

## STUDY GUIDE

**NEW VISION**  
**SURVIVALIST**  
**IDENTITY**  
**2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21**  
**02/12/2017**



### MAIN POINT

At the core of the good news of the gospel is what has often been called the “great exchange.” Jesus takes our sin; he gives us his righteousness.

### INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What is the most frustrated you have ever been with your inability to do something? How did you act in that moment? Why was the experience so frustrating?**

**When you aren't good at something, are you the type of person who refuses to try or is motivated to excel? What does this tell you about your personality?**

**When have you been the most frustrated in your walk with God? What were the circumstances?**

Many of us still think, “We are what we do.” We say and do bad things (sins) or make mistakes, and then come to the conclusion that this defines our identity. Well, the bible says the opposite! “Who we are defines what we do.” Yes, we do commit specific sins – plural. But the heart of the matter is identity. We were born with a sin (singular) nature. *“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”* (Romans 5:12).

But we can have a new identity! At the core of the good news of the gospel is what has often been called the “great exchange” Jesus takes our sin; he gives us his righteousness. This shocking transfer lies at the heart of the Christian faith and is as clear in 2 Corinthians as anywhere in the Bible. This transfer is not a dry, cold matter, however. An individual is reconciled to God and made a new creation in Christ on the basis of this exchange. We are connected vitally and legally through our union with Christ because he imputed his perfect, righteous life of obedience into our account. He imputed not only innocence but also righteousness, not only pardon but also perfection. He not only stood condemned in our place as a punishment bearer; he also stood in our place as our law keeper. Jesus not only died the death that we should have died; he also lived the life that we should have lived. All has been taken care of. We might be tempted in the morning to stand in front of our mirror and recite, “You’re strong, you’re beautiful, you’re smart, and people like you!” Instead, we should recite 2 Corinthians 5:17!

### READ AND REFLECT

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21.**

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**What does it mean to be reconciled to God? Why did we need to be reconciled to God? What separated us from Him?**

**What emotions do you feel when you think about the fact that because of Jesus, God doesn't count your sins against you? How could these feelings impact the way you feel about others?**

**How does Jesus' becoming sin take our sin away?**

In Paul's former life as a Pharisee, he believed he could earn God's approval. Now as a Christian he knew that everything came from God through grace. God wants sinners to come to a right relationship with Him. Through Christ's sacrifice, God did not count their trespasses against them. Suffering was the means by which Jesus brought to others life and reconciliation with God. When we come to saving faith in Jesus, our sinfulness is replaced with His righteousness. We are dependent on God to make this transaction possible, and we remain dependent on Him to help us live as obedient disciples.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13.**

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**How do we live obediently to God, according to Paul in these verses? What do you think this looks like?**

**If we understand that salvation is a work of God, what does this passage tell us about the believer's responsibility to grow in salvation?**

**What is the difference between working out your salvation and working for your salvation?**

Paul was not teaching that believers can accomplish sanctification through their own efforts alone, for God is working in them for His good purpose. Believers pursue God's will and the promotion of the spiritual life in themselves as God empowers their activity. Paul didn't advocate passivity in the Christian life, in which believers do nothing and God does everything for them. Rather, God works in believers and believers actively work. God doesn't work in us because we have worked. Just the opposite is true. Because God works, we therefore work.

**What is God's responsibility and what is yours for achieving God's "good purpose?"**

**How would you respond to a friend who said, "I'm not good enough to be an example of Christianity?"**

For Paul, sanctification was working out what God was working within. That is, sanctification is a combination of human effort and divine activity. Throughout his writings, but especially in the passage under examination, Paul linked human striving with God's power in the pursuit of spiritual maturity. He called believers to self-activity by virtue of God's powerful working in them. Paul instructed the Philippian church that in his absence they must diligently work out their own salvation. But their obedience isn't to be understood in the sense of following rules but of being completely devoted to Christ. To be like Christ, we must be completely dependent on Him.

**HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 3:10-4:1.**

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**What was Paul's ultimate goal in his relationship with God?**

**Practically, how can we go about knowing Christ more personally and intimately? What is the connection between knowing Christ and becoming like Him?**

**What experiences and disciplines help Christians grow in Christlikeness? What is God's role in each of these? What is our role?**

**Think about a person you look to as a pattern for Christian living or a person who has played a part in your Christian growth. What characteristics of that person have you tried to imitate?**

**Is your life such that someone could look to you as a pattern? Why or why not?**

**What do verses 20-21 tell us about the goal of spiritual growth, of God's work in our lives? Would this goal ever be possible by our own effort?**

The pursuit of Christlikeness takes a lifetime, but God promises to complete it in us. We are permanent citizens of heaven and our lifestyles should indicate that reality, though our residence is on the earth. Our purpose is to evangelize those around us, and we eagerly await the return of our blessed Lord from heaven. At that time our earthly bodies will be changed into the likeness of His glorious body (see 1 John 3:2). The power by which He will transform us is the resurrection power by which He subjects all things to Himself.

## **APPLY**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Describe a time when your personal effort and will power failed to make you righteous, leaving you frustrated in your relationship with God. What would you do differently next time?**

**When have you been the most dependent on the Holy Spirit? What were the circumstances surrounding that time in your life? How was your relationship with God impacted?**

**Why is it so easy for us to fall back on our own effort and will in our walk with God, rather than relying on Him? What can you do this week to intentionally fight that tendency?**

## **PRAY**

Invite your group members to confess silently to God areas where they fall short in working out their salvation and areas where they rely too heavily on their own effort. Thank Him for His ministry of reconciliation, which continually pulls us back to Him and washes us anew with His righteousness.

## **COMMENTARY**

### **2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21**

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5:17-18 The words in Christ refer to being in union with Him. Genuine conversion begins life transformation, but not by reforming the old nature. The indwelling Spirit creates divine life in believers (Rom. 8:8-10), enabling a life of new things. Other New Testament passages communicate this truth by using language such as "born again" or

“regeneration” (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:23). Those who were enemies of God have now become friends by being reconciled to Him. God’s wrath against sin was satisfied in the death of His Son. Sinners—who formerly put self-interest above God’s glory (Rom. 1:21; 3:23)—have been brought to cherish God as their highest treasure (2 Cor. 4:6). The ministry of reconciliation—being an agent of this good news—was Paul’s special responsibility, but the task belongs to all who have received this ministry.

5:19-21 What Christ did, God did. Christ’s death mainly affected the world, that is, human sinners (rather than evil supernatural beings, for whom no divine provision for reconciliation has been made). Christ’s death upholds God’s righteousness. Trespasses were placed on the One who did not know sin. In return, the righteousness of God is credited (imputed) to all who are in Him. The message of reconciliation is known to others only when ambassadors for Christ spread it. The Great Commission is the responsibility of reconciled human beings, not angels (Matt. 28:18-20).

## **PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13**

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In 2:12 Paul continued his practical exhortation on how the Philippians were to live—whether in his presence or in his absence. Paul had just shown the depth of Jesus’ obedience (2:5-11), and it is that same level of obedience that believers are to exhibit. Obedience to Christ is the primary responsibility of the church, and it is a critical component of the Christian life. The humility and obedience we see in Jesus Christ is to be a factor on our own lives. How are we to show obedience? The command is to work out your own salvation. When we work out our salvation, we are taking the salvation God’s given us and strengthening it through spiritual growth.

We cannot work out our salvation without God’s intervention. There is human responsibility, but there is also divine empowerment. It is a partnership. We work out our salvation with a serious realization that God is working in us. The word for God’s working refers to an energizing work that is always effective. When God works, He succeeds and enables us to act. God places the desire within us to be obedient, and then He leads us to do it. When we are obedient, we are true to God’s purpose. We carry out His will, and the purpose behind His will is to bring glory to Himself. God enables us to work out our salvation, and the way we work it out is to bring praise and glory to the One who gave it to us.

## **PHILIPPIANS 3:10–4:1**

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3:9-11 Paul described his new aspirations in three ways: gaining Christ and being found in Him, having a Christian righteousness, and attaining resurrection from the dead. Found refers to judgment day. Christ brings a righteousness through faith in Christ (imputed), not from works of the law (v. 6). To know Him parallels and explains “found in him.” It involves experiencing the power of His resurrection, resulting in Paul’s own resurrection from death, and knowing the fellowship of His sufferings. Identification with Christ’s suffering brings conformity to Jesus’ death through refining obedience, and a believer attains the resurrection from among the dead.

3:12-14 Paul acknowledged his imperfection. Reached the goal and fully mature indicate the need for growth. Make every effort recalls the athlete’s discipline and focus. Together these reveal that Paul had not yet achieved perfection. Take hold of it and have been taken hold translate the same Greek word, one active the other passive. Paul aspired to complete salvation through resurrection. Because presents the substance of Paul’s hope—the perfection of the resurrection. Pursue, goal, and prize use athletic imagery of the runner’s energy, focus, and reward. “The prize” is God’s heavenly call (to heaven), like a referee calling a winner to the platform to receive the prize.

3:15-16 Paul exhorted the mature. The use of the same root word in verse 12 reveals that Paul addressed the false teachers who claimed perfection. Live up to means to walk in order, in rank like a soldier. Whatever truth we have attained is what brought previous success in Christian living.

3:17-21 First, Paul encouraged believers. Imitating me reveals his confidence that he lived correctly before God and man. He spoke with tears (the only record that Paul cried) because of the damage these false teachers brought to God’s work. As enemies of the cross, they were inflated with their own spiritual abilities rather than trusting Christ. Paul described them four ways. First, their end is destruction (not annihilation but eternal judgment). Second, their god is their stomach reflects their preoccupation with Jewish dietary laws. Third, their glory is in their shame means focusing inappropriately on the genitals (circumcision). Fourth, they focused on earthly things, unable to see beyond the present time.

True believers differ from these false teachers. Citizenship was rare and prized, and the Philippians were justifiably proud of their Roman citizenship. “Citizenship” in heaven reminded the church of the existence of a greater society and culture. Military images continue with the Savior from heaven. Roman citizens called the emperor “savior”; Christians expect their deliverer from heaven. The body of our humble condition refers to the body limited by

earthiness, finiteness, and sin. Christ will change the body into the likeness of His glorious body. Physical bodies will become glorified bodies in the image of Christ. Salvation has three stages: conversion, moral perfection at death, and the transformation of the body through resurrection at the second coming of Christ.