

“Radical Reorientation”  
2 Corinthians 5:11—6:2  
June 20, 2021

Happy Father’s Day to all of our dads! I am so deeply thankful for my father who has modeled faithfulness to Jesus through every season of life. I am also very thankful for my father-in-law who is here today. When I was 20 years old, I didn’t think I knew *more* than my father, but I sometimes thought I knew *better*. But I soon came to discover that that was the folly of youth. Now that youthfulness is in the rearview mirror, I’m surprised at how much I still have to learn. The good news is you don’t have to know everything to be a good father because wisdom is not based on mere knowledge but on a favorable relationship with our heavenly Father. Wisdom is about a perspective that factors God into His proper role in our lives. For those of you who didn’t have the example of a godly father, let me encourage you that in Christ there is no limit to your access to the heavenly Father as your source of security, wisdom, comfort, and protection. My prayer for all of us dads today is that God will strengthen our vision and sharpen our perspective to be godly pacesetters for our kids regardless of their age.

Today’s passage in 2 Corinthians 5 is not specifically about fathers for fathering, but it is a tremendous passage for us as dads to apply to our lives and our leadership because it is about having the right perspective in life with the proper corresponding influence on others.

**Scripture reading: [2Corinthians 5:10—6:2]**

**Big Idea: Being reconciled to God through the gospel brings about a radical reorientation of our lives as Christ-centered, gospel servants.**

I’m using the term reorientation because when you become a Christian you live your life in a new direction with a new reference point. Perspective really matters. If you think you are driving toward the beautiful Pacific coast, but you are actually facing north, you are going to end up at the Canadian border and wonder how you got there. And sometimes we find ourselves at

the wrong destination in life and wonder how we got there. We were disoriented. We had the wrong perspective.

It can be really helpful to just read through 2 Cor 5, beginning with the last vs of chapter 4, asking, “*What should our perspective be as a Christian? What direction should our lives be oriented toward?*” For example,

- in 4:18 Paul calls us to “look,” to fix our perspective on what is eternal rather than the temporal and external. This is a major reorientation of life. Our bodies, our homes, our work, our recreation are not an end in themselves, but a means of stewarding eternal values. We are to have an eternal perspective.
- In 5:7, Paul reminds us that our orientation as believers is to live by faith and not by sight. The focal point of our lives is not what we can see and touch with our hands now. We are living in light of our final reunion with the Lord in heaven.
- In 5:9, our lives are to be oriented toward a singular, overarching ambition to please the Lord.
- In 5:10, our earthly perspective is to be governed by a particular future day when we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, where we will be evaluated and rewarded based on our earthly lives, as to how we have lived with an eternal perspective, walking by faith and not by sight, seeking to please the Lord.

This brings us now to vs. 11 and following for today’s passage, where Paul will continue to teach the Corinthians (and us) the proper orientation of our lives. One of the reasons 2 Corinthians is challenging to preach is because there is not good place to pause from one Sunday to the next—it’s one continuous flow of thought. Have you ever had a ‘conversation’ with someone who talks and talks and keeps weaving from one topic to another related topic and you can’t ever break in because they never take a breath? That’s 2 Corinthians. Thirteen chapters of Paul never taking a breath (13/21 vs. in ch 5 begin with “therefore” or “for”)! So today we are going to continue Paul’s flow of thought that we interrupted last week between vs. 10 and 11.

Today Paul reminds us of 3 aspects of life in Christ that reorient the direction of our lives.

1. **The fear of the Lord orients us to persuade others to align their lives with God and the gospel (5:11-13).**

We must begin reading with vs. 10 (covered last week) because vs. 11 hangs on vs. 10. **[10-13]** According to vs. 10 there is a coming day of judgment. For the believer, it will not be a judgment of condemnation because of Christ's death-payment for our sin, but it will be an evaluation of the believer's life (both good and bad) to determine his rewards. What do you think the criteria of this judgment will be? Given the immediate context, it will likely be criteria like, did you have a singular overarching ambition to please the Lord? Did you walk by faith and not just by sight? Did you live with an eternal perspective, investing in eternal values rather than just living for what you could see and accumulate on this earth?

The fact of a future day of accounting is a sobering thought. It should affect how we live on June 20, 2021 (today). And it should cause us to walk in the fear of the Lord. What does it mean to walk in the fear of the Lord? To live our lives knowing that because God is holy, sin has serious consequences and therefore we live so as to please God in doing what is right according to His character and will so as not to bring the displeasure of His discipline upon our lives. Unbelievers don't fear God. They live as though there is no God (like blind men walking toward a cliff). But believers know that God is holy and that sin is more detestable than we can fully comprehend. And so we live in a reverential fear of God which prevents us from having to live in a terrifying fear of God, knowing that Christ has served our sentence of death and made it possible for us to live God-pleasing lives by the Spirit.<sup>1</sup> So your perspective as a Christian should be governed by the fear of God.

It is the fear of God in light of the coming day of judgment that motivates Paul to persuade others with the gospel to be reconciled to God by wholeheartedly embracing Jesus Christ as Lord.

Now let me briefly comment on the rest of vs. 11-13. The Corinthians had been swept off their feet by smooth-talking false apostles who were very outwardly impressive but were self-promoting, lacking the selfless servant-heart of Christ. They demeaned Paul for his lack of impressiveness in public speaking. Paul did not attempt to persuade people with ecstatic spiritual

displays like tongues and visions (as vs. 13 likely refers to). Paul simply tried to persuade people with the gospel. God knew his heart as the Corinthians also ought to know his heart. In other words, Paul was more concerned about walking in the fear of God than he was about impressing people. The underlying principle of these verses is that authentic spiritual leadership is displayed through selfless, Christ-exalting character that serves others in the fear of God rather than promoting self. This leads directly to our second point...

## 2. **The love of Christ orients us to please Christ and serve others rather than promoting self (5:14-17)**

**[14-17]** The selfless, sacrificial love of Christ reorients the believer's life from living for self and promoting self, to living for Christ as a selfless servant of others. What is true for Paul's life should be true of ours: the love of Christ is the controlling factor in his life. It defines how he lives. It reorients life away from self to Jesus and defines how he relates to others.

Follow Paul's logic which is grounded in the gospel. When he says in vs. 14, "one died for all, therefore all died," he's saying that Jesus' death was effective for all who trust in Him. His selfless, sacrificial death was a substitute for the death you deserve as a sinner. **[Vs. 15]** reveals the purpose. The purpose of Jesus' death is not only to cancel sin's penalty against you but also to reverse the disorientation of sin which made you self-conscious rather than God-conscious. You are no longer your own, Christian. You were redeemed by the blood of Christ so that you would no longer be enslaved to self-absorbed living but freed to live for God as you were created. This is what our perspective should be as Christians: we live no longer for ourselves but for Jesus who died and rose on our behalf.

One of the implications of the gospel according to vs. 16 is that we no longer evaluate people on the basis of external impressions. There was a time when Paul evaluated Jesus on the basis of human impressions which led him to conclude that He was nothing more than an imposter and

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<sup>1</sup> "Only the fear of God leads us to not having to fear God." Scott Hafemann, *NIV Application Commentary: 2 Corinthians*, pg. 259.

blasphemer whose suffering and crucifixion confirmed that he was accursed by God.<sup>2</sup> Paul failed to see the glory of Jesus' selfless suffering and death to reconcile us to the Father until God opened his eyes on the road to Damascus. Paul is urging the Corinthians and us to not get pulled adrift by those who are outwardly impressive or have notable human accolades but lack the heart of vs. 15, living for self-promotion and self-indulgence rather than selflessly promoting the will of Christ.

When Paul says, "we recognize no one according to the flesh," it included himself. He once prided himself in his personal status (circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the Law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church) but when Paul's heart was converted, He recognized all those things as meaningless in comparison to the surpassing value of knowing Christ (Phil 3:5-8).

Beloved, we are far too easily impressed by the external abilities and achievements of people (including our own) when God looks at the heart (1Sam 16:7). Spiritual maturity is selfless, Christ-exalting character that serves others.

### 3. **Our new creation in Christ orients us to join God's ministry of reconciliation** (5:18—6:2)

**[17-21]** One of the true evidences of authentic conversion (rebirth), is the fundamental change that takes place in a person. Vs. 17 says that the person who is in Christ is a new creature. This new creation is the result of being reconciled to God with a new heart. Old values, perspectives, ideas, plans, loves, desires, and beliefs are replaced with new ones that correlate to Christ instead of our sinful flesh.

This does not mean that the new creature no longer struggles with his old way of life. But there is new life within (the life of the Spirit) which bears itself out in a new orientation of living. When Paul says "new things *have come*" he uses the perfect tense in Greek which indicates a past action with continuing results.<sup>3</sup> In other words, we are given new life that we continue to grow into our ability to express.

It really is a miracle when someone who

- has only had a temporal, earthly perspective suddenly begins to live with an eternal perspective
- has only lived by sight begins to live by faith
- has only lived to please themselves, begins to live to for Christ to please God
- has only lived by sinful inclination begins to reoriented by the fear of God and the love of Christ.

And all this is the result of God's hand in reconciling us to Himself through Christ (vs 18)j so that the basic desires of our heart are not longer hostile toward God.

But God not only reconciled us to Himself, He also entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation through the gospel. Vs. 20 says we have been commissioned as ambassadors on behalf of Christ to speak not our own message or by our own authority but to announce the good news of the gospel (that men and women can be reconciled to God).

This gospel (good news), Paul clearly states in **[vs. 21]**. Did you notice how God-centered vs. 18-21 are? First, vs. 18 says, "all these things are from God who reconciled us to Himself." Then vs. 19 restates that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." And finally, in vs. 21, God does 4 things:

- **God intervenes:** "*God made...*" (21). The sense here is not creating but acting. We are reconciled to God because God intervenes on our behalf by His mercy. God is the active agent.
- **God provides:** "...Him who knew no sin..." (21). God sent His sinless Son to be the Redeemer of undeserving sinners.
- **God substitutes and sacrifices:** "...to be sin on our behalf..." (21). That is to be regarded/treated as the one responsible for our sin.
- **God forgives sin and gives righteousness:** "...that we might become the righteousness of God in Him..." (21). That is, God regards/treats us as the recipients of Jesus' own perfect righteousness. And so we receive God's favor instead of His wrath.

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<sup>2</sup> David Garland, *The New American Commentary: 2 Corinthians*, pg. 285.

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur NT Commentary: 2 Corinthians*, pg. 196.

John MacArthur summarize vs. 21 this way: *“The Father treated [Jesus] as if He were a sinner by charging to His account the sins of everyone who would ever believe. All those sins were charged against Him as if He had personally committed them, and He was punished with the penalty for them on the cross, experiencing the full fury of God’s wrath unleashed against them all.”*<sup>4</sup>

In other words, *“Our [sinful] life was legally charged to [Jesus] on the cross as if He had lived it, so that His righteous life could be credited to us, as if we had lived it.”*<sup>5</sup>

Do you see the radical reorientation of our lives in vs. 21? We no longer live with sin as our destiny. We live in the direction of righteousness under God’s favor and mercy.

Let’s take a step back and look at the big picture. What should our perspective and orientation be as a follower of Christ?

- We are to have an eternal perspective (4:18)
- We are to live by faith and not by sight (5:7)
- We are to have a singular overarching ambition to please the Lord (5:9)
- We are to walk in the fear of the Lord (5:10-11)
- We are to be governed by the love of Christ, no longer living for ourselves for Christ as gospel servants (5:14-15)
- We are to be ambassadors for Christ, pleading on behalf of Christ for people to be reconciled to God (5:20)

Dads, I don’t know of any better exhortation or encouragement that I could give you than this (above).

My closing plea to all of you today are Paul’s words in vs. 20: I “beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God!”

Some of you need to be reconciled to God because you are still living in sin, alienated from God. Today I call you to believe on the good news that God has provided His sinless Son as the payment for your sin so that you can be

spared of God’s wrath and lavished with His grace and favor. Today I urge you whole-heartedly receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Now is the time. Today is the day of salvation (6:2).

Others of us may need to be reconciled to God because, though we have been saved, we are living disoriented lives with temporal and external values, living by sight to please gratify ourselves apart from God. The fear of God and the selfless love of Christ is waning in our lives. To us Paul urges us in 6:1 to not receive the grace of God in vain but to let it have its full impact as we turn our lives in the direction of Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 217.