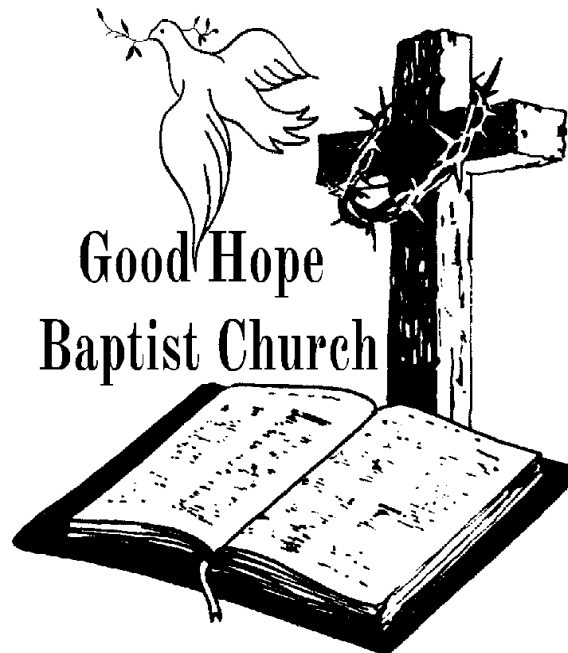


Religion or Relationship

2 Corinthians 5:17



Living Together In The Love Of God

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FOCAL Read Responsively 2 Corinthians 5:17
Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:
**old things are passed away; behold, all things are
become new.**

Years ago at the beginning of the reign of King David there was a fellow by the name of Mephibosheth. I like saying that name - say it with me - Mephibosheth. His name, according to Easton's Bible Dictionary, means "**Expeller of Shame**", so this boy's parents expected great things for him. They thought he would be a great warrior. His father was Jonathan, King David's best friend, and the grandson of King Saul. When Mephibosheth was five years old his nurse fell with him, and permanently crippled him by breaking his feet. Crippled in the feet he could do little to earn a living.

One day King David called Mephibosheth in to the palace and adopted him as his own. Mephibosheth asked David:

**2 Samuel 9:8 ... What is thy servant, that thou
shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?**

You know what David told him? "**I show you kindness for your father Jonathan's sake**". Isn't that beautiful? King David wanted a relationship with Mephibosheth because he had a relationship with his father Jonathan.

Love was transferred to an undeserving young man because of the deserving father.

Like Mephibosheth, none of us who are the children of

Adam have anything to commend us to God. And yet, God wants a relationship with each and every one of us. Why?

1. God Wants A Relationship With You

FOCAL 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore **if** any man be in Christ, he is a new creature ...

That word "if" implies possibility. IF I am in Christ, THEN I will be a **new creature**. What will make me a **new creature? Religion?**

I want you to know that the person who wrote this Scripture we're reading today was *very religious*. Was it his religion that brought him to productivity in God? He writes in another place:

Philippians 3:4-6 ..though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. (NIV)

As far as RELIGION goes, this man had it all. He belonged to the best family, the best Church, had the best private teachers. His family was the "Mayflower" type of Jew. You know the type, the snooty type who says "**My family came over on the Mayflower**".

ILLUSTRATE Adrian Rogers said that he was

preaching a revival one time when a woman rushed up to him and said, "**You're a Rogers, aren't you?**" Adrian said, "**Yes Ma'am**". She said, "**Well, I've been doing some work on our genealogy because I'm a Rogers, too. You will be happy to know that the Rogers came over on the Mayflower.**" Adrian said, "**Well, that's wonderful. But I've traced it back further than that.**" The lady got really excited. He went on. "**I traced it all the way back and you need to know that we came from a crooked farmer and a drunken sailor ... the farmer was Adam and the sailor was Noah. That's how far back we go.**" The woman stomped off mad.

Listen, Saul was a "Mayflower Jew". He was religious to the hilt. He was so religious that he hunted down and imprisoned people that didn't follow his own religious views.

I've met some Fundamentalists like Saul of Tarsus! So filled with religion and so devoid of a relationship with God.

Saul got his start as a religious zealot at the murder of Stephen, found in **Acts 7:58-60**. Stephen loved the Lord Jesus, and tried to tell everyone he met about the wonderful relationship you can have with God through faith in Him.

What did Saul and the religious crowd do? First of all, **they drug Stephen out of the city. Throwing him to the ground in a garbage dump, they beat him to death with rocks - but only after they removed their**

clothing to keep the blood from spattering on it. What an awful sight! These people stripped down, and laid their clothes at the feet of the man who would one day write this Bible text. He would stand by and watch the brutality as Stephen was beaten to death. As his life poured out of him Stephen - who had done no more than lovingly present the Gospel of salvation to these men - Stephen would say "Lord - don't lay this sin to their account. Lord, receive my spirit".

You know what "religion" does? It hardens a heart. It breeds hate, and cultivates self righteousness. Religion teaches that you're good because you follow a pattern, but mentions nothing at all about love toward God nor love toward your fellow man.

Saul was impressed by what he saw, so much so that he went and asked for special permission to hunt down these "Christians" on his own. The Bible says:

Acts 8:3 Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. ^{NIV}

Illustrate We have some modern illustrations of religion gone wild. I'm sure you've all heard of so called "Church Groups" like **Westboro Baptist**, which loves to picket the funerals of fallen American soldiers. **Andy Stanley** wrote of a so called Church in his book *How Good Is Good Enough*:

"One Sunday morning a black woman arrived early for a Sunday morning service. She sat in the third

row on the aisle. There were only a few other people in the sanctuary at the time. One by one they got up and left. Soon a crowd gathered outside. The deacons wouldn't allow anyone to enter until they could figure out what to do. After a brief meeting they decided to turn off the lights When the black woman didn't leave, two deacons went in and asked her to leave the premises. She agreed. Once the crisis had passed, everyone filed into the sanctuary and worship service began. ... The congregation sang:

**Praise God from Whom all blessings flow.
Praise Him all creatures here below.
Praise Him above, ye Heavenly host.
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost."**

What a blasphemous thing! Religion does not save us, and can not save us. But a relationship with Jesus Christ can and does save.

Saul thought he was doing good, but he was trying to do good apart from a relationship with Christ. Jesus eventually knocked Saul down on the Damascus Road, and told him "**Saul, you think you're helping God, but you're hurting Him**".

Acts 9:5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

I praise God for the valley that brought me to the Mountain that is Jesus Christ! A broken Saul has a good chance of becoming a usable Paul if the broken Saul will pay attention!

That which saves a person and lifts up a society is a relationship with God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!

CONTEXT 2 Corinthians 5:18 And all things [are] of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

Word Study The Christian is **reconciled** to God. What does that mean? That word **reconciled** is the Greek KATALLASSO, which means "to receive into favor, to cause to be at one, TO BE BROUGHT INTO A GOOD RELATIONSHIP".

We can't be in a good relationship with God on our own. The Bible says that we are all sinners.

Romans 3:23 All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God

That's the bad news. But the good news is:

1 Timothy 1:15 Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; ...

How does Jesus save sinners? Well, as sinners we have all offended the most holy God who made us. The Bible says that **sin offends God greatly**. God can't have a relationship with a sinner if his sin has not been punished. So what did God do?

God the Father has an eternal and undying relationship with His sinless Son Jesus. He had His Son take the punishment for our sins.

CONTEXT 2 Corinthians 5:21 For {God} hath made {Jesus} [to be] sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

How did God make Jesus to be sin for us? Every bit of our debt was poured out on Him. Our **Jesus died in the worst way possible**.

a His friend Judas Iscariot betrayed Him with a **kiss for thirty pieces of silver**, just as was foretold in the Old Testament:

Psalms 41:9 Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me. (see also John 13:18)

b He was - against the Mosaic Law - **tried in the dead of night by a jury of liars and thieves**. Turned over to Pilate, even that Gentile Judge saw not evil in Him. As the crowd cried out CRUCIFY HIM Pilate plead,

Matthew 27:23 **Why, what evil hath he done? ..**

Jesus did no evil. His death on that Cross was not for His sins, but for our sins. Jesus Christ died hanging between two thieves, **numbered with the transgressors**. But the most shocking thing was this.

C God could have no relationship with man because of our sin. Jesus Christ even took this upon Himself, for God the Father turned His back on God the Son. He cried out in agony:

Matthew 27:46 ... about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Our Lord Jesus hung on that Cross dying for all - for *whosoever will*. We read:

CONTEXT 2 Corinthians 5:15 {Jesus} died for all, ...

He died for every person who has ever lived so that He could reconcile us - give us a RELATIONSHIP - with God. Salvation is all of Grace!

Titus 3:5-7 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; 6 Which {God} shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; 7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

**2. As A New Creature In Christ
Judgment Drives Me To Faithfulness**

What drives the Christian? **The Judgment of God.**

CONTEXT 2 Corinthians 5:11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; ...

What drives the Christian forward? Having been saved from the wrath of God by faith in Christ, we want others to be saved as well. We know that religion doesn't work, but that a relationship with God does work.

Listen Beloved, there is a Judgment Day coming for everyone, Christian or non-Christian, saved or unsaved. There is the Judgment that is called **the Great White Throne Judgment**, also known as **The Terror of the Lord**. Jesus Christ preached about this Judgment. He said that it is such a horrible place that:

Mark 9:43-44 if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: 44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Hell is the place where those go who have no relationship with God by faith in Christ. Those who inhabit that terrible place should not even be there. Jesus said that it is a place of

Matthew 25:41 ... everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

John the Revelator saw this place, and wrote of it while in exile on the Isle of Patmos. He wrote:

Revelation 20:11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

These are all the people who heard the Word of the Gospel. They heard that

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

but they ignored what they heard. They heard

John 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

but yawned through one more nuisance message. "We're sure God isn't this intolerant. We're good people. We're going to go to Heaven because we're not as bad as Hitler or Mussolini or some of these others." You know what God has said?

John 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

The Great White Throne is the **Day of Abiding Wrath.**

The sight was so terrible that we are told **from His face they all ran - but there was no where to hide.** The Bible says:

Hebrews 10:31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

These people had their chance, and now they run, but there's no where to hide. We read:

Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is [the book] of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

They thought "**our works will be good enough**". No, they are not. Their works don't save them. Their religion don't save them. Look further in that text:

Revelation 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

That's what saves them - **their names written in the Book of Life.** You see, Heaven is a place of life. It is where those who belong to God go forever. We labor, telling others of Christ - for we want none to go to that place.

As Christians we are also driven by the knowledge that *we ourselves shall be judged.*

I Am Headed Toward A Better Place

CONTEXT 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things [done] in [his] body, according to that he hath done, whether [it be] good or bad.

There is a Judgment Day for the believer. This Judgment is not about our salvation, but about our works. You see, as Christians we are not saved by works. But once saved, we are commanded to work! As Jesus said:

Luke 2:49 ... I must be about my Father's business?

If you are a Christian, how you handled your stewardship will one day be judged. God has entrusted us with a **ministry of reconciliation:**

CONTEXT 2 Corinthians 5:18 ... all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

Those who are reconciled to God by the Blood of Christ are, in turn, reconcilers. Saved by the glorious Gospel, we tell others of Jesus. This is our central work. This is the main thing we do. We model Christ in this assembly so as to lead others to Jesus. We model Christ at home and at work so as to lead others to Jesus. As we have loved, so we love - and try to win every person to Christ.

3. As A New Creature In Christ,

CONTEXT 2 Corinthians 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

There's an old song we sing that sticks in my mind right now - and I love it! It says:

**This world is not my home
I'm just a- passing through
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue
The angels beckon me from
Heaven's open door, and
I can't feel at home in this world anymore**

**They're all expecting me
And that's one thing I know
My Savior pardoned me
And now I onward go
I know He'll take me through
Though I am weak and poor
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore**

**Just up in Glory Land
We'll live eternally
The Saints on every hand
Are shouting victory
Their song of sweetest praise
Drifts back from Heaven's shore
And I can't feel at home
In this world anymore**

That's a good song, because that's what it's all about.
Dear friends, are you in a relationship with Jesus Christ?
Do you love Him with all your heart, mind, soul, and
body? Do you trust Him and His finished work to be
your salvation? In this relationship you have with Him,
do you know and can you rightly sing:

**O Lord you know I have no friend like you
if Heaven's not my home then Lord what will I do?
the angels beckon me from Heaven's open door
and I can't feel at home in this world anymore**

If not, today is the day to give yourself over to Him.
Jesus said:

**John 10:10 ... I am come that {you} might have life,
and that {you} might have it more abundantly.**

Jesus Christ wants a living relationship with you. He
calls - can you hear Him?

**Matthew 11:28-30 Come unto me, all ye that labor
and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take
my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek
and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your
souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**

May God touch your hearts with His Word!



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Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: **old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.**

2 Samuel 9:8

1. God Wants A Relationship With You

2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 3:4-6; Acts 8:3; Acts 9:5; 2 Corinthians 5:18; Romans 3:23; 1 Timothy 1:15; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Titus 3:5-7

Word Study The Christian is **reconciled** to God. What does that mean? That word **reconciled** is the Greek KATALLASSO _____

a His friend Judas Iscariot _____
_____ Psalms 41:9 ; John 13:18

b He was - against the Mosaic Law - tried _____
_____ Matthew 27:23

c God could have no relationship with man because of our sin. _____
Matthew 27:46

2. As A New Creature In Christ

Judgment Drives Me To Faithfulness

What drives the Christian? **The Judgment of God.**

2 Corinthians 5:11; Mark 9:43-44; Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:11; John 3:16; John 3:17; John 3:36; Hebrews 10:31; Revelation 20:12; Revelation 20:15; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10; Luke 2:49; 2 Corinthians 5:18

3. As A New Creature In Christ, I Am Headed Toward A Better Place

2 Corinthians 5:1; John 10:10; Matthew 11:28-30

