

CLARITY TRUMPET

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For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

-First Corinthians 14:8, 9-

Important Texts

Second Corinthians 5:17

As it is with any verse of Scripture, it is important to examine this verse in its context. Paul has been talking about the believer having God's approval upon his or her life (v. 9), whether that approval is while we continue laboring for Him in this body or while serving face-to-face with Him in Heaven (vs. 1-11).

Starting with the fact that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" to give an account of the things done in our bodies (v. 10), Paul then develops a strong argument for why believers should live for Christ. He reasons that we should live for the Lord because --

- We will one day stand before Christ to account for the good and bad things done in our bodies (vs. 10, 11a).
- Our lives and motives are already an open book to God (v. 11b).
- We are constrained by the love of Christ (v. 14).
- Since Christ died for *all* of us, then *all* of us should live for Him (vs. 14b, 15).
- We should no longer look upon others from a human, fleshly or external viewpoint, but as God sees them (v. 16).
- We are new creations. Our old condition before God has been completely changed now that we are in Christ. All of this "newness" is of God (vs. 17-19).
- Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, pleading with others on Christ's behalf to be reconciled to God (vs. 20, 21).

Viewing Others As God Does

The verse immediately preceding verse 17 is especially helpful, I think, in understanding it.

Therefore from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer (v. 16).

I use the New King James version, but I'll

quote verse sixteen from some other translations to help us get the full impact of what is being said.

So from this moment on, I do not estimate anybody by the standard of outward appearances. (Williams Translation)

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view. (Revised Standard)

Once convinced of this, then, I estimate no one by what is external. (Moffat)

Therefore, from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh. (New American Standard).

What does all of this mean to a proper understanding of verse seventeen? Simply this: since Christ has died for all, then it is as if all died when He gave His life on the cross. Verse fourteen says, "if One died for all, then all died." That being so, several things become evident: 1) I should no longer live for myself, but "for Him who died. . . and rose again" (v. 15). 2) I should no longer view or judge my fellow man, especially fellow believers, by outward, fleshly appearances; that is, I should recognize them as God does. Those who are in Christ are "new creations;" those who are not, are of the old creation in Adam (see Romans 5:12-21; I Corinthians 15:45-49). Therefore, I should view a believer as one who has died with Christ and risen with Him to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). 3) Whether I detect any changes or not, I should recognize that all who are truly in Christ *are* new creations of God. Such a true believer has the new birth, is God's spiritual creation, and has the Divine guarantee that the old state of affairs *has* passed away once and for all; all things *are* now brand *new* between the believer and his God (v. 17)!

So Why Is This Important?

All that I've said up to this point becomes very revealing when we stop to consider that the usual, almost universal, use of verse seventeen is

just the opposite of how it should be interpreted.

This verse is often quoted when one gives a personal testimony. I was saved in June of 1953. Later that same year a number of young people returned from their respective Christian colleges for the Christmas break. We had our usual Saturday night youth rally and many of them were present. When the leader asked for testimonies, one after another stood and shared thoughts similar to this:

My favorite verse is II 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" (King James Version). I just thank the Lord so much for all the changes in my life. I used to smoke, and drink and cuss, but now God has changed all of that. The things I once loved, I now hate; and the things I used to hate I now love. God has made all things new. Praise His name!

I sat there dumbfounded. Doubts began to flood my mind. I *knew* that *all* things were *not* new in my life. I still smoked, still used cuss words on occasion, and had an ongoing battle with lust and my temper. Though I had a few doubts about my salvation prior to this, I now began to have *major* questions and doubts.

Was I not saved because "all things" were not new? I thought that must be the case. So, on Sundays I would walk the aisle "just in case it didn't take the first time . . . or the second. . . or the third." Confusion reigned.

Positional Truth or Experiential Truth?

The key to unlocking verse seventeen is probably found in the phrase "if anyone is *in Christ*." We might translate the verse thus: *In light of this (verse 16), whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old condition [or standing before God] is finished and gone; the new has come.* And what is the "new" creation? **Our position in Christ** as members of God's family. Perhaps a diagram will help.

IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST HE IS A NEW CREATION:	
OLD THINGS ARE PASSED AWAY;	BEHOLD, ALL THINGS HAVE BECOME NEW.
<i>He Was:</i>	<i>In Christ He Is:</i>
Lost	Found
Hell-bound	Heaven-bound
Blind	Not Blind (now sees)
In Darkness	In the Light
Condemned	Not Condemned

When Second Corinthians 5:17 is used to describe one's experience it is misleading and may easily cause one to exaggerate or lie concerning his or her life. Even if it is true (and I would hope that it is) that many wonderful changes occurred when you trusted in Christ as your Savior, honesty demands that you admit that not *everything* has changed, *all* things are not new.

Whatever your understanding of this verse, you can't get away from "*old things have passed away*" and "*all things have become new*." Even if you can name a number of sins that no longer dominate you, are there any sins that you must still do battle with (or have there ever been such sins *since your conversion*)? If so, then it is not fair, honest or correct to use this verse to describe your Christian experience.

Verse seventeen does not apply to the *outward* life at all, but to the new *inward* condition that is true of *every* believer, not just some. In that inward, spiritual realm *all* things for the true believer are indeed new. *We are new creations "in Christ Jesus!"* None of the old flesh nature is part of the new. The old has not been simply whitewashed or reformed. The new birth is something brand new, of the Spirit and not of the flesh in any way (note John 1:12,13; 3:3-7; I Peter 1:18, 19, 23-25).

Romans 8:5-9 is a good commentary on this subject when it points out that although believers in Christ may "live according to the flesh," they are not "in" the flesh, but "in" the Spirit. *I may observe a fellow believer living a flesh-controlled life, but even while he is doing so, God (whose spiritual vision is always 20/20) sees him in His Son and, therefore, indwelt by His Spirit.* This simply reiterates the fact that we dare not "judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24; compare I Samuel 16:7).

Further Spiritual Ramifications

Unbelievers are blinded and in darkness, believers are often confused and bewildered. Let's not cooperate with the enemy of our souls by plunging people further into spiritual darkness by the misuse of Scripture. Let's make sure our public pronouncements regarding the Word of God are, in fact, correct. Don't allow what may be a traditional *use* of Scripture to ever be a substitute for what the Bible actually says and *means*. ×

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