

2 CORINTHIANS 5

THE HEART OF OUR SALVATION

As I said in the introduction, 1-2 Corinthians give some tremendous descriptions of our salvation as Paul is seeking to remind this Corinthians church of the gospel. Perhaps no section better summarizes the salvation we have received in Christ than 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. Follow along in your Bible as I explain three fundamental truths of our salvation, along with one great implication.

5:17—You are a new creation. Paul says in 5:17, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”**

Think about the trajectory of history. From the glories of creation, to the depths of sin and ruin in our world, and ultimately back to a greater glory in the new creation that will come in the new heaven and new earth. Isaiah 25 and Revelation 21 picture this reality—and it uses vivid language of God dwelling with his people and enjoying the bounty of new creation in ways that go beyond even the language of the Garden of Eden. We are longing for this to become reality; for God to usher in this new creation. And yet, what do we see here in 2 Corinthians 5:17? **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.** If you are in Christ, *you are* new creation. New creation—experiencing God and the riches of his presence—has already begun in you through your salvation. How? Well, the answer is that God has achieved the reality of Ephesians 2:4 in you. You—dead in your trespasses and sins—have been miraculously saved by the powerful working of God in your life. From death to life. From an old heart of stone to a new heart of flesh. No longer the old self; but a new creation. Think then: this has great implications for continued life with God. One, we get a *serious* foretaste of his presence even now as we wait for the new creation. Two, we can fight sin because our nature is fundamentally different—we are new creation (see Romans 6). Three, you do not follow God then from a place of defeat, but from a place of victory. Your status is secure, you are new. Which means that then we get the opportunity to live out our newness and follow God in it. What a beautiful picture!

5:18-19—You are reconciled to God. Paul says in 5:18-19, **“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 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.** What is the key word repeated? Reconciled/reconciliation. Both to God and to others—but ultimately grounded in reconciliation with God. What does reconciliation mean and entail? It is the same as how we might use it in speaking today. *The man was reconciled to his wife and children.* What do we understand? 1) There was estrangement, 2) something happened such that forgiveness was made by the offended party, such that 3) a relationship is now possible. Our reconciliation with God follows the same pattern.

First, there was estrangement, alienation. We read of this in Genesis last month. Not only in Genesis 3, but in how that estrangement increased and snowballed over time and throughout human history creating distance with God. Second, something happened so that forgiveness was made possible by the offended party. Notice, in the biblical story, we are not the offended party. God is. That means that if forgiveness is going to happen, God must do something or act in a way that makes forgiveness possible. We are the spouse that really messed up; God is the spouse that must offer forgiveness motivated by love and grace. Thankfully he does in Christ. That even while we were still sinners, enemies, Christ died for us to bring us forgiveness and satisfy the wrath of God (Romans 5:6-8). Or as is described here, **in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them...** Through Christ's death we have forgiveness from God, our sin not being counted against us. Third, a relationship is now possible. Jesus saved you for the ultimate purpose that you would know God in relationship and experience him for the rest of eternity. Many want relationship with God—it only happens if we understand our estrangement from him, and believe in Jesus's death on the cross as the offer of forgiveness. Then we get the joy of living out a relationship with God for the rest of time, which is closely bound up with the idea of new creation in verse 17.

5:21—*The great exchange accomplished our salvation.* Verse 21 states, **“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** Many have called this The Great Exchange because of what is described in this verse: our sin placed upon Jesus, his righteousness given to us. This is what happened as Jesus died for his people. For us who are in Christ: our sin was placed on the one who knew no sin. That means that he paid for it on the cross and suffered as if it was his. Which it wasn't—for he was the one who knew no sin. That is what we could call *the negative* of our salvation—what was taken away. *The positive*—what was given—is that we were given the righteousness of God. This doesn't mean we instantly became righteous, for it is talking on the level of our standing before God. In God's eyes, the work of Christ was applied to our account, such that he now sees the work of Christ in our place. Our account is stamped righteous—and it is a permanent stamp, for it is the righteousness of Christ, which does not wax or wane. This is such a wonderful one-verse description of our salvation because it neatly describes what Jesus did to achieve our relationship (him taking our sin; us taking his righteousness), but it also gives us an understanding of our relationship going forward with God. We could therefore combine these three verses to state our standing with God in Christ: having our sin paid for by Jesus and receiving his righteousness, we are made a new creation and so now we get to enjoy the fruit of a relationship with God that has been provided by Jesus.

5:20—*Our salvation moves us to action as ambassadors.* Verse 20 summarizes our salvation by saying, **“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”** We find it incredibly easy to be ambassadors for our favorite restaurant, that new product we’ve been trying out, our sports team, or that movie we recently enjoyed. How could we not then be an ambassador for the God who has saved us—and done everything we have seen in this short passage? Our salvation moves us to witnessing, to ambassadorship. Picture it this way. In salvation, our citizenship has now changed. The paperwork has gone through—we are now citizens of a different kingdom, our heavenly home. But in the meantime, we are stationed as ambassadors in this fallen world. The local church is our embassy—the place we gather for encouragement, where people understand us, where we receive motivation for the mission. But ultimately, as ambassadors, our mission is in reference to the nation we are stationed in. The nation that is not our home. View our lives in light of this picture. We are here, in a place that is not our home, surrounded by people who may be hostile to our sending nation (our heavenly home). So we exist as ambassadors, to bring the truth of the gospel on display—in our teaching and in our witness—to those around us. If you are struggling in your desire to be an ambassador, don’t just grit your teeth and press on. Meditate on your heavenly home, your sending ruler, who has commissioned you to serve him in this way. For the longer we meditate on the gospel (verses 17, 18-19, and 21), the more we would want to represent this glorious King, this loving God more than anything else.