

2 Corinthians 5:14-21June 28, 2015 – 5th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**New Creation ☩ New Outlook**☩ **On God** (vv.14,18-19,21)☩ **On myself** (vv.15,17,20-21)☩ **On my neighbor** (vv.14-16,20-21)

Dear fellow “*jars of clay*” in whom God has hidden His treasure of the Gospel:

The more things change, the more they stay the same. People in Paul’s day are like people today. Imagine you’ve travelled on foot for hundreds of miles for several years. You’ve been beaten and bruised by stoning, whipped and imprisoned, fled violent crowds at night – all to bring the message of God’s forgiveness in Christ to strangers. But you come to one group of people who consistently complain and misjudge you. They’re leaving nasty voicemails, disgusting texts and starting rumors in all the social media. All of you know how it feels. And all of you have done things like this to others. So have I. Maybe the thoughts don’t always come out in words, but complaining, misjudging attitudes in the dark recesses of your heart can’t stand the light of day. Selfishness is like a cancer that kills souls and ruins relationships. I want the Good Doctor for this. I want His medicine, His therapy. I want to be a **New Creation** with a whole **New Outlook – On God, On myself, On my neighbor**. Are you with me?

☩ **On God** (vv.14,18-19,21)

Before Paul gets to the love part of this text, he writes: “*Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. 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 what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.*” (2 Corinthians 5:11–13 NIV84) There’s so much of this that’s just not natural. You feel out of your mind.

“*Fools for Christ*” is what Paul called himself and the other apostles in his first letter. Why would he willingly “*...go hungry and thirsty...in rags...brutally treated...homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.*” (1 Corinthians 4:10–13 NIV84) Why was Paul willing? Because “*we know what it is to fear the Lord.*” Remember how God made Paul a **New Creation** with a **New Outlook**? While he was still trying to stamp out the church of Jesus Christ, the Lord appeared to Paul in blinding light on the road to Damascus. When God empties you of yourself, and you have to be led for three days blind...ouch!

But Paul got the opposite of what he deserved and he knew it. Instead of death and eternal destruction in hell, Paul got forgiveness and grace in Christ. That’s why the “*fear*” of this “*fool for Christ*” was not run-and-hide terror, but deep respect and appreciation. Jesus died in Paul’s place when He died under the wrath of God as our Substitute. Can you hear Paul’s **New Creation + New Outlook – On God**? “*Christ’s love compels us....*” We’re driven to serve God like sports fans for favorite players. Like the sweet love of husband and wife making up, “*God reconciled us to himself in Christ.*” The war is over between us and God. “*He gave us the ministry of reconciliation*” so our whole **New Outlook** on God is filled with peace and joy. God took all our prideful rebellion and put it on Jesus. He exchanged it for the perfect humility of Christ. Your record in heaven is clean, your ledger full because “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*”

✠ On myself (vv.15,17,20-21)

If you've been paying attention over the years, you know there's only one member of this congregation who really pains me. Misjudging people, he's so full of himself, I can't stand to be around him. I'd literally like to strangle him, but I can't get my hands on him. I've talked to the elders about him. Everyone close to me knows about this. He does not deserve to be a member of this or any congregation of believers. He hides for a while, then jumps out and scares me. I'm talking about **myself**.

But God "...rescued [me] from the dominion of darkness and brought [me] into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13-14 NIV84) And "*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*" My old sinful nature will never be converted. So God has created inside me a **New Creation** with a new heart. In spite of my foolish fears and sinful weaknesses, God looks at me only in Christ. He keeps washing the old away in the Word-powered water of my Baptism and cleansing me with the body and blood that was given and shed for me for the forgiveness of all my sins. Because Jesus died in my place, I don't want to live for **myself** any longer, "*but for him who died for [me] and was raised again.*" It's great when the water of God's grace rises so high that it covers the dead trees and dirty bottom of that lake of my old life.

New Outlook On myself too: "*Christ's love compels us.*" I get to speak God's Word along with the apostles of our Lord: "*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.*" Sunday's as a teenager I'd feel strong hands turning me toward visitors and Granddad's voice in my ear: "We have young people visiting today." Any squirming by me only made those hands tighter. Now I have such great joy to comfort you with God's grace that gets bigger and brighter in you: **New Creation + New Outlook...**

✠ On my neighbor (vv.14-16,20-21)

Let's be honest. You have the same old sinful nature I do, and it's not pretty. As in most congregations the majority of the work is done by about 10-15% of the people. Church Families help us spread the work around, but sadly, the sin of selfishness attacks both the sluggards and the workers.

On the one hand, there are Christians who naively think the lawn gets mowed, weeds pulled and church cleaned all by itself. You can tell by the mess they leave where they were eating or in the restrooms – as if someone else should pick up after them. They know they could not keep their lights on for \$5 a week, but they seem to think the church get cheaper rates. And they're so busy – as if no one else is! So when their Church Family leaders call them to help with cleaning or potlucks, they're offended: "Why ask me? I'm so busy." They don't notice that a busy volunteer just called them.

Active members hear this nodding in support: "You tell 'em, Pastor!" Meanwhile, they complain about their work for Christ as if they were still working for themselves. Did Christ pick up His cross complaining? I hear Him praying, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*" Isn't there a reason why God tells us to bear with one another in love? Some Christians still have not matured enough to live for others; they think only of themselves. But selfishness bites mature Christians too. While complaining, we forget the million other things God's hands and feet are doing to carry the Gospel banners forward. Some serve our Savior in Synod. Others are truly busy caring for children and elderly parents, helping needy neighbors with the firm, but gentle hands of Jesus. And "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*"

"*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.*" Another pastor is coming. We need a **New Creation + New Outlook** to step up to our new opportunities and responsibilities to give extra time, talent and treasure. Like my Granddad's hands, "*Christ's love compels us*" by His Word of grace. God change us! Amen.