

Finding Our Identity in Jesus Series

Starting New with Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17-18)

By
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At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Starting New with Jesus

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Moving to College

1. I can still remember what it was like starting my life over for the first time. While I've started my life over several times since, the most dramatic beginning occurred when I moved away from my parents for the first time and went to college. I completely started my life over with a group of people who didn't know me. My normal daily routine was interrupted and I needed to form a new one. I had the opportunity to completely reinvent myself and my identity.
2. During my freshman year of college, I started to build the person I was going to be for the rest of my life. I developed habits aligned with the type of person I was going to be as an adult, not the person my parents wanted me to be. I spent my time and effort on the activities that would build me into the type of person I wanted to be. While I had to go to church under my parents' authority, I needed to decide if I valued church enough to keep doing it when no one was making me. I needed to decide if I was going to be responsible and go to all my classes and make sure I was keeping up on all the work to get good grades without my parents requiring me to do it.
3. I was no longer under the rules and restrictions of my parents. The only person deciding who I was going to be and what I was going to do was...me. The freedom I had longed for finally arrived. It was both exciting and scary. I could remake myself however I wanted—this was the way I thought at least.¹ At the same time, the consequences that resulted in my life would also be of my own choosing. There was no more protection from my parents.

B. Have you ever started your life over? Perhaps through moving to a new location, starting a new job, entering a new phase of life, or making a major change such as getting married or having kids. When we make major adjustments to our life, we get a glimpse of what it means to start our lives over again—at least to an extent. These experiences can help us understand what it means to become a child of God and accept our new identity in Jesus. While our changing circumstances of life restart the logistics of our life, our new identity in Jesus restarts the spiritual dynamics of our life. Though similar, they are different.

C. In 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, we learn the critical difference our new identity makes in our lives. If we are going to live a spiritually fruitful life, we must accept and act as if our new identity that God says about us is real. It is easy to give intellectual consent to being a child of God it is another matter altogether to allow that identity to shape how we live. This text will help us transition the truth we believe about our identity and translate that truth to our actions. Our focus will be on the more practical implications of our new identity as a child of God. Being a child of God drastically changes us and changes our lifestyle as a result.

¹ The reality is we use our freedom of choice according to our nature. Some people, because of their sinful nature, can't do what is good (Jn. 8:44, Eph. 2:3, 2 Pet. 2:12, Jude 10, Jer. 4:22, Am. 3:10). Others, who belong to God, can't bring themselves to do series and significant evil because it goes against their nature (Mt. 7:17-18, 2 Pet. 1:4, 1 Jn. 3:9).

II. We are a New Person

- A. If we are going to live the Christian life effectively, the way God has designed it to work, we must embrace and understand our identity in Jesus so that our lifestyle is connected to our identity. We've also learned that we must intentionally ground our self-understanding in what God says is true about us as a child of God. This builds our identity in Jesus so that we can live how God wants us to live. Instead of finding our identity from sources outside of God, it is healthier for us to allow the core elements of our identity to come from God.
- B. In 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, the apostle Paul is describing the practical implications of salvation. The major claim being made is found in verses 14-15. The purpose of the death and resurrection of Jesus in the life of every child of God is to enable them to live for Jesus. This purpose is fulfilled by reconciling each child of God to God and making them a new person,

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; ¹⁵ and He died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose on their behalf. (2 Cor. 5:14-15)

- C. The purpose and direction of life changes when we become a child of God. Instead of living for ourselves and pursuing the activities that we desire and think will make us happy ("those who live would no longer live for themselves", v. 15) we die to ourselves and start living for the things of God and that which will make Him happy ("but for Him who died and rose on their behalf", v. 15). The temptation to turn back and start living for our own interests is a continual one throughout the Christian life (Phil. 2:19-23). Those who live for Jesus care about the spiritual welfare of the people of God, have proven character, and do gospel work as God's kingdom spreads on earth. This is what it means to love and live for Jesus—we care for His sheep (Jn. 21:15-17).
- D. The means by which living for God is accomplished is transforming us into a new person who has access to the resources of God. Being a child of God results in a new identity and access to new resources that God provides to those who belong to Him. This new identity is not just a mere label; it is a new reality we live in. Because Jesus died to empower disciples to live for Him here is what happens to us in the Christian life,

¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *this person is* a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. ¹⁸ Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, (2 Cor. 5:17-18)

- E. The power of God makes us a new person with a new heart—we begin to care about new passions ("Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation;" v. 17).² To become a child of God is to become a new kind of person brought into existence by God.³ To be a new creation refers to someone who becomes a child of God and their experience of a total restructuring of life that alters its whole fabric—thinking, feeling, willing, and acting.⁴ Jesus

² This text is one of three applications of what it means to live for God indicated by the term "Therefore" (2 Cor. 5:16, 17, 20).

³ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 2 Corinthians 5:17 "a new creation"

⁴ Murray J. Harris, [The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 434, John MacArthur Jr., ed., [The MacArthur Study Bible](#), electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1771.

totally transforms a person when He makes them spiritually alive (theologically this is called regeneration, Tit. 3:5). Like a company that was bought out, a child of God is bought by Jesus and finds themselves under new management and receives a new title and job description (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Paul is emphasizing the significant changes that occur when a person transitions from being hostile toward God to being reconciled with God (Col. 1:21-23).

- F. This change in spiritual condition and relationship with God, changes our identity (“the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”, v. 17). Here we get a description of who this new person is. As children of God, God makes us a better person. The “new things” that have come are qualitatively better compared to that which existed previously.⁵ Children of God are excited and happy about what God has done in their life (“behold”, v. 17).⁶ Think of fresh bread or cookies coming out of the oven. Something new and pleasant has just been created.
- G. While we are focusing on the new things that have come because of our identity as children of God, it is still important to at least briefly mention the spiritual dynamic of old features of our life, attached to our existence prior to our trust in Jesus, is progressively put aside and moved away from (“the old things passed away”, v. 17). Our old person and lifestyle have become old-fashioned, outdated, and worn out.⁷ Like dial-up internet or washing clothes by hand, our old manner of life is completely unnecessary. Biblically, this is referred to as the “old man”—the old person we used to be before we came to know God. The Christian life involves a continuing and progressive struggle with our old selves, tendencies, desires, patterns, and life. Our old identity and way of life have passed out of relevance.⁸ Those who are a child of God and connected to Jesus are given the power of God to fight against and overcome their old sinful nature (Gal. 5:16-24). As children of God, we no longer live like those who don’t know God who are living for themselves (2 Cor. 5:15) and practicing indecent behavior (Eph. 4:17-19) because we are created for good works (Eph. 2:10).
- H. Being a new person means we are a person created by God. This new identity implies that we are a person who lives in harmony with God’s moral standards and dedicated to the purposes of God found in His word,

²⁰ But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²² that, in reference to your former way of life, you are to rid yourselves of the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you are to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph. 4:20-24)

- I. The person God creates us to be is created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. As a newly created child of God we also keep renewing the way we think and develop a true

⁵ Linda L. Belleville, [2 Corinthians](#), vol. 8, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1996), 2 Co 5:14–17.

⁶ Murray J. Harris, [The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 434.

⁷ Linda L. Belleville, [2 Corinthians](#), vol. 8, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1996), 2 Co 5:14–17.

⁸ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 2 Corinthians 5:17 “passed away”

knowledge of who God and who He wants us to be. All this is included in what it means to be a new creation of God,

⁸But now you also, rid yourselves of all of them: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene speech from your mouth. ⁹^aDo not lie to one another, since you stripped off the old self with its *evil* practices, ¹⁰and have put on the new *self*, which is being ^brenewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created it— (Col. 3:8-10)

- J. The reason a person needs to be a friend of Jesus and child of God the Father is because every benefit connected to the new identity finds its source in God (“Now all these things are from God”, v. 18). Without attachment to God, it is impossible to become a new person with a new nature and heart. God is the One who performs the work of making us into a new person. Without God, a person will never receive their new identity, and they will remain hostile to God and what He wants in their life.
- K. Every child of God lives at least two lives. Have you experienced living two significantly different lives in which your life has completely changed direction and focus? Every true child of God should be able to answer this question in the affirmative. Before we know Jesus our lives naturally take us in one direction but after we come to understand who Jesus is and what He’s done for us our life turns in the opposite direction and we pursue a complete different course. One direction moves us away from God the other toward Him. Primarily this movement is a change of direction that moves us from living for ourselves to living for Jesus (2 Cor. 5:15).
- L. For me, living form myself, meant pursuing a life course in which I was chasing my own enjoyment of sports and setting the goal of my life on making the most amount of money as I could as an electrical engineer. I enrolled in a college that was cheap, yet was well respected and the average salary of graduates from the electrical engineering program was six figures. At the same time, I would be able to enjoy playing college football. When I was living for myself I set the direction of my life on my own desires and plans. I pursued what I thought would make me happy and lead to the type of life I wanted for myself.
- M. When God took hold of my heart, my desires changed, and the direction of my life took a significant turn. I set my life on doing what God wanted me to do instead of what I thought I wanted to do. I enrolled in a very expensive private Christian college knowing I would make a lot less money so that I could be trained as a pastor. Instead of getting out of college debt free I spent a long time paying off my college education. The money I earned as a youth pastor meant my lifestyle didn’t change much after being a poor college student. However, I wanted to serve and care for the people of God and devote as much time and attention to God as I could.
- N. Old opinions, views, plans, desires, principles, and affections are passed away; new views grounded in truth, new principles, new apprehensions of the destiny of man, and new feelings and purposes fill and govern the soul.⁹ While a person may not complete change careers and move to another country because of the new life God has put into them, there will be an unmistakable change in who we are as a person and what we care about in life. Even if our daily

⁹ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1891), 141.

routine stays largely the same, our attitude and outlook on those activities will be entirely different. God and His priorities will be brought to the forefront. It is impossible to stay the same person and remain on the same course of life after having a life changing encounter with Jesus. Have you had this experience with Jesus?

III. New Things Have Come

- A. The immediate question that comes to mind is, what are the new things that have come? What is available to the person who has committed their life to Jesus as a child of God? What is the apostle Paul talking about? While Paul doesn't specifically identify the "new things" that have come from God in our current text, we can learn about Paul's perspective and the types of spiritual resources he has in mind from his other writings. He identifies and describes the new features of life lived in connection with God in multiple other places.¹⁰ We are going to looking at a short list of what Paul identifies as the "new things" that have arrived in the life of the children of God.
- B. The primary new thing that comes into the life of the child of God is the ability to become righteous by receiving a type of righteousness that comes from God not ourselves. This is clearly part of Paul's thinking according to what immediately follows,

²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin in our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:21)

- C. The type of righteousness (moral goodness) Paul is referring to is a righteousness that doesn't come from our own effort but from a dependent and open posture toward God (Phil. 1:11, 3:9). As children of God, we have access to a form of righteousness that comes from God to us through His Spirit. This is a far superior type of righteousness than the one that comes from our own efforts to obey the word of God using our own abilities and strength. Children of God live for righteousness in a way that they were never able to do before (1 Pet. 2:24). Disciples grow to be a person who satisfies the moral requirements of God's character.¹¹
- D. Children of God will grow to become a morally good person by the power of God. While their energy and effort will be involved the progress is made because God is working in them as disciples continually rely on God to change them. We become a person who does the right thing in every circumstance more consistently. Are you becoming an increasingly morally good person who is performing the good actions God has for you to do? In the time you have been following Jesus, is there a noticeable difference in your moral conduct? Under God's influence, children of God become better people.
- E. In general, there is a whole newness of life that is freed from sin connected to becoming a child of God,

⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that

¹⁰ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 433.

¹¹ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 2 Corinthians 5:21 "the righteousness"

our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;⁷ for the one who has died is freed from sin. (Rm. 6:4-7)

- F. As disciples and children of God, our lives no longer have to continue to be controlled, dominated, or saturated with sin (“our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin, for the one who has died is freed from sin.”, vv. 6-7). Children of God can learn how to overcome and live without previous patterns of sin or specific habits of immoral behavior. While this is a battle (Heb. 12:4) and sin can easily entangle us (Heb. 12:1), with God’s help, children of God can grow to become free of sin. As disciples, we no longer respond to and interact with sin the way we did before our attachment to Jesus.
- G. Do you have any life dominating sins that are a regular pattern in your life? Are there any specific immoral actions or practices that you can’t seem to stop? A significant part of the Christ life for the child of God is using the resources of God to overcome the remaining sin in our lives. Disciples regularly confess, repent, resist, and overcome their own sinful tendencies. Children of God can thoughtfully develop wise plans to prevent, diminish, and respond to sin in their life as a regular habit.
- H. This newness of life also includes being alive to God,

⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all time; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.¹¹ So you too, consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rm. 6:8-11)

- I. Children of God are responsive to the work God is doing in their life (“consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”, v. 11). Children of God live a life oriented around God. We care about Him and His work in the world. We cooperate with the work the Holy Spirit is doing in us. We follow and obey God’s word. We serve Him and live for Him the way Jesus did while He was on earth (Lk. 20:38, Col. 3:17). We are convinced and work at doing what God tells us to do so we live the kind of life that is pleasing to God. Being alive to God means we become the person God wants us to be and live the type of life God wants us to live.
- J. How much is God part of your life? Children of God learn to consciously and intentionally bring God into everything they do. God’s influence and presence become a natural part of how they live so that bringing God into their life is not forced or awkward. Going long periods of time without thinking about or focusing on God becomes unnatural. Disciples are not content to live their life separated from God giving little thought and attention to Him. We regularly respond to God in ways that are good—the way God desires.
- K. This newness of life is the result of the newness of the Holy Spirit in us,

⁶ But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.
(Rm. 7:6)

L. Our new life in Jesus is a life of service to God empowered by the Spirit. God's Spirit shapes us into the person He wants us to be, and we live and act out the character of our new nature (Gal. 5:22-23). Be acting in harmony with the person God shapes us into we naturally perform the actions that are found in the commands of God's Word but in an effective and genuine way (Rm. 8:4). Our heart motivates and moves us to do what God requires us to do. God gives us a helper that assists us in becoming the person He wants us to be (Jn. 14:16-17). Our mind is set on the things of God because of the Spirit in us (Rm. 8:5-6). Primarily, living in the Spirit according to Scripture means we are killing sin in our lives and developing righteousness (Rm. 8:13, 14:17, 1 Cor. 6:11, Gal. 5:16), learning about the word of God (1 Cor. 2:12-13), and being empowered for effective service (1 Cor. 12:7, 11).

M. Children of God receive a new heart, desires, and attitudes from God,

²⁶ Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put My Spirit within you and bring it about that you walk in My statutes, and are careful and follow My ordinances. (Ezek. 36:26-27)¹²

N. This new heart causes us to love God with everything we are (Dt. 30:6). We obey God in our actions because of this new heart of love for God (Dt. 30:8). This new heart allows us to develop a true knowledge of God (Jer. 24:7). God's word enters us and becomes our internalized value system (Jer. 31:33). This God given heart moves all of God's children in the same direction (Jer. 32:39). It is a heart that is soft and responsive to God and the needs of others.

O. While there are other "new things" that are part of living life connected to God as a child of God these are the basic and most central elements. If our true identity is being a child of God, it will dramatically and drastically change who we are and how we live. Our identity in Jesus transforms us and our lives in real and practical ways. This is the main point being made by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18. This spiritual transformation empowers us to live for Jesus instead of ourselves.

P. Are these new elements of the Christian life present in your life? Can you recognize them operating in your day-to-day activities? How has your life been different since you heard and responded to the message of Jesus? Children of God will be able to point to new elements of life that did not exist prior to trusting Jesus. They have lived experience that confirms new things have come just as Paul says they do. Life has a spiritual richness with Jesus.

IV. Conclusion

A. Our identity as a child of God is so transformative that we become a new person. God creates us to be the type of person that is pleasing to Him. Every area of our life is impacted by the influence of God.

B. As a child of God we have access to new resources and abilities because of our attachment to Jesus. These new things include a God given moral goodness, a newness of life, power to be freed from sin, responsiveness to God, the Holy Spirit as our Helper, and a new heart. All these benefits come from our identity in Jesus. Are you using these "new things" in your life?

¹² Ezekiel 11:19-20