

## “People and Pastor: Seers” 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

There was once a man in a church I pastored that caused a lot of trouble. He was well-spoken, charming, seemed to express genuine interest in me, and drove a nice car. But later, I realized that this person had a long history of destructive relationships in churches. And he was a former pastor himself.

At one point, my neighbor friend, who was concerned for my well-being and for our church, even though he wasn't a believer, pulled me aside. He told me that he thought this other fellow had a very serious and dangerous personality disorder. This type of person, my friend said, is usually charming, well-spoken, and seems to care. But this type of person, he said, has two kinds of relationships: victims, and accomplices. You are their accomplice as long as you'll help them get what they want. If you don't, you become their victim.

From the moment my neighbor friend said this, I had two thoughts.

1. How do I keep this man in our church from destroying our congregation?
2. How do I keep from becoming a charming, well-spoken, surfacy, deceptive man who has no true friends, but only victims and accomplices?

Because it's very possible to slide into spiritual and relational disorder. To see people as levers to pull in order to get what you want. To see people who don't love your agenda as threats --- keeping you from getting what you want.

Paul himself knew this first hand. He was once, in a profound way, exactly this kind of person.

So, let's listen carefully to Paul's council, so we can avoid seeing people like this. And perhaps by God's grace we can even grow to see others through truly Christian eyes. Let's see if Paul can show us how to be Seers:

1. How not to see
2. How to see
3. How we're seen

1. How not to see

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Most of the charming things about my children come from their mother. The rest they picked up from me. But one thing their mother unfortunately did pass on to all three of them is the gene for colorblindness. It's weird to think that they're seeing less than the rest of us. Or at least they're missing visual distinctions that others of us easily make.

There is a spiritual colorblindness that we've had passed on to us from our first parents. Paul had it, you and I have had it, many still have it.

Paul says, (16) “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.”

Paul isn't afraid to say that he was once profoundly worldly, even though he could hardly have been more religious. When Paul looked at Jesus Christ---Jesus, the pinnacle of all religious desire; Jesus, the hope of nations---square in the face, his response was: “meh.”

After all, like Isaiah the Seer foretold, Christ came and wasn't particularly handsome, he certainly wasn't wealthy, he wasn't well-bred. The only things that drew people to him were spiritual thirst and religious hatred.

What the NIV calls “worldly perspective” here (16) is the word *sarx*, or “flesh.” “Flesh” is our propensity to become merely smart animals rather than becoming lovers as God is love. And apart from the love-compulsion of Christ, we will only ever be sophisticated animals. We'll judge, and live, by appearances.

Paul once saw everyone, and Jesus himself, through animal-only eyes. He saw Jesus as a threat to his religion. And people whose hearts were being captured by the love of Jesus and who were telling others of that love---he saw these people as threats, too. And they became his victims in the same way that Jesus had become a victim.

And so he's telling the church: don't let your eyes be worldly! Don't let your heart be set on what you want and how to get it---especially in the church!

If you're to be a Seer; if we, as people and pastor, are to be ‘Seers,’ we can't see through worldly, fleshly, selfishly ambitious eyes. When we look at others with such eyes, our eyes become weapons of our agenda, and the whole church will end up

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being either our accomplices or our victims.

How can we follow Christ and at the same time see those he's loved with eyes that we didn't get from him, but from the world, the flesh, and the devil? We can not. And we must not.

So, how not to see, then? We won't be spiritual Seers with worldly, fleshly eyes.

2. But how *are* we then to see? How *do* we become Seers?

Somehow, Paul went from “Yes, as surely as I live, this Jesus deserved to die” to “Yes, I would gladly die for this Jesus, and the life I now live I live by faith in him.”

And once his view of Christ changed, his view of everything, his every view of things, and especially his view of every *one*, was transformed.

And as Paul says in verse 17: When we reckon with the people we come across in our day to day lives, we are looking at people who have in Christ become a New Creation. Or we are looking at people whose greatest need in the world is that they would become New Creations in Christ.

To be a Seer is to be on the lookout for New Creation. And especially in people. We can't be sure it's New Creation we're seeing, but when we see what looks like New Creation fruit, we rejoice! We ask God: “How can I help see ever-newer New Creation emerge here? If this person is a New Creation, how can I help them be renewed even more? If they're yet to become a New Creation in Christ, how can I be a minister of reconciliation so that they become new in him?”

As CS Lewis has said, it's incredibly important how we treat the people we meet each day, how we “conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people.” Why? Because “you have never talked to a mere mortal. ... But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit.” And many of them will be “everlasting splendors.”

To be a Seer means that we who are New Creations ourselves in Christ make it our habit and our joy to lovingly call forth the new in people, and call for people to put behind the old so that it's dead and gone.

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To be a ministers of reconciliation, verse 18; to be Christ’s ambassadors, verse 20, is not just to “see” the invisible reality that others don’t see; it’s to have a wonderfully significant part in the emergence of New Creation life in others!

If we’re “Seers,” we go through life consistently asking the Lord to bring New Creation more fully into fruition, until at last every moment of every day is fully and evidently saturated with New Creation life.

And this doesn't mean that the life of a Seer is detached from “the real world” that everyone else sees. But rather, the goal for us as people and pastors, as Seers, is to live our most mundane moments---

---around the dinner table with family and friends, on the train or the tram, in the car, at work, chatting outside after church, in an office cubicle, at the grocery---

with a recognition that the New Creation has dawned in Christ and is looking to emerge, sooner or later, right here, right now. And then we Seers become pray-ers and speak-ers. We pray and speak into the darkness the light of the New Creation. We love, we serve, we act with a New Creation urgency, because we want nothing more than for Christ to be all in all.

I had a friend who was a true Seer. He and his Christian college buddies were friends with a woman who was a great cook but not a Christian, and not always so kind. They helped her open a cafe. They painted, built countertops, helped run the espresso machine, and spread the word. Some even helped grow the vegetables. On the first day the cafe was open, I sat across the table from my Seer-friend. And he said to me: “what’s happening today is a signpost of the New Creation.” Now, it was just a restaurant opening. But for a Christian Seer like my friend, it was a glorious occasion in which Christian believers worked for and prayed for and served a not-yet-believer with such New Creation zeal that having lunch at her cafe almost felt like going to church. They recognized, like Paul, verse 18, that “all this is from God!”

How not to see?

“We no longer see anyone from a worldly perspective.”

How to see?

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“If anyone is in Christ, they are a New Creation,” and they see with their New Creation eyes.

### 3. How we're seen

But the reality is, In order to become Seers, we need to see ourselves being seen by the Seer of Seers. By Jesus.

In his letters to the Corinthians, Paul has been really passionate. Many in the church thought Paul was so obsessed with the matters of the heart that he was “out of his mind” (13). He says, remember, “if we are out of our mind, it is for YOU!” And he says that, regardless of what they ultimately think of him, the Christ’s love compels him (14).

It will always be my job, if I am a true Pauline Seer in my pastorate, to be a tad “out of my mind” for you; to look to the heart of each of you. Not to be impressed with your wealth or appearance or prestige. But to have always on my heart the New Creation potentiality in each of you, and to love and serve you until there is New Creation all over your life and your work.

And it will always be your job, if you are the true Christian Seers of a truly Christian congregation, to look past the superficial markers of worldly success. To see how you might be able to see New Creation emerging in my life, and in one another’s lives.

But still---how do we get to this place where “the love of Christ compels us?” How can we keep being Seers?

Before we have any other job, it will always be all of our jobs, as Christian Seers, to first have our eyes fixed upon Jesus. We need to lock eyes with him. And in his eyes we see the most generous, New Creation-giving Seer of all.

What do we see when we see this Seer?

We see him who **saw** us as we were, and said (verse 21) “I will be seen as ‘sin’ for them, so that they can be seen as ‘righteous’, and be reconciled to God.”

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We see him who sees us **now** as we are, and if we're in him he says “what I see is not a lost cause, but a New Creation that I will make newer still, just like I make all things new.

We see him who will **one day** look back and see all of our attitudes, words, and actions, and he'll say to us---to our astonishment--- “well done, good and faithful servant!” Because he will have seen all of his own work in us. And he will be anxious to bring it, at last, to completion, so that we can at last love and serve him and one another, and the world, completely, in the New Creation.

And so, we have our work, as Seers, cut out for us! We've got to see with New Creation eyes. We've got to love one another. And we've got to tell others that Jesus is here to reconcile them to God. We've got to go, in other words, IN, and OUT.

But before we get ahead of ourselves, let's remember, as Paul says here in verse 18, “all this is from God!” And it's God who first reconciled *us* to himself, not counting *our* sins against *us*!

How do you go IN and love often difficult people who are your sisters and brothers in Christ in the church? How do you go OUT and share good tidings of God's love with people who have no love for your ambassadorship (20) of the New Creation?

The only way to pry our eyes open so that we are New Creation Seers is to see that Jesus is seeing us with eyes of New Creation love. If you're in him today, he beholds you as a New Creation in whom he takes the utmost delight. And if you're in him today, you can know that he's always making you newer and newer. That's his thing. He sees, and behold, he makes all things new. Even me. Even you.

And if you aren't in Christ today, verse 20, “we implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.” You'll begin to see with New Creation eyes. And you'll begin to see even yourself as a New Creation, because that's what you'll be.

Let's be together, from here out, Seers with New Creation eyes.

Amen.

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