

From The Pulpit Of



## A New Creation

**No. 15**  
**Series: 2 Corinthians**

**2 Corinthians 5:16-17**

**September 13, 2026**  
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### Text

*<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

### Introduction

You've heard the phrase – "There's more than meets the eye," right? It means that there are often many things going on below the surface that you don't get at first glance. Growing and developing in life involves learning how to recognize these things.

Toddlers don't easily understand metaphor in language, or nuance. Increasing EQ involves learning how to read a room, how to discern intricate relational dynamics. Artists help us look at life more carefully and notice the complexities. Philosophers encourage an examined life and speak of metaphysics. Many people will tell you to look underneath the way things appear at first.

But I think we stop way too short in this pursuit. There's even more than meets the eye.

The Bible wants you to look at yourself, those around you, nature, culture... existence itself even more attentively. Don't be simplistic, unreflective, merely instinctual. Don't settle for a surface understanding, or even one or two levels below the surface. Go deeper. The Scriptures are like spectacles that help us perceive the multi-layered textures of reality.

We've been looking through the book of the Bible called 2 Corinthians lately as a church. And there the author (his name is Paul) has been talking about profound concepts like "seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" in ch. 4, v. 4. He says that not everyone sees it. It's like they are looking at these deeper realms through a veil that their sense of perception can't penetrate. In 4:18 he talked about Christians as those who "look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." Paul helps us look beyond the immediate, the obvious, to something greater, even more substantial; to see the unseen.

He's also been talking about knowing, a knowledge that extends to heavenly realities. 4:14 – "knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us... into his presence." 5:1 – "We know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in

the heavens.” 5:6 – “We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.” 5:11 – “...knowing the fear of the Lord...” You may know a lot of things about biochemistry or software engineering or even sociological phenomena, but do you see the unseen spiritual realities all around you? Do you know who made you, why you’re here, and what will happen to you after death? Most people, I fear, are going through life unthinkingly, ignorant of these ultimate realities.

Today we’re just taking two verses. And in short, what we’re going to see from them is just this: **don’t see things superficially. Don’t see things superficially.**

*Let’s pray...*

### **Don’t See People Superficially**

The one thing that these verses are telling us is: **don’t see things superficially.** But we can further elaborate on that in three ways: don’t see people superficially, don’t see Christ superficially, and don’t see the world superficially.

The first thing we see in this text is: don’t see people superficially. It comes from the first part of v. 16, which says, “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.”

“From now on, therefore” ties this proposition to what came before it. So, look up to the previous verse, v. 15. There Paul was saying that Christians don’t live for themselves, but for him who died and rose for them. We have a different outlook on life, a different motivation, a different purpose. We’re not living for ourselves, just like animals seeking their own food and shelter and pleasure. No, we live to please him who loved us with a love more intense and meaningful than anything else in all the world.

Therefore, what does that look like? Therefore, we don’t see people superficially. Once you’ve experienced Jesus’ love, then from that point on, you can’t keep seeing other people superficially. This is a major part of what it means to live for the Lord – you love other people deeply.

Paul says, “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.” “Regard” is translating the word “know.” “According to the flesh” means with the values and assessments and limitations of our fallen, sinful nature. “The flesh” is what everybody is born into this world with. It’s a spiritual birth defect. It’s a twisted, broken way of being, of inhabiting the world. In our flesh, we don’t see properly. We are oriented away from God and turned in on ourselves.

And so, when we look out at other people, we don’t see them accurately. We view other people as accessories to our own self-salvation project. We use people for our own selfish ends. We are sizing them up based on what they can do for us. We don’t know them properly.

In Junior High and High School, you’re looking for other people to associate with that can bolster your own reputation and sense of belonging. So, you look at them superficially, sorting them into categories like pretty or popular or ugly or nerds. School culture can be brutal in its superficial judgments, can’t it?

But we never really outgrow Junior High, do we? We still segregate into cliques. We are constantly sizing people up, seeing if they will be socially beneficial to us. We look down on those who are different from us. The world is separated by class. There is

real racism and xenophobia in the world. And those who are supposedly ‘woke’ can often be condescending and look with contempt at those who are different than them in their politics. Human societies are super superficial.

It’s natural and easy to regard other people according to the flesh, to see them superficially – *she’s fat, he’s too skinny; too tall, too short, awkward, annoying, needy, loud, quiet, snobby, uneducated... I don’t ‘click’ with that person.* We make snap judgments and write people off based on all kinds of shallow criteria. We’re obsessed with looks and image. We put people in boxes. This is the fleshly, fallen, sinful way of seeing people. It’s seeing them through a lens of what they do for you.

It can get into the church too, can’t it? Churches can be not much more than mere social clubs sometimes. People are church shopping, looking for a community that is like them, where they fit in. It’s consumeristic, me-centered, worldly. And the people that are already at a church can be closed off, excluding certain types that ruin our comfortable vibe. Even when it’s subtle, partiality is still shameful. It has no place in the people of God saved by grace. It must be denounced and fought. “From now on... we regard no one according to the flesh.”

This kind of sinful thinking was threatening the Corinthian church. You see it in the factions referenced in 1 Corinthians – “I’m of Paul... I’m of Cephas” (cf. 1Cor. 1:12). And it’s what Paul is battling here in 2 Corinthians. There are worldly people (so called super-apostles) bringing in a kind of superficial spirituality that says they are cooler than Paul. Paul is weak and unsuccessful. It’s what Paul was just referring to in v. 12. Look at that verse and how it describes “those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart.” Superficiality. Christians should not see other people superficially.

Instead, all people should see all people as inherently dignified, worthy of respect. We should look at other people as valuable, deserving of attention, interesting, not discardable or expendable. Can you see other people as more than just either in your way or an aid to you? Can you see beyond the surface of someone’s skin or socio-economic status and see their soul? See them as someone who’s not just a clump of cells or an accidentally evolved organism whose thoughts are simply chemical reactions with no real meaning. Can you see them as a reflection of God? That’s what it means to be an image-bearer.

The reflection is smudged and warped. The mirror is cracked. But it’s still there. And so every human being, no matter how valuable in the world’s eyes, is someone to see and know and love. Not look past. Who are you looking past? Even this morning, at church?

But what’s more, since other people are broken image-bearers, then those who have heard the gospel because someone cared about them and who have been reconciled to God and are being restored into Christ’s image should be seeking to share that gospel with others too. Everyone. Not just the people that you are drawn to, but the rich, the poor, the up and coming, the down and out, the young, the aged... We should look on everyone we meet as someone who needs Christ and seek to share Christ with him or her. Nobody is too far gone. If you truly love people, you will tell them the good news.

It’s easy to slip into thinking that people are fine, we have time. It’s easy to slip into a worldly way of relating to our neighbors, viewing them as people that are either to be avoided (the nuisances) or as nice neighbors to say hi to that make the neighborhood

pleasant. But we should no longer think of people like that. We should realize that every single person you see is going to spend an eternity in either heaven or hell. Nobody is annihilated. Everybody is an eternal being. That's heavy. It's easier to try to escape the ramifications of that by just seeing them superficially, but we can't.

C.S. Lewis has this famous quote from his essay "The Weight of Glory." It goes like this:

[R]emember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you sa[w] it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or [the] other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.... [I]t is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.<sup>1</sup>

Is that how you view other human beings? Or are you seeing them superficially, without much thought to the weight of their eternal destinies? Do you interact with them superficially, keeping the conversation at superficial level – the weather, the Bears game... Living for the Lord by not seeing people superficially will mean loving everyone by fighting favoritism in all its forms and by seeking to do evangelism. Who have you tried to share the gospel with recently? Don't see people superficially. There's way more depth and significance and potential to every person you see.

### **Don't See Jesus Superficially**

The second point Paul makes in this passage is this – don't see Jesus superficially. Maybe if you have a hard time talking about Jesus with people, it's because you're seeing him superficially. Paul says in the second part of v. 16 – "Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer."

Christians have come to see Jesus as *the* most weighty, consequential, worthy person in the universe. He is the perfect image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). He is infinite in all his perfections. He is inexhaustible in his profundity. He always rewards a closer look, further reflection, deeper contemplation. You can't just skim over him. He is altogether lovely and worthy of eternal worship.

But most people don't see him that way. They see him superficially. Most people regard Christ according to the flesh; that is, look at him through sinful eyes that minimize or criticize. John 1:10-11 says, "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." There's one occasion later on in John where people are rejecting him and Jesus says, "You judge [me] according to the flesh" (Jn. 8:15; cf. Jn. 7:24). In other words, *You're seeing superficially; you're missing the point.*

The Jews looked at Jesus and thought – *He's too weak, too mild. He's not Messiah material.* But, of course, they were seeing superficially. They were using

worldly categories of power and looking for worldly deliverance, superficial salvation. They were missing the intense significance of who Jesus is. Greeks likewise found the message of the Cross objectionable. It wasn't flashy. It didn't fit their superficial specs for spirituality.

Paul himself was once a scoffer of Jesus. Forgive me, but I'm going to quote David Garland at length here because I think he puts it so clearly:

It takes no stretch of the imagination to assume that a zealous, law-observant Pharisee [like Paul was] would have pegged Jesus as a charlatan and blasphemer whose crucifixion revealed him to be accursed by God. He must have raged at anyone who proclaimed the crucified Jesus as the promised Messiah.... Paul's self-centered devotion to the law had blinded him to the glory of God in the person of Christ. Only when the Lord encountered him on the Damascus road was he constrained to recognize the truth. This compelling encounter caused him to change his mind from one corrupted and veiled by sin to one that could now see the very heart of God. Jesus had been raised by the power of God; he was the Son of God, and the exalted Lord. Paul learned that Jesus' crucifixion was not God's retribution against some imagined blasphemy committed by a counterfeit prophet but a vicarious sacrifice for the sins of humanity. God revealed to him that the object of his spiteful hatred... had died for him making him the beneficiary of staggering sacrificial love. He also learned that his righteousness according to the law (Phil 3:6) was nothing more than filthy rags. The crucifixion exposed the deep seated evil hidden in his own heart.<sup>2</sup>

Have you had a similar experience, where the sheer mass of Jesus' person and work brought you to your knees? Where you could no longer see it all superficially and therefore ignorable? The infinite Son of God going to the Cross to take the judgment for your sins, your pompous pride and self-centered living captivated you?

What are some ways that people see Jesus superficially still today? Some see him as a myth, a legend, a fairy tale. How superficial! Some people acknowledge that he lived, but relegate him to the category of a good teacher with some fine principles to put into practice that could make your life better. They have not paid careful attention to him. It's quite patronizing, actually. Some people see him as a social revolutionary who sought to liberate the oppressed and tragically died in the process. Some people turn him into a tame genie that's there to give them health and wealth and wow them with miracles. Academics debate him. Political people use him like a mascot for their cause. Many Christians still try to domesticate him and keep on the side of their lives to pull out from time to time like a pet that they feel guilty for not playing with. There are numerous ways to see Jesus superficially.

How about you? Who do you say that Jesus is? The right answer is the sovereign Ruler of the universe who substituted himself as a sacrifice of atonement to save us. Keep staring at him, because even that description I just gave only scratches the surface.

## **Don't See the World Superficially**

So this short section of Scripture is telling us – **don't see things superficially**. Don't see people superficially – stop looking past them or viewing them as extras in the movie about you, but recognize that each and every person is an image-bearer of God who needs the gospel. Certainly, don't see Jesus superficially – don't reject him as ridiculous, don't dismiss him as irrelevant, and don't take him for granted, or make him your servant. He is the God-man who died and rose again to make it possible for God and man to be reconciled. Which leads to our last point – don't see the world superficially.

It's easy to go through life oblivious, with such a small vision of what's really going on. Some people are so small minded that they can't even think beyond the weekend and their small circle of family and friends. But even if we're globally minded and care about big issues like world peace and climate change and humanitarian aid and stuff like that, we can still have an extremely myopic sight of things. Do you realize what's happening around you? The epochal, seismic shifts that are afoot? Something grand and greater than we can imagine is occurring right under our noses. Don't miss it. Don't see the world superficially.

Paul says, "Therefore [in light of Christ's inestimable significance], if anyone [*anyone...* ANYONE! God's grace does not discriminate like us superficial, petty people do]..." "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ [meaning he has seen below the surface and gotten a closer look at who Christ really is and de-centered himself and bowed the knee to Jesus for his magnificent mercy in dying for him and now finds himself so identified with Jesus that Jesus' death counted as his and Jesus' resurrection makes him also alive and Jesus' ascension brings him into heaven and sits him down right at God's right hand, fully accepted and admitted and secure and loved forever..." "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." Literally, it just says in the original language – "If anyone is in Christ, NEW CREATION!"

When anyone is united to the risen reigning Christ by faith "there is a detonation. In fact, the Greek is explosive, 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ (*boom!*) new creation.' Sometimes the detonation is a bang," says Kent Hughes, "other times it is a long, rolling thunder, but the outcome is the same – 'new creation.'"<sup>3</sup> Remember the original creation? God said, "'Let there be light,' and [*bang!*] there was light" (Gen. 1:3). Remember how Paul said in 4:6 – "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ?" New creation is happening, right here in the middle of this old creation. Are you aware of this miracle? Or are you seeing the world superficially?

When someone is joined to Jesus, a new creation has occurred. "The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." "Behold" is "an unmistakable note of spontaneous jubilation."<sup>4</sup> That person is no longer the same. The old fleshly man was crucified with Christ. It no longer defines him. And he has been raised, spiritually, with Christ and is alive in him. All the New Covenant promises we've been looking at in 2 Corinthians have come true. He has the Spirit. He's unable any more to just thoughtlessly keep evaluating people as the rest of the world does. He's can't keep treating Jesus himself as unimpressive. Something has fundamentally changed deep down in the inner man.

As one person has put it, “as a man-in-Christ he is in fact a new creation – a reborn microcosm belonging to the eschatological macrocosm of the new heavens and the new earth.”<sup>5</sup> God has long promised that this fallen, decaying creation will one day be remade to a state beyond even its previous pristine glory (for example, see Isaiah 65:17). But that’s not just a distant, future hope. It’s happening already. “[I]t is present in the hearts of all who, though still in this world, have already become by God’s grace members of the world to come.”<sup>6</sup> The future has slipped back into the present.

Can you see it? God’s re-creational power, the same power that brought Jesus from the dead, is at work in the world today. Don’t see the world superficially, merely scientifically or sociologically, as the product of chance or market forces or political movements. God is regenerating people, syncing them up with Jesus, bringing about new life from the dead, creating a new humanity in Christ. If you are a believer, you’re a new creation. Any conversion represents a new creation. God is moving, expanding his Church. Can you see it?

It may not always look to our eyes like a clean break has occurred in someone’s life. The new world overlaps with the old world for now. It can be messy. But don’t miss it. Something supernatural is underway. It happens in revivals. The movie *Jesus Revolution* tries to capture something of this that was happening during the massive turning that occurred among the hippie culture in America circa 1970. And there have been other Great Awakenings from time to time. But it’s more regularly happening in ordinary churches like this where we’re going to have two baptisms next Sunday and where people from different cultures are gathered together into one body that is loving each other through the mundane. It’s easy to overlook and think nothing of, but that would be a superficial way of looking at things. Look more closely. A new creation has begun and is growing.

## Conclusion

Be amazed. Be curious. Live in wonder! The WNDR Museum here in the West Loop closed its doors this last week. But the Church is still alive and well and multiplying around the world by the power of the Spirit. Don’t miss it. **Don’t see things superficially.**

You’re surrounded by immortal creatures all around you who are worthy of your attention and needing you to clearly articulate the gospel call them to repentance and faith.

Jesus is not just another distant historical figure, irrelevant to your life. He’s the only hope for truly experiencing life. If you are in Christ, keep plumbing the depths of your salvation.

If you’re not yet a Christian, I implore you to take a closer look today. Why did he have to die? Because humanity, in its sinful state, was under the sentence of death, not just physical death, but spiritual death. And so Jesus, in order to save humanity, had to bear the penalty on our behalf so that we would not have to. But he didn’t stay dead. He came back to life, showing that we’re not just forgiven, but risen to walk in newness of life.

Don’t just stumble through life seeking immediate thrills that allow you to hide from eternal realities. Ponder carefully what’s behind all your insecurities and fears and emptiness and anger. Don’t gloss things over or accept easy answers. Wrestle with your

sin and explore the message of the gospel that in Christ your sins can be dealt with and you can experience new life, no matter who you are or what you've done or where you're from, you can be made new!

### **The Lord's Table**

Don't see this superficially. It's not just bread and wine...

### **Benediction**

Now Jesus sends you to open people's eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in him (Acts 26:17-18).

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Immanuel Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, by Pastor Nathan Carter on Sunday morning, September 13, 2026. It is not meant to be a polished essay, but was written to be delivered orally. The mission of Immanuel is to be a multiplying community that enjoys and proclaims the Good News of Christ in the great city of Chicago.

End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in Walter Hooper, ed., *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Touchstone, 1996 [1949]), 39.

<sup>2</sup> David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC (Brentwood: B&H, 1999), 285.

<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 120.

<sup>4</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 203.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.