



**2 Corinthians 5:12-17**  
**You Can Be Renewed**

Summary: Your whole life can be made new in Christ, and the change will transform everything you desire and value.

Today is Juneteenth, the newest federal holiday. Many people don't know what it is or what it's about or why Christians, of all people, should be reflecting on it.

We have an opportunity here in the beginning to define it for ourselves and others who may be suspicious. Conservatives may feel like it's a move by progressive cultural forces to advance a particular agenda, but you need to know a few important things. First, 47 states had already officially recognized Juneteenth before its federal recognition. Second, yes, the bill to provide it's federal recognition was sponsored by three Democrats, but also, a Republican Senator from Texas. Let's not allow this to become an us vs them issue.

Juneteenth commemorates the day when the Union Army finally arrived in Galveston, Texas to inform enslaved Black Americans that the Civil War was over and slavery had been abolished. More than 250,000 people learned of their freedom for the first time that day.

Juneteenth celebrates the declaration of freedom. And as people of the gospel, people who know what it means to hear the good news that you are set free, it's something we can celebrate. Imagine yourself as a black man or woman or child in that city at that time – imagine what it means to learn that you are free, and it's not because of anything you have done, it's what has been done for you. Imagine what it means to try to understand, what do we do next? What does it mean to still live in the same town as someone who once owned you?

On both a physical and spiritual level, there is much for Christians to consider about Juneteenth. It shows us both the tremendous power of sin – that this is how human beings can treat each other – to own other human beings and to use them for their own profit. There is a horrendous capacity for self-indulgent evil in the human heart.

But Juneteenth also helps us imagine and appreciate the power of the gospel. What would the announcement of freedom have meant to people who heard the good news? What does it mean to have your life radically altered in an instant? As Christians we are uniquely poised to appreciate both the horror and the hope memorialized in Juneteenth.

We, of all people, know what it means to [regard no one according to the flesh](#).

Our skin color matters. Black Americans have different experiences. White Americans have different experiences. Asians and Latinos in America all have different experiences and so

do first and second-generation immigrants. There is much for us to understand about and with each other. But of all people, we, the Church, are also able to say, there is something deeper that defines us, that unites us, that brings us together, in Christ. We have the hope the world needs.

For regardless of where we've come *from*, or what we've come *through*, we have come *to* Christ and He is now the compelling force in our lives. He is the one who sets us free. Jesus Christ died and rose for us, and now, by His grace, and with His strength, we will live these new lives compelled by Him. So, let's talk about that now, let's talk about how free people should live.

Last week we had a pretty heavy Sunday, we talked about the fact that we will all be judged one day by a holy God. And we talked about what that is like: dreadful, horrifying, and inescapable, unless you are in Christ. We said that no one ever really gets away with anything - either your sin will find you out, you will be charged with it, confronted by it at the judgment, or Jesus paid for it on the cross. According to God Himself, these are the only two options.

But this morning and next Sunday, we get to explore that second option – forgiveness instead of condemnation, salvation instead of suffering. This morning we get to talk about what it means to be made new and to see the world in new ways and to value new things. Read with me.

**2 Corinthians 5:12** For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have *an answer* for those who boast in appearance and not in heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, *it is* for God; or if we are of sound mind, *it is* for you. 14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. 16 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Here's what I hope you can see this morning: Your whole life can be made new in Christ, and the change will transform everything else you desire and value as your attention and your affection migrates from external things to internal values. So let's dig in and do some deep work on our souls.

Notice, Paul describes two ways of looking at the world. There is a way that looks at the flesh, what the Bible calls the outward man – all the external stuff about you. This is the natural way to live. This is how most of the world lives. It's focused on the external things of life: how you dress, what you wear, how you talk, what you drive, where you live, where you went to school, where you work – all that stuff tells a certain story about you. It's what you look like on paper, it's all the stuff you can list on a resume. It's practically everything

about being an “influencer” online. It’s the stuff that people point to when they want to boast. Look at what I’ve done. Look at what I bought. Look at what I earned.

But Paul says that’s not who *we* are. In fact, he says, (vs 16) [from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh.](#)

He speaks of the difference between boasting about appearances and evaluating the heart. We’ve all met the person who is physically attractive but personally repulsive. It doesn’t matter how good looking he or she is, there’s a really, really good chance that somewhere out there is someone who is tired of putting up with their drama.

We’ve all met the person who is really good at what they do and they’re cocky and confident and cold about it as a result. The funny thing is, it doesn’t matter what we’re talking about, the behavior surfaces everywhere. You can find arrogant pride among fighter pilots and kids competing at the local spelling bee. You can find it among female softball players and real estate agents. Surgeons do it. Musicians do it. Coders do it. They’ve got skill but they lack humility and so they use their skill as something to stand on and look down at others. They boast in their flesh, in what they can do.

Well, Paul is writing this to the church, because you can find this behavior among spiritual people too. People can begin to boast in how pious they are. They can boast in how they do all the right things spiritually. In Jesus’ day they were called the Pharisees, and Jesus agreed, they looked really good from the outside, but inside they were like tombs full of nothing but dry bones.

Friends, last week when we spoke about judgment, I shared my concern with you that it’s really, really easy for us, here, in this church, living in this area, to get caught up with all the busyness, building things with our time, energy, and resources that aren’t going to last or have any eternal value.

We looked at Scripture from 1 Corinthians 3 that talks about the judgement of those who follow Christ and what they have built with their lives, and we saw that’s possible for us to be very busy, very active, with very full calendars and overflowing inboxes, and yet it’s like building with wood, hay, and straw – if it passes through the fire of God’s judgment it all goes up in flames and there’s nothing left to show afterward.

But there’s also a way to build with gold, silver, and precious stones. You’re still working. It’s still hard. It’s still labor. But you’re doing it in a way that actually has eternal significance and value. When that work faces the fire of God’s judgment it passes through and remains – God is pleased, well-pleased, with the way you have spent your life.

So, here is where this all comes together – we see that there are two things at play – there is the external reality, that is, things like physical appearance and skill and the flurry of activity of your life, and then there’s the underlying spiritual reality, the condition and motive of your heart, and these two things are not always in sync.

So, which should we prefer?

There's the easy answer and then there's the right answer. The easy answer is to prefer all the stuff that you can see – to prefer things we can observe in the physical world. To pursue and cultivate beauty, strength, and skill. To esteem accomplishment and ability.

But the right answer is to look through all of that at the heart. Yes, the girl is very pretty, but how does she treat people who aren't? Yeah, the guy's a good soccer player, but is he a good person? Sure, you come to church all the time, and know your Bible back and forth, but are you any fun to have dinner with? Jesus was.

Friends, what are you pursuing in life? What is your goal? What's the thing you keep thinking about? What is the thing you keep researching online? Is it something that's going to add to appearances, or is it something that strengthens your heart? Is it a reflection of the old man, or the new?

I have to remind us, and that includes me, that it is very, very, easy for us to fall back into old habits, old patterns, old values, or to absorb those of the world around us. It is very, very, easy for those of us with a smartphone in our hands and living in this city that so values appearances, accomplishments, and abilities, to get swept up in things that neglect the heart, neglect the soul, neglect Christ our King and His desires and ambitions for our lives.

Christian, for the sake of your soul, listen to the warning of Scripture:

**2 Corinthians 5:16** Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh ... if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

When it comes to your daily life are you focused on, investing in, pursuing, old things that should have passed away, or new things that last forever?

You need to know: there's a way for *you* to live well for God *tomorrow* – at work, or at home, wherever you go, to do whatever it is that you do, to live for the glory of God and the good of others. No one is saying we need to retreat and withdraw to some monastery in order be close to God and live in a way that pleases Him. To the contrary, He wants you to go out and refuel airplanes to the glory of God. Go out and teach students to the glory of God. Go collect intelligence, perform accounting, treat patients, to the glory of God, as a new creation *and enjoy it*. This is what you were made for, to exalt God and enjoy God in every area of life.

Listen to what Paul says,

**2 Corinthians 5:14** For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

This is your blessed opportunity: *to live for God*. You are surrounded by people who are trying to figure out what life is all about. They're trying to decipher why they're here and what to do. So, they try all sorts of things. They explore different trends and fads. They go on vacations. They go to restaurants. They buy things. They pour themselves into their work or their studies or their skill set. They explore their sexuality and gender. They try various drugs. Why? They're trying to find themselves – they're living for themselves, and not (vs 15) [for Christ who died for them and rose again](#).

But what about you? Which are you living for – the flesh, or the Christ?

Here's the reality – many of us in this room know Who we *want* to be living for. Who we should be living for. But we're also very, very, prone to distraction.

I know you sense that, you feel that. And look, maybe you need to repent. Maybe you need to confess some things to God. Maybe you need to come back to your first love and re-examine your priorities. But listen, *praise God you've got something to come back to!* Because here is the reality – you have the amazing privilege and responsibility of living for Christ – living [for Him who died for you and rose again](#).

You have a purpose and it is a grand purpose. You have an identity. You have a reason for life and someone to serve. There is a God and He is personal, and He is calling out to you. He is directing and preparing your life for you and you for your life. He is intentional and He is involved.

You had nothing to do with where you were born, or who you were born to. You didn't put in your order for life like you're going to Chipotle – yeah, give me extrovert, no make that introvert, but athletic, and could I get I side of extra mathematical reasoning and some musical ability? No. You had no say in it.

God knit you together in your mother's womb – chose who your mother would be – and your father, gave you certain aptitudes and abilities, made your hair curly or straight, decided whether you'd have it for your whole life or start to lose it early, and sent you into the world to discover Him, exalt Him and enjoy Him *forever* as you follow and worship Him.

This is the purpose of life. It is not to live for yourself, but to live for Him who [died and rose again](#) for you.

I want to suggest that if your life feels tense right now, if your life feels meaningless, or adrift, if your life feels full of friction or empty – one of the best things you can do is to assess your motivations. How much of your attitude, outlook, and efforts are built around living for yourself, and how much is built on living for Christ?

This whole passage we've examined this morning is telling us there are these two ways to live. Our life naturally drifts toward selfish choices. Our life naturally drifts toward what is easy, toward living for ourselves. But if you slow down for a minute, if you will calm down,

if you will spend some time with Jesus working on your soul, He'll lead you toward things that are eternally fulfilling and which last forever. It might be hard, but you'll discover spiritual strength and joy along the way.

Listen to Paul say it's [the love of Christ](#) that [compels](#) him in life.

Here is something wonderful about being a Christian – *the compulsion of God*. You've known it, you've felt it, you've been led by it, and... you've resisted it and comprised. Ask any Christian and they'll tell you all these things are true.

There are times when you sense God speaking to you, guiding you, directing you, compelling you. There are times when you have this strong spiritual sense that "I can't do that," or "I have to do this." And it really is a conviction, God is constraining you.

Here Paul says we need to let that guide our lives. It is good for us to be limited by God, to be led and moved by God, to be boxed in, hemmed in, held down, by God. Scripture speaks of God as our Master and we are His servants. He is the King and we are His people. He is our Father and we are His children. In every case, He is in authority and we are to obey.

But look at *Who* we are to obey – the one who has shown us love. The one who [died for us and rose](#) again.

This is not an abusive authoritarian. This is not a self-serving dictator. This is a merciful and just God who calls out and confronts every act of unrighteousness, but also pays the penalty that is due Himself.

My friends, may I ask – what is compelling you? What is motivating you? What is guiding your actions, your choices, your desires? When you have the opportunity to make a choice or make a request that will get you closer to your goal, closer to the thing you want next, how do you make it? What is compelling you? Where are you trying to go? What are you trying to do? What are you trying to accomplish? What do you think you need? Is it something that will help you boast in appearances, or is it something that will demonstrate your heart? Is it something in line with the flesh or something that will last forever?

This is an important question. And its particularly important for you men. This Father's Day is a good time for some personal reflection and evaluation.

Which direction are you leading your family? Some of the decisions you make, some of the opportunities you take or turn down have an effect on your wife, your kids, and one day your grandkids and others. What is compelling you when you make that choice? What is compelling you when you make the decision or put in the request? Listen, God wants to be part of your planning. Invite Him in. Ask Him where and how you can best serve Him. Ask Him if this thing you're considering is anchored in the flesh or the soul? Ask Him to help you judge it now before it has to pass through His judgment later.

And the same is true for you ladies. you make countless decisions that affect your life as an individual, choices that affect your own life and those of people around you. Are those decisions compelled by Christ? Are they leading toward things of eternal value, or are you choosing momentary delight in passing pleasures and appearances?

For you single ladies - when you meet a man, one of the most important questions you can ask is, *what compels this man?* What is he driven by? Because the answer to that question is going to have a profound impact on the shape of your future and the atmosphere of your home and relationship. And then, when you have children, you need to constantly reassess for yourself – is this choice I’m making or advocating for the kids, influenced by Christ? Does it reflect His priority of the heart, or is it driven by appearances?

We are all responsible for ourselves, but we also have tremendous influence on others, which is why it’s all the more important that we know, and be compelled by, the love of Christ.

Perhaps this is the right time then for me to highlight a warning we see in our text – and that is that this kind of life, a life lived for Christ, compelled by Him, emphasizing the eternal and internal aspects over the external and immediate things most people boast in – living this way may cause some people to think you’ve lost your mind. Paul says:

**2 Corinthians 5:13** For if we are beside ourselves, *it is for God*; or if we are of sound mind, *it is for you*.

I hope that if you’re a Christian you know exactly what this is talking about. Because, you don’t have to follow Christ for long before you make a decision that someone thinks is crazy. And it doesn’t have to be something big, you’re not trying to make a big deal out of it, but someone finds out you do this, or don’t do that, and they think you’re nuts. That is exactly the kind of awkward moment that angels sing about and God smiles about.

You look different, sound different, seem different to people who don’t know God because you do, and you’re just trying to follow Him, honor Him, esteem Him, worship Him.

You can’t follow Christ long before this day comes. And it’s wonderful when it does. Remember, people accused Jesus of being out of His mind, is it any wonder they’re say the same thing about you as you follow Him?

Now, that’s not to say you have to be intentionally weird, please don’t. Please don’t be awkward, notice Paul also says there will be times when we appear to be of sound mind. Both are true. As you follow Christ you will be compelled to make choices that seem crazy and choices that make you seem like the smartest person in the room. Both are real. At times you’ll seem calm and sensible while the world is going mad and at times you’ll seem crazy and contrary, just keep your eyes on Christ.

I want to end by looking for a moment at verse seventeen. This is one of those verses that is highlighted in my Bible. It’s one of those foundational truths that we need to know and

keep coming back to. Some of you are not saved, and you need to know that you can be. Some of you are saved, but you need to be reminded of what is always true. We all need to know who God is, what He has done, and who He did it for, we need to know:

17 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

I want you to see the broad potential of this truth – that it applies to anyone. If [anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation](#). And I want you to see the transforming power of this truth – there is nothing about your past that needs to hold you down or back, nothing that God cannot carry you through or deliver you from. No one is broken forever, if you are in Christ, [old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new](#).

Now, I expect God has been stirring up some things for some of you this morning, putting His finger on various parts of your life and attitude. I want to encourage you to yield to that. Talk to Him about that – pray about that. Invite God into that exact area of your life and surrender it to Him. Ask Him to make all things new, and to help you focus, and stay focused on the eternal things of the heart without being distracted by the immediate things of the flesh and appearances. Draw a line in the sand and say, this is day when things changed, this is the day when things were made new, this is the day when I began to exalt and enjoy God in that area of my life, or with my whole life.

Let's pray.





## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### 2 Corinthians 5:12-17 You Can Be Renewed

Summary: Your whole life can be made new in Christ, and the change will transform everything you desire and value.

- What do you know about Juneteenth? Why should Christians mourn over the events it commemorates? Why should Christians rejoice? What other Federal Holidays should Christians be able to celebrate as Christians and not simply citizens of America?
- Review vs 12. What does Paul say should be commended and who should do it? Is this the way you think about church, ministries, pastors and ministry leaders – boasting in their heart over their appearance? What are some of the externals that we often focus on when we visit a new church? How can you look for the heart behind the ministry or ministers instead?
- Have you ever been thought of as out of your mind for something related to your walk with God? How do you handle the situation? See Mark 3:20-21 for the time when people said Jesus was out of His mind.
- Paul says “the love of Christ compels us” referring to the love he has experienced from Jesus. How has this love directed your life? How have you felt “compelled” to do something or avoid something else by the love of Christ?
- Do you tend to focus more on external appearances or the internal heart when it comes to yourself? When it comes to others? What makes it hard to this right? What helps you get it right?
- Have you ever met someone who had great appearances on the outside – either their appearance or the ability was clearly evident, but they weren’t very attractive on the inside? Have you ever met anyone who was the exact opposite? Is it possible to have both?
- Review verses 14 and 15. Do you feel this compulsion? Have you felt it in the past? What are some ways that Christians fall into living for themselves instead of Christ? How can we break out of those traps and reorient our lives?
- How has Christ made you new? What difference does He make in your life? If you knew someone who was frustrated, defeated, or upset about their life, how would you suggest Jesus to them?