

THE CONTEXT :: Paul continues his efforts to persuade the Corinthian church members to “grow up” in their faith. He seems to see them as inadequately socialized converts who claim to follow Jesus but who are still firmly rooted in Greco-Roman culture, following pagan mores and see the world according to the standards of Roman imperial power.

Therefore / so that... :: throughout this section (as in the preceding ones) we see that Paul is carefully crafting a persuasive argument using rhetoric, demonstrating that because of what God has done in Christ, we should then live accordingly...

the fear of the Lord:: this expression punctuates the entirety of the First Testament, in particular the Psalms. The word “fear” is less one of terror and being afraid, and much more an emphasis on respect. “*God is so personal and holy, worthy of our respect. The good life begins in the fear of God— Do that and you’ll know the blessing of God.*” Psalm 111:9-10 (The Message). Paul is emphasizing that they have come to persuade their audience to a certain belief and active practice of belief. They are not afraid of God, nor are they there to persuade God. They are there to persuade the Corinthians to new belief and trust in God through Christ.

in outward appearance and not *in the heart* :: Paul is insisting upon authenticity and transparency (remember the treasure in clay jars in 2 Corinthians 4:7). His point is that he isn’t there to give a fancy or smooth appearance, dressing well like some Sophists and other leaders in that day, but rather what counts most is his heart, the way in which his life and his lips both speak the same language. He’s deliberately contrasting himself with other specific individuals or cultural mores.

in Christ:: the Greek preposition *ἐν*, which here is translated as “in” can also be equally translated as “in, on, at, by, or with.” Paul insists upon this focus that the work of and through Christ was at the initiative of God and no one else. God does the work, Christ is the agent. Paul is appointed to make this known, not because it was his idea or plan, but because it was God’s purpose.

died for all :: this “all” is to be taken seriously. It’s not just for the elect, or those who believe now, but for the sins of the whole world.

A NEW CREATION:: If a person is in Christ, not only does that person’s worldview change, but he or she also realizes that the world itself has changed as a result of Christ’s objective death and resurrection. There is no business as usual any longer. The Corinthians (and us) as Christian should no longer be evaluating Christ by worldly or external standards. (Witherington, p. 395).

from a human point of view :: the Greek literally reads “according to the flesh” This might mean that they should no longer evaluate Christ from a human point of view, seeing him as a failure [crucifixion] in regard to the expectation that the messiah would be a warrior kind come to throw off Roman rule, or according to worldly standards or leadership.

ambassadors for Christ:: Ambassadors are sent to use rhetoric, to persuade foreign leaders/people to praise the leader they represent, or in order to defend a policy or ruler, or to accuse a vassal ruler of misconduct in regards to the one they represent. Here, Paul offers himself (and his colleagues as examples of this ambassadorship) with authority, although the authority is not his own.

2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2

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¹¹ **Therefore**, knowing **the fear of the Lord**,

we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. ¹² We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, **so that** you may be able to answer those who boast *in outward appearance* and not *in the heart*.

¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has *died for all*; **therefore** all have died. ¹⁵ And he *died for all*, **so that** those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

¹⁶ From now on, **therefore**, we regard no one *from a human point of view*; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ **So** if anyone is **in Christ**, there is **A NEW CREATION**: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the **MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION**; ¹⁹ that is, **in Christ** God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ **So** we are **ambassadors for Christ**, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be **SIN** who knew no **SIN**, **so**

~~that~~ **in him** we might become the righteousness of God.

¹As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ² For he says,

“At an **acceptable time** I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

Luke 15:25-32

New Revised Standard Version | (NRSV)

²⁵ “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ ³¹ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

AS YOU READ AND REFLECT ON THIS TEXT:

- ☞ When have you felt like the older son either resentful of God’s grace, or not needing it? How have you been persuaded to see, receive and grow from God’s grace?
- ☞ How are you experiencing grace (Christ dying for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in him) in your life today?
- ☞ How are you becoming the righteousness of God in Christ? suffering and trials (or nakedness as Paul calls it in today’s scripture)?
- ☞ How do you need God to free, heal or recreate you so that you might join with God in ministry of reconciliation?; so that you might allow God’s mercy, justice and grace to overflow from you as a gift to all?

SIN:: the Greek word is hamartia, meaning “to miss the [intended] mark.” Paul is insisting not upon a specific action or habit, but on a worldview, a way of being, an identity that is mistaken, twisted and missing its God-given *raison d’être*. It’s any and every departure from the way of righteousness (the way that God longs for us to live and be). It can be an action as well as a quality or way of being.

the righteousness of God:: the Greek is “*dikaio sunē*” of God. This is the characteristic required of humankind by God. Plato uses this expression to talk of the challenge to do good in order to avoid punishment after death. But in the Second Testament it’s much more the notion of fulfilling the divine statutes, a compelling motive for the conduct of one’s whole life, not just to do good to get into heaven. It’s what a follower of Jesus should hunger and thirst for (Matthew 5:6). It can be taught and learned 2 Peter 2:5. It’s both faith and works. For the Greeks righteousness was the characteristic required for a judge. For the Hebrews, God’s righteousness was his justice which was intimately linked with his mercy. It is right conduct before God, which is also the right conduct to have among other human beings (cf. “*Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other.*” John 13:34-35)

MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION :: Paul uses the word “service of reconciliation”, here translated as “ministry”. “*Diakonia*” [service] in Greek. “God is the initiator of this process. Reconciliation is chiefly something that God must accomplish, before humankind can respond to the work of Christ.” (Witherington)

acceptable time:: the expression sounds weird in English. It connotes the idea of favorable, ideal or auspicious. Paul is saying that now is the opportune or perfect moment! Get to it. Be reconciled to God completely.

Luke 15:25-32 is the conclusion of the Parable of the Two sons. It tells the paradox and urgency of grace that Paul is trying to persuade the Corinthians to adopt as not just an idea but as a way of life.

Monte’s notes are heavenly influenced by his reading of *Conflict & Community in Corinth: a socio-rhetorical commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*. Ben Witherington III. Eerdmans, 1995.