



## BECOMING NEW

Believers faithfully represent Christ by living as new creations reconciled to Him.

### 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21; 6:1-2

Humans are relational by nature. Some of the greatest joys in life are found in healthy relationships. On the other hand, a broken or lost relationship can send us into depression or desperation. The closer the relationship, the greater the hurt if broken.

***Can any broken relationship be fixed? Explain. How does the restoring of a once broken relationship change the people who were once at odds with each other?***

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 2 CORINTHIANS 5:11–7:16

God created us to relate to one another, but He also created us to relate to Him. Our greatest need is to be reconciled to God. Sin has created a barrier that must be dealt with if we are to come into a right relationship with Him. Sin also creates barriers between people, and barriers must be removed if two sides are to come into agreement. In this week's Scripture passage, we'll see that Paul thought deeply about reconciliation and insisted that genuine reconciliation comes only through a right relationship with Jesus. Further, as you study this passage, keep in mind that churches that reconcile fractured relationships will be more effective in proclaiming the gospel message.

Understanding affliction in the Christian life has been a key theme from Paul in this letter to the Corinthians. One of the reasons why believers “do not lose heart” (2 Cor. 4:16) is because we trust that our momentary afflictions will produce an “an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (4:17) in heaven. Christians can expect the temporary “earthly home” of their bodies to be replaced with “a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (5:1).

This truth, of course, leads us to desire to be “away from the body and at home with the Lord”—but until that happens, “we make it our aim to please him” (5:8-9). Why? Because, as Paul stated, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (5:10).

Because judgment is approaching, Paul insisted that “we persuade others” (5:11). Not only on account of judgment, but also because “the love of Christ controls us” (5:14), our aim should be to convince people to live as those who have been reconciled by God. If Jesus died for all, then “those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (5:15).

Living for Christ means living a life of separation from the world (6:14-18). If we are to be held accountable for the things we've done in our body, both good and evil, then “let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God” (7:1). Yet none of this is possible unless we've become new creations, having been reconciled to God through Christ's sacrifice.



Read 2 Corinthians 5:16–6:2 in your Bible. Identify words or phrases used by Paul to describe the results of salvation. How do the words or phrases work together in Paul’s description?

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## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**REBORN** (2 COR. 5:16-17)

**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.**

### VERSE 16

**From now on**, compelled by the love of Christ, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to see people through a spiritual lens, not **according to the flesh**. Paul’s desire was to see grace extend through more people, which would not happen if those same people were thought of according to worldly standards.

Sadly, the Corinthian church had been infiltrated by false teachers who prioritized external things and “boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart” (5:12). The body was not unimportant to Paul. He proclaimed the resurrection of an incorruptible, immortal, image-bearing body in the likeness of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:50-55). Perhaps this rejection of seeing others from a worldly perspective was Paul’s response to the accusations that his sufferings cast doubt on his authoritative status among the Corinthians.

The same goes for knowing Christ, said Paul. **We once regarded Christ according to the flesh**, he claimed, **we regard him thus no longer**. Paul formerly viewed Jesus according to the flesh. He considered Jesus just a man, a teacher who claimed to be the Messiah, yet a rebel against Judaism, worthy of condemnation. After Jesus met Paul on the road to Damascus and changed his life, Paul knew

Him differently—as the Son of God, Messiah, and risen Lord. Spiritual rebirth transforms a worldly perspective about Jesus and about others.

### VERSE 17

Everything and everyone must be viewed through the gospel of Jesus Christ. For those who are saved, who are **in Christ**, everything has changed. Paul referred here to being united with Christ—a theological reality central to his understanding of salvation. Being saved, or born again, means that believers are now *in Christ*. At the same time, Christ is said to be in us (see Gal. 2:20). Union with Christ involves both aspects, revealing a complementary relationship between our being in Christ and Him dwelling in us.

***What are the benefits of being united with Christ? How does being united with Christ change how a person lives daily?***

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Anyone who trusts Jesus Christ for salvation is a **new creation**. Again, what is external isn't important compared to this reality. Paul said to the Galatians, "For both circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing; what matters instead is a new creation" (Gal. 6:15).

Because of the regenerating work of God in saving us and giving us new birth, **the old has passed away**. Paul told the Romans, "our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin" (Rom. 6:6). The old self that we used to be—with the old desires, inclinations, pursuits, and goals—has been transformed and replaced by **the new** that **has come** in Christ. We now have new desires, goals, and purposes because of the gospel. Born again by the Spirit, having trusted in Christ, we have put off the old and put on the new.

***What actions and characteristics point to a person being made new as a result of faith in Jesus?***

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## KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus.

### RECONCILED (2 COR. 5:18-21)

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

### VERSES 18-19

Paul provided a reminder of God's initiation in our redemption, saying simply, ***All this is from God.*** This truth applies to what Paul has said, and will say, on both sides of this statement. From the death of Jesus and its saving benefits, to the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit, to reconciliation, to the judgment seat of Christ—God is the One who began the good work in believers and will bring it to completion in Christ (see Phil 1:6).

It is God ***who through Christ reconciled us to himself.*** The clear testimony of Scripture is that our sin has created a barrier between us and God (see Isa. 59:2). Reconciliation is the restoration of a relationship that has been broken or severed; it is the reunion of parties separated by the consequences of sin or wrongdoing. Paul's emphasis was that God reconciled sinners to Himself through Christ. We have been brought near to God by the blood of Christ; the cross is where reconciliation and peace have been won and achieved (see Eph. 2:13-16). All of this is from God—He initiated it, He achieved it, He applied it to our lives.

The Corinthians needed to know and appreciate that God's reconciling work was not isolated to them alone, but that ***God was reconciling the world to himself.*** John said it this way: "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of

the whole world” (1 John 2:2). God’s work through Jesus was not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him (John 3:17).

***How does being reconciled to God serve as motivation for serving Him? What does God’s initiating this reconciliation reveal about God’s love for humans? How should the love God demonstrates motivate us to serve Him?***

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### VERSES 20-21

As amazing as our reconciliation with God is, Paul added more: **God** is ***making his appeal through us***. It is the proclamation of the gospel that God uses to save others. How will people be saved unless they hear the gospel for themselves (Rom. 10:14)? God “entrusted to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19), and ***we are ambassadors for Christ***. Believers are messengers for and representatives of the One who sent them.

### **It is the proclaiming of the gospel that God uses to save others.**

It is incredible to think that “we are God’s coworkers” (1 Cor. 3:9). He assigned us the responsibilities to plant and water, but He gives the growth. So ***we implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God***. Even though pleading is commanded, reconciliation is still from God. He alone can forgive our sins and restore us to Himself. But in light of receiving that reconciliation, we are commanded to take action on His behalf.

*We implore you on behalf of Christ* because only the life and death of Christ qualifies us for reconciliation with God. Jesus did not know sin; He lived a righteous life in full obedience to God the Father. Yet God made Him ***for our sake ... to be sin***. Our sins and punishment were laid upon Him, even though He didn’t deserve it.

If we are in Christ, God doesn’t count our trespasses against us because Jesus became sin on our behalf. In Christ, we ***become the righteousness of God***. Paul appealed again to our union with Christ.



We have been reconciled to God and entrusted with the message of reconciliation as ambassadors for Christ.

***How does being reconciled to God qualify a person to be an ambassador for the reconciliation available to others? What responsibilities does an ambassador carry and how do those responsibilities inform believers of God's expectations for them?***

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Notice repeated words or phrases in a Bible passage.*

Biblical writers sometimes used repetition of key words to emphasize a theme or message. Paul used word repetition in this session's passage. Identify the term (verb and noun) he used five times in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. Think about what this repetition helps communicate in the overall passage. Look also at the other times the apostle used forms of this term in his letters (Rom. 5:10-11; 11:15; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20-22). What significance does this repeated term have for believers today?

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**READY** (2 COR. 6:1-2)

**<sup>1</sup> Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup> For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you."**

**VERSES 1-2**

Paul directed the Corinthians to recognize the urgency of one's response to the gospel message of reconciliation with God.

People must be ready to act on God's offer while the opportunity is available to them.

In verse 2, Paul applied the words of Isaiah 49:8 to his own time. In the original setting, the Lord was speaking of a time of restoration after the captivity of Israel. That time would be called **the day of salvation**. To Isaiah's first hearers, these words offered the hope of restoration after a time of judgment. The Lord promised in Isaiah 49:8 "to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages." This ultimately would come to pass through the Messiah. Paul believed that this time of salvation had arrived with the coming of Jesus Christ. No longer was this an unfulfilled promise; it had arrived now. There could be no delay in responding to the good news.

The urgent message of reconciliation was pressed upon the Corinthians with the words, **we appeal to you**. Jesus' reconciling work on the cross was indeed for the world, but the Corinthians must receive it for themselves. Paul's appeal was that the Corinthians would not **receive the grace of God in vain**. Hearing about but doing nothing with the saving work of Jesus Christ would be a tragic omission.

The emphasis is on the present moment of opportunity: **Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation**. Paul's urgency echoes Joshua's call to choose today whom you will serve, worship, and obey—will it be the Lord, or will it be other things? (See Josh. 24:14-15.) The message of reconciliation with God is too important to overlook or push off for another time. The Corinthians, and all who hear this gracious gospel message, should be ready so as to not receive the grace of God in vain.

**What are some reasons people may give for waiting to accept the gospel? What can a believer do to emphasize to others the urgency for accepting Christ?**

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# IN MY CONTEXT

- Only through faith in Christ can a person be made new and move away from what he or she once was.
- Only through faith in Christ can a person be reconciled to God.
- All people must act on God’s offer while the opportunity is available to them.

***Take time to evaluate your life, looking for “old” things you still struggle to put off. Ask God to help you live in light of the new life He offers through His Son.***

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***As a group, discuss how people seek to become reconciled with God on their own terms. What actions can your group take to help others know that reconciliation with God only comes through faith in Jesus?***

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***Pray that God help you see people as others in need of the gospel. Ask Him to help you see them through a spiritual lens with the urgency of the gospel. With whom do you need to make an urgent effort to share Jesus?***

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## Prayer Needs

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