

Week 6, 2 Corinthians 5:1–6.2a

Hook



Main Point: The Gospel changes our identity and our future, which fuels our faith and our ministry today.

Current Event: The popular Transformers franchise has been a part of culture for more than three decades in the forms of toys, television series, comic books and films. Although countless pieces of merchandise have been created, one Turkish company, Letvision, recently took the idea to an extreme. It released a video depicting a full sized BMW transforming into a giant, moving robot. The toy can be seen in the video here (<https://www.yahoo.com/tech/want-real-life-full-size-transformer-company-builds-131858101.html>) being operated by a remote control. This prototype, named Letrons, is the first of a proposed line of transforming vehicles.¹

Why do you think the Transformers franchise has been so popular?

What other films or television shows focus on the notion of transformation?

In what ways has Christ transformed you?

¹ <http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/nation-now/2016/09/27/video-real-life-transformer-built-turkish-company/91164330/>

Week 6, 2 Corinthians 5:1–6.2a

Book

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Text Summary: 2 Corinthians 5:1–6:2a Paul continues his defense of his ministry and authority as an apostle. He empathizes with how dark the present can be sometimes, but pushes us past that by explaining what the resurrection holds for us. Paul covers his motivation for ministry, the details of the Gospel itself, and how believers should view the lost as well as other Christians due to Christ’s work on their behalf. He finishes with a natural application of believing the Gospel: inviting others into it.

2 Corinthians 5:1–10 [Read]

Sub-Point: Certainty of the future kindles faith and obedience for today.²

Verses 1–5 Paul draws on his experience as a tentmaker in verse 1. He likens his present, physical body with an “earthly tent,” something vulnerable and flimsy that could easily be damaged or destroyed. But his future, resurrected body is much sturdier—a building from God, eternal in the heavens (v. 1)

Paul was absolutely certain that though the *present* may be dark, the *future* for believers was an overwhelmingly bright one—eternal life with God, in physically resurrected, imperishable glorified bodies.

Verses 2 through 4 express similar sentiments to 4:18—fixing one’s eyes “not on what is seen but on what is unseen.”³ The ESV Study Bible explains:

*Paul groans for the resurrection (i.e., being further clothed; cf. v. 1) in order to not be found naked or unclothed, which likely refers to the intermediate state in which believers’ spirits are with God but they do not yet enjoy their resurrected bodies.*⁴

The Holy Spirit at work in the lives of believers is a guarantee that they will one day receive their resurrection bodies at the return of Christ (v 5).

² R Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2006), 103-109.

³ David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 565.

⁴ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2229.

How do these verses comfort believers as they grieve or contemplate their own mortality?

How should the guarantee of a future with God in resurrected bodies influence the way Christians live their lives?

What other Scriptures have comforted you as you've experienced hardships or sickness?

Verses 6–10 Because his future is secure, Paul exudes Christian confidence and instructs his hearers to “always be of good courage” (v. 6). What is “seen” right now may be dark, but our “unseen” future is undeniably bright.

Because we know this eventual destination, we can walk by faith (the unseen) and not by sight (the seen) (v. 7). When Paul thinks about his resurrected body, he cannot wait to be “at home with the Lord” in a face-to-face, fully realized relationship with Him. And this thought creates a desire in Paul to “please the Lord,” to bring him delight (vv. 8–9).⁵

Another motivation for believers to please God in their time “away from the Lord”—we will all eventually give an account before the judgment seat of Christ for what we have done with our “earthly tents”—is our bodies in this life (v. 10). Paul says two things: One, *we walk by faith* in our present bodies because we’re sure of what’s coming: divine, resurrected life. Two, we *please the Lord* in our present bodies because we’re sure of another thing that’s coming: divine accountability. For Paul, certainty of future resurrection and accountability ignite faith and obedience for today.

According to verse 6, under which circumstances should we “be of good courage”? Explain how we balance Paul’s call to “groan,” yet also “be of good courage.”

How has God been teaching you to walk by faith, not by sight?

Explain how certainty of the future changes how Christians live today.

2 Corinthians 5:11—6:2a [Read]

Sub-Point: Fear of God and love of Christ motivates the believer’s ministry.

Verses 11–15 Paul is defending his ministry yet again in this section, explaining that **his motivations are based on two things: the fear of the Lord and the love of Christ.**

Fear of the Lord The “fear of the Lord” here is a reverent awe that Paul has for Christ, knowing that one day he would stand before Judge Jesus and give an account of his life (2 Corinthians

⁵ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2229.

5:10).⁶

The account that Paul will one day give to Jesus drives him to persuade men of two things: 1) the truth of the Gospel and 2) his legitimacy as an apostle. If people did not believe his legitimacy as an apostle (that his credentials were certain and his motives pure) then his ability to share the truth of the Gospel would be impeded.

While Paul openly admitted to persuading others, he knew he did not have to persuade God, for the Lord knew Paul was legitimate (v. 11). The Corinthians should come to the same conclusion, drawing on their interactions with Paul for proof.⁷

In verse 12, Paul asserts that he isn't sharing his motivations in order to commend himself but to provide the Corinthians with ammunition to defend Paul against his accusers (v. 12). These opponents looked only at the outward appearance, not at the heart.

Paul affirms his sincerity in verse 13 by presenting himself as one who is both "beside" himself and in his right mind. Some of Paul's actions could certainly have earned him the title of being out of his mind: He demonstrated great disregard for his well-being, facing a mob bent on destroying him (Acts 19:30; 21:35–40), walking back into a city from which he had been dragged after being stoned (Acts 14:19–20). As one commentator puts it, "only a person who was utterly devoted to God would show so little regard for himself. Such a man was Paul."⁸ However, the Corinthians also understood the side of Paul that was in his "right mind." They knew him as a teacher and loving father. Whatever he was labeled, Paul was selfless.⁹

Love of Christ Paul then moves into his second motivation for his ministry: the love of Christ (v. 14). Paul speaks in representative language here, attributing everything Christ has done to all of his followers. Since we are one with Christ, when He died, we are considered dead to sin, too. Since Christ was raised and is living, we also are considered living anew after our death to sin. Anything that is true for Christ is true for us. This is the substitutionary Gospel, and it evokes great love in Paul. This is the primary reason Paul loves Jesus—because Jesus took his place. In this is an important lesson for the believers in Corinth: Christians can love Jesus for lots of reasons, but the peak of the believer's love for Christ should flow from His Gospel—work on behalf of guilty sinners.

How could you put verse 13 in your own words?

⁶ Harris, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 477.

⁷ David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 567.

⁸ David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 567.

⁹ Ibid.

What is the difference between motivation out of “fear of God” and motivation from “love of Christ”?

Verses 16–6:2a Paul’s conversion changed the way that he evaluated people; in verses 16–17 the apostle gives the believer healthy insight as to how he should view others.

We should *not* regard people “according to the flesh” (v. 16).¹⁰ The Gospel changes how we view others in that we no longer look at them through an ordinary lens. We should not view others based on the world’s values: race, gender, socio-economic status or prestige. Prior to his conversion, Paul regarded Christ according to the flesh.

Once a person becomes a believer, we should regard him as a “new creation” (v. 17). God changes the entire condition of the heart; the believer experiences a “total restructuring of life that alters its whole fabric—thinking, feeling, willing and acting.”¹¹ Put another way, this person is entirely under new management according to God.

After Paul tells us how we *should* and *should not* regard people now that the Gospel has changed us, he gives us the source of all of this change: “all this is from God” (v. 18). Then he follows immediately with the reason for ministry, saying that because Christ reconciled us to God, we are commissioned to go offer the same invitation to others who will hopefully be reconciled to God through our message of Christ’s work. Christ ministered to us with reconciliatory purposes, so it only follows that we should minister to others with the same goal (v. 19).

Paul finishes this section in 6:1–2a with another identity the Christian has. Not only should a believer be considered God’s “new creation,” he or she is also considered God’s “ambassador” (v. 20).

In ancient times, an ambassador was the official representative of a sovereign with immense authority—usually a king. The king’s ambassador sent and received messages on behalf of the ruler. As he visited other lands and conferred with others, his words did not originate in him; he only had clearance to speak what the *king* wanted.¹² Ambassadors had both a humble and a great role in the ancient world; they were not the king, yet they were the official representatives of the king. Paul says that this is the role of a Christian.

We are not the source or the power behind a lost person’s conversion, yet we are the *vehicle* by which the saving message is delivered, “God making his appeal through us” (v. 20). We aren’t

¹⁰ Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, 118-119.

¹¹ Harris, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 481.

¹² Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, 124.

the king. But we *represent* Him wherever we go, bringing His reconciling message with us. As those who bear the name of the ruler (Christian), we implore everyone on behalf of Him to be reconciled to God (v. 20).

To sum up *how* one is reconciled to God, Paul returns to the Gospel in verse 21, stating that Christ became our sin so that we could take on His righteousness, and be seen totally upright before God. Paul closes in 6:1–2a with a fitting plea drawn from Isaiah 49:8, saying that Isaiah’s day of salvation has arrived in the reconciliation of the Cross.¹³ Paul’s point is clear: “It’s right here. It’s right now. Be reconciled to God through our message of the Cross.”

What is required to be an effective ambassador? What is required to be an effective ambassador for Christ?

In what ways is our culture desperate for the message of reconciliation?

How are we “working together with God” as we share the Gospel with others (v. 1)?

What barriers might keep Christians from spreading the Gospel message? How can your Bible Fellowship engage together in spreading the Gospel message?

¹³ Ibid., 127.

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Took



Main Point: The Gospel changes our identity and our future, which fuels our faith and our ministry today.

Testimony: Ask one or two of your classmates to share their testimonies. Encourage them to communicate how the Gospel transformed their lives and fuels them to live with purpose today.

Lesson Conclusion: As believers, we can easily forget our precious and true identities according to God, and in so doing, we forget to invite others to have the same privileges that we do as God's children. We forget that we are not all that we will be—one day our bodies will be glorified and totally renewed. *Right now* is now what eternal reality will look like. The unseen is true reality, and the seen is temporary. We forget that though we have a dark past without Christ, we are considered *new creations* once we come to Him. We forget that because of the Gospel, we are now *representatives* of the King of the Cosmos, commissioned to speak His authoritative and gracious message to all those we come in contact with. We forget to view others with a spiritual lens instead of a cultural, worldly one. We forget the fear of God and the love of Christ, and instead we fear man and love the world. We forget our mission to reconcile others to God, and instead we stay in our safe Christian bubble, with those who have already been reconciled. But God anticipates our forgetfulness and faithfully uses Paul to write these precious truths to His children. As we return to this text over and over, God helps us remember who we are, how to view the world, and what our mission is in it. While we may forget, God helps us remember through passages such as this one.

Challenge

Fight your disobedience. Where are you struggling with obedience to Christ? God calls us to obedience in all areas of our lives. We must submit to His lordship over us. For this reason, we must confront the areas in our own lives where we are disobedient. When we do, reflect on why and the source desire for acting contrary to God's commands. Ask others to offer their voice in your life for visible areas of disobedience.

View people through a Gospel lens. Let go of cultural and worldly standards on how to view people. View everyone as a creature that is created by God. Some know His voice, and others don't. This must challenge our evangelistic efforts. Don't look at people for what they offer you or how they measure up in society. Instead, measure them according to God's standards. Give them grace. Show them mercy. But impart love and kindness to everyone as you understand not everyone knows the salvation of Christ.

Remember who you are. You are a representative of the king. As you go forward throughout your day, remember that God bought you with a price and you are now His workmanship, created for Him and by Him for good works. Your identity matters because actions flow from identity. When you have grasped who you are and whose you are, your lifestyle will follow suit.