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Inside Out – 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

This morning we are going to continue our theme of change. We have been talking about several different aspects of change. This morning we are going to look at the passage that the closing blessings I have been using comes from. 2 Corinthians 5:17, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old is gone, the new is here.”**

This morning we are simply going to march through this passage and talk about what Paul is doing with it. So let's read it. Read **2 Corinthians 5:11-21.**

Immediately before our passage Paul is discussing how the life of the Christian is one seeking to please God. He says, **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”**

He is telling us that we all will face Jesus in judgment when we die and will need to make an account for whatever we have done, whether good or bad. I find this intimidating. Paul did too. And because we all face this reality and because what we do in this life matters deeply for that interaction . . . Paul begins our passage by referring to a healthy fear of the Lord. This “fear of the Lord,” is awe and reverence of Christ’s authority and power – not run away with your tail between your legs fear – that drives Paul to persuade people to be followers of Jesus. He knows he is going to have to make an account for his life.

Paul lived deeply under the reality that God was watching and that when he died he would be called to make an accounting of what he did with his life. And this deeply motivated him to talk with others – not just because he wanted to obey, but also because he deeply desired for others to experience the relationship with God that he experienced. Paul had a deep sense of personal responsibility for his ministry.

We have all had an experience, probably in some work environment, where when our boss walks in or sees what we are doing, we quickly jump into full speed. We hunker down and work as hard as we can to show our boss how awesome we are.

I used to work for an auto parts store in High School when I was not cleaning horse stalls. We opened the store new so it was not very busy at first. There were often just two of us in the store all day waiting for customers. We filled our time by shooting rubber bands at each other, listening to the radio, and playing around with battery testers, etc. But when the owner came in we quickly jumped to duty.

The problem with God is that He never stops watching us. God is perpetually watching us. Paul got this. He could not escape it. Nothing else mattered for him. Now, I imagine the dramatic nature of his conversion helped to make God's presence particularly evident in his life, but he saw God rightly. Present. Interested. And deeply desiring to work through us . . . Paul understood his life and his ministry as life lived with your boss perpetually looking over your shoulder.

Not only is God perpetually looking over our shoulders and desiring to use us . . . he deeply desire to know us. This is an important point and where the boss analogy is not entirely helpful. Our earthly bosses watch over our shoulders because they want to assess our work . . . there is a job to be done and they want to know whether we are getting it done or not. Usually truly getting to know us in relationship is not the primary goal.

But God is not looking over our shoulders in an effort to keep a record of mistakes we make. Sometimes when humans are watching us we can't tell whether they want what is best for us or not. But with God – He deeply desires what is best for us and wants to know us.

In our passage, Paul writes, **“What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart.”**

“What we are is plain to God.” A more literal translation is, **“We are well known (clearly evident) to God.”** What matters to Paul is what God thinks of him. His evidence for why he should be listened to is his character, which is affirmation that God really knows him. Paul is confident.

Knowledge here is not information. We know God knows everything about us, but when we talk about God really knowing us – it is relationship. In the ancient world, people often used “to know” someone in

reference to sex. It was deeply personal. Something that required two people. For God to truly know us, we must submit ourselves to him. We must choose to participate in the relationship.

The way Paul thinks about this though is instructive to us. We nearly always discuss how much we know about God. How much Bible knowledge we have? We talk about our exteriors.

But Paul's emphasis, at least at first, is clearly on the inside. Do we seek to be known by God by committing to a relationship with him?

There are aspects of our lives that are not public, but that are just as important, if not more important to God. Our character is the most important aspect of our person to God. Paul was content to take his stand on what was not outwardly evident, i.e., what was “in the heart. He was confident and transparent. What was on the inside of him was consistent with God.

To have someone's character, their heart, their motives, their desires oriented towards you is to truly know them. And God wants ourselves aligned towards him.

I have had a few instances in my life when there has been a clear distinction between people that understood some facts about me and people that truly knew me. When people introduce you, you can often tell something about how well they know you or at the very least what they think is the most valuable thing to convey.

I have heard people talk about me before and spend most of their time describing what I have done or my career choice, or other facts with no reference to my character. They are usually nice, but I don't feel known. Over the years I have come to believe that God cares far less about what we do than we we are.

In a very practical way, God could care less about what particular job we pick . . . he cares deeply though about who we are as we do it. Does it enhance our character . . . does it inhibit our personal growth? God cares about whether or not we are a disciple . . . whether our heart is becoming more and more like the heart of Christ . . . and that may be as a food service worker or a teacher or a pastor or a mechanic or factory worker . . . I honestly think on that day when we stand before Jesus, our career

choice won't come up . . . what Jesus will see is our character. **Did what we claimed to believe match the beat of our heart?**

We want God to know us. We need God to know us. Matthew 7:22-23 makes this dramatically clear to us. **“Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”**

When I was in college, especially my freshman year before I joined a fraternity, the cool thing to do was to go to fraternity parties, but most of the fraternities had guys that would stand out in front of the houses and monitor who got in based upon whether they knew someone or not. If you were a girl - you nearly always got in, but if you were a guy then you needed a connection. I remember walking around one night and walking by a house and one of my friend's saying "I know that guy really well." We go way back, we went to high school together, played in the band together . . . I always had his back . . . he will let us in." We rush up to the sidewalk at the front of the house and my friend rushes confidently forward. "Hey Mike, It's Ben. Great to see you. How are you doing?" And he rambles for a minute or so and then says, "you don't mind if we go in, do you?" The fraternity guy just looked at him and said, "nice try. I don't know you." My friend was devastated. I thought it was hilarious.

God wants to know us through relationship . . . we can talk all we want about how much we know Him . . . but the real question for us must always be . . . have we made ourselves available so he might know us.

Verse 12 is interesting. Paul says, **“We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us.”** It sounds really arrogant at first.

Paul’s point, though, is that he does not want to be known so that others can tell him how good he is, Paul wants to be an encouragement – or an example – for his readers to use in contrasting between those that look like religious people on the outside and those with godly hearts on the inside. It is a very high standard! Do you ever think about whether your friends use you as evidence of the sufficiency of the Gospel? Do others think of you as someone that has such character, such a way of making

decisions, and wisdom . . . that you influence even those you don't have contact with, because others are talking about you. That is influence!

I guarantee that we are more influential not because we read our Bible's at lunch (I hope you do – not for others, but for you) . . . or tell people you will pray for them (I hope you do that too – and actually pray for them . . . so that it is not just something we say because we don't know what else to say . . .), but because when a co-worker does something wrong or unjust or unfair, we don't match their aggression, but approach them in peace.

I guarantee that you are more influential not because you go to a church building on Sunday mornings and drink coffee and eat a donut, but because when others are gossiping about some preference or some person, you step away or you speak up, but you don't participate and don't contribute. You are influential when you don't let sarcasm or humor be a device to get in a jab at someone. You are influential when you notice and greet people others ignore.

Those behaviors overflow from your heart, your character, your integrity. Some have used a barrel filled with liquid to describe character. No one really know what is inside you until someone bumps up against you and they see what overflows. Its when you get thrown into an unexpected situation or scenario . . . when you are caught off guard that your true character comes out. **Your character is your influence.**

C.S. Lewis has a fantastic analogy. He says, “Surely what a man does when he is taken off his guard is the best evidence for what sort of man he is. If there are rats in a cellar, you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly. But the suddenness does not create the rats; it only prevents them from hiding. In the same way, the suddenness of the provocation does not make me ill-tempered; it only shows me what an ill-tempered man I am.”

God needs people of character to influence the world. He needs people willing to be changed on the inside. He can use one man or woman who is honest, self-aware, and full of character with some rough doctrine . . . before he can use a hundred men and women with perfect theology and reasoning without a desire to be moldable. **God does not need more people that know more facts about the Bible, he needs more people willing to live it.**

In the sports' world they call this quality coachable. God wants coachable people, because he can help them influence others.

Paul's actions are not for himself, they are directed outward with intention to God and others.

Paul explains why self-pleasing was impossible for him. Verses 14-15 say, **“For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”**

Paul cannot be too concerned with himself because the example he is using for the rightly lived life is Jesus . . . and Jesus gave up his life for everyone. Paul's model for life is the most selfless man to have ever walked the face of the earth. And he literally sees himself as dead, and Christ as alive in him. Christ's love compels him . . . the love of Christ controls him. And again, all of this deeply drives him to share with others.

Christ died for all and thus all died with Christ. All of humanity was in the same situation. All of us were destined to spend eternity dead. But Jesus Christ did not just die, he also resurrected. And as Paul says, for those who choose to no longer live for themselves but for Christ . . . they will live – live eternally.

Jesus' offer of redemption, of salvation, is universally available. But only some chose to accept Christ's work for us.

When we choose to appropriate Christ's sacrifice for us, Paul then says, “we regard no one from a worldly point of view.” Again, we are told that one's perception of reality, the heart, character, vision changes.

Stepping into a relationship with God and being indwelt with the Holy Spirit is an extreme life makeover. We have to reiterate though, this transformation is not so much in the stuff we do. That changes too, but God is primarily concerned with transforming the heart . . . because someone can have

an awful heart and still do great outward actions . . . they can fake it . . . but someone cannot have a god-altered heart and have awful outward actions. Character runs deeper and God cares about deep.

The change God wants in us is risk though. C.S. Lewis has another great analogy of how God works.

C.S. Lewis provides a great analogy for how God works. “When I was a child I often had toothache, and I knew that if I went to my mother she would give me something which would deaden the pain for that night and let me get to sleep. But I did not go to my mother – at least, not till the pain became very bad. And the reason I did not go was this. I did not doubt she would give me the aspirin; but I knew she would also do something else. I knew she wanted out of her without getting something more, which I did not want. I wanted immediate relief from pain: but I could not get it without having my teeth set permanently right. And I knew those dentists; I knew they started fiddling about with all sorts of other teeth which had not yet begun to ache. They would not let sleeping dogs lie; if you gave them an inch they took an ell [a mile].”

“Now, if I may put it that way, Our Lord is like the dentists. If you give Him an inch, He will take an ell [a mile]. Dozens of people go to Him to be cured of some one particular sin which they are ashamed of, or which is obviously spoiling daily life. Well, He will cure it all right: but He will not stop there. That may be all you asked; but if once you call Him in, He will give you the full treatment.”

Paul says it this way, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

Paul does not say, “if anyone is in Christ, one major sin gets fixed. He says we are a new creation!

Jesus gives us a new outlook. A new chance. A new life. As we talked about last week when we discussed the deep persecutions that Paul was a part of, Paul needed new life. He needed it to be true that when you accept Christ the old is gone and the new has come. This is what gave him his influence and allowed him to gain so much respect.

Whenever a person comes to be part of the body of Christ by faith, there is a new act of creation on God's part. One set of conditions or relationships has passed out of existence; another set has come to stay. And (v.16) the principal area of change is that of attitude toward Christ and other people.

But God does not just change some things about us. God desires to renovate all of us from the inside out.

I think that many of us, when Christ has enabled us to overcome one or two sins that were an obvious nuisance, are inclined to feel that we are now good enough. He has done all we wanted Him to do, and we should be obliged if He would now leave us alone.

C.S. Lewis again has some great imagery in thinking about this. He says, "God is the painter, we are only the picture."

"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of – throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards."

All this change is from God who used Christ to reconcile himself to us and called us to reconcile others to God and ourselves through Christ . . . In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself - not counting their sins against them and giving up.

We now have this Good News to pass on to others. We are ambassadors for God, as if God, Himself, were making His plea (begging) through us. We plead with you on Christ's behalf ("we implore you on Christ's behalf"), "Be reconciled to God!"

Paul ends with, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Not only does the believer receive from God a right standing before him on the basis of faith in Jesus (Phil 3:9), but here Paul says that "in Christ" the believer in some sense actually shares the righteousness that characterizes God himself (1 Cor. 1:30)

Sources Consulted:

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