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2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-20

2 Corinthians Series

[PRAYER] Lord, just in my own heart as I switch gears here, I pray that you would give me the ability to do that. To think clearly about the things that you shared with me this week. Lord, we do thank you for your word and the power that it has to bring about change in our lives. So today we're asking you to speak to us. Make us different people as we leave here. We know that if we come into contact with your word it has the power to change us if our hearts are open and receptive. So right now we're opening our hearts. We're asking you to speak to us and lead us and guide us on this day. In Jesus' name, amen.

We're studying right now verse by verse through the book of 2 Corinthians. We've arrived now at chapter 5. In chapter 5 we're studying really how we deal with the power of God in a practical way. The whole series of 2 Corinthians I've titled "All Things New" and it comes from the verse we're going to look at today. So you'll see that idea in that verse. But the whole subject that Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians is power and how it's available to us and how we need it personally in our lives.

Two weeks ago we looked at the whole idea of stress and what that stress looks like in our lives personally. We talked about the passage in chapter 4 where it says we're hard pressed and we're perplexed and we're persecuted and we're struck down. But there is this reservoir inside of Christ's power that prevents us from being crushed or despairing or abandoned or destroyed. The solution is that living in Christ.

The next week when we looked at the scriptures we saw another passage that talked about how we are to walk by faith and not by sight. What does that mean? How do we walk by faith in our lives and not by sight? So we talked about that. This was the outline of our message from last Sunday. You can find these sermons online. You can either read them (they're in PDF form) or you can listen to them. But they're all focused on this idea of dealing with the personal stress that we have in our lives.

Today as we look at God's word we're going to go into 2 Corinthians 5:11-20. So you can open your Bibles there. 2 Corinthians 5:11-20 is our passage for today. As we get started, I'm going to ask you in just a moment to stand with me and we're going to read these verses. These verses are going to introduce us into this passage that we're looking at today and verse 17 is the key verse. So we're going to go through 11-20 today. Right now we're going to read 16-20, and 17 is the key verse that everything is going to rest upon, it seems to me, as I'm kind of looking at the passage and the Lord was teaching it to me this week.

So would you stand with me as I read this passage for us? Be sure to look at your Bibles and see where it is in your scriptures as well.

Verse 16 says – *So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. What an interesting statement. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come (or some of your versions say he is a new creation): The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

You may be seated. I'm going to talk to you today about change and how change takes place in our lives and what it looks like. In order to do that, I just want to show you what the four components of change are so you understand them. We'll see them in the passage today, but just step outside the passage for a minute and let me introduce this idea of change to you by looking at these four ingredients. All four of these ingredients are necessary for change to take place.

One is that you have a vision for something different, something better. I can do this. Or I'm going to be different. Something happens. You see the before and after picture of someone and you go, "I think I can do that." You get a vision for something that's a very important part of change is that I can be different than I am right now.

The second component of change is that you add something new. We try to change a lot of things in our lives. We want to maybe lose weight or get more exercise and be more healthy. We want to manage our money better so we're not in debt or we're saving or giving money away. We are trying to manage our emotions. We're trying to not yell at our kids. Whatever it is we're trying to do, we're going to add something new. Maybe we're going to add that diet or we're going to add something, but those are externals. What we're talking about in the passage, and I think where real change takes place, is when we add something on the inside that has to do with three things that are inside the heart – either a value, or a desire, or a belief. I want to look better so I might lose weight. I have a value to be healthy, so I'm going to stop smoking. I'm going to change, so I add something new.

The other thing is we get rid of something old. Now all of these components are important. If you just focus on adding something new, you'll often be discouraged because you really have to offload something. Usually the change that's required and if we're going to move to this new place in our lives, become the new me or whatever it might be, then we have to get rid of something that's old.

When we do that, we've got those three things going, then we have to make it part of our lifestyle. Otherwise we're carrying around this burden and always pressured. I've got to put this on and take this off. When we have to make it part of our lifestyle, it has to become part of who we are.

It's those four ideas that I think are strategic. But I want you to see that anybody could do that whether they're a Christian or not. If you're not a believer, you can do those things. People who are not Christians change today, don't they? They change.

Well the neat thing about this passage that we're looking at, and I want to show to you this one verse in verse 17 a little bit differently. This is the same verse, but in a picture kind of form. I want you to see what it says. It says – *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.* There is something about being in Christ that brings about this change in a more powerful way. You want power to change, then being in Christ is going to make that happen.

The key word in this verse is the word *if*. *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.* You see, if you're not a Christian today then you're on your own trying to solve those problems. Do the best you can, get people around you, join a group, read a book, whatever, and try to make some changes. But if you're a Christian you have something going on inside of you that empowers you in a different way than if you're not a Christian. That's what it means to be a Christian. You're in Christ.

If anyone is in Christ, then he is a new creation. The word *creation* here is the same word used to describe the creation of the world, which took place in six days. A kind of progressive change in what happened. So you have this world that God did in six days. In the same way, God is doing that kind of thing inside of us, this progressive change that takes place. We are a new creation. The word *creation*, creativity, emphasizes this sense of energy and newness that's taking place inside of us.

We all like to see something new and advanced coming out. The new *Star Wars* movie. Boy, I want to go see the new *Star Wars* movie because it's new and advanced. Or a book is coming out and I want to read that book. Or something is new. If you go to an art exhibit and you see the new things that are out there in the art exhibit, you're intrigued by the creativity.

I always like to hear the reports about the electronic shows. All the different things that are coming out that are electronic kind of things because these people are creating amazing things. I know you got the Alexa that sits on your table. You can talk to it and it does all kinds of things. My mom has one of those. I helped her program it. But now they've got this one that follows you around the house. It's a robot thing and it does the same thing. I'm not interested in it, I'm just intrigued by the creativity that people have.

Recently in one of the electronic shows they have this dot that you can wear and you can wear it on your fingernail and it tells you what the UV rays are. So when you're outside you know when you need to get inside or cover up or whatever. Just all these electronic things that people come up with because of the creativity of humans.

What we're seeing here in this passage is that we're referencing the original creation of God. God had this original creation that He did for us. He made the world and He made people. And with six billion plus people, there's a lot of creativity. There's only so many ways that you can put a nose and eyes and eyebrows and a chin and hairline and all that together, but God made six billion plus people that don't look the same and there's uniqueness about each one of them. The

creativity is amazing. For some of you a little more creativity was used than others. But there's the idea that God is very creative.

But now we're talking about a new creation. So He's taking this creativity of the beauty of creation and He's doing something inside of us that's bringing about change.

I'll show you toward the end of this presentation or sermon where I get the word 'change' in the passage. But I just want you to see that God is doing something new. A new creation. He's taking that energy of creation and He's empowering us to bring about significant change in our lives. *Old things have passed away; behold, all things become new.*

Now what that tells me is that the change... You saw the last one didn't have the words *in Christ* in it. This one has the words *in Christ* in it because that's where change is maximized in our lives. If you really want to change, if you really want to make some adjustments in your life, it's going to happen in Christ. That's where the power is going to come. And yes, you can be different tomorrow than you are today because there's this process that's taking place.

In Christ is added to this scripture to demonstrate what this passage is actually saying. We're going to do all this. Vision, add something new, get rid of something old, integrate it, make it a lifestyle, but we're doing it not on our own by reading a book or going to a seminar. We're doing it by being in Christ. So just think about change. Maybe some of you think about the change that God has already done in your life and you know that it comes from Christ and what He's done for you.

Let's look back at the passage now starting in verse 16. I want to talk about that first part, the visioning part. Look at the passage and see what it says. *So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.* We don't think of people the same way anymore. Now we view them with potential to have this new creation inside of them. So we look at each other if we're Christians and we say, "That person is in process. They're growing in Christ, and I need to give them grace because something is happening."

But let's talk about the cantankerous person who is annoying or angry or selfish that maybe you see working or at the store or somewhere. You look at people differently. We don't look at people the same way anymore. Now we see "yeah, that's the old person, but this person could really be a new person in Christ. If they would have Christ in them, they would change and major things would happen in their life." We don't look at people the same way is what that verse says. *Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.*

It used to be people when they're not Christians – "Oh He was just a great teacher. He was a very important person in history. He was just a baby born in a manger. Or He was someone who just died on a cross. "We don't look at Christ the same way now because we perceive life differently. So now we don't even think of Christ that way. We see the power that He energizes us with. Very interesting part of the passage.

Then verse 17 is part of our key verse, which is –*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God.* Keep that in mind. All this change, this new creation stuff is from God and it’s important to understand.

I’m going to come back to the rest of the passage in a moment. I know I’m kind of taking this apart, but in my mind as I’m going through the passage myself, I’m going, “Whoa, I want to go back to this part, or there’s that other part there.” So I’m going to take you back to verse 11 in just a moment.

When we’re talking about vision, we’re talking about seeing it differently and what it looks like.

Let’s look back at the passage in 11-20 and see how this vision reveals itself in these verses. Verse 11 says – *Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord.* Well he glosses over this so quickly. The words *fear the Lord* are powerful words. Because the words *fear the Lord* are these words that have to do with this appreciation of God, that He’s so awesome and powerful. The words *fear the Lord* are used a lot in the book of Proverbs and it’s a whole deep study in and of itself. I hope we’ll get there someday, but don’t just quickly go over there because if you have this fear of the Lord, as we do as Christians, we have this fear of the Lord, it moves us into a different way of thinking. *Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others.* It’s not just about us. It’s about what we’re going to do with this.

What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. Now Paul in the passage, as we’ve referenced already, is being challenged by some people in Corinth. Paul’s been somewhat defending himself in the book because he’s getting some unfair criticism that he’s insincere, that he’s out to get his own, build himself up, and so on. So Paul is addressing that and saying – I know it’s plain to God, I hope it’s plain to your conscience and you get this.

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... I’m going to stop. He’s saying I want you to have what you need here so that you can answer people who take pride in what? Well we have to go back to last week’s teaching. *Walk by faith and not by sight.* That’s what we do as believers. We walk by faith and not by sight. But there are some people who have a problem in this area and they walk by sight. So he’s saying I want you to have what you need. We’re 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.*

You see, when you look at people differently, you look at what’s in the heart, not just what is seen on the outside. All of this comes together now in this passage as we try to understand how we can walk by faith and not by sight. How we can manage the stress in our lives that we all experience.

Verse 13. This will resonate with some of you. *If we are “out of our mind,” as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.* There are some of you I know who are criticized by others who say you are crazy. “Why are you doing this?” So people view us sometimes as a crazy people. “They are out of their mind.” There is such a different way of living that we have that people go “I can’t believe you do that.” That is so hard.

I was talking to a man this week about loving his wife and he said, “You’d have to be a saint to do that” in the way I was talking about loving. I just looked at him. He’s a Christian! He’s a saint. I feel like saying, “You are a saint! Come on. Get with the program here.” The Lord really used that in his life to kind of jolt him a little bit to being more loving to his wife.

Yes, we’re out of our mind in some respects, although I don’t want to make that an excuse for people to be weird. There are some weird Christians. I don’t want to be associated with them because they’re just acting weird. Alright? That’s not godliness, that’s weirdness. But there is this sense in which people don’t understand what we’re talking about and so they think we’re out of our mind.

Get this. Verse 14 – *For Christ’s love compels us*. What drives us? It’s this big love that God has that’s so big that it makes me want to change the things inside because I know God loves me and He wants to do these things inside of me. And what does it compel me to do? It compels me to persuade others and to talk to others about the gospel and this message of reconciliation we’re going to see in just a moment.

For Christ’s love compels us because we are convinced... And now we come to the heart of the gospel, and this is at the center of all we do. We really need to understand the crucifixion, the death of Christ, and the power that it has for us. *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.*

See, there’s this vision now that we have, that it’s not just about me, it’s about the Lord. It’s about Christ and what Christ wants to do in me and what Christ wants to do in other people. So I don’t just live for myself anymore. See, I have this vision now for something better. When I have this vision for something better then I can move forward and God can do some important things in my life. So we have the vision component mentioned in the passage in these ways about thinking differently about people, about ourselves, motivated by God’s love. All of that comes together here. Add something new and get rid of something old.

When we’re making changes in our lives, we do that. We say I’m going to put this off, I’m going to put this on, and we’re going to do some different things.

Paul describes this process in another passage in Ephesians 4:22-24. Same writer, Paul, ignited by the Holy Spirit to write these words describes this putting something off and putting something on this way. He says – *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

There’s this newness. The word *new* that’s used in our passage in 2 Corinthians 5 (*all things are passed away; behold, all things become new*) is the word ‘fresh’. They become fresh. There’s something fresh and new about this, about our lives.

So as you're trying to make changes in your life, think about what God wants to do, making you a new creation inside. What does He want to do? How is He going to make changes? See, I'm convinced that we make changes at any life stage that we're in. So if we're trying to help a five year old learn how to stop whining when he doesn't get what he wants, newness is going to come into that dynamic. If a young person is learning how to stop procrastinating about assignments and get on them and get them done, there's newness that takes place. It's fresh. God can empower us in those particular ways.

And then of course we deal with all kinds of challenges in our lives to try to be the people that God wants us to be. We're putting off the old self (notice something we take off) and we put something new on. *We put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.* We're going to add something new, get rid of something old. That's what the passage is talking about in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

And then we want to integrate it and we want to make it a lifestyle. We want to make it a part of who we are. We're not just doing change of habit in twenty-one days, or forty days, or whatever number you want to choose there. It's about making it part of who we are now because now we're in Christ and there's something that takes place inside of us that changes who we are.

I just want you to know you can be different today. And really I think you should be. We all should be different today than we were yesterday because God is changing us. He's moving us in a different direction and He's integrating that into our lives and making that a lifestyle for us.

So that takes us back into our passage in 2 Corinthians 5. I know I'm jumping around in the passage. We looked at 11-15. Now this is 16 and I stopped when we got to this part in 18 where it says *all this is from God*. But now we see the word *reconciled* several times. Let me read it and then I want to talk about what it says.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. What an awesome opportunity. We have this message that we have. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

The word *reconciled* is up there several times. Do you see it? You heard it at least several times. The word *reconciled* is a really interesting word. So interesting that I want to show you what it looks like in the Greek. So this is the Greek dictionary. I just took a snapshot of the book and this is what the word is, *reconciled*, in the Greek language. Because it means change. I just want you to see it. I'm not making this stuff up. That's what this word means. To reconcile is to get it down to the exact point, to decisively change, as in when two parties reconcile they change so that they can become one, the same position. It's applied to marriage partners in 1 Corinthians 7:11, but usually in the redemptive sense of a sinner reconciling to the Lord, changing because Christ does this work so that there's reconciliation. There's change that takes place. It was originally used for the exchange of coins, property to exchange or to change, especially of

money. Hence a person as they become not enmity or enemies, but now they're friends. Change takes place.

So when we look at that place, what we're seeing is that the changes take place overtime in our lives. Now when you look at the verses, I was starting to think here going back to those verses in 2 Corinthians 5 when he talks about new creation. Is it a one-time thing? Is that when you get saved? Because I was thinking that's what it's saying. *All this is from God*. Or verse 17 – *Therefore anyone who is in Christ, the new creation is come*. It's done. There's nothing there about continuing on and so on. So I'm thinking is he talking about salvation initially, or is he talking about the process? I came to the conclusion he's talking about the process because in the previous chapter, just a few verses earlier, there are the words that are used to describe this day by day. *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed* (there's our word again, fresh) *day by day*.

Every day we're making these changes in our lives. God is doing something powerful in us and so He's given us something that we can share with others. We live in a world that is debilitated because many people feel helpless because they can't change, they're stuck. And they really are stuck. They're in patterns they can't get out of. You see people like that. Why don't they just change? They're stuck. Many people are just stuck where they are today and they're frustrated and bad things are happening. Yet they're following the same patterns. They can't get out of where they are. Whatever the problem might be, they are stuck.

Yet when Christ comes into a person's life and He does this work, we become this new creation. People who lived with the Lord for a few years and God is kind of working out salvation into the areas of their lives, their finances, their emotions their decision-making, as God does that in a person's life, these people become exceptional. They stand above. They have some inner kind of strength and peace that they experience. It's just amazing. It becomes part of their lifestyle.

We have a small group Take Jesus Home study that meets on Wednesday night. Josh was there this last week and he was telling about Shanice, this woman at work. He's a police officer, so at work there's a lot of kind of stress at that job, as you might imagine. I can't imagine. There's a lot of stress there. There's this one gal, he asked her how she's doing. She always says, "I'm blessed." No matter what you say, no matter how it's going on. How are you doing? "I'm blessed." So if any time he's feeling down, he just goes and talks to Shanice because Shanice is this person who has something inside. Is Shanice a Christian? He said, "I think so. I don't know." But then today he says, "I went and talked to her and yes, she's a Christian." Obviously she's got something inside! Something to offer and share with other people. It's amazing.

When Christ does this deep work in our lives, it changes who we are. It gives us something we have to offer to the world. We live in a world where people need help today. But often it means we need to make some significant changes in our lives in order for God to do that new creation work.

Joanne Miller was telling this story yesterday of her coworker whose daughter went to Gambia (that's in western Africa) to live and work among people there. Now it's been a few years, so her coworker decided to go visit her daughter in Gambia. She went to visit her and she was so

impressed on her two week visit with her daughter because her daughter could speak the language fluently, but she's working among people who have very little and they're so joyful. They experience so much joy in the midst of the challenges they face every day, but they don't have a lot of stuff.

Joanne says that her coworker came back and said, "I felt like selling everything I have." Because our lives get so complicated, don't they? So complicated with so much stuff we can hardly think straight because we're moving around and doing all these different things. So she was really impressed in her life. These people have so little yet have so much. I should sell everything I have.

I don't know what God would say to you about living simply or dealing with emotions or whatever it is you need to deal with. All I know is that God changes people on the inside and then He gives us a message, a message that we can share with others. A message that people need.

Because when you have this understanding of who Christ is in you, you look at problems differently. When adversity comes into your life then you're not complaining and negative and upset. Now you're saying, "I wonder what God's doing here. Here's an opportunity for me to understand more of what it means to live in Christ. Here's another opportunity for me to draw closer to God. Here's another opportunity for me to shine with God's grace in a world that's hurting." We think differently as Christians because Christ is in us. And those changes that we try to make aren't these just simple changes. We're trying to do something because it's part of our identity in Christ.

I want to deal with stress in my life. I want to be able to handle the stresses and the pressures that come in my life. Why do I want to do that? Because it's part of my calling that God wants me to live in peace. God wants me to be joyful. God wants me to be loving. So as part of my calling of who I am, God is doing something. So it's not just about I need a good night's sleep, it's about the identity that I have in Christ.

So I want to encourage you, as you're thinking about changes that God might be impressing on your heart that you need to make, if you're trying to make some big changes in your life about how you're going to manage life or do something or get rid of a habit or take on something new, think in terms of being in Christ, not just reading a book or watching a video series or something. Think about being in Christ because the power that's resident there is so strategic for the change. That's what our passage is talking about and helping us understand more about what it looks like.

Verse 17 says – *Therefore if anyone... If anyone.* That's anyone. That's if any one of us has the possibility to be there, you can't say, "Oh that doesn't mean me. You don't know how many bad things I've done." Do you see the word *anyone* there? That includes you and me. That's all of us. *If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come, or has become new creation. The old is gone and the new is here.* The power of Christ is resident inside of us and amazing things happen. Amen? Amen.

Let's stand together and pray.

[PRAYER} Lord, I trust that your Holy Spirit is working inside of each person here. For many that's affirming your word, affirming your changes that you've made already and the gratefulness then just flows out of that that we need to have because of what you've done already. We're so grateful. We're grateful for the cross, we're grateful for the sacrifice you made and the privilege we have to accept you, Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Savior. So thank you. At the same time, Lord, we know your Holy Spirit flows into other parts of our life and says, "Hey, you need to deal with this." So I ask that you would speak to each of us now and point out those areas where we need to change. Direct it, Lord, not because of our own initiative, but because of your initiative in us. Then we'll know it's from you and we'll know that the power that comes to deal with it is part of the miracle that you're doing inside of us. So Lord, we trust you. We ask you to work. Make our hearts open, pliable, to be used by you today. And it's not about us, we know. We want that love to compel us to persuade others, to talk to others, to share this message of reconciliation and change with others as well. Provide us with the opportunities to do that. Surprise us with those things, but help us to be prepared to take on those challenges. In Jesus' name, amen.