

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: A few months after 9/11 I read a story in the *Chicago Tribune* about Betty Maxfield, one of the survivors when the terrorists flew a plane into the Pentagon. The article said, “*Co-workers who once greeted each other with a friendly smile or ‘hello’ now hug when they meet in the hall.*” Betty said, [3/22/02]
- B. That account resonates with Christians. “*I should’ve been dead. We were all, for some reason, saved.*” Being saved by Jesus Christ changes us—far more deeply than Betty was changed, actually.
- C. We’ve been looking at unique aspects of our Christian identity. What’s different about us now? Turn to **2 Cor 5**. Let’s walk into Paul’s thinking here. This chapter begins as he is talking about his view of life and death as a Christian. He says he’d prefer to be free from this old body and be present with the Lord but in **v.9-11** he says, “*So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others.*” That soon leads to **vv.14-15**: “*For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*” So: “we make it our goal to please him” leads to “we try to persuade others” because “Christ’s love compels us.” That leads to the first aspect of our Christian identity I want you to see. **V.16**, “*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.*”

I. NOW WE SEE PEOPLE DIFFERENTLY

- A. Betty said, “*Co-workers who once greeted each other with a friendly smile or ‘hello’ now hug when they meet in the hall.*” We’re like that, only more. From our old worldly

point of view we did not see how precious people are to God, nor what a dire threat their sin poses, no what God could make of their lives. We did not see living for Christ as life's greatest gift. What's worse, we saw Jesus Christ from a worldly point of view—as a teacher perhaps, or as an inspirational figure. But not as Lord and Savior.

B. Do you know why we see people differently? Because we've seen what they could be. **V.17**, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation.*" Jesus said a new believer is *born again*. **Do you know what is new when a person becomes a new creation?**

- The brokenhearted are bound up
- Captives are set free
- Prisoners come out of the darkness
- Mourners are comforted and given a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.
- They are called oaks of righteousness

The old is gone, the new has come!

- All their sins are forgiven
- All their soul's diseases are healed
- Their life is redeemed from the pit
- They are crowned with love and compassion
- Their desires are satisfied with good things

The old is gone, the new has come!

- Once nobodies, they become God's chosen people
- A royal priesthood
- A holy nation
- A people belonging to God that they may declare his praises.

The old is gone, the new has come!

- They have a heritage of faith and a homeland that is everlasting
- They have a family
- They are a bride to Christ himself
- They have God's own Spirit within them.

- They are clean—washed—made righteous.
- They are sons and daughters of God, the flock of God, the army of God, the servants of God, and the ambassadors of Christ.

The old is gone, the new has come!

- C. So when we look at people now—anyone we meet—we see them differently. Remember how C. S. Lewis put it in his sermon, “The Weight of Glory”?

“It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. ... There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.”

- D. That means that all our relationships, however passing, have an eye to eternity. We think about whether people are saved or not. Our new point of view changes how we see people at school, in the neighborhood, at work, in the news.

Illus.: Dr. **D. A. Carson** tells about a time years ago when he and a friend were going to the beach for some much-needed peace and quiet, but when they got there they found a horde of high school kids celebrating graduation with lots of beer, loud music and, shall we say, public displays of affection. He writes, *“Deeply disappointed that my evening’s relaxation was being shattered by a raucous party, I was getting ready to cover my disappointment by moral outrage. I turned to Ken to unload the venom but stopped as I saw him staring at the scene with a faraway look in his eyes. And then he said, rather softly, ‘High school kids—what a mission field!’”*

- E. Some of you were born color blind. You simply cannot see certain colors so your view of the world is affected by that.

We were all born people blind. It's not that we can't see them at all but that we can't see them from God's point of view. When we're saved we get new eyes: "*From now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.*" **Part of our new Christian identity is that we see people differently than we did before.**

That leads directly to another aspect of our identity. Betty said, "*We were all, for some reason, saved. My question now is, what am I supposed to do with it? I just can't go waste it.*" Good thinking, Betty.

II. NOW WE SEE OUR DUTY TO PEOPLE DIFFERENTLY

- A. Paul said in **vv.14-15**, "*For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*" Jesus' love for me and in me compels me. Living for Jesus Christ inevitably gives us a love for the lost. **You cannot have Jesus living within you and not have a growing concern for those who are lost.** Jesus does that to a person. What *he* cares about—who *he* loves—soaks into us. The more you know and love Jesus the more you will care about people who are dying without him.
- B. Then we just saw how **v.16**—"we no longer see people from a worldly point of view"—ties to **v.17**—"that anyone who is in Christ is a new creation." Because of our new God-given point of view we are now agents of God's new creation. You and I are living evidence: "*the old is gone, the new has come!*" Now we realize that we could actually help someone else not just have a better life, not just feel great, but to be **reborn, recreated!** *Illus:* A friend who is a new Christian texted me this, "*Lee, I want to tell you that there's no words that express well enough what a happiness it's been to be a child of Jesus.*"
- C. **V.18-19** says, "*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to*

himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.” One thing that is *new* for us as God's *new creations* is that he has given us “*the ministry of reconciliation.*” ‘Ministry’ means ‘service’. **This is an astonishing promotion!**

But we must embrace this privilege. Illus.: I heard about a young man who applied for a job as an usher at a theater in the mall. During the interview the manager asked him, “*What would you do in case a fire breaks out?*”

“*Oh,*” the young guy answered quickly, “*don't worry about me. I'd get out o.k.*” [#3624] That's how we are?

“*What would you do if Jesus came back tomorrow?*”
“*Oh, don't worry about me. I'd be o.k.*” *But you're an usher!!!*

But the implication here is not merely that the ministry of reconciliation is our duty but that it is an astonishing privilege—to usher people from death to life, from old to new, to be an agent of God's new creation!

What's more, we are actually *naturals* for this holy assignment. We are inclined to *think* that some other Christians are better suited to this *ministry of reconciliation* than we are. But don't you see here that anyone who God reconciles to himself then becomes a servant of his reconciliation? Oh, you won't do it like Amit or me or anyone else. But step into all your relationships with unbelievers confident—*absolutely confident*—that God has equipped you to be a *minister of reconciliation*. How? It's as simple as **prayer/care/share**. Pray for them—for open doors. Care for them in genuine, loving ways. When opportunities arise speak of your faith in Christ.

- D. He expands on that in **vv.19**: “*And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*” The ministry and the message. Jesus gives us the assignment and what we are to say. Jesus says, “You're my emissary, my spokesman.”

One of my diplomatic postings is Einsteins Bagels. I'm Jesus' ambassador there. I go there mindful of my mission and message from Christ. I make friends and then see what happens. Illus.: I've been praying for one friend there for many months. I really like her and we have a lot of laughs

together. She told me a long time ago that she was really wary of religion, so I just don't bring it up. But the other day, out of the blue, she sat down at the next table and said, "Can I ask you a religious question?"

"Of course," I said.

"OK," she said, "why does God require people to worship him?"

"Good question," I replied, "It sounds sort of egotistical of him, doesn't it?"

"Exactly," she said.

I thought a moment and something I'd just heard came to mind. "He wants people to worship him because he loves them," I said, and in the moments that followed, just by answering her questions, I explained God's desire to have a relationship with us and why Jesus died for us.

She kept saying, "That's really interesting," and "I never thought of it that way before."

We were getting up to go and I said, "I pray for you quite often, you know."

She had me repeat that. "You do?!" Her eyes teared up. "Thank you!"

When you don't know what to say, God will give you just the right way to express his message of reconciliation. E. So **v.20-21** comes to this conclusion: "**We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.**" [And here is what God has written in the spiritual portfolio we carry as his ambassadors to the rebels and orphans who aren't even really a people, who have no nation or lasting identity:] "**We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.** [Here's how:] *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" When we put our faith in Christ our sin was forgiven and we become God's own righteousness on legs. We are walking-around, God-made-holy, newly created people. **And on top of that, we are the ambassadors of Christ**, dispatched to those alienated from God, orphaned, rebellious, lost. Telling them what God wants them most to hear: *Be reconciled to*

God! Come home! Repent, the kingdom of heaven is so close!

Illus.: **Howard Hendricks** was a beloved professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. His sense of humor enlivened all his preaching. In one sermon he said,

After I spoke to a group of men recently, a man came up to me sobbing. He said, “I’m the only Christian in our company.”

I said, “You mean God Almighty entrusted that outfit to you?”

Every time I get around a group of laymen like you—those of you up close can see—there’s drool all down my front. That’s why I have to get out of the ‘cemetery.’ I’ve been teaching there for 43 years. If I stayed around a seminary all the time, I’d dry up and blow away. I’ve got to get out around some *hells* and *damns* to be convinced this is life. I look at you who live, move, and have your being with these people. Those of us in the ministry are paid to be good. You people are good for nothing. Don’t miss it!” [#3787]

Conclusion

Illus.: A couple weeks ago I came across the following story in an online newsletter from Open Doors, a ministry working with persecuted Christians, told by one of their field workers in Indonesia. She wrote about a former Muslim she visited with:

Meet Bagus [not his real name). He came to know Jesus in 2014, and was baptized the following year. Bagus remembered well the reason he followed Christ: “It was because of my long, hard, and troubled life, Ma’am.”

“So when you finally decided to follow Him, your life wasn’t troubled anymore?”

“Not anymore, Ma’am.”

“What did you do for a living, then?”

“I was a trash picker, Ma’am.”

“And what do you do now?”

“I’m still a trash picker, Ma’am.”

Now everyone around us was laughing.

Really, from my point of view, nothing seemed to have improved in Bagus' life after he began walking with Christ. It took a few seconds for me to understand what he meant by 'not troubled anymore.'

"So, how did you feel after following Isa (Jesus)?" I asked.

"Very different, Ma'am. I felt happy and restful," he replied. He showed confidence by straightening his back and looking me in the eye.

Bagus seemed very quiet and answered only what he had been asked. Imagine my surprise when he said that he was a house church leader of 15 former Muslims in his village. The second he started talking about Jesus, I was convinced. His eyes lit up and an endless fountain of words burst from his mouth. Perhaps it was this that got him into trouble not too long ago.

A villager had seen Bagus sharing the story of Jesus with a neighbor and reported him to the village authorities. The authorities dragged him and 15 others to a paddy field and threatened to kill them unless they returned to Islam. Bagus refused and remained firm in his new faith. While his life was spared, he is now forced to live apart from his wife and children, spending his days on the street. He now can only see them periodically.

"I never regretted my decision to follow Jesus," he told me without a hint of doubt. "I'm following Him wholeheartedly."

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/tag-blog-post/led-to-christ-to-lead-others>

Bagus, an ambassador of Jesus Christ skillfully disguised as a trash picker. And you?