

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

[www.sermonaudio.com/crc](http://www.sermonaudio.com/crc)

[www.unholycharade.com](http://www.unholycharade.com)

[www.lightfordarktimes.com](http://www.lightfordarktimes.com)

## *God's Word to a Hesitating Church*

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (7:1)

*“Do Not Judge by Outward Appearance – (or you will reject the true Christ)”*

**November 2, 2014**

**Sermon Text:** 2 Cor 5:11-17

**Scripture Reading:** 1 Cor 1:17-31

### **Introduction-**

The almighty, all-knowing, all-wise God reveals His power and wisdom through the weak and foolish things of this world. How many books would be

required to expound on this theme shown us from Genesis to Revelation?

- He chose the smallest and weakest of nations through which to display His power,
- He kills giants by the hands of a young shepherd boy,
- He does not choose the powerful and noble of this world for His people, but most often the weak and detested – tax-collectors and sinners,
- And, of course, He sends His Son into this fallen world in lowly rather than royal form to suffer and then to die on a cross.
- The Apostle Paul said “when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Therefore the wisdom of God is foolishness to this world, and the power of God is evidenced through the weakness of this world.

1 Corinthians 1:21-24 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who

believe. (22) For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, (23) but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, (24) but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The greatest news in the world, the gospel, is seen as folly to the world.

Now, this brings us to Paul's dealings with the church at Corinth in this second letter to them. They had not yet learned (though he wrote to them about these very things earlier, as we have just read in 1 Corinthians) these lessons. And we haven't fully learned them either. To a large extent, sanctification is the renewing of our minds so that we see wisdom and power as God does, and so that we do not make the error of judging people and things by outward appearance.

***“If we judge and boast about outward appearance rather than what is in the heart, we will go very wrong. We will to a greater or lesser extent reject the true Christ and embrace a false one of man's own creation.”***

Listen to it –

2 Corinthians 5:11-17 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is

known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. (12) We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. (13) For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. (14) For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; (15) and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (16) From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. (17) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

### **Boasting About Outward Appearance**

You will remember from our study of 2 Corinthians so far that Paul is working to show them the error of judging from outward appearances:

- He opened the letter speaking about his own suffering – even to

the point of certainty he was going to die – and how the God of all comfort comforted Him to teach him that he must trust entirely in the Lord and not in himself. The Corinthians, with the help of the false teachers at Corinth, saw Paul’s suffering as a sign of inferiority. They distanced themselves from him.

- Unlike the many “peddlers of God’s Word” (2:17) who distorted the gospel to make it pleasing to people and to gain notoriety and profit for themselves, Paul faithfully proclaimed Christ. As a result (15-16) he was a “stench of death” to those who hated Christ. Once more, the Corinthians saw this as a flaw in him.
- Paul did not come to them with the normal “letters of recommendation” from the religious powers (such as people so largely exalt and look for today), but in the power of the Spirit of Christ. He came with the glory of God revealed in Christ, a glory that was however veiled from the eyes of unbelievers. Once more it seems that the Corinthians were of the same mindset that so many professing Christians today are. Namely –

***“If something is from God it will be widely popular and accepted by the majority of people. If it isn’t accepted to such a degree, it must not be of God. If something is of God it must seem like wisdom to most people. It will ‘fit’ the world’s ideas of power and greatness.”***

In truth, the Word of God is *rejected* by the majority of people. Today people err through judging by outward appearance, according to the world’s thought: If a church is successful and blessed by God, it will grow in numbers. It will be popular in the community. You know this drill. Judge by outward appearances and you will go wrong every time, as Paul is about to tell us.

- And then the last time we looked at chapter 5, we considered the doctrine of the Judgment seat of Christ (vs 10). On that Day, every human being will be revealed for what they really are. Paul challenged the false teachers at Corinth in this regard, in a sense saying “Come on! Let’s get to it! I’m ready for that Day. Are you?”

Look again now at vss 11-12:

2 Corinthians 5:11-12 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we

persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. (12) We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart.



**NOTE:** Of course by pointing out the error of boasting about outward appearance, Paul is not telling us that we are not to make any judgments about a person by their outward appearance. Jesus said that a tree is known by its fruit. No, what Paul means here is *we must not embrace the world's ideas of power and greatness and truth and **boast** in them and use them to evaluate what is true. We must recognize that what is truly important is what is in the heart. Someone can appear to be "blessed" according to the world's notions of "blessing," and yet have a thoroughly rotten heart that stands condemned before God.*

So let's ask ourselves a very important question. Paul wants the Corinthians (and us) to be able to "*answer those who **boast** about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart.*" Can we answer such people, be they family members or strangers we run into or co-workers or people to profess to be Christians, but who are boasting in outward appearance? Outward appearance is the world's notion of power and success and greatness. I am sure you have heard it repeatedly.

- What church do you go to? How many people are there?
- Is your church active in the society of the community and well-liked?
- Does your church teach and preach messages that make people feel better about themselves?
- Does your church have a beautiful cathedral with lots of

stained glass windows and things like liturgical processions?

- Does your church teach that God loves everyone, accepts everyone, and that in the end He will accept everyone who at least tried to do the best they could?
- Does your church teach that it really doesn't matter what you believe, because there are many ways to God?

We could go on, but I think you get the idea. Boasting about outward appearance is, you see, *maintaining that the ways and nature of God must be in accordance with man's ideas of power and greatness and glory.*

But in fact as Paul tells us here, THE PRIMARY ARENA IN WHICH GOD WORKS IN US IS THE HEART. He is interested in *who we really are!* This is why Paul says –

*“But what we are is known to God....”*

And then he tells the Corinthians –

*“and I hope it is known to your conscience.”*

That is to say, “I hope that you really know us. I hope that you know that we speak to you in truth and sincerity from our hearts, that what you see is what you get in us.”

He continues in the same vein of thought:

2 Corinthians 5:13-15 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. (14) For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; (15) and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

That is to say-

***“No matter what condition we are in, we serve God and you. We are controlled by the love of Christ and we are driven by the conviction that the gospel is true! Our message is that Christ has died for all (his people) and therefore all (of his people) have died in Him. We have been raised with Him and now we no longer live for ourselves, but for Him.”***

*“that those who live might no longer live for themselves.”*

Let's get this down very carefully –

***“The ‘outward appearances’ standards of measuring truth in accordance with the world's ideas about power and greatness are***

*always, always, always in agreement with self-serving.*



That is to say, this “outward appearance” Paul is exposing here is the world’s idea of power and greatness that is driven by *selfishness*. *Living for oneself*. The Corinthians were in danger of being consumed by this thinking. *They thought that Paul was not truly commissioned by God because Paul was not serving himself!* He was not coming in a manner and preaching a message which exalted him in the eyes of the crowds. He was suffering persecution. Therefore he must not be a true apostle.

***“If the Corinthians applied this same thinking to Christ, if they embraced boasting about outward appearance and by these standards examined Christ, they would necessarily reject Him as well.”***

And so will professing Christians today. So DO many professing Christians today. But Christ died for us, and we died in Him! So that now

WE can continue to die to ourselves and instead be driven by the love of Christ to live for Him.

### **How do We Look at Others?**

2 Corinthians 5:16-17 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. (17) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

As I look at these verses, I am often overwhelmed with the realization of how foolish we can be. Boasting in outward appearance, evaluating others in terms of the world’s standards of greatness and glory, is very selfish. It gives us a “greatness” that our fallen flesh likes. Even if that greatness is centered in a *celebrity* figure rather than in ourselves and through which WE vicariously enjoy that self-serving greatness, boasting in outward appearance serves US. And so, when we do this in the church, what is the inevitable result? –

***“We will accept a false Christ, we will preach a false gospel, we will accept false teachers and false Christians, all the while rejecting Christ Himself and His true servants.”***

Think on this very, very carefully. How do we evaluate one another? Well, the answer is that most people who profess to be Christians evaluate others according to the world's ways of thinking. Just as the Pharisees of Jesus' day were exalted as the "great ones" of God, so today it is the same. In fact their hearts were rotten, they were totally self-serving, and they were the children of the devil. Today we have many churches led and populated by the very same breed of people. How does this happen? Through naively and selfishly evaluating by outward appearances.

Listen to Paul again in this key 16<sup>th</sup> verse-

2 Corinthians 5:16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.

I conclude that Paul's phrase here "according to the flesh" is synonymous with his "boast about outward appearance" in verse 12. Namely, evaluating people in accordance with the world's (and the flesh's) concept of greatness. We must cease to do this! Why?

*"Because of the very nature of salvation in Christ. The Christian is*

*in Christ and as such is A NEW CREATION. The old ways, the old man, the old ideas we once were governed by are gone. We are citizens of a new creation now. We are not who we used to be. We have new hearts/affections and we have new minds. We now serve Christ and not ourselves."*

And if we are to "boast in the Lord," then we must boast according to the Spirit, not the flesh. We must "regard" people who claim to be Christians as people who have died to themselves in Christ. And part of this "regarding" is to expect them to live in accordance with that claim. Further, it is to realize that-

*"...their outward appearance, that is, their status in the eyes of the world, is not the critical thing. The real thing we must watch for is, 'what is their heart? Where is their heart? What do they love? Who do they love? Who do they serve – themselves or Christ?'"*

Jeremiah 9:23-24 Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, (24) but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the

earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."

The fact is, I think we all have to admit, that in the history of this church and in our own lives, we have too often made foolish evaluations of people who professed to be Christians because we regarded them according to the flesh – in accordance with outward appearance. We put people in leadership positions who should never, ever have been in such offices. We failed to test them adequately and realize that they were in fact self-serving people out for personal glory. Over time, the Lord was good to us and taught us some things and we corrected those errors.

Notice interestingly that Paul also says in verse 16 –

*“Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.”*

What does Paul mean by this? Is he referring to Christ when He was on this earth in contrast to Christ who is now exalted? Some commentators suggest that Paul is thinking of how he used to regard Christ before he was a Christian. Paul no doubt would have heard of Christ as a young local rabbi and ultimately of course regarded Him as a dangerous heretic deserving of

death. That is all Jesus was to Paul “according to the flesh.”

And many people today who profess to be Christians in fact do regard Jesus Christ “according to the flesh.” They evaluate Him in accord with the world’s standards of greatness and power and really, in the end, regard Him as a mere man. They choose what they have a taste for from His teaching and throw away what they don’t like.

But just as Christ has been raised and we regard Him as the Son of God, so those who are in Him have been raised up as new creations. What is true about these “new creatures” in Christ? Well, as we have just seen, *they have died to themselves with Christ and therefore they no longer live for themselves, but for Christ.* Here is the universal truth about the nature of EVERY true Christian:

**2 Corinthians 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

We regard him as such and we *expect* to see him living in a manner that evidences this truth.

*“The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*



This phrase is quite remarkable. Paul means that every Christian is already part of the New Heavens and New Earth. Every Christian is a living example of the New Creation breaking in upon this one. Further, every Christian is a living example of the Old Creation passing away. So we are to regard one another in this way, and we expect that *a true Christian will not live in a manner that is in accord with the mindset and manners of this present world. He will look and act "oddly."*

That is precisely the problem these Corinthians were having with Paul. Paul was *weird* in their thinking. Paul suffered. Paul was lowly. Paul had enemies. Paul preached a message that lots of people thought obnoxious and foolish. They were regarding Paul as a mere man rather than looking at him as *a new creation in Christ.*

## Conclusion

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. (35) By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Our enemy is very deceptive. He loves to send his plants in among us wearing sheep's wool and even angelic garb. Many of these kind who have crept

into this church over the years wore very convincing facades of being true "servants" when in fact they were driven by an evil heart that was totally self-serving. They are still at it today, having deceived others.

What is our defense? It is the same thing that Paul has written here- *we regard no one according to the flesh.* We must not boast about outward appearance.

***"If a person is truly in Christ, then they are a new creation. The old dominion of the flesh and the world has passed away for them, and they no longer serve themselves but they serve Christ from the heart. They are driven by their love for Christ, who loved them and died for them. This is the being they claim to be, and it is the being that we are to expect and look for.***

Do you begin to see where we go wrong then? Without sometimes even realizing it, we embrace the world's notion of what Christianity *should be* and who Christ *should be*. Then, when someone comes along claiming to belong to Christ and who evidences these false notions of power and greatness and "godliness," we fall for them and promote them. And to the extent that we err in this respect, we also do what the Corinthians did – we

distance ourselves from Christ and from His true people and servants.

May the Lord bless us and teach us these things, enabling us to see Christ and the New Creation and at the same time rejecting the counterfeit.