

12,11,25 2 Cor. 5:12-21, If Anyone is in Christ, He is a New Creation.

Immediately after Paul discusses the Judgement Seat of Christ in 2 Cor. 5:10 he adds this in vs's 12-13;

For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you.

In vs. 12, Paul is basically saying that he has no intention of boasting about how awesome he is; that's something the Lord will decide at the Bema Seat. The best way to understand Paul's offer to the Corinthians would be to look at another way this verse has been translated;

(Amplified) We are not commending ourselves to you again, but we are providing you with an occasion and incentive to be [rightfully] proud of us, so that you may have a reply for those who pride themselves on surface appearances [on the virtues they only *appear* to have], although their heart is devoid of them.

We see this surfacing numerous times in Paul's writings. It was common then, and it's common now, to evaluate other people by their "appearance". It's similar to when Jesus indicted the Pharisees;

(Matt. 23:25-28) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Spiritual discernment sees past the outward appearance to the heart. It can identify that which is genuine from that which is simply an outward show to impress others.

All that Paul has revealed of himself to the Corinthians was never intended to "impress" them, but to reveal the real person of who Paul was to them. If they saw him as he really is, they would have "an occasion and incentive to be proud of (him)."

Here's a commentator's take on this;

Every time Paul sought to defend himself, he ran the risk of being misunderstood (they might think he was "patting himself on the back"). And every time you seek to defend your ministry, you too will run the risk of being misunderstood as bragging or arrogance. And given the fact that virtually the entire second epistle to the Corinthians was written to defend his ministry, it could easily be misconstrued that he was a "self-promoter." And so, he says that he is *not* commending himself again, but in fact was giving the Corinthians "ammunition" so to speak to counter the false allegations against him.

Paul was always under attack from people who wanted to slander him and discredit his ministry, so he had to defend himself, but like the author said, when someone defends themselves it can be misconstrued as "boasting".

Why was this so important to Paul? He wasn't the type of man that worried about what other people thought of him; he wasn't serving the Lord with the motive of "pleasing men". But sometimes, when you deeply care for someone and don't want them to be led astray by men who *are* in the ministry to "please others", you'll do whatever it takes to retain their confidence in you. Here's another explanation of this;

If the Corinthians began to question the apostolic ministry of Paul and the authenticity of his Gospel, and turned to follow false apostles with a false messages, the church at Corinth would eventually cease to exist. This is true of any church, anywhere, any time. When the message and the messenger of any local church become perverted, the foundation of that local church will erode until all that remains is a shell or until it is completely destroyed.

Even if he risked being misunderstood, Paul wouldn't hold back on defending the message God had given him by openly revealing the person Paul had become in the Lord's hand. The Corinthians were too important to him to risk them believing his accusers over him. If that meant he'd have to spend some time defending his apostleship, then that's what he'd do.

When Paul adds this in vs's 13-14, it's another way of saying the same thing he's been saying;

For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ compels us . . .

This isn't the first time Paul has come up against this;

(Acts 26:24-25) As Paul thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning has driven you mad!” But he said, “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.”

So, some may interpret Paul’s actions as “insane”, they did the same thing with Christ. Others might see him as being “of sound mind”. But regardless of how they evaluated Paul, he desperately wanted them to know that everything he did was a combination of zeal for the Lord and a desire for the growth and spiritual life of the Church. Either way, his motives were the opposite of selfish or self-serving.

In all of this we can see an amazing display of the humanity of Paul as well as of how deep his love for the Corinthians was.

Next, Paul reveals what’s driving him. His love for the Corinthians was definitely part of it, but listen to the next two verses (vs’s 14-15);

The love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

In vs. 14, the conjunction translated “of” (the love of Christ) should be translated “for” or “because of”; in the original it denotes a *reason* for taking an action. Paul’s saying that his love for Christ compels or constrains him. This is easy to see in what he says in the rest of the passage. We should no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died for us.

Now, what does Paul mean in vs. 14 by “. . . all died”?

This is one of two verses in the New Testament that fully refutes the Calvinist view that Christ only died for the elect - for those chosen by God in eternity past to be saved. In their theology, the rest of humanity would be condemned; there is no blood sacrifice made for the non-elect.

However, the verse we’re looking at refutes that, as does this one in 1 Jn. 2:2;

(Christ) is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

The reality is that when Christ died, He took all of humanity into the grave with Him and buried it. As we saw in 1 Cor. 15:22, “. . . in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive . . .”. At the Cross one entire race or species of humans was judged in Christ; God has judged and rejected the Adamic race. When Christ rose from the dead, a new creation began.

So, now, there are two humanities populating this planet. The race that comes from Adam through our natural birth; and the race that comes from Christ through our second birth. The two destinies of heaven and hell aren't based on behavior or religion, they are based on whether we remain as the seed of the first man, Adam, or whether we have been born again and are now the seed of Christ, the Second Man. All whose lineage is Adamic are flesh; all whose lineage is Christ are spirit; as our Lord said in John 3:6-7;

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You *must* be born again.'

And 1 Cor. 15:42-49 we read;

The body is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so, it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

From here, I initially thought about expanding on what it means practically to "no longer live for ourselves", but we've talked a lot about the cross in the life of a believer and about what it means to "deny ourselves". So, I'm going to take another approach. I'm hoping this can simplify what it actually looks like on a daily basis to, as they say, "live for the Lord".

First, what kind of people are being asked to turn their lives over to the Lord? And if they do, what does the Lord desire will result from that decision; what will it look like over time?

(Deut. 7:6-8) The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you.

(1 Cor. 1:26-30) You see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things

which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

God chooses those most likely to realize they are products of His grace, not products of their own self-sufficiency. To be a genuine disciple of Christ a person must first of all realize that they do not have anything to offer but themselves. There is only one thing that God requires; they must be teachable.

The word “disciple” is simple in concept – a disciple is a student willing to give his life over to an instructor and to listen to all that his teacher tells him. But if it’s so simple, how can there be so much deception and division? Most students are not fully teachable; they have itching ears and they ignore what they don’t approve of. And most are listening to men rather than God; they aren’t “Bereans”; they aren’t willing to spend time in prayer and study to determine whether what they are hearing matches what the Lord has already said in His Word.

The idea of teachability is not a complex principle, and I’m sure everyone believes he is; but the degree to which that’s true in us is the degree to which we will understand and live the Truth. If we were all fully receptive to the Lord’s instruction, there would be no deception or division, but to have full unity and spiritual maturity, there has to be a vision of what God’s purpose is for us.

As we’ve seen, the word “purpose” is singular in the epistles. God only has one purpose for us and that is stated clearly in Rom. 8:29, “ . . . whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

The process the Lord uses for that is a combination of increasingly advanced understanding of the scriptures coupled with the experiences we need in our lives to move what we learn from intellectual knowledge to personal character and expression in our lives.

(Heb. 4:12) Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

(2 Tim. 3:16-17) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be mature; thoroughly equipped for every good work.

(2 Tim. 2:15) Study to show thyself approved of God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Again, if the whole church understood God's purpose for us and, as Jude put it, was willing to defend the truth and the reality of that purpose "... once delivered unto the saints", against all opposition or distortion, we'd be seeing the Book of Acts in our generation instead of the Laodicean confusion and limitation we are seeing instead.

In 2 Cor. 5:16-17 Paul introduces one of the most vital instructions in the New Testament.

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

I have tried on numerous occasions to communicate what the meaning of "new" is and I still struggle to find a way to make that as clear and absolute as it's meant to be in Paul's writings. We've looked at it in the original language and in the theology of the new creation, but I still don't think the full reality of this has hit home. Paul struggled to find the words to express his amazement at what the Lord had shown him. His understanding of why we are here and what our destiny is governed all his thoughts and actions for the rest of his life. Our intended destiny is infinitely greater and more wonderful than any imagination of "heaven" that we could ever come up with.

Now, in John 17:16, when Jesus was praying for us to the Father He said, "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." As we saw in Rom. 8, Jesus is the first born of a new race or species of humanity – a new creation.

The word "new" (kainos) means, "... of a new kind, unprecedented, novel, uncommon, unheard of..." What we became through our new birth is a type of creature, by a creative act of God, that has never existed before. There is nothing even similar.

(1 Jn. 3:2) Now we are offspring of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

We are simply not like anyone who is of this world; we are here temporarily on a mission to seek and save that which is lost, and then we will go to the place that the Lord is preparing for us.

When we see ourselves as we really are; as God sees us, we will never look at anyone the same again; we will never "regard anyone according to the flesh." And Paul adds, "Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer." His disciples

knew Him in the days of His flesh and blood as Jesus of Nazareth; the carpenter, the Messiah, and Son of Man. But following His ascension and glorification, His glory and divine Personhood is now fully revealed; just as it was for those few moments on the Mount of Transfiguration when He gave Peter, James and John a glimpse of His eternal glory and majesty.

That is how we are to see the Lord now; not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit, by spiritual revelation, just as John did in Revelation chapter 1.

The more we see Him as He is now, the more like Him we become. Most of Christendom sees Him as a Jesus Who is a million miles below the wonder of Who He really is. The Jesus of “The Chosen” is a perfect example. That Jesus is a weak, pathetic, imitation of the Son of God. He’s one of the “other Jesus’s” that would be presented to this world to deceive people from finding the true Christ.

If we see each other according to the Spirit instead of the flesh, we will know how to genuinely guide, direct, encourage, comfort and exhort in ways that truly help us grow in likeness to the Lord. If we see our Savior according to the Spirit, we will fall to the ground in wonder and worship; we won’t need a Christian rock band, light show and smoke machines to inspire us. Christ is the beauty and perfection of God made visible in human form and seen in His creation. He is the “radiance of the glory of God”.

Henry Ward Beecher had this input on the essential quality of that “radiance”;

We never know how much one loves till we know how much he is willing to endure and suffer for us; and it is the suffering element that measures love. The characters that are great must, of necessity, be characters that shall be willing, patient and strong to endure for others. The greatest demonstration of the divine ideal was embodied in the Son of God Who loved us and gave Himself for us. They should have known that He was God; His patience alone should have proved that to them.

Getting back to “now we regard no one according to the flesh”, in other words, how we see one another as members of this new humanity; listen to this commentary on 2 Cor. 5:16;

The first and primary thing is the absolute necessity for knowing one another after the Spirit. That means that as far as we can see, we have not made what we are by nature the final basis of our relationships, of our expectations, of our judgments, of our appraisals. It does not mean that we are oblivious of one another’s human nature. It does not mean that what we are in the flesh never strikes us; that we are to be totally insensible to the defects of one another’s nature. No- We shall always be sensitive. It is probably true that

the more spiritual we are, the more sensitive we become to what we are by nature and to what others are by nature. Perhaps we shall suffer all the more *because* of the defects and imperfections, the strengths and the weaknesses of one another naturally.

Men of the world do not have the degree of the difficulty that Christians have of getting along with one another. They seem to be able to ignore and ride over one another's difficult parts and make-up. It seems that Christians are much more alive to that sort of thing than others, and are touched by it more keenly. Of course, we can explain that along two lines. If we become spiritually sensitive, the flesh is sensed much more quickly; what is *not* spiritual registers itself upon spiritual sensitivity. There is also the fact that we have an adversary to reckon with who is always seeking to expose our imperfections and bring them up and hit us with them. He is at work in this matter of seeking to upset the relationships of the Lord's people. He never tires of that. Not knowing one another after the flesh does not mean that all that realm will cease to exist for us, but it does mean that we shall look beyond that realm and we shall steadily seek grace and the help of the Holy Spirit to cultivate and develop a determination to look through what we are by nature to what there is of the Lord Jesus and of the Holy Spirit in one another, and seek to keep our eyes upon that.

This is just another of numerous levels of perception and spiritual reality that we need to develop if we want to see as Christ sees, and relate to one another as Christ relates to us.

We've talked a lot in the past about the difference between the soul and the spirit; this is another place that comes in. Using our soul (our mind, observation and hearing) to evaluate the person in front of us is the only way an unbeliever can come any conclusions about other people. They take what they see and what they hear and with that information, they make decisions. But Christians have a "spirit" which, if their spiritual senses are exercised and developed, allows us to see past what the soul can see; we can get to the core, the heart, of the other person.

Soul-sight is "regarding according to the flesh"; spiritual sight is "regarding according to the spirit".

The Pulpit Commentary editors put it like this;

It is a consequence of my re-birth into a new creation that I am done with carnal, superficial, earthly, external judgments according to the appearance, and not according to



the heart. Paul is saying that he has now renounced all mere earthly and human judgments.

In the last part of chapter 5, Paul takes everything he's said so far and ties it directly into our mission as ambassadors of Christ. When we see life as we are meant to see it – through the eyes of God's Spirit, that seeing becomes an inward drive to move into action in order to accomplish what we could call the "vocational" calling we have. Here's the passage;

(2 Cor. 5:18-21) Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

I'm going to paraphrase these verses to bring out the original meaning that's here;

All things of eternal value and consequence are out from the source of God, Who has brought about our reconciliation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And He has placed upon us the responsibility of doing our part in fulfilling the service or stewardship of reconciliation. Christ was the incarnation of God and in that role He reconciled the world unto Himself, refusing to hold their sins against them, and has given us a stewardship to spread this word (the offer of reconciliation). Therefore, we are ambassadors sent by Christ to represent the One who commissioned us. It is as though God was pleading *through us*, "We beg you on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God". This reconciliation is possible because God made the One who was sinless to take our sin upon Himself so that our sins could be removed from us and in their place the righteousness of Christ could be imputed to our account.

What Paul is doing is restating the essential elements of our salvation through Christ and reminding the Corinthians of the commission our Lord gave to His apostles prior to His ascension.

Since we are very familiar with "The Great Commission", what I want to do with this is point out some issues related to this 'commission' that we need to remember.

First, as we see in our passage, it's an "appeal", a "pleading" from God through us. This shows us the heart of God for the lost, for those He came to seek and to save. The Lord is unashamed to "beg" people to come to Him.

Also, even though this commission obviously involves evangelism, the actual wording is "make disciples of all nations". The goal of our mission is not only to make converts, but to establish committed followers of Christ in every nation, which those who understood this calling have been doing for 2000 years.

We also have to remember that it's not us who save and disciple people – that is something that is a miracle every time it happens – it's something only God can do.

(Rom. 1:16) I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.

We can't argue, debate, or manipulate people into faith in Christ. The power God uses to draw those with open hearts to Himself is not our persuasiveness, it's the gospel. And one of the main reasons for that is the fact that there is more involved in reaching someone with the truth than just giving them the correct information;

(Acts 26:17-18) . . . I now send you to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Prayer for a spiritual revelation must always accompany any presentation of the gospel for the simple reason that there is a powerful spiritual resistance in play whenever we witness to someone. That resistance is only broken through prayer, followed by a clear presentation of the truth unhindered by the attempt of the enemy to distort, confuse or blind the recipient. We are being sent to open eyes that the enemy has closed; correct theology alone will not do that.

As an evangelist, Billy Sunday, from the last century said, "If you are a stranger to prayer, you are a stranger to the greatest source of power known to human beings."

I'm not sure this next comment is as much of an issue now as it was in past generations, but there was a time when the work of evangelism was, for the most part, left up to those who were *public, stadium-filling* evangelists. But in case that's ever come up in any discussion of this you might have had, I wanted to make sure this verse was available;

(Act. 8:1-4) At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria,

except the apostles . . . Therefore, those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

Notice that the whole church “went everywhere preaching the word.” The only ones who *didn’t* go, were the apostles; the ones we would have *thought* would be those most likely to go. The Lord didn’t limit evangelism to evangelists and apostles.

Evangelists may do it full-time to our part-time. They may be better, more faithful, less fearful, but the believers in Acts 8 weren’t all evangelists; they weren’t all extroverts; they weren’t all fearless soldiers of the Lord. They were just like you and me with one ‘environmental’ exception. Persecution had moved them out of complacency into active obedience. Persecution often has the effect of moving people out of the danger of an ingrown Christianity.

Finally, on this; I’ve shared the following a couple times over the last few years, so it’s not new information, but it’s always a very important reminder that evangelism is not, and has never been, a cookie-cutter operation. Everyone we talk to is a unique individual and it would be a huge mistake if we thought our witnessing would be effective if we didn’t adjust our presentation of the gospel to fit the person we’re witnessing to.

Jesus talked to the woman at the well about living water; he talked to Nicodemus about the new birth, etc. He didn’t just pass out 4 spiritual laws tracts or 3 steps to salvation. It was always unique because it was always personal based on what the Holy Spirit knew would be the most effective in meeting the deepest needs of the person He was talking to; which is another extremely important reason for prayer. We desperately need to know what the person we’re ministering to needs to hear, and only God knows for sure what that is.

This writing by a student from Prairie Bible College does an excellent job of showing the immense diversity involved in coming to Christ;

The accessibility of God’s forgiveness is the greatest wonder of the world and is offered to those who believe (those who put their trust in Christ to save them)- it is by faith only. No strings attached.

Jesus said, "I am the gate, whoever enters through me will be saved." (John 10:9). The gate is always open; the decision is ours.

Let's say one hundred people enter that gate in the next ten minutes.

One comes with purpose and vision for a lifetime of serving Christ.

Another comes with the bare thought, "Just don't let me burn in hell."

Another loiters around outside for years, and finally steps across the line, not entirely sure she made the best decision.

Still another starts for the gate, turns back, changes his mind, starts for the gate again, and repeats this process numerous times before realizing he needs help getting through the gate. "Lord, help me decide," he prays. A compassionate, tender hand reaches through the gate and helps him through.

A mother won't go in without her children. She gets them ready and as they pray to receive Christ together; they enter the faith-gate to eternal life.

Another stands restlessly outside the gate. "He doesn't want me like He wants the others," she bemoans. "Maybe if I stand here, he'll notice me." "Come," Jesus cries out to her. "It was for you I died." With awe she passes through the gate.

Still another, hurt by the years, stands at the gate, angry with the Master for the way his life has gone. "I don't want you," he thinks, "but I have no other place to go; so, I must go through the gate."

Jesus takes them all, because that's how we come- as needy, blind, hungering, angry, frightened, confused, lost human beings. Jesus is the only One who can save us. "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

So, you can see that we do really need to have the Lord's help in knowing when and how to make our appeal to someone to be saved. This is absolutely not a "one size fits all" stewardship. It's unique in every case and it's meant to be compassionate, wise and very personal.

Finally, just as a reminder of something the Lord wants us to always keep in mind, from Zech. 4:10; "Do not despise the day of small things!" None of us may fit into the category of an "evangelist" with hundreds of souls brought to Christ through us, but Spurgeon once wrote something that reminded me of what our focus should really be;

If there existed only one man or woman who did not know the Savior, and if that person lived among the wilds of Siberia, and if it was necessary that all the millions of believers on the face of the earth should journey there, and every one of them plead with him to come to Jesus, it would be well worth all the zeal, labor, and expense. If we had to preach to thousands year after year, and never rescued but one soul, that one soul would be full reward for all our labor, for a soul is of countless price. If sinners will be condemned, at

least let them leap to Hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to believe. Let not one soul go into eternal darkness unwarned and unprayed for.