

- ***READ II Corinthians 5:17-6:2*** A few days ago, a preacher friend polled his Facebook friends with the question, "What book, section, or chapter of the Bible do you find the most difficult to teach?" Of course, what one thinks makes a section of the Bible difficult to teach can change from person to person, but many of the usual suspects were in play in people's answers. Some said Song of Solomon and Psalms, others Leviticus, and then there were a few answers of different sections of the Prophets. Then of course there were some votes for Revelation. But there was one answer that struck me as almost out of place. Mark Roberts, who preaches for the Westside church in Irving, Texas replied, "*I find II Corinthians difficult. It seems like 'some stuff about some stuff-oh wait, Titus is back so here's more stuff about the other thing.'* #confusingstructure."
- At first I thought this was a strange answer, but then as we have been reading through II Corinthians over the past couple of weeks, you might be like me and be able to sympathize with our brother Mark a little more! In my estimation, it is a very true statement to say that Paul isn't quite up to his normal organized structuring of his letters in II Corinthians. Even within his first letter he addressed the issues of the church issue by issue, but in this second letter he is kinda sorta all over the place! This can make the reading and comprehension of the letter a bit difficult, but I hope that our study today from **II Corinthians 5:1-6:2** will shed at least a little light on what Paul is saying in this section and encourage us in our faiths.
- As you were going through these first few chapters, you might have noticed that there has been a particular phrase that has popped up time and time again. In the first five chapters the term "*In Christ*" appears six times, and we know that when there is repetition that the author must be trying to drive a point home to us. Therefore, once I got to chapter 5 it became very obvious that Paul was really keying in on what it meant to be in Christ. However, Paul seems to unfold his thoughts in an almost backwards logical order, so this evening we are going to look at what Paul says about being In Christ from the end of chapter 5, work our way backwards to the start of the chapter, and then we will go back to the end of chapter 5 and look at the conclusion in the first two verses of chapter 6.
- All of this message about being In Christ seems to be predicated upon Paul's understanding that He is serving as an ambassador for Christ. We often look at this text and talk about our roles as ambassadors for Christ, which I believe is a true statement, but in context Paul is talking about himself and Titus as special ambassadors to the Corinthians on behalf of Christ. We best know ambassadors as those who go from one country to another country as the official delegates to establish and grow relations between the two countries. These men or women work on behalf of their country's governments as representatives during such visits. Therefore, for Paul to say that He was sent as an ambassador is simply to say that he was sent as a representative of God to work on the relationship between Christ and these people by speaking well of the goodness of Christ and what He offers through faith so that others might be willing to submit their lives to Him. "***We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us.***" (II Corinthians 5:20) With this established, what then are the specifics of Paul's message of what it means to be in Christ to these people?

Paul's Message & Appeal as an Ambassador on Christ's behalf:

I. Be reconciled through the Gospel. (5:18-21)

1. The foundation of Paul's message to the Corinthians was concerning their need to be reconciled to God. Paul establishes that he was serving God as His spokesman and the message he was to be taking to those he spoke with was the message of their need to be reconciled or brought back together with God. (5:20) And yet, why was there a need for reconciliation? The need is spelled out for us in this text when Paul writes that the need for reconciliation was because of

transgressions. **(5:19)** It is our transgressions or sins against God's will that originally separate us from Him so that we are no longer in fellowship with Him. **(Isaiah 59:2; I John 1)**

2. This then is the need for reconciliation. We need to be brought back into fellowship with God, and Paul establishes that the very ministry given to him by God through Jesus was for this very purpose. His message as he went about from city to city and people to people, specifically the Corinthians, was their need for reconciliation. This reconciliation would make it so that God would no longer count their trespasses against them. **(5:19)** God willingly extends the opportunity for us to be joined to Him again. He alone makes that possible through His grace and mercy. Yet, the question is at this point...what was done so that there could be reconciliation?
3. This ability for man to be reconciled to God was born out of God using Jesus as His perfect sacrificial lamb on the cross. **"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf."** **(5:21)** Most modern translations render this verse in a similar manner, but some of them also offer an alternate rendering of, **"who knew no sin to be a sin offering on our behalf."** I believe that rendering makes more sense to us when we consider the sacrificial system that God had established long ago. Yes, animals were offered on behalf of the sinners for forgiveness, but none of them were actually sinful. The same is true of Jesus. He was sinless, and yet He was killed as if He was the sinful one. He became the sin or guilt offering for all of mankind, and it was through His sacrifice that **"we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** **(5:21)** Through Jesus's death and our acceptance of and obedience to this message of reconciliation, we can be as if our sins are no longer against us and be even as Jesus was...righteous in the sight of God. We are reconciled through Jesus actions in giving His life on the cross, and this reconciliation begins a new chapter in our lives.

II. Through this reconciliation, those in Christ are new creatures. (5:16,17)

1. This new chapter in our lives can be summed up in us being new creatures in Christ. Paul's encouraging words remind us that **"old things passed away; behold, new things have come."** Our pasts apart from God and Christ are no longer remembered by God. Our sins that we committed in rebellion against God are no longer held against us. In the simplest terms, we have been given a second chance at fellowship with God through Jesus's sacrifice. We get to wipe the slate clean and live with a renewed sense of self and purpose.
2. However, this new life demands of us that we be different in the way that we live this new life as opposed to how we lived the previous life. This is described in **5:16** when Paul says **"From now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even through we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him in this way no longer."** There are a couple of things going on here, so let's unpack them.
 - a) Firstly, Paul is calling upon these brethren to recognize that they now have not just a renewed life, but that they ought to also have a renewed perspective on life. They might have known many people before Christ, but now in Christ they were to view them differently. No longer do we view our neighbors from a worldly perspective as the CSB puts it, but we are to see them as souls in need of a savior Jesus Christ. They were to view others not by fleshly standards, but they were to see them through the lenses of spiritual people.
 - b) Speaking of Christ, Paul says that even if they had known Jesus while He was in the flesh on earth, they should no longer view Him in that manner or use it as a means of boasting because Jesus Himself was not different from who He was here on Earth. He had been exalted as King of God's people as He sits at the right hand of God.
 - c) The bottom line...our renewed lives demand that we now live as renewed people. We should see people as they really are and even as Jesus saw them...lost sheep in need of a shepherd, and we must recognize that Jesus is both Lord and Christ. He is our King, and we must submit to Him in all respects as we live this new life as new creatures like that He has made possible.

III. Being new in Christ allows for a readiness to appear before the judgment seat of Christ in the last day. (5:10–15)

1. Through God's reconciling ourselves to Him and giving us this new life, we can be prepared for that day when we will stand before Christ in judgement. In **5:10**, Paul writes, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed (repaid) for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."* Our reconciliation to God allows for those things that would have been held against us at the judgment to no longer be held against us, but we must also consider how we live moving forward in this new life.
2. If we want to continue to move forward and be ready to stand before the judgment seat then we must lean upon the love of Christ and what it moves us to do. *"For the love of Christ controls us, 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."* (**5:14,15**) Paul's logic states that since Christ has died for all then all must die. This took place when we chose to crucify ourselves and all of our desires in order that Christ might take hold of our lives. With Jesus as the one who controls us, we must recognize that the life that we now live is not for ourselves but for Him.
3. If we will give every effort to live as Christ would have us to live then we can be confident that we will be able to stand before Him in that last day and give a good account for the new life that He made possible through His death. For if He was willing to die for us when we were so undeserving then how could we possibly give Him anything less than all of ourselves with Him being so absolutely deserving? And what He deserves is our passion for Him and His causes in this world. If those causes will be our focus then we can most assuredly be able to stand before Him in righteousness only being repaid for the godly lives we lived in His name.

IV. This readiness gives confidence to live this life with courage. (5:1-9)

1. If this attitude is ours on a daily basis then we can look to the beginning of the chapter and see that this life becomes so much more doable. If we are willing to live by faith in God, with the courage He provides, and not by the sight of the temptations and difficulties that are all around us (**5:6-8**) then we can persevere and be pleasing to God in all things. (**5:9**) No matter what we endure, if we will be pleasing to God then we will obtain the ultimate reward that awaits us in eternity.
2. As an Apostle of Jesus, Paul knew these things to all be so true. He had his unfair share of difficult experiences as an ambassador of Jesus, and some of those are detailed in **II Corinthians 4:7-11**. He was continually being assaulted by messengers and workers of Satan, and he could've easily been discouraged to the point of giving up. But instead of falling in the face of the difficulties, Paul was convinced that His hard work here on earth was only preparing Him for something that was so much greater. (**4:17**) Therefore, Paul was confident that even if this body on earth was destroyed that he had something far greater awaiting him. (**5:1**) In fact, his greatest desire was to be clothed with a heavenly dwelling. (**5:2**)
3. He wanted to be in that state because he knew that there would be no more lacking in any way, no more groaning, no more burdens, and no more mortality. (**5:4**) Paul was convinced that He had been prepared by God for this very purpose, and that the Father had given him the Holy Spirit as a pledge or a downpayment to show that He truly meant business and wanted for His people to find success in this life. (**5:5**) If we have a heavenly Father who so strongly desires our endurance in the face of life's difficulties that He would seek to give us help through His Spirit, then why wouldn't we have confidence over the difficulties of this life? What confidence to know that our God is for us, and wants us to be ready for that day through our new lives that He has given us through His offering of reconciliation. What blessings from God, and the best news is that those blessings can be found even today!

V. Today is the day to be found in Christ! (6:1,2)

1. Putting this whole picture of **II Corinthians 5** together leaves us with great encouragement and hope that we can surely find eternal rest with God through His Son and His sacrifice, and Paul concludes these thoughts by solidifying that these blessings are available to all, but that they could receive God's grace and goodness in vain. **(6:1)** How could this be done? It could easily be done by people forgetting what God had done for them through Jesus. They could lose confidence in God's strength and Spirit. They could begin to allow their faiths to be overtaken by the difficult world they lived in. They could fail to live new lives as new creatures. They could fail to live for the one who had given His life for them.
2. Therefore, Paul quotes from **Isaiah 49:8** when he writes, *"AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU."* His conclusion? *"Behold, now is 'THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,' behold now is 'THE DAY OF SALVATION.'"* Paul demanded that these brethren recognize that the day to be living for the Lord was today and everyday! The days of salvation that Isaiah had written of so many hundreds of years before were now upon them, and they would be foolish to not take advantage of the opportunities to be found in Christ so that they might enjoy all of the blessings that come with being one of the members of His Body.

Those same blessings that Paul offered to the Corinthians continue to be offered to us. If we want to be in Christ then we absolutely can be. We can receive reconciliation to God. We can be given a new life to live, a new hope to possess, and a new confidence to push us forward each and every day. May we recognize that today is the day for salvation, and may we continue to live each and everyday with the knowledge that in Christ we have everything we need in order to be pleasing to God. May He bless us each and every day as we move forward living in Christ.