

## The Difference Jesus Makes

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Intro: This past week-end Dale Bekkering and I attended an excellent conference on a biblical understanding of Racial Reconciliation. The speakers pressed home the point that Jesus, and Jesus alone, can heal the wounds of our world – not only racial injustice, but every form of evil, every work of the Devil. No social program can change a sinful heart. But Jesus changes everything.

H.B. Charles – Jesus Changes Everything.

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul is engaged in a defense of his ministry. It seemed that some men were trying to lead the congregation away from listening to Paul – though Paul had planted this church and was an apostle. And in the context of defending his God-ordained ministry, Paul is explaining the way the gospel radically impacted his life, transformed his way of ‘seeing’ and gloriously changed his status before God. Jesus changed everything. And from the inside out.

### I. A New Principle (14-15)

What is the primary motivating principle of all men after Adam’s fall into sin? Pride and Self. By virtue of the fall we are hardwired for self-worship and self-service.

That was Saul’s life before he met Christ. He was an extremely gifted, accomplished and proud worshiper of self. His zeal to keep the Mosaic law was driven by pride and self-righteousness. His “service of God” was in fact an act of self-worship. Remember the guy who prayed: (Luke 18:11–12)  
“God I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’

Remember him? That was Saul of Tarsus. Exact same spirit. An arrogant, self-righteous man, persecuting the church thinking he was pleasing God. Compelled by pride.

But Jesus changed everything. Notice verse 14-15.

<sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; <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.

There was a “something” that replaced pride and self as the dominant motivating factors of Paul’s life. The engine that drove his thoughts and attitudes and actions used to be the engine of self-interest, self-love, self-advancement, self-worship. But something radical had happened to Paul – on the inside. He had an engine overhaul. The engine of self was pulled out and replaced with a new engine - an engine called “love of Christ”. His life came under the control of Christ’s love.

“The life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” That’s it.

The word “controls” comes from the word ‘to imprison’. “To be claimed, totally controlled”. I met a man this past week who describes himself on his twitter as “imprisoned by the love of Christ”. That’s exactly what Paul is talking about.

“The love of Christ “completely dominates” Paul (2 C. 5:14) so that on the basis of Christ’s death the only natural decision for him, as for all other believers, is no longer to live for self but to live for Christ.<sup>1</sup>

**“We have concluded this:”** The word means to carefully examine and consider and then to pass a sound judgement. Paul says, “we have carefully examined the gospel facts and have come to this profound conclusion – we don’t belong to ourselves anymore. Our life is not our own. Christ is our life (Col 3:4). To live is Christ (Phil 1:21).

What is the motivating principle of your life? Why do you do the things you do? Jesus can change you from the inside. He can teach you how to live a life controlled by his love. We just need to be convinced of it. Paul was gripped by this thought, “Jesus loves me, this I know.” Do you? He gave his life for you. He was raised to glory for you. We can live in the compelling power of these facts.

## II. A New Perspective (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.

If you would like to hear a magnificent exposition on this text, I highly recommend to you Eric Hausler’s sermon, preached here at Harvest about 18 months ago.

Paul says, “we once regarded people according to the flesh – including Christ.” It’s the most natural thing in the world. We regard people according to the flesh all the time. In other words, we make snap judgements about people according to their appearance: their ethnicity, skin color, social class, physical attractiveness, personality, and gender. We love meeting smart, attractive, influential, funny or wealthy people. We tend to ignore poorer, unattractive, obnoxious people. We judge people according to external issues and our own personal prejudices. And it’s a sin.

That’s how sinful people ‘see’ and that’s why the religious leaders couldn’t ‘see’ Jesus. He was from Nazareth. He was poor. He was unattractive. He was friends with the wrong people. And he didn’t meet their standards of religious purity.

We know people like this, right?

Though Paul most likely never physically saw Jesus, he certainly knew of him and, like the other Pharisees, he saw Jesus as an enemy: a false teacher, a breaker of Sabbath, a violator of purity laws. He ate with prostitutes and befriended sinners. A blasphemer who called the Thrice Holy God his Father. But he got what he deserved: he died for his crimes – dying the death of the damned, crucified on a Roman cross.

Paul is telling us here: That’s what I thought. That’s what I believed. But Jesus changes everything. On the road to Damascus the Holy Spirit opened Saul’s eyes to see the glorious truth about Jesus. That this was the very Son of God, come in human flesh and blood. He came to see that Jesus was the image of the invisible God, the exact imprint of his being.

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<sup>1</sup> Köster, H. (1964–). [συνέχω, συνοχή](#). G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, & G. Friedrich (Eds.), *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed., Vol. 7, p. 883). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Colossians 1:16–18 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

From him, and through Him and to Him are all things.

And, seeing the truth about Jesus changed the way Paul looked at people. He didn't see people according to the categories of this world. He didn't see Jews or Gentiles, male or female, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free. He saw people: made in the image of God, fallen, ruined children of Adam, at war with their Maker, and desperately in need of redemption. He saw this world with the eyes of Jesus who looked on the crowds and had compassion for they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Is that what you see when you go about in the world?

H.B. told a story about when his church, a predominantly black church, was in the process of merging with another congregation which was predominantly white. At an informational meeting with the white congregation, a man stood up and said, "Pastor, if you take over here, will we still be allowed to have our Beast Feast? An annual outreach event where guys would go hunting wild game and then gather at church to cook and eat what they killed. H.B said, "we'll see." He was talking in the parking lot with some of his leaders after the meeting and this man walked by and HB said, come and tell the brothers here about this Beast Feast. The man did and they had a good chuckle about this outreach to rednecks. And as the man turned to walk away he said, You know Pastor, at the foot of the cross, we's all just rednecks.

That's the truth. Every person is a fallen image bearer. Every person is a sinner in need of redemption. None worthy. All needy.

Jesus changes everything. When we see the truth about Jesus we see the truth about ourselves and everyone else. This truth includes not only what we are without Christ – but what happens whenever someone comes to Christ.

One of the most distinctive truths of the gospel is what happens to people when they become a "Christian". Here Paul lists two glorious truths – regeneration and reconciliation.

### **III. A New Person**

#### **A. A New Nature (Regeneration)**

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

Notice the phrase "in Christ". This is the essence of the believer's new identity. In Scripture we see that God looks at humanity in a binary way. There are only two people groups – those who are 'in Adam', and those who are 'in Christ'. That's it. Doesn't matter whether you are red, or yellow or black or white. Your skin color isn't the most important aspect of your identity – not even close. The most essential question is – and always will be – to whom do you belong, Adam or Jesus? Who are you "in"?

The union of the believer with Christ is the glory of the Christian. No other religion has this. No one is “in Mohammed” or “in Buddha”. To become a Muslim or Buddhist simply requires that you adopt the tenets and practices of that religion. But when you come to faith in Christ – you come to Jesus and are united to him, so that Christ himself becomes your **identity** and your **destiny**. Paul says in Colossians 3:3–4 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Identity) <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Destiny)

**“If anyone is in Christ – he is a new creation!”** Isn’t that wonderful? You are not a remodeled, refurbished, creation. You are new! The old you died when you were united to Christ in his death. And the new you came to life when Jesus rose from that grave. You are now, eternally part of God’s new creation.

The old has “passed”. Aorist, active, indicative. A completed, accomplished fact. And ‘Behold’ – in other words, wake up, pay attention, rejoice – “the new has come.” How did this happen??

### **B. A New Status (Reconciliation)**

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

“All this is **from** God!” Religion might be the story of man’s search for God, but the gospel is the story of God’s search for men – God seeking and finding every last one of his lost elect children and bringing them to home to himself.

The glory of the doctrine of reconciliation is only seen against the backdrop of man’s alienation. This is the tragedy of fallen humanity – our sins have separated us from God. We were by nature enemies of God, objects of wrath, allied with the Devil and destined for hell.

But God .... **“through Christ reconciled us to himself.”** We did not reconcile ourselves to God – he reconciled us to himself. And he did it all “through Christ.” **How?**

<sup>19</sup> 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.... <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Verse 19 - “The best summary sentence of the gospel in the Bible. “

- 1. What God didn’t do. “Not counting our *trespasses* against us.”** The Bible uses a variety of words for sin: transgression, iniquity, and trespasses. Trespasses highlights the wicked, inexcusable, rebellion of sin. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit – that was trespass.

**H.B. Charles:** “You can sin with good intentions. You can’t trespass with good intentions.”

You knew the rule, the law of God is written on your heart. You knew what you desired was wrong, you knew it was wicked. But it was what you wanted – and so you did it anyway. Flat out rebellion in the face of God.

God does not count our **trespasses** against us! I'm so glad Paul used that word. I could believe that God was willing to forgive my unintentional sin. I could even believe he would be able to forgive my iniquities. But what about my trespasses?

**Romans 4:25** He was delivered up for our **trespasses** and raised for our justification.

**Ephesians 1:7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our **trespasses**, according to the riches of his grace,

How is this possible?

2. **What God did.** (21) "For our sake, he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

For our sake – let those words settle upon you. Think of the mystery, the weight of this.

For your sake – God sent his own Son to death.

For your sake – God took all the guilt and shame and evil of your trespasses and placed it all upon his perfectly obedient Son.

For your sake - Jesus was made sin and crushed by divine justice – so that in Him, we might become the righteousness of God.

Here is the great gospel exchange

- your trespasses placed upon Jesus so that he might die.
- His righteous life given to you so that you might live.

All this from God. God reconciling you to himself in Christ. Overcoming your trespasses by placing them on Jesus. Do you see why Paul would say, "we have concluded this – that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who **for their sake**, died and rose again."

What will that look like?

- It will change the way you live. No more fighting for your way, for your desires.
- It will change how you pray – 'your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
- Our life isn't ours to live as we choose. It belongs to Jesus, to be used for his glory and the promotion of his kingdom.

Jesus changes everything.

## V. A New Purpose

<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.

The gospel is the message of God reconciling the world to himself in Christ. The church is the delivery system. Evangelism is not an optional ministry of the church it is our sacred trust. To us has been given the message of reconciliation.

We exist to glorify God and to spread the message of reconciliation. It starts in our homes – as we live together for Jesus. WE gather in worship and prayer meetings and Bible Studies to encourage each other to embrace this message and to share it. We live in the midst of dark world and an evil generation – holding out the hope of the gospel.

What do the people in West Michigan need the most?? Safer streets? Better schools? Racial harmony? Sure – all those things. But most importantly – they need the ministry of reconciliation. They need to know that God is willing to forgive trespasses and has reconciled sinners to himself in Jesus.

Are you reconciled to God in Jesus?

Are you willing to let the gospel break your pride?

Are you willing to be imprisoned by the love of Christ?

Are you ready to receive and enjoy  
     the reality of regeneration – you are a new creation, and  
     the reality of reconciliation – God will never count your trespasses against you.

Are you ready to live to him, and for him – in every area of your life: your finances, your entertainment, your sex life, your work life, your family life?

**Galatians 2:20** I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

We are in the world but not of it.

Drummer goes by in the parade – out of step. Might think he has no sense of rhythm – until you realize that he is wearing earphones – and he’s marching to an entirely different song! That’s the believer in the world.