

2 Cor 5:16-6:2 Consequences of Living for Christ

Conversion to Christ brings about a great change, a radical shift in our thoughts, words, and deeds. This change is one of the evidences of genuine conversion. If nothing has changed, then nothing has changed; you are still dead in trespasses and sin. The reality of a great change in your thoughts, words, and deeds gives evidence of genuine conversion.

This is especially true of those converted as teenagers or adults. Little children converted at a young age or those raised in church might not experience a radical reorientation of life. But even little children experience a great spiritual change when they are born again. That changed spiritual status will have consequences for the rest of their lives.

In the previous section of 2 Cor, Paul exhorts us to live for him who died for us. (Read vs. 15).

What does that kind of life look like? What does it mean to live for Christ? How would your life change if you really lived for him?

Note vs. 16a—“therefore, from now on ...” These words introduce several consequences or results of vss. 14-15. Since Christ loved us, died for us, and rose again, we should live for him and not for ourselves. What would it look like if we did that? What would be the consequences if we lived for Christ “from now on”? That’s what this passage tells us.

Before getting into the text, we should recognize that this passage is absolutely jam-packed with profound theological truth. We could take several messages to unpack the meaning and significance of everything Paul says here. So the depth of the material requires that we go slowly and try to gain a good understanding of these words. This is part one of our study of this passage.

What are the consequences of living for Christ? What kind of great change does it make? One consequence is that ...

- I. .16 We regard no one “according to the flesh.”
 - A. To regard/know (οἶδα) someone “according to the flesh” would be to evaluate him on human terms or from a worldly perspective, i.e., based on secular, worldly, or sinful standards. To regard someone “according to the flesh” would be to make value judgments based on external things like race, finances, education, or achievements.

Cf. vs. 12—“boast in appearance and not in heart”—that’s what unbelievers do; it’s a mark of worldliness to judge in that way—on external, superficial appearances like race, intellect, money, or looks.

This is the typical way that secular people evaluate things—by external factors. Unsaved people commonly judge others based on purely human terms. They judge others based on their own personal, superficial ideas. They do that because they are unsaved; they have not been regenerated by the Spirit of God. Their sinful nature is still in control of how they think, which leads them to think in purely human, worldly terms—“according to the flesh.”

- B. Especially in our world today, external features are very important. The world seems to be preoccupied with external appearances instead of inner values or personal character.

Illus.: I recently read an article regarding NASA’s efforts to return humans to the moon (Artemis mission). And the big deal about this mission to the moon is that it will include the first woman and the first person of color to walk on the moon. That’s what they are really excited about. Diversity/equity/inclusion—all of this requires that we judge “according to the flesh” – according to external, superficial appearances. Of course, these days, no one can say for sure what a woman is, so I’m not sure how they’ll send one to the moon.

In our world, what seems to matter the most is your color, your gender, your race, your financial or educational status, and your achievements. In today’s world, these external factors are very important. They were important in Paul’s day as well.

Paul assures us that, for Christians, none of that matters anymore. In the Christian church, it doesn’t matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, a man or a woman, a slave or a slave-owner, rich or poor, one ethnicity or another. All of that external stuff has no bearing on our spiritual condition. We don’t evaluate people on those terms—or we should not.

We see people as valuable because they reflect the image of God. Our primary interest is one’s spiritual status, not his financial status, ethnicity, or education. We don’t judge people the way the world judges—by external appearances and worldly values. It’s important that the church does not judge the way the secular world judges. We should view people and events from a biblical, Christian worldview, not a worldly, external, superficial viewpoint.

C. .16b Paul affirms that he used to think of Christ in this way, but not any longer.

1. It seems possible if not probable that Paul had heard Jesus or seen him before his death. And Paul had an opinion about Jesus.
2. He, along with many of the Jews, evaluated Jesus based on external appearances. They thought that he was a mere man; in fact, they thought he was a false prophet, a fraud, a blasphemer, one accursed by God as he hung on a tree. There's no way in Paul's mind that a crucified man could be the Messiah. To Paul, before his conversion, Jesus was a cursed heretic. That unregenerate mindset led Paul to reject Jesus and to persecute the church.
3. Paul and many of the other Jews were wrong about Jesus; they were looking at him from a fleshly/worldly perspective.

App: Many people today still regard Jesus “according to the flesh.” They think of him as a good teacher, a religious leader, a revolutionary, or a community organizer. Many people today try to make Jesus into an image they like, someone who supports their political philosophy, someone who they can live with. People today think that they can recruit Jesus to support just about any cause, including abortion and homosexuality.

E.g., “If he were here today, Jesus would be the grand marshal of the gay pride parade.”

But these people make the same error that Paul did—they are seeing Jesus in purely human terms, only through human lenses. They think Jesus would be much like them. But they are wrong; they are thinking about Jesus in human terms.

.16b Note the language: “we have known...yet now.” Something happened to Paul to change his perspective about Jesus. He had judged Jesus in human, worldly terms, by superficial standards. But something changed; what happened?

Paul experienced a great change when he was born again. He found out on the road to Damascus that Jesus is the Son of God, the risen savior, the Lord and head of the church (Acts 9). Paul realized he had been opposing God's plan by persecuting the church. Paul's viewpoint about Jesus changed radically when he was converted. His conversion experience totally reformatted his life. A *persecutor* of Christ became a *proclaimer* of Christ. This experience radically altered his life; a great change happened because of this.

Quote: Worldly standards and distinctions of race [or] class [make no difference to] Paul (Gal. 3:28) as he looks at men from the standpoint of the Cross of Christ.¹

App: Like Paul, we don't evaluate Jesus in human terms anymore. We believe that the biblical description of Jesus is true—he's the Son of God who died for our sins and rose again. We submit to his lordship and we anticipate his glorious return. We should use Christian principles and biblical values to make our judgments—that's called a Christian worldview.

Jesus asked his disciples, "What think ye of Christ?" (Mt 22:42). That is perhaps the most significant question you will ever answer. Your earthly life and eternal destiny depend on your answer to that question. If you think of Jesus in purely human terms, then you can have no hope of eternal life. Salvation depends on believing in Jesus as the Bible describes him—in supernatural terms—as the Son of God, the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord. We cannot think of him in any other way.

Trans: *The first consequence of living for Christ* is that we see Jesus in biblical terms, not in human terms, no longer "according to the flesh."

¹ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), 2 Co 5:16.

II. .17 We relate as new creations in Christ.

When you trust in Jesus as your savior, your spiritual status changes. A great change has occurred since you have been born again.

A. You are “in Christ.”

1. To be “in Christ” is to be saved, to be born again, to be regenerated.
2. To be “in Christ” speaks of union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Cf. Gal 2:20
3. To be “in Christ” means to be a member of the body of Christ, the NT church.
4. And notice the little phrase “if any man ...” (τις). Anybody can be saved. Salvation is open to anyone who desires to be forgiven for sin. All you need to do is to repent of sin and believe in Jesus...

B. You are a “new creature/creation.”

1. Conversion to Christ is a radical, life-changing experience. At conversion, your spiritual status/standing changes drastically.
Even if you are a little child when you get saved, your spiritual status/position changes radically.
2. The salvation of a soul is like an act of creation. Spiritual life is infused into what was formerly dead. What formerly did not exist now exists. What formerly exists now changes. The convert to Christ is truly a new creation.
3. Jesus describes this experience in terms of being “born again” or “born anew.” Prior to this experience, you are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1). After the experience of the new birth, you are a “new creature/creation.” We are regenerated—given spiritual life. We have passed from death unto life. Salvation starts something new.
4. As a consequence of new life, a whole new lifestyle begins. The believer has new values, a new worldview, a new set of behaviors. He may have new friends and maybe even new enemies. If you get saved and start following Jesus, many things are going to change.

5. One of the best examples of genuine conversion is the Maniac of Gadera (Lk 8:26f).

Quote: When people become part of the body of Christ at conversion, their lives take a complete reversal. They now abhor the world of sin and former friends are hostile to them.²

- C. .17c Your old pre-conversion life is done/passed away.

The word “passed away” (παρέρχομαι) means “to cease, to go out of existence, to come to an end, to perish.” And the grammar here (aorist) suggests that this happens at a point in time—the point of salvation.

What “old things” pass away when you get saved?

1. Old ideas about Jesus have passed away. Paul thought of Jesus as a false prophet, a fraud, a man accursed by God. But in a supernatural flash, he realized that his ideas about Jesus were wrong. Imagine Paul’s shock at hearing Jesus’ voice on the road to Damascus. Salvation calls for a radical change of mind. We call this change of mind “repentance.”
2. The old lifestyle is no longer appropriate for one who is “in Christ.” Sinful, pre-conversion behaviors must pass away. The old way of living must remain in the past. We are no longer slaves to sin; we are set free from sin and are now servants of Christ.
3. The old worldview is passed away—your value system, what you love and hate, your political philosophy, your moral views. You no longer evaluate things “according to the flesh,” i.e., from a worldly point of view.

Quote: The individual’s whole being, value system, and behavior are also changed through conversion.³

“I’m not what I ought to be, but at least I’m not what used to be.”

² Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 193.

³ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 287.

What if that change does not happen? What about those who claim to be saved, yet persist in their old habitual sins? The key concern here is repentance. Believers are not perfect people; they continue to sin. But they also repent and make progress in holiness and godliness. Unsaved people continue on in sin habitually, without repentance, and without conviction.

If a professing believer continues on in the old, pre-conversion way of life habitually, without repentance, and without conviction, then there's little reason to believe that his profession of faith is genuine. If nothing has changed, then nothing has changed. We have the biblical expectation that the old, pre-conversion lifestyle should pass away. It may take some time, but eventually your lifestyle changes if you are truly saved.

For genuine believers, the old, pre-conversion lifestyle and worldview is gone; it's passed away; it has ceased to exist; it has come to an end. If you can't say that for yourself, then what Paul is talking about here has not happened to you.

D. .17end Your new life has come.

Paul marks this difference with the word “behold.” This word is like a sign, marking something unusual or important. It's a point of emphasis. He's saying that believers experience a radical change of life that is observable—other people can see it—“look at this!”

Illus.: Occasionally we see a sign at a business saying “Under New Management.” We expect something to be different about a business “under new management.” That's true spiritually as well.

Quote: When a person becomes a Christian, he or she experiences a total restructuring of life that alters its whole fabric—thinking, feeling, willing, and acting.⁴

And the grammar here (perfect of γίνομαι) suggests an event in the past with continuing results. The old is dead and gone, but the new extends out into the future; the new nature is here to stay. There is a radical difference between the old and the new.

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.

What are the consequences of being a new creation? What is new?

1. We have a new spiritual nature. We previously were dead in trespasses and sins, but after salvation we have spiritual life. We have passed from death unto life—regeneration.
2. We adopt a biblical, Christian worldview. We start thinking about things from a biblical perspective. We renew our mind through exposure to God’s Word (Rom 12:2—transformed by the renewing of your mind). And that results in a new set of behaviors that are in keeping with God’s expectations.
3. We have hope for the future. This is the hope for change and Christ-likeness. The old is gone and the new has come; we are new creations. Therefore, the old problems, habits, addictions, and sins need not hold us back. We are not limited by what we used to be. Our potential for success is very good; we have good prospects for the future.

- E. .18a How does this happen? “all things are of God...” God is the author and initiator of this great change. All these changes happen through God’s work in our lives. God initiates and carries through these changes as we submit to him.

One translation (NEB) reads, “From first to last, this has been the work of God.”

Quote: God is the driving force behind the redemption of humankind. Reconciliation comes solely at God’s initiative.⁵

1. Our salvation is “of God.”
 - a) Salvation begins with God. No one can claim credit for his own salvation. God took the initiative in saving us. “We love him because he first loved us.” Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. “No man seeketh after God” (Rom 3).

John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, ...

⁵ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 288.

The HSp convicts us of sin and enables us to repent of sin and believe in Jesus. That is “of God.” God does the work in salvation; all we do is accept the free gift. And even repentance and faith are, ultimately, gifts from God.

b) .18b God “reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ.” The initiative comes from God.

(1) to “reconcile” (*καταλλάσσω*) is to restore a proper relationship between two people in conflict.

The word originally referred to the exchange or substitution of peace for war, of love for anger, or of friendship for enmity.⁶

(2) Reconciliation happens when the source of the conflict is removed and the relationship is restored. Friendly relations replace former hostility.

(3) God, the offended party, reached out in love to us sinners. God himself did what was necessary to restore the relationship broken by sin.

(4) God, as the judge, not only pardons our sin, but also he brings us into a personal, positive relationship with himself. God adopts us as his children and friends.

Colossians 1:21–22 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—

2. Our sanctification is “of God.”

This great change is something God does—he is working in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). Growth and maturity in the Christian life come from yielding ourselves to God (cf. Rom 6:13). Life begins to change when we live for him who died for us (cf. vs. 15).

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), 435–436.

3. Our service is “of God.”
 - a) The Bible assures us that God gives spiritual gifts to believers, and we are now responsible to serve God in the area of our gifting.
 - b) It might take you a while to figure out how you’re a gifted, but if you have a gift, you are obligated to use your gifting for God and for the benefit of God’s people.