

I. Read II Corinthians 5:16-17

- A. In verse 16, Paul is pointing to the great difference in perspective or *world and life view* that must occur when someone is converted and truly realizes the significance of Christ's gospel. The language is a bit confusing, but in context with verse 15 it becomes more clear. Professor Hendriksen explains:

“Despite his interest in the earthly, historical Jesus, Paul here is not alluding to a time when he had seen Christ in human appearance. Rather, he refers to the time during which he was still unconverted and became acquainted with Christ's teachings. In that time, he refused to acknowledge Jesus as God's Son and honor him as Messiah. From the moment of his conversion, however, Paul saw Jesus Christ through spiritual eyes and understood that Christ's death and resurrection occurred for the benefit of all believers.”

This new perspective toward Christ revolutionized Paul's life. From the moment of his conversion, his life would never be the same.

What difference should it make in:

1. Priorities:
John 6:33; Luke 9:25
 2. Use of money:
1 Peter 4:10; Luke 18:18-27
 3. Perspective toward marriage:
Ephesians 5:21-33; Proverbs 18:22
 4. Perspective toward raising children:
Proverbs 22:6; Psalm 127:3-5
 5. Perspective toward church:
Hebrews 10:24; Ephesians 5:25b; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27
- B. In verse 17, Paul speaks of being “in Christ” implicitly saying that some (perhaps most) are “out of Christ”. What is the difference, if there is a difference, and is this sort of exclusionary thinking nice? (See Matthew 25:31-33.)
Paul speaks of those who are “in Christ” as a particular redeemed people who have been brought into *union* with Christ. Their standing before God is based completely upon Christ's righteousness and sacrifice, and has nothing to do with their own works. It is solely a matter of grace.

Those who are “out of Christ” are the unredeemed. Jesus himself spoke of these and the judgment they would suffer. (Matthew 25:31-33.) Some find this exclusionist way of thinking anachronistic and unloving, yet Jesus could never have been unloving – just truthful. What is true and just is not always nice.

- C. What does Paul mean when He says that those who are “in Christ” are “new creatures”
Paul is referring to the entirely new standing one has before God following conversion. Forgiveness, justification, adoption, and sanctification are all implicit here. He is also alluding to the *process* of sanctification which is ongoing from conversion to glorification.

What practical, as opposed to positional, consequences follow from being a “new creature”? (See Acts 26:20.)

Repentance is a necessary part of the *becoming a new creature*. This means *turning from* what the world embraces and promotes, toward God and the things of God. It is a demonstrable change that is always present in *new creatures* to one degree or another. Those who deny this have not really understood that conversion consists of *faith and repentance unto life*.

- D. What sort of “new things” result from the change occurring at conversion? (Read Romans 5:1, 10; Philippians 1:21-24, 27; Romans 8:14-15; Philippians 4:19; Colossians 1:13-14.)
Romans 5:1, 10: Before conversion we are at war with God. Following conversion, we are at peace with God.

Philippians 1:21-24, 27: Our purpose in life changes as our fear of death is erased. We realize that our time here is short and should count for something. We want our testimony to endure and honor Christ’s gospel.

Romans 8:14-15: We become a child of God with a heavenly Father we can turn to for all things.

Philippians 4:19: We can expect God to generously provide us with what we need (not necessarily what we want).

Colossians 1:13-14: We are no longer under the dominion of sin and the evil one. We are redeemed in every sense.

- E. What are some common misunderstandings regarding verse 17 among evangelicals?
Some suppose that it means that our practical circumstances must change even as our position before God has changed. This is not usually the case. For example, a person in prison, even on death row, may be genuinely converted but still have to face the consequences of their actions before conversion.

Others suppose that this verse is a rationale for expecting God to prosper them or heal them physically. God has promised tribulation in this world, and those who think otherwise have under-appreciated the effects of the Fall on *all* creation.

Some use this verse to advocate perfectionism, that is, the idea that Christians can and will become sinless or will not sin. While Paul definitely had sanctification in view, justification was the primary meaning intended. Once again, those claiming Christians will never sin are under-appreciating the effects of the Fall.

- F. What sort of emotional response should a proper understanding of verse 17 cause in us?
We ought to be relieved and rejoice at the great truth of forgiveness and adoption which Paul implicitly teaches. We ought to be encouraged that our failings and sinful lapses will become fewer and farther between as God grows us in grace.

We should never lose hope that while we may fail to live practically and fully as *new creatures in Christ*, God has promised that *He that began a work in you, will complete it until the day of salvation* (Philippians 1:6).