

## Seeing Things Differently

2Corinthians 5:11-21

*Vision is one of the most amazing things God has given to humanity.*

My understanding of how it works is basic to say the least, but even the little I know amazes me.

Light enters into our eyes, that light is converted into electrical signals, those electrical signals travel through the optic nerve to the brain, and the brain converts that into a useable picture.

That is astounding.

Of course because we live in a fallen world not everyone has the same level of vision and most of us find that our vision gets worse over time.

Thankfully we live in a time and place where many of us can go to an eye doctor and receive treatment for vision issues.

*In order to assess a patient's eyes an eye doctor uses something called a 'Snellen Chart'.*

That is the chart with lines of letters on it and as you go down the chart the letters get smaller.

The doctor then asks you to read the smallest line you can and based on your ability to do so gives you a score on your vision.

The score is a ratio with the first number being 20, because the test is based on a standard distance of 20 feet, and the second number being how your vision compares to the average.

For the longest time I thought having 20/20 vision meant you had perfect eyesight, but it turns out that is not true.

Having 20/20 vision just means you have normal vision compared to the average population.

If the second number is higher you are worse than average and if it is lower you are better than average.

*I'm a bit worse than average and have been for a long time.*

For me that means that objects in the distance appear blurry.

I find that is particularly true at night or when it is raining.

That is where the eye doctor comes in. I went to him, he assessed my eyes, and gave me a prescription for eyeglasses.

I vividly remember the first time I put on a pair of glasses and how instantly everything became much clearer.

Anyone else ever have that experience?

It totally changes the way we can see the world.

[Even if you don't need prescription glasses you have probably worn sunglasses, looked through a pair of coloured glasses, a microscope, a telescope, or something that changes how

you see the world. That is a good picture of what God's word has for us this morning in **2Corinthians 5:11-21**. In these verses the apostle shows us how knowing God through the LORD Jesus has a dramatic effect on how we see the world. We are told here about four ways our vision is affected by our faith. First we are taught that...]

**Point #1 – Christians look deeper than outward appearance. (Verses 11-13)**

It is impossible to believe the bible and limit our vision to external things, especially when it comes to how we see other people.

Once again we see the apostle use the word 'therefore' at the beginning of verse 11.

In verse ten he reminds believers that everyone will appear before the 'judgement seat of Christ' and because of that he says this in **verses 11**.

There is no shortage of commentators who wish to lighten the phrase "the fear of the LORD."

Many of them have good intentions pointing to the work of Jesus on our behalf and how we as believers are no longer under God's wrath but under His grace.

I don't believe Paul's reference to fear here is a reason to diminish our assurance of salvation, but rather a reminder of why we need to cling to the cross of Christ.

Fearing God means we know God is holy and just and that His judgement against sin is both right and terrifying.

It means we fight against taking His glorious grace for granted and seek, according to that grace, to obey Him.

Because the judgement of God is a fearful thing, he says, "we persuade others."

The apostle doesn't want people to stand before God on their own, he wants them to have Jesus on their side.

He rests in the thought that God knows this and he is hoping that the Corinthian believers know this as well.

To that desire he adds this in **verses 12-13**.

Much like our own time and culture many in the society of the ancient Corinthians concerned themselves with appearances.

If things looked good on the outside then you should listen to them, if not then they should be ignored.

When he describes himself and his fellow gospel workers as being beside themselves in verse 13 he likely means having the appearance of being fools or having lost their minds.

I mean who endures being stoned for the gospel and goes right back to preaching.

Who gives up power, position, and likely family to be hungry and cold all the time?

He says, "If we are in our right mind, it is for you."

If you actually take the time to listen to Paul teach you would not find a raving lunatic, you would find a brilliant man whose faith rests on a firm and reasonable foundation.

Paul's point in saying this is that he is concerned with much more important things than mere appearance.

If he looks like a fool or like a scholar to people it is unimportant, what matters is he is living for the glory of God and the good of others.

He expects the believers to know that because he expects them to look deeper than outward appearance.

[I'm not sure it is as popular as it used to be, but not too long ago it was sort of trendy flip houses. Some people made out pretty good doing that, but it is sort of a two edged sword. If you find a neglected house but have the ability to see past the exterior for what it could be then it might be a good deal. On the other hand if someone only took care of superficial things and neglected to fix serious unseen problems then the next homebuyer could be in for a real disappointment.]

That same lesson can apply to the church.

We need to always be concerned about more than outward appearances.

I've been both fooled badly over the years and happily surprised.

I've been fooled badly by people who concerned themselves with outward appearance and not about 'what was in their heart'.

I've also made the mistake of jumping to negative conclusions about a person based on what I could see from the outside and it turned out they genuinely loved the LORD.

[As believers our primary concern should never be, "What do people think of me?" That will lead us to focus on external things. As believers we should concern ourselves with, "What does God think of me?" that will lead us to focus on our heart attitude. I wonder, "What the church in North America would look like if we spent less time looking into mirrors and more time looking at the condition of our souls?" If like the apostle and his co-workers we are looking deeper than outward appearance, we are going to see something else that is very important. That is the second way this text shows us how our vision is affected by our faith. It shows us that...]

## **Point #2 – Christians see that the gospel is for everyone. (Verses 14-15)**

In our LORD and Saviour Jesus Christ the way to God has been opened for everyone who believes.

Whether they look like fools or are perceived as being in their right mind it is all for the glory of God and the good of people.

Why is that his way of thinking? (**Verse 14a**)

Being the object of Jesus' love, which is the case for everyone who belongs to Him, works itself into being an instrument of that same love.

He tells us why that is in the second half of verse 14. (**Verse 14b**)

I find it difficult to limit the word 'all' to only believers.

The apostle here puts no qualifier that I can see on the word so it seems to me that the best way to see the word 'all' here is to see it as referring to all humanity.

What does it mean that Jesus "has died for all" and "therefore all have died"?

Some see this as meaning everyone is going to heaven no matter what. That is what is called universalism.

Any honest reading of 2Corinthians and the Bible as a whole makes that interpretation impossible.

Even the very next verse here shows that cannot be true.

So what does it mean then? The key, I believe, is the word 'for' used here in verse 14 and also in verse 15.

That translates a Greek word that means "on behalf of".

Jesus dying "on behalf of" means He died "in the place of", that is our LORD acted as a substitution for humanity.

He died my death, and your death, and the death that all people deserve.

Because he acted as a substitution for 'all' it is as though 'all have died'.

I admit there is an element of mystery here, but don't let the mystery cause you to miss the main point which is "Jesus died in the place of humanity."

Because that is true we can rightly say to everyone living and breathing on planet earth, "Jesus died for you! He died in your place!"

It is the free offer of the gospel to "all"!

The apostle applies Jesus dying for all in **verse 15** putting an end to any thought of universalism.

He died for all so that people might live, but notice the word 'all' is not used for 'those who live'.

What does that life entail? It entails living for Jesus instead of yourself.

Clearly, not everyone in the world is doing that, but the offer is there.

The barrier to anyone being saved from God's wrath has nothing to do with the sufficiency of what Jesus did bearing God's wrath on our behalf.

The barrier to a person's salvation is the hardness of their heart, the refusal to see and believe that Jesus died in his/her place.

Jesus death and resurrection is not keeping anyone out of heaven.

If you are on your way to hell this morning, the only one keeping you out of heaven is you.

The gospel is for you, but you need to want it.

[Think of it like a potluck. If we had enough food to invite as many people as we wanted could we invite everyone to come? Of course! Does that mean everyone will come? No, they have to want to come.]

The apostle here concerns himself with the invite rather than the response and I believe he is encouraging all believers to do the same.

Listen, you have never met a person in your whole life who cannot be given the invitation to eternal life.

You have never met a person in your entire life for whom Jesus did not die.

[Think about for a minute how that should change the way we see people? Whether a person be our enemy or someone we love dearly, they are someone for whom Jesus died and He died for them so that they might live. Putting on the glasses of the gospel changes how we see things. It causes us to look deeper than outward appearance, it shows us that the gospel message is an offer for all people, and thirdly it makes...]

### **Point #3 – Christians see that being in Christ changes everything. (Verses 16-19)**

When a person trusts Jesus as their saviour they remain the same in their outward appearance, but they have been irreversibly changed in their soul and their standing with God.

*Knowing that Christ has died for all so that in Him believers might live, the apostle continues in verse 16 saying...*

When he says that they 'regard no one according to the flesh' he is likely meaning that when they think of people they are thinking about spiritual things rather than physical things.

He says, that is how they once thought about Christ.

That would have been particularly true for the apostle Paul.

Given that Paul was a Pharisee it is also highly probable that he was in Jerusalem for the Passover when Jesus died.

What did he see? Weakness and defeat. A man under a curse.

Now that he knows Jesus and the power of His resurrection, what does he see? He sees his Lord and

Saviour, the King of the Universe, One who is worth giving his life for.

Because he now sees Jesus so differently he also says this (Verse 17).

‘If’ is a critical word in that sentence.

The ‘new creation’ is only possible if someone belongs to Jesus by faith.

There are many things in the world that can cause behavior modification.

The threat of penalty might keep a person from breaking the law.

The promise of money may get a person to do a job they would not otherwise do.

Putting a person on a guilt trip may change the way they behave towards another person.

Many things can affect what a person does, but they don’t change who a person is.

Being a Christian does something much more than improve our behaviour, it changes who we are.

Look! That is an irreversible change.

‘The old has passed away’ which means it is never coming back.

Someone will say, “Wait a minute!” Christians still act like their old selves at times.

That is true, but remember we are NOT talking about behavior modification here, we are talking about heart change.

A Christian is a new person the moment they know Jesus as Saviour, we might not see the effect of that right away and we won’t see the full effect until the resurrection of the dead, but nevertheless the irreversible change has happened.

[Jesus on a few occasions uses plant seeds to illustrate spiritual lessons. I brought an apple seed with me this morning. If I put this seed in a glass jar and put in on a shelf what will happen? Nothing. On the other hand if I put it in the ground and it gets all it needs it may start to grow into an apple tree. Now here is the critical question. When the seed begins to grow into a tree can it ever go back to being a seed? No, that is an irreversible change.]

So it is with being in Christ.

Why must that be so? We are told in **verses 18-19**.

Because salvation is the work of God and God’s work never fails.

The primary work of salvation is to reconcile us to God.

To be reconciled has the sense in the original language of being put into friendship with God.

The idea of being reconciled implies that we were God's enemies and now in Christ we are no longer enemies but friends.

That is a 180 degree change brothers and sisters.

Having reconciled us, it says, God has given us the ministry of reconciliation (which is the preaching of the gospel).

It is through this ministry that 'God is reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.

I am often amazed how much I take for granted God's patience and grace.

First, His patience in-+ waiting for people to come to cross and trust Christ.

If God were to give instant justice no one could be saved.

I am also amazed at His grace. When someone is "in Christ" not one of their acts of disobedience whether great or small is counted against them.

You go from guilty to innocent because everything has changed.

[As has already been hinted at in these verses, this irreversible change, this making of a new creation in Christ affects the way we see ourselves as believers. That is the fourth lesson from our text in terms of seeing things differently on account of being in Christ. Because God has made us into new creatures and entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation, it follows that...]

#### **Point #4 – Christians see themselves as God's representatives. (Verses 20-21)**

Believers are citizens of heaven and have a desire to accurately and faithfully make known the will of their King in this foreign land called the world.

Once again in verse 20 we see the important word 'Therefore' in the text.

Because everything has changed on account of being in Christ.

Because we have been reconciled and because believers have been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation **Verse 20.**

An ambassador is a citizen from a foreign country who lives in another country to act on behalf of his or her own country.

The ambassador, if he/she is doing their jobs properly, concerns himself with interests of his home country.

It is not the job of the ambassador set the agenda or interests of his home country, it is his job to make those interests known.

It is also the role of the ambassador to represent his country in a way that is pleasing to the leader of his country.

All of those things apply to the Christian as ambassadors for Christ.

As Christians the bible calls us citizens of heaven, the place where Jesus in His humanity is seated at the right hand of the visible presence of God the Father, and we are supposed to think of that as our home country.

As ambassadors we are supposed to act according to the agenda of heaven, serve the interests of heaven, make known the will and the ways of heaven in this foreign country called planet earth.

We are supposed to concern ourselves with acting in a way that is pleasing to Jesus.

As ambassadors, it says, “God is making His appeal [to the world] through us”.

Like a good ambassador the apostle makes the appeal even to his readers here at the end of the verse.

He pleads with people “to be reconciled to God”.

Why would he make that plea to people in the church?

He makes that appeal because he knows belonging to or attending a church is no guarantee that a person is right with God.

He knows people sitting in the pew can sit there trusting in the wrong things.

He knows there can be people sitting in the pew who need to put on the glasses of the gospel.

Perhaps that is you this morning. Perhaps your faith is only superficial, perhaps you have never understood your need of a saviour, or perhaps you have never been changed by the gospel.

God’s plea to you this morning is “be reconciled.”

Why is that His plea? Why does He make that plea through His ambassadors? **(Verse 21)**

He makes that plea because of what He did in Christ.

Jesus, it says, ‘knew no sin’. That means something different from knowing something in your brain.

Of course Jesus has the facts of sin in His mind.

He understands the difference between right and wrong and He was around sin all the time when He lived upon the earth.

The knowledge that is being referred to here suggests a joining of one’s self to sin or experiencing the doing of sin.

Jesus doesn’t know sin in that sense. He lived perfectly in all that He thought, in all that He said, in all that He did, and all that He felt.

He was completely right with God which is what the word ‘righteous’ means.



*He knew no sin, but God made Him to be sin.*

That is He put our sin on Jesus. That is what happens on the cross, this is how people are 'reconciled to God'.

God put on the Son He has loved for all eternity all the things that separate us from Him.

With a cost so great, how could He not implore people to be reconciled?

There is more than Jesus becoming sin, that happens 'so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'

Jesus takes what we are and gives to us what He is.

That is how we are reconciled. Through faith alone in the death and resurrection of Jesus our sin is removed and we are given the God pleasing perfection of Christ.

That is the message God wants the world to hear.

He is making this glorious appeal through the church, through His people, through us if we belong to Jesus by faith.

*That is how He wants us to see ourselves, He wants us to see ourselves as His ambassadors of this glorious message.*

I wonder how that might change our everyday lives if we reminded ourselves of that regularly.

What if before every interaction we had with other people, we stopped ourselves and said, "I am an ambassador for Christ and I need to act on His behalf and not for myself."

I want to challenge you in this coming week to start everyday reminding yourself of that and pray that the Holy Spirit would be at work causing you to live that out.

It might just change the way you see everything.

*That is what the gospel does.*

It is like a new pair of glasses that helps you to see everything the way we are supposed to.

That is what glasses do, they take eyes that don't see very well and help them to see better.

For the Christian the gospel helps us look deeper than outward appearance, it causes us to see that the gospel is for everyone, it shows us that Jesus changes everything, and shows us that as new creations in Christ we are His representatives in this foreign land that is not our home.

Do you have a pair of gospel glasses this morning? I hope you do because the truth is we all need them so that we can see things differently.