

04/26/26 Controlled by the Love of Christ

2 Corinthians 5:11-17

Prayer...

Good morning! If you are new here, my name is Dan Burleson. I am one of the Associate Pastors here at Cornerstone. And we always tell our guests three things.

First, we are grateful that you are with us. You are God's gift to us in this time that we have together. So, thank you again for worshipping with us.

Second, you are in a place where **the ground is level.** Which means no one is any higher, better, or more significant than anyone else. The ground at the foot of the cross is level ground and we are sinners who need a Savior and Jesus is that Savior. And while your salvation is a personal matter, God never designed for it to be a private matter. He wants us to live as brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Which leads to the Third thing we need to tell you... **we love you enough to speak the truth** to you. That's truth with a capital "T". The truth from God's Word. The truth about Jesus. His Person. His Works. And His Words. How He can transform your life from the inside out. He is the Cornerstone of our faith.

We are continuing our study in Second Corinthians this morning. The Word of God does not merely inform the mind; it exposes the heart. Second Corinthians 5 is written with the weight of eternity in view, and that gives every word a seriousness we cannot afford to ignore.

Paul writes with urgency because the gospel never leaves a person unchanged. It reshapes motives, governs speech, alters perspective, and creates an entirely new identity in Christ. So, the question this morning is not whether this text is important. The question is whether we are living it out what it says.

Let's read 2 Corinthians 5:11–17 (NASB95) — *11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. 12 We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. 13 For if*

Associate Pastor Dan Burleson, Cornerstone Community Church

we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. 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 they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. 16 Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

What we have just read is not the kind of truth that allows us to remain unchanged. Paul is not describing a Christianity that simply tweaks the **outside** while leaving the **inside** untouched. He is describing a gospel that reaches all the way down into the heart and then works its way back into everything else. It is like putting on the right prescription after years of seeing everything blurry. The world hasn't changed, but your ability to see it rightly has.

Eyeglasses Illustration

If I were to take off my eyeglasses, I would not be able to see my notes in front of me. All of you would be blurry. But when I put my glasses on, everything comes into focus and is clear and I don't stumble or get into an accident and harm someone.

And that is what the gospel does. It gives us new sight. Christ is no longer distant, people are no longer reduced to outward appearances, and life is no longer governed by self-interest. That is what Paul begins to unfold in this passage as he shows us how the gospel reshapes the way we live, the way we see and the way we understand who we are in Christ.

This brings us to the main point and outline of our passage. 2 Corinthians 5:11-17 reveals four gospel-shaping realities that compel us by the love of Christ to no longer live for ourselves but for Him. The four gospel-shaping realities are:

- I. The Fear of the Lord Governs Our Message (verses 11–13)**
- II. The Love of Christ Compels Our Motives (verses 14–15)**
- III. The Gospel Reshapes Our Perspective (verse 16)**
- IV. The New Creation Defines Our Identity (verse 17)**

My prayer is that each of us will be controlled by the love of Christ and no longer live for ourselves but for Him. With that prayer in mind, let's look at the first gospel-shaping reality in our passage...

I. The Fear of the Lord Governs Our Message

Notice verse 11... *“Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.”*

The word “therefore” connects Paul's statement back to verse 10, where he says, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”* In other words, Paul is writing with the reality of Christ's evaluation clearly in view. We learned of that judgment last week.

So, when he says... *“knowing the fear of the Lord,”* he is speaking of a reverent awe before God that shapes the way a believer thinks, speaks and lives. This is not fear or terror in the cringing sense, but holy reverence before the One who will judge every deed with perfect righteousness.

In light of that reverent awareness, Paul says... *“we persuade men,”*. Because he feared the Lord, he urgently sought to call people to the truth. He reasoned, appealed, and pressed the claims of the gospel with seriousness because he knew he would one day stand before Christ. That was especially important in Corinth, where false teachers were attacking his ministry and trying to draw the Corinthians away from the truth. But Paul was not merely defending himself; he was committed to making the gospel clear, compelling, and faithful before God and before men.

Look at the last part of verse 11... *“but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.”* **What does it mean “to be manifest to God?”** God sees the heart and Paul is transparent before Him. Paul knows God sees his heart, and he hopes the Corinthians will see it too. **What does it mean “to be manifest in your consciences?”** Again, Paul's confidence is before the Lord, and his desire is that the consciences of the believers at Corinth would

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confirm his sincerity. This is the same kind of appeal he makes in chapter 1 where he points to a clear conscience and holy sincerity before God and toward them.

2 Corinthians 1:12–14 (NASB95) — *12 For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you. 13 For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end; 14 just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.*

Then verse 12 says... *“We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you and occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart.”* “Not again commending ourselves” means, Paul is not defending himself for personal gain, and he is not trying to build his own reputation. He is giving the Corinthians a reason to trust a ministry that was marked by sincerity before God. The issue was never outward appearance, but inward reality. False teachers were concerned with image and human approval, but Paul lived before the Lord. And because he feared God, he cared far more about what was true in the heart than what simply looked impressive on the surface.

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Illustration...

We have placed an emphasis on evangelism this year. We’ve been praying for opportunities to talk to people about Christ. We have heard stories from those who have preached share about their recent experiences of sharing the gospel. I have recently had a few opportunities to talk about the gospel with a friend and a couple relatives. What is interesting is that normally I would be a bit fearful of them rejecting me, but the topic came up quite naturally in our conversations. What’s crazy is that two of the three brought up the topic. I’m pretty certain that none of the three have trusted Christ yet, but I know that God is able to use even our short conversations to do a work that I could never do.

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Verse 13 continues... *“For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God, if we are of sound mind, it is for you.”* What does it mean to be “beside ourselves?” It means

Associate Pastor Dan Burlison, Cornerstone Community Church

that Paul's passion for Christ and His truth was so strong that His opponents accused him of being out of his mind. He was not saying he was irrational. He was saying that his zeal for the gospel looked extreme to people who did not understand his devotion. If Paul seemed foolish to the world, it was because he was consumed with the glory of God, not the approval of men. Paul is not driven by self-interest, personal image, or the approval of men. His life is marked by a holy seriousness because he lives before the Lord. And when he speaks this way, it is not because he is unstable or trying to impress anyone. It is because his heart has been captured by Christ. "If we are of sound mind, it is for you" means that when Paul speaks sensibly, calmly, and clearly, it is for the Corinthians' good. He is not trying to impress them. He is trying to serve them in a way they can understand and receive. Whether he appears intense or measured, everything in Paul's life is governed by God and directed toward the good of others.

So the question for us is simple: are we living before the Lord or are we living for appearances? Paul reminds us that one day every life will be judged by Christ, which means we cannot afford to be careless, shallow or driven by human approval. The fear of the Lord should shape the way we speak, the way we serve, and the way we think about ministry itself. We need to care far more about what is true before God than what merely looks good to man.

If the fear of the Lord governs our message, then something deeper must drive our hearts...and that is the love of Christ. Which brings us to point number two.

II. The Love of Christ Compels Our Motives

There are many different types of motives, but not all of them are strong enough to carry a life of faithfulness. Some motives are temporary, some are shallow, and some are powerful enough to shape everything we do. If a motive is weak, it will not carry you through suffering, sacrifice or opposition. But if a motive is rooted in the gospel, it can govern the whole direction of a person's life.

Verse 14 says... *"For the love of Christ controls us,"*. That means Christ's love has gripped us, constrained us, and now rules our motives. It does not merely inspire us. It governs us. His love lays hold of the heart so strongly that it changes the direction of our lives. It is certain that Paul had a great love for Christ. In the

Associate Pastor Dan Burlison, Cornerstone Community Church

context of verse 14, Paul is most likely referring to Christ's love for him, displayed most clearly at the cross. That saving, undeserved love gripped Paul's heart and governed his life. At the beginning of the service we sang, "Magnificent, marvelous matchless love, too vast and astounding to tell...Your cross is our door to redemption." That's the love Paul means. It's not our love for Him, but Christ's redeeming love gripping us at Calvary, turning self-rule into Christ-rule.

Look at second part of verse 14 and verse 15.... *"Having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."*

Jesus died so that those who live would no longer live for themselves." Sin does something terrible to me. Sin turns me in on myself. Sin shrinks my life to the size of my life. Sin makes me obsessed with my wants, my needs, my feelings.

Coupons Illustration:

Years ago, Maria came to me with an idea to save money on our groceries. It was when couponing was popular and she had a friend that was saving a lot of money using coupons. I stubbornly rejected the idea and told her that we did not need to start clipping coupons. I was adamant. No. I didn't want to buy a Sunday newspaper. I did not want to spend time cutting and filing coupons. She and I disagreed on that issue. As silly as it is, five years later, a friend told me how much his wife was saving them on groceries doing couponing. I went to Maria and said, "we should start doing this." Maria reminded me that years earlier she presented the same idea to me. But I didn't want it. I was stubborn. Now I know that that is a silly example of a seemingly small disagreement (and I'm sure we've had bigger disagreements over our nearly 35 years of marriage).

But the point is this...When Maria or people deliver what I want, I speak kindly to them, not actually because I love them but because I love myself and the fact that they have satisfied my desires. When they get in the way of what I want, I speak unkindly to them because I love myself, and they have made the mistake of getting in the way of what I crave.

Associate Pastor Dan Burlison, Cornerstone Community Church

But Christ's death did not merely pay the penalty for sin; it also broke sin's rule over the believer's life. The cross frees us from the old sentence of judgment, but it also frees us for a new way of living. So, Paul is saying that if we truly belong to Christ, then our life is no longer ruled by self. We do not belong to ourselves anymore. We belong to the Savior who died and rose again for us, and His love now controls our motives, our direction and our ambition.

John Stott wrote, "Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us, we have to see it as something done by us." That is why Old Covenant sacrifices could never fully remove sin, because **Hebrews 10:4** says, "*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*" But **Hebrews 10:10 and 14** remind us that Christ offered Himself once for all and truly dealt with sin.

It is also why he could say in **Galatians 2:20**, "*I have been crucified with Christ...and the life which I now live...I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*" Last week John Mark called this a rescued and redeemed ambition.

The Christian life cannot be lived on weak motives. Gratitude alone is not enough. Fear of consequences alone is not enough. Approval from others is not enough. Only the love of Christ can hold the heart steady and keep a believer moving forward in faithfulness.

That is exactly what Paul is saying. Christ didn't just improve your life—He gave His life for you to rescue you from judgement and to redeem you and reconcile you to God to live with a new purpose. And when that truth grips your heart, you don't ask, 'How much do I have to give?' You begin to ask, 'How could I live for anything else?'

And that leads us to the next reality: The Gospel Reshapes our Perspective.

III. The Gospel Reshapes our Perspective

Look at verse 16... "*Therefore, from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.*"

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When I talk about the gospel, I mean the good news that God has saved sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the message that forgives our sin, reconciles us to God and gives us new life in Christ.

Because the gospel has changed Paul's heart, it changes how he sees people. To recognize someone "*according to the flesh*" means to view them by worldly standards and values...by outward appearance, status, reputation, background or by living as if this present physical life is all that matters. Paul is saying that he no longer evaluates people the way the world does. He does not look at ministry through the lens of image, and he does not look at others through the lens of fleshly categories.

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Biblical Counseling Illustration...

When I became a biblical counselor, I was often intimidated by the people in front of me. Some came angry, some broken, some ashamed, some defiant, and some deeply wounded. But the longer I counseled, the more the gospel changed my own heart. I stopped seeing people mainly by their outward behavior, background or hardest moment and started seeing them as souls who need Christ. That is what Paul means when he says, "we regard no one according to the flesh." The gospel gives us a new way to see people.

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The second part of verse 16 says, "*even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet we know Him this way no longer.*" Even Christ is no longer seen the same way. Before his conversion, Paul once regarded Jesus according to the flesh. He saw Christ as the Jews often did...as a false messiah, one whose suffering and death looked like the curse of God (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). But Paul now knows better. The gospel has opened his eyes to see Jesus not as a defeated man under judgment, but as the crucified and risen Lord.

That is what the gospel does. It gives us a new lens, so we see people, ministry, and even the Lord Jesus Himself in light of eternity instead of in light of temporary, earthly standards. Paul's burden for the lost and his desire to preserve a clear gospel witness explain why integrity mattered so much to him. If he lost his credibility, he could hinder the very message that saves.

And that leads us to the next reality: The New Creation Defines Our Identity

IV. The New Creation Defines Our Identity

Look at verse 17... *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.”*

Paul is saying that if anyone is “in Christ”, if anyone has been united to Jesus by faith, that person has become a new creation. To be “in Christ” means that His death counts for us and His life becomes our life. It means we are no longer merely improved versions of the old self. God has brought something entirely new into being.

When Paul says “new creation, he does not mean God just patched up the old life. He means God made something genuinely different. The believer is not merely improved, cleaned up or morally adjusted. He has been given a new heart, new desires, new direction and a new spiritual identity in Christ. This is not just a fresh start with the same old heart. This is a work of grace that reaches all the way down into the soul.

And this is true for anyone who is “in Christ.” God’s grace and mercy are wide enough to save even the worst sinner, but only through faith in Jesus Christ. His substitutionary death becomes their death, and His resurrection life becomes their life. That is why Paul can say that *“if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature.”* It is not because they have cleaned themselves up, but because Christ has united them to Himself and made them new. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, *“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*

That is why Paul says, *“the old things passed away.”* The old way of thinking, the old loyalties, the old values, the old desires, and the old identity no longer define that person. This does not mean sinless perfection, but it does mean real transformation.

C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, “When a man is getting better, he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him.” When Lewis says, “when a man is getting better,” he means someone who is turning toward God,

Associate Pastor Dan Burlison, Cornerstone Community Church

not just cleaning up his act. The more God’s grace works in him, the more clearly he sees the sin that still remains because the new creation in Christ is opening his eyes. If you are in Christ, the old no longer rules, and the new has begun.

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Illustration

Before Christ, the Bible says we were dead in our sins. Not sick. Not struggling. Dead. But when someone comes to Christ, God doesn’t just treat them differently—He makes them different.

It’s the difference between a death certificate and a birth certificate. You’re not the “same person” with a “second chance.” You are a “new person” with a “new life.” That’s what Paul means when he says you are “a new creature.”

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And Paul adds, “*behold, new things have come.*” That means this change is real and lasting. God gives His people new desires, new affections, new ways of thinking, and a new understanding of the Truth.

Where do you find your identity? In the old things that have passed away, or in the new life you have in Christ? A lot of people look for their identity in their family, their accomplishments, their relationships, what others think of them, or past hurts or failures. But Paul says if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, which means our deepest identity is no longer found in the old things. It is found in Christ.

Are you in Christ?

That is the most important question you will ever answer. If not, today would be a great day to place your trust in Christ alone for salvation. And if you are in Christ, remember that “the gospel is not just the entry point into the Christian life; it is the pathway along which we walk every day.” (Milton Vincent)

Conclusion

So, what does all of this mean?

It means your life is not your own.

If you are in Christ, you have been gripped by His love, changed by His grace, and sent to live for His glory.

The question is not whether Christ has died and rose again.

The question is whether you are living.

Are you still living for yourself? Or are you living for the One who died and rose again on your behalf?”

Paul brings it down to one question that tests every part of our lives...Are we living under the control of Christ's love as new creations in Him? If you are not in Christ, come to Him today. Only Christ gives new life, a new heart and a new identity. If you are in Christ, then this week live like Christ's love controls you. Not next month. Not when life settles. This week. When self rises up...an angry word, a selfish choice, or “image-protection,” pause and say, “No. Christ's love governs me. I'm new.” That's what new creations do.

Let's pray.