **attempt** to appease, pursue, or make amends for what we have done, but the **declaration** of our being fully accepted and freely reconciled because of the work of Jesus Christ.

This is “all from God” because the **Father** planned redemption before time, the **Son** accomplished redemption in His death, and the **Spirit** applies it to us.

**All the work necessary** for us to be reconciled to an offended God has been accomplished by God Himself. Our faith adds nothing to that work. Our response, our faith, is the **trusting reliance** on what has been done on our behalf. It is only through the death of Christ that God reconciled us to Himself. Because of Jesus taking on our due penalty he does not hold our trespasses against us.

Paul says that he, as well as others who tell others of this good news, have been given the **ministry of reconciliation**. This word “ministry” may give some the impression of those in authority, someone with status, professional pastors or missionaries. But the word is equivalent to a table servant, one of low status and position.

The picture is that of a person who is going from table to table in human relationships, washing feet, caring for needs in the name of the master of the feast, Jesus. In doing so, the “main dish” that is being offered is that of reconciliation, being at peace with God. It isn't for the guests to contribute to the meal by their own good works, but to accept the free gift as offered through the table servant from the Master.

It is a ministry of reconciliation, which is Paul's emphasis here. This isn't just something said, but **something lived out**.

*The ministry of reconciliation therefore involves more than simply explaining to others what God has done in Christ. It requires that one become an active reconciler oneself. Like Christ, a minister of reconciliation plunges into the midst of human tumult to bring harmony out of chaos, reconciliation out of estrangement, and love in the place of hate. (Garland)*

### **Application**

It is our great honor to be entrusted with this message of reconciliation. With this message comes the responsibility of ourselves being reconcilers, peacemakers, and a New Creation people of God to model it to the fallen world.

Paul picks up another metaphor in addition table servants, that of ambassadors.

 **Ambassadorial Appeal (v.20)**

***<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ,  
God making his appeal through us.***

***We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.***

An ambassador is an authorized representative of a person in power. But in using this metaphor from the ancient world, Paul is at the same time drawing out some stark contrasts between Gospel ambassadors and worldly ambassadors.

**First, ancient ambassadors had a protected dignity.** They were not to be imprisoned for the message they brought. If they were imprisoned by the ones to whom they were delivering the message, there was a great risk of an attack of the sovereign’s army.

**Second, ancient ambassadors were ordinarily sent by the “inferior” nation.** They did this as a sign of friendship and good will, to establish a relationship, to form an alliance. Nations would send ambassadors to Rome for appeal. Rome didn’t appeal to anyone. They just threatened. Caesar sent decrees, he sent governors to lord it over the cities. These governors were to be submitted to without resistance. You resist, you pay the price.

In **contrast** to that protected dignity, Paul speaks of how God’s ambassadors had been imprisoned, beaten, maligned, accused, and abused for his delivery of God’s message. God allowed His ambassadors to suffer scorn, mistreatment, dishonor, and assault (inside and outside the church). While other ambassadors wore gold chains and pendants as tokens of the wealth and power of their kings, Paul’s chains were made of steel and bore the tokens of servanthood, humility, and patience in the scars of his body.

In contrast to the inferior appealing to the superior, God as the Sovereign King so **longs for the reconciliation** of His enemies that he preemptively sends His humble servants to plead on His behalf with the nations to accept His terms. His terms are “I have done everything despite your rebellion and offense. I have paid the price by the life of my Son. Now, accept peace with Me.”

In other words, here is a **different God-King** than what they know with different kinds of ambassadors. Through them God was appealing, begging, imploring to be reconciled by the work of Jesus. Paul does not demand different treatment, travels at his own expense, and yet considers himself to have enormous privilege of being an ambassador of Christ and to suffer for Him. He was like His Savior.

### **Application**

We may think of God as if He is a tyrannical despot, arbitrarily demanding His way out of petty and picky desires. But instead we God revealed in such a way that He and His messengers work differently than human tyrants. He humbles Himself to reach out to the fallen human race, and calls us His servants to suffer disrepute and dishonor in imitation of Jesus.

And now Paul summarizes that Ambassadorial Appeal in this way...

### **The Great Exchange (v.21)**

***21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin,  
so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***

For our benefit, God put the **responsibility and punishment** of our sin on His Son who knew no sin of His own. The purpose and guaranteed outcome is that we would become the righteousness of God.

This happens in two ways. **Judicially**, that all of Jesus' righteousness would be credited to our account so that there is no wrath remaining for us from God. This opens the way to our adoption as children of God, becoming friends of God, and the promise that He will never abandon us because of our sin.

The second way that we become the righteousness of God is by our being **transformed**, being conformed to the ethical standards of God's holy law, the law of love for Him and for our neighbors. This means our actual progress in holiness, sanctification, righteousness over time, which will be completed when Jesus returns.

### **Application (Lord's Supper)**

Seeing what God has done, first we remember that our standing with God is **totally and completely accomplished** in the sin-bearing Savior we have in Jesus. Nothing we have done, are doing, or will do separates us from the love of Christ. Jesus paid it all. We accept that by God's free offering at the beginning of our Christian life, and by that we live day by day.

Second, our being accounted as righteous is the **energy behind** our becoming righteous. There is work to do. There is God to love, self-discipline to exercise, the Spirit to walk in. Yes, we are accounted righteous. Now, by Grace, we are becoming righteous.

Appeal to non-Christians

