

## THE FORGIVENESS-BASED VIRTUE OF THE NEW CREATION: THE NEW "SOCIOLOGICAL" LOCATION OF THE BELIEVER

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In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul declaims that those who live under the sovereignty of the rule of the Messiah (i.e., they are "in Christ") have obtained a new social identity as a "new creation" in the midst of the old. In delineating the contours of this new identity Paul ties the forgiveness of sins that is the foundation of the new covenant (Jr 31:34), of which Paul is an apostolic servant (2 Co 3:6), to the ethic of love that in 2 Corinthians 5:14–15 defines what it means to be a "new creation." It is this "forgiveness-based virtue of love" that becomes the lens for understanding one's own identity as a new creation as well as that of all others (5:16). The implications of this new social location are then mapped out in 5:18–21, with Paul himself as the archetype of this new identity.

Hence, 2 Corinthians 5:14–21 provides an apt case-study of the dynamics of community identity-formation as a function of the establishment and maintenance of an insider/outsider self-understanding. Depending on one's focus, such a dynamic can be analysed either through the lens of "social identity theory" (SIT) or via the "sociology of deviance." The former approach focuses on how, in the establishment of "in-group categories" (Paul and his church are a "new creation") the formation of group identity leads to a process of "self-categorization" within the group (cf. the categories of "church," "saints," "brothers," "beloved," etc. for the Corinthian "believers") and "depersonalization" towards outsiders (cf. Paul's use of the image in 2 Co 11:20 of an animal devouring his kill to describe his opponents).<sup>2</sup> In the latter approach, inasmuch as deviance is a relative "social product," "social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them

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<sup>2</sup> For SIT and its application to the realities of the NT, see now J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), esp. the presentation of the method by Philip F. Esler, "An Outline of Social Identity Theory," 24. This essay is adapted from my "New Creation and the Consummation of the Covenant (Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17)," in my *Paul: Servant of the New Covenant: Pauline Polarities in Eschatological Perspective*, WUNT, 435 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 300–43.

as outsiders” (cf. the rule in 2 Co 5:15).<sup>3</sup> Thus, in terms of the community’s understanding of “deviance,” the ethic of love in 2 Corinthians 5:15 has an implied positive and negative “social” function in determining the identity of the new creation – those who do not embody the ethic of love and evaluate others accordingly cannot be identified as a new creation despite their “theology.” Rather, their identity is still formed by the “old things” that no longer exist for those of the new creation.

### 1. THE OLD AND NEW THINGS

Though the outcome of the church’s self-understanding is sociological, its source is biblical, which pastors should keep in view when “building up” the church. To be the church, her identity must not be derived externally from the “other,” but ultimately from her own Scriptures as her “identity papers.” The contrast in 2 Corinthians 5:17cd between “the old things” (τὰ ἀρχαῖα; *ta archaia*) that have passed away and the “new things” (καινά; *kaina*) that now exist derives not from the culture at large, but from a widely attested and often recognized Isaianic theme, the link to which is found most directly in the τὰ ἀρχαῖα/καινά (*ta archaia/kaina*) contrast of Isaiah 43:18–19.<sup>4</sup> The common referent of this contrast in Isaiah is to the “old/former things” of God’s prior acts of redemptive history (cf. Is 41:21–29; 43:9; 44:6–8; 45:20–21; 46:9–11) over against the “new things” of God’s eschatological deliverance and restoration of both Israel and the creation (42:5, 9; 43:1, 15–21; 48:3–16; 65:17–18; 66:22).<sup>5</sup> In 2 Corinthians 5:17 too, and with Isaiah as its generative source, the contrast between “the old things” and the “new” is best taken to refer to the historical-eschatological contrast between the old way of knowing others “according to the flesh,” which is constitutive of this created order under the old covenant, and the

<sup>3</sup> For this approach, see Troy A. Miller, “Dogs, Adulterers, and the Way of Balaam: The Forms and Socio-Rhetorical Function of the Polemical Rhetoric in 2 Peter (Part ii),” *Irish Biblical Studies* 22 (2000): 182–191; quotes from 183 and 184, with the citation from Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: The Free Press, 1963), 9.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to Is 43:18–19, Moyer V. Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thought*, SNTSMS, 119 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 12, 12n.4, 15n.17, 17, points to the contrast between “first/former things” vs. “new things” and related concepts in Is 41:22–29; 42:9; 48:3–6; 43:9, 18; 44:6–8; 45:11, 20–21; 46:9–11; 48:3, 12–16; 51:9; 65:17–18; 66:22. In LXX: τὰ πρῶτα/πρότερα (*ta prōta/protera*) in 43:18; 48:3; 46:9; τὰ ἀρχαῖα (*ta archaia*) in 43:19 and ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς (*ap’ archēs*) in 42:9; 43:9; 45:21; τὰ καινά (*ta kaina*) in 42:9; 43:19; 48:6. However, Hubbard’s emphasis, 16–17, on the difference between its application in Is 40–55, where the focus is on the transformation of God’s people, with “creation” in a supportive role (cf. 43:18), and in Is 65–66, where the focus is on cosmic new creation, with God’s people “swept up into the new creation,” should not be pressed for Paul. Both Is 43:18–19 and 65:17 inform 2 Co 5:17.

<sup>5</sup> Here too following Hubbard, *New Creation*, 15–17, 182, who in turn follows von Rad, Beale, and Webb. But, contra Hubbard, 183, I do not think that Paul is filling Isaiah with his own, distinctive content in which the “old things” now refer to “boasting in appearances (5:12), living for self (5:14–15), and judging others κατὰ σάρκα [*kata sarka*] (5:16).” Rather than being the “old things” themselves, these vices are all manifestations of the attempt to go back to the former things now that the new act of redemption has arrived.

implied new way of knowing others according to the new creation of the new covenant.

Once this is recognized, 2 Corinthians 5:17 represents the same historical-eschatological contrast found in the three structurally and conceptually related passages of Galatians 5:6, 6:15, and 1 Corinthians 7:19. Furthermore, the explicit reference to the “new creation” in Galatians 6:15 forges a conceptual link between the related negative sides of the contrasts in Galatians 5:6, 6:15, and 1 Corinthians 7:19 and the contrast in 2 Corinthians 5:16–17. For as their interrelationships demonstrate, each of these contrasts pivots on a radical repudiation of the identity-determining, *old-covenant*, *this age*-distinction between Jew and non-Jew now that the Messiah has brought about the new covenant of the age to come:

- Ga 5:6a οὔτε περιτομή τι ἰσχύει (*oute peritomē ti ischyei*)  
οὔτε ἀκροβυστία (*oute akrobystia*)
- Ga 6:15a οὔτε περιτομή τί ἐστίν (*oute peritomē ti estin*)  
οὔτε ἀκροβυστία (*oute akrobystia*)
- 1 Co 7:19a ἡ περιτομή οὐδέν ἐστίν (*hē peritomē ouden estin*)  
ἡ ἀκροβυστία οὐδέν ἐστίν (*hē akrobystia ouden estin*).
- Ga 5:6b ἀλλὰ πίστις δι’ ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη  
(*alla pistis di’ agapēs energoumenē*)
- Ga 6:15b ἀλλὰ καινὴ κτίσις (*alla kainē ktisis*)
- 1 Co 7:19b ἀλλὰ τήρησις ἐντολῶν θεοῦ (*alla tērēsis entolōn theou*).<sup>6</sup>
- Ga 5:6a Neither circumcision accomplishes something,  
nor uncircumcision,
- Ga 6:15a Neither circumcision is anything,  
nor uncircumcision,
- 1 Co 7:19a Circumcision is nothing.  
Uncircumcision is nothing.
- Ga 5:6b but faith working out, with regard to itself, through love.
- Ga 6:15b but a new creation [is something].
- 1 Co 7:19b But keeping the commandments of God [is everything].

J. Louis Martyn is therefore right to emphasize that from our distance we often miss the radical, “apocalyptic” shock of this twofold rejection. For Paul, as *the* Pharisee among Pharisees (Ga 1:14; cf. Php 3:5–6; 2 Co 11:22), the distinction between Jew and Gentile, determined by divine election and demarcated in the Abrahamic-Sinai covenant, had been the most fundamental reality of life (cf. Gal 2:15!). In fact, maintaining this distinction was often more important than life itself (cf., e.g., the stories of

<sup>6</sup> The interpretive parallel between these contrasts was first set forth simply in my *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 196, though without regard to the development of Paul’s thinking from Galatians to the Corinthian epistles.

the martyrs recounted in 1 Macc 1:41–64; 2:15–38, 49–64; 2 Macc 6:10–31; 7:1–42). Yet now, in the eschatological reality in which God's people live “in the Messiah” (ἐν Χριστῷ [*en Christō*]; Gal 5:6a), neither being a Jew nor a Gentile is an essential identity-marker of being a member of God's people.<sup>7</sup>

It is important to point out, however, that although being a Jew or Gentile no longer determines one identity “in Christ,” this does not mean, for Paul, that one's new identity is no longer expressed ontologically in regard to being Jewish or Gentile, any more than being male and female, married or single, disappears into an androgynous “person” or “human” (Ga 3:28; 1 Co 7:1–40), even in worship (1 Co 11:2–16!). Moreover, being slave or free, though abolished at a soteriological and ecclesiastical level, can still be significant as the divinely-determined social and history-of-salvation context for expressing one's new identity (cf., e.g., Paul's dealing with the slave-master relationship in Philemon). Eschatological realities are still only inaugurated and must be lived out in the midst of the present, evil age.

The stark antithesis in these passages between what is denied and what is affirmed thereby establishes a threefold set of *eschatological* contrasts. Moreover, the mutually interpretive parallels between the three statements of what *does* count in the new eschatological age indicate that Paul's statement concerning the “new creation” in Galatians 6:15b occupies the same position rhetorically as the parallel expressions in Galatians 5:6b and 1 Corinthians 7:19b regarding “faith” and “the commandments of God” respectively. Paul therefore equates conceptually the reality of the “new creation” with “faith/trust working out, with regard to itself, through love” (Ga 5:6),<sup>8</sup> which in turn can be framed in terms of “keeping the commandments of God” (1 Co 7:19), and vice versa.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This is one of the central themes running throughout his work; see J. Louis Maryn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997). The radical nature of Paul's disavowal of both circumcision and uncircumcision can be seen when compared with the main point of *Joseph and Aseneth*, in which the conversion of Aseneth is also portrayed in terms of a new creation that lasts into the ages to come (*JosAsen* 8:3, 9; 15:5; 16:14; 19:5; 21:4, 21; 27:10; and compare 8:3, 9; 12:1 with 20:7). But now this conversion as new creation leads not to the disavowal, but to the strengthening of the divide between Jew and Gentile. For a detailed analysis of the key text, *JosAsen* 8:9, within the writing, see Hubbard, *New Creation*, 57–58, 63–65, 68, 72, 74; for an analysis of the contrasts between *Joseph and Aseneth* and Paul, see my *Paul: Servant of the New Covenant*, 304n.11.

<sup>8</sup> This awkward translation reflects the fact that the middle voice of ἐνεργέω (*energeō*; “to work out”) is difficult to render in English, since the faith which works is also impacted by its activity, being “directly and personally involved in the process”; for this description of the force of the middle, see Bernard A. Taylor, “Deponency and Greek Lexicography,” in *Biblical Greek Language and Lexicography*, FS Frederick W. Danker, ed. Bernard A. Taylor, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 167–76, at 174. On the necessary embodiment of dispositions such as “faith” in one's way of life, individually and communally, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 19–61, and its application to the Pauline doctrine of “justification by faith,” 347–54.

<sup>9</sup> For the conviction that “a comparison of the second members in the three passages is instructive,” see already Ernest De Witt Burton, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1977 [1920]), 356. Burton, 356, sees πίστις (*pistis*; “faith/trust”) and ἀγάπη (*agapē*; “love”) in Gal 5:6 as “purely ethical terms, descriptive of the fundamental moral

## 2. ESCHATOLOGICAL SOCIAL IDENTITY

Within this semantic-theological field, knowing someone “according to the flesh” in 2 Corinthians 5:16 corresponds to considering a person’s identity to be determined by the distinction between circumcision and uncircumcision that is inherent in this age/world, i.e., by “the old things” of the old covenant that have now passed away eschatologically. Conversely, the “new things” of the new covenant that now exist correspond to the way of knowing Christ and others that results from being a “new creation” (2 Co 5:17).

If this conceptual link between Galatians 5:6, 6:15, 1 Corinthians 7:19, and 2 Corinthians 5:16–17 holds, then what is the relationship, if any, between the ethical contrasts in Galatians 5:6 and 1 Corinthians 7:19 and Paul’s declaration in 2 Corinthians 5:17? Is there a related emphasis in the context of 2 Corinthians 5:17 to the fact that Paul defined the “new creation” (Ga 6:15) in terms of the believer’s ethical life of love as the eschatological fulfillment of the law (Ga 5:6, 13–14), which corresponds to an obedience to the commandments of God as determined by life in the “overlapping of the ages” (1 Co 7:19)? In the “new creation” passage of Galatians 6:15 in particular, what is the significance of the fact that this love, as comprising an essential element of the believer’s essential “social identity,” *brought about by Paul’s boasting in the cross of Christ*, was in stark contrast to the behavior of those boasting in the “old age” identity of their circumcision (Ga 6:11–14)?

The answers to these questions derive from the observation that the same emphasis on love as the expression of the new creation in Galatians 5 and 6 is found in the near context of 5:17. Here too, Paul again offers himself in 5:14, as he did in Galatians 6:14, as the example of one who is ethically “impelled” (συνέχω; *synechō*) by “Christ’s love” (ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ; *hē agapē tou Christou*) as manifest in Christ’s death for all.<sup>10</sup> Picking up the theme of Galatians 6:13, Paul’s life stands in stark contrast to those described in 5:12 as those who boast “in face,” i.e., in the old-age identity as determined by one’s identity-revealing appearance, and not “in heart,” i.e., in the new-age identity as demonstrated by the character of life that

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attitude of the Christian,” while “keeping the commandments” in 1 Co 7:19 is “a more external characterization of the Christian life and more formal.” Over against both, “new creation” in Ga 6:15 is “less definite as to the moral character of the new life than either of the other expressions,” though it “directs attention to the radical change involved rather than to the external expression or the moral quality of the life thus produced.” The deposit of these contrasts in 2 Co 5:7 will demonstrate that such contrasts are only apparent.

<sup>10</sup> For the meaning of συνέχω (*synechō*) as “impelled” via a “compulsion *from within*” and of ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ (*hē agapē tou Christou*; “the love of Christ”) as a subjective genitive, i.e., “Christ’s love,” that is then explained in 5:14b–15 (cf. Ro 5:8; 8:32–35; Ga 2:20), see Hubbard, *New Creation*, 171, emphasis his. In my view, Paul’s statement in 5:14–15 that Christ’s love, manifest in Christ’s death, impels Paul to live for Christ parallels Paul’s assertion in Ga 2:20, so that in the phrase ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῆ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ (*en pistei zō tē tou huiou tou theou*; “I am living by [the] faith of the son of God”), τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ (*tou huiou tou theou*; “of the son of God”) should also be understood as a subjective genitive: Paul lives to God by the Son of God’s faithfulness in loving and dying for Paul.

results from the cross and the Spirit, emblematic of the new covenant (cf. 5:12–14 with 2 Co 1:22; 3:2–6; 4:6; cf. Ro 2:15, 29; 6:17; Ga 4:6). Hence, in 2 Corinthians 5:17 the “new things” of a cross-produced love are set forth as a fulfillment of the Isaianic hope for a second-exodus act of deliverance that will be paramount to a new creation. Indeed, in Isaiah 65:17–25 the new heavens and new earth are a place of newly created, Eden-like joy, in which, in God’s presence, his transformed people never again do wrong. Against the backdrop of the link in Jeremiah 31:31–34 between forgiveness and obedience to the Torah as the central promise of the new covenant, Beale’s argument in view of Isaiah 43:18–19 (cf. 65:17) that “it is plausible to suggest that ‘reconciliation’ in Christ is Paul’s way of explaining that Isaiah’s promises of ‘restoration’ from the alienation of exile have begun to be fulfilled by the atonement and forgiveness of sins in Christ” gains additional strength (cf. 2 Co 3:6 with the backdrop to 5:17, which are cemented together by the imagery of conversion as new creation in 2 Co 4:6).<sup>11</sup> For Paul, then, the portrayal in 5:17 of the believer as a “new creation,” exemplified in Paul himself, underscores that this conversion into a new identity, a new manner of evaluating others, and a new way of life is the beginning of the eschatological age of redemption (cf. 2 Co 4:5–6). Just as the Lord created Israel at the exodus as part of the “old things” (Is 43:1–2), so too he has created his people anew at the “second exodus” redemption brought about by the Messiah as part of “the new things” promised by God (Is 43:18–19).

### 3. COVENANT SOCIAL IDENTITY

At this point it should be emphasized again that the theological context for the confluence of new creation and conversion, of eschatology and ethics, is thus the new covenant. Paul makes it clear that according to the early Jesus-tradition the Corinthians are to understand the Lord’s Supper in terms of the “new covenant” established in eschatological fulfillment of the Passover, which now “proclaims the Lord’s death” as “our paschal lamb” (1 Co 5:7) until he returns (1 Co 11:23–26). The inauguration of the “new creation” is thereby inextricably linked to the establishment of the “new covenant,” in which, *based on the forgiveness of sins*, the Spirit creates and empowers the life of faith in anticipation of the resurrection to come (cf.

<sup>11</sup> G. K. Beale, “The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5–7 and Its Bearing on the Literary Problem of 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1,” *NTS* 35 (1989): 556. Thus, though Beale stresses cosmic renewal in his reading of new creation in 5:17, the anthropological consequence of God’s act of new creation actually seems to be the import of his programmatic essay; cf. 551–557. See too now Ryan T. Jackson, *New Creation in Paul’s Letters: A Study of the Historical and Social Setting of a Pauline Concept*. WUNT, 2/272 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 123–124, who follows Beale in arguing that the theme of reconciliation in 2 Co 5:18–21 reflects the Isaianic “second exodus” restoration of Israel from exile (Isa 43:1, 5–7, 15), which is also spoken of in “new creation” imagery (Is 43:1, 15, 19–21). The link between Israel’s restoration and new creation imagery is common in Is 40–55 (see 40:28–31; 41:17–20; 42:5–9; 44:21–23, 24–28; 45:1–8, 9–13, 18–20; 49:8–13; 51:1–3, 9–11, 12–16; 54:1–10; 55:6–13).

1:20–22; 2 Co 3:3–18; 4:10, 13–18; 5:4–5). Hence, despite their differences on whether for Paul the new creation is exclusively anthropological or not, both Jackson and Hubbard agree that in reading Paul’s twofold emphasis on the eschatological “now” in 2 Corinthians 5:16 (cf. the ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν... ἀλλὰ νῦν...; *apo tou nyn...alla nyn*) we must not separate the eschatological “now” (cf. Rom 3:21; 16:26) from the soteriological “now” (cf. Ro 5:9, 11; 7:6; 8:1; Ga 2:20), especially as these are interwoven in 2 Corinthians 6:2.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. NEW CREATION AS THE CROSS-SHAPED LIFE

Paul’s declaration of the eschatological-soteriological significance of the new creation-transformation of individuals “in Christ” in 5:17 is confirmed and explicated by the parallel between Paul’s statement concerning the implication of the cross in 5:14–15 and its restatement in 5:20–21. By means of these parallels, Paul has re-applied his previous eschatological contrasts in Galatians 5–6 and 1 Corinthians 7, which likewise focused on the new-age transformation of those in Christ, to his present argument. The parallels within 2 Corinthians 5:14–21 may be outlined as follows:

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|-----|--|-----|--|
| 14a | the love of Christ compels us  | 20a | we are being ambassadors in Christ’s place (ὕπερ Χριστοῦ; <i>hyper Christou</i> ), |
|     |  | 20b | <u>just as</u> (ὡς; <i>hōs</i> ) God is appealing through us.                      |
|     |  | 20c | <u>Hence</u> , we are begging in Christ’s place,<br>“Be reconciled to God.”        |
| 14b | because (adv. ptcp.) we judge this, that one died in the place of all, (ὕπερ πάντων; <i>hyper pantōn</i> ) | 21a | For he made the one who knew not sin to be sin                                     |
| 14c | therefore (ἄρα; <i>ara</i> ) all (οἱ πάντες;   |     |  |

<sup>12</sup> See Jackson, *New Creation*, 133, who in stressing the “broader soteriology” inherent in the “new creation” also recognizes the “clear anthropological application of 2 Cor 5:16–17,” and yet critiques Hubbard for nevertheless opting for a “stringently anthropological understanding” of 5:16. For his part, Hubbard, *New Creation*, 174, rightly points out that ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν (*apo tou nyn*) in 5:16 explicates κρίναντας (*krinantas*; “having judged”) in 5:14, so that “from [the] now” refers to the time when Paul formed the judgment in the preceding verses, i.e., from his conversion. Moreover, given the content parallel between the two ὡστε (*bōste*)-clauses in vv. 16a and 17a, “from now” parallels being “in Christ,” so that a reference to “conversion” is “beyond dispute” in view of Paul’s statement in v. 16b concerning his pre-conversion perception of Christ (174). By framing conversion in terms of a “new creation” Paul indicates that he views the former as an event of eschatological and cosmological significance. So Hubbard’s conclusion that 2 Co 5:17 “is not essentially about the presence of the new age, but the presence of a renewed image and a new humanity” (185) is overdrawn, since the newly created humanity “in Christ” is an expression of the new age and could not come about without it. The purpose of the new creation statement is more than a rhetorical way “to portray conversion as a complete and irrevocable break with one’s former way of life” (contra Hubbard, *New Creation*, 186).

- hoi pantes*), died,
- 15a and (*καί; kai*) he died  
in the place of all (*ὑπὲρ πάντων; hyper pantōn*)      in our place (*ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν; hyper hēmōn*),
- 15b in order that (*ἵνα [hina]+subj.*) those who are living      21b in order that (*ἵνα [hina] + subj.*) we
- 15c might no longer live for themselves,  
but (*ἀλλά; alla*) for him      might become the righteousness of God
- who died and was raised in their place  
(*ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν; hyper autōn*).      by means of him (*ἐν αὐτῷ; en autō*).

Paul's apostolic appeal as an ambassador "in Christ's place as his representative" for the reconciliation of the world (v. 20) is the consequence of his being compelled by Christ's love (v. 14a). More specifically, Paul's apostolic ministry, as the embodiment of his love for the Corinthians (cf. 2 Co 2:4; 11:11; 12:15), is based on Christ's own love as embodied in his death "in the place of all he represents" (vv. 14b; 15a: *ὑπὲρ πάντων; hyper pantōn* and v. 15c: *ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν; hyper autōn*). The *ὑπὲρ* [*hyper*]-formula in vv. 14–15 is then explicated in v. 21, so that the *ὑπὲρ* [*hyper*]-formula in these verses is best interpreted to mean the same thing that it signifies in v. 20, where, by way of analogy, the role of the ambassador is to take the place of the one he represents.<sup>13</sup> In view of these parallels, v. 21a refers in covenant-cultic terms to the death of the Messiah as a sinless, atoning sacrifice for sin (cf. "the one not having known sin ... he made sin") offered in the place of all believers, who are represented by the Messiah (cf. *ὑπὲρ πάντων* [*hyper*

<sup>13</sup> Following Sung-Ho Park. *Stellvertretung Jesu Christi im Gericht: Studien zum Verhältnis von Stellvertretung und Kreuzestod Jesu bei Paulus*. WMANT, 143 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2015) and my review of his work, BBR 27 (2017) 443–444. Park develops the Tübingen perspective on the meaning of "representation" in Paul as set forth by Gese, Janowski, Hofius and Frey et al., in which in a judicial context acting (*handeln*) or entering in or standing up (*eintreten*) in the place of another (*anstelle eines anderen*), though often atoning in function, must not be equated with substitution (*Austausch* or *Ersatz*) or assumed always to be cultic in nature (cf. 2, 4nn.11–12, 6, 6n.20, 33). Park's own work makes clear, however, that the distinction between representation and substitution is not always easy to maintain. Indeed, for Park, one can distinguish conceptually, but never isolate, "inclusive" and "exclusive representation," thereby avoiding viewing representation either solely as a matter of "solidarity" or as a simple "substitution" (7–8). Park's own focus is on the two Pauline letters where Christ's representative death on earth and his ongoing intercession in God's presence are explicitly interrelated both to one another and to divine judgment, above all at the Parousia: 1 Thessalonians (1:9–10; 4:14; 5:9–10) and Romans (5:8–10; 8:1–4; 8:31–34).



*panōn*] in vv. 14b and 15a with ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν [*hyper hēmōn*] in v. 21a).<sup>14</sup> Once again, now implied in the cultic backdrop to Paul's argument, forgiveness is thus the assumed foundation of his ethic of love.

The key parallel for our purposes consequently becomes that between vv. 15bc and 21b, where both texts indicate the purpose in the life of the believer to be accomplished by Christ's death. That Paul is focusing on the life of the believer in 5:21, however, is not immediately evident. Though a matter of current debate, the parallels between vv. 11–14a and vv. 18–20 confirm that the first person plurals in vv. 18–20 are best construed not as references to the calling of the church, but as "apostolic" plurals referring to Paul's own ministry.<sup>15</sup> It may seem natural, therefore, that the first person plural pronouns in v. 21 also refer to Paul in his apostolic ministry. But by virtue of the same argument the parallels between vv. 14b–15c and v. 21ab indicate that in v. 21 Paul now includes his readers – exemplars of all believers – as the beneficiaries of Christ's death and as those who, by means of Christ's death (cf. the parallel to 5:15c), are to "become the righteousness of God." Furthermore, the threefold use of "all" (πᾶς [*pas*]) in vv. 14b–15a and the switch to the third person in v. 15c clearly refer to referents including and outside of Paul, which signals an inclusive reading of v. 21 as well. That Paul can move abruptly from talking about his own ministry in the first person plurals of vv. 18–20 to including his readers in that same pronoun in v. 21 is evidenced by the identical move in 2 Corinthians 3:18 within its larger context, again indicated by the use of πᾶς (*pas*).<sup>16</sup>

To restate Paul's point again, the purpose of Christ's atoning death (v. 21a) is that "we," i.e., "those who are living" as new creations "in the

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Lv 4:13–14, 20–21, 24–25, 32, 34; 5:6–8, 10–12; 6:18; 9:7; 14:19; 16:15, where "sin" can be used as a short-hand description for the atoning sacrifice of the sinless animal offered on behalf of Israel. "To be made sin on someone's behalf" (cf. 2 Co 5:21) is thus to be made a sacrifice for sin. Reconciliation is possible because the sinless Christ dies to atone for God's people, a motif then picked up in Is 52:13–53:12 (cf. Is 53:10 LXX: *περὶ ἁμαρτίας* [*peri hamartias*; "concerning sin"], and Ro 3:25–26; 4:25; 5:8; 1 Co 6:11; 11:23–26; 15:3–6; Col 1:19–20). For the corresponding lexical evidence and its application to the parallel *περὶ ἁμαρτίας* [*peri hamartias*; "concerning sin"] in Rom 8:3, see N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 221–222. For חַטָּאת (*h't't*) as a "sin-offering" for the purpose of the forgiveness of intentional sins, as well as a "purification offering" for the sanctuary, see John Dennis, "The Function of the חַטָּאת (*h't't*) Sacrifice in the Priestly Literature: An Evaluation of the View of Jacob Milgrom," ETL 78 (2002): 108–129, esp. 111–115, 118–119, 125–126.

<sup>15</sup> For corollary support that the first person plurals in this passage, except for the general statement in v. 21, refer to Paul in his apostolic office, see Seyoon Kim, "2 Cor 5:11–21 and the Origin of Paul's Concept of 'Reconciliation,'" NovT 39 (1997): 360–384, 368–371.

<sup>16</sup> See Victor P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*. AB, 32A (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 326, following Dinkler: though 5:14 refers to Paul and his colleagues, "it is almost inevitable... that the *us* in this initial affirmation of v. 14 should begin to expand under the sheer weight of the affirmation itself, so that what Paul has applied in the first instance to apostles is seen immediately to be applicable to all believers." For the contrary view that 5:21 is a continuing reference to Paul in his apostolic ministry, see N. T. Wright, "On Becoming the Righteousness of God: 2 Cor 5:21," in *Pauline Theology, Vol. II*, ed. David M. Hay (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993): 200–208.

Messiah" (5:15b, 17), might become the righteousness of God "by means of him" (ἐν αὐτῷ [*en autō*]; v. 21b). Though also a matter of much debate, the parallels between 5:15, 17, and 21 support those who argue that "the righteousness of God" in 5:21 is a possessive or subjective genitive (i.e., "God's righteousness" or "the righteousness that God exhibits"), depending on the degree to which δικαιοσύνη ("righteousness") is rendered a verbal noun in relationship to the transitive uses of δικαιῶ ("to justify"). Either way, it refers to the forensic estimation of God's character as a result of evaluating the faithfulness of God's actions against his own covenant commitments. The specific divine actions in view vary from context to context. Here the demonstration of God's righteousness is seen in the establishment of the new creation by means of the reconciling cross of Christ as it accomplishes, through the Spirit, the transformation of God's people in accord with the promises of the new covenant (cf. the reference to the fact that "all things are from God" in 5:18a against the backdrop of Is 43:18–19; 65:17–23; 66:22–23; Is 52:6–10; 53:5 and 2 Co 3:3, 6 against the backdrop of Ez 36:26 and Je 31:31–34).

### CONCLUSION

Concretely, and as a concluding development of the eschatological contrasts in Galatians 5:6 and 6:15, this transformation under the new covenant is framed in terms of God's people no longer living for themselves, but for the Christ who gave his life for them (5:15c). Here too the new creation of the new covenant is unpacked by a typical Pauline description of love for others as love for Christ, since love for others embodies God's righteousness as now revealed eschatologically in and through Christ's death (cf. Ro 5:8; 8:35, 38; 14:15; 1 Co 13:4–7; Php 2:3–5; 1 Th 1:3; cf. Eph 5:2, 25; Php 2:1–4 in view of 3:10–11; 2 Ti 1:13; Ti 2:11–14).<sup>17</sup> Here too the church must confront and be confronted by the Scriptural truth by which she is to be known. As Hays puts it, "where the church embodies in its life together the world-reconciling love of Jesus Christ, the new creation is manifest. The church incarnates the righteousness of God."<sup>18</sup> Not to love one another, regardless of its confession, is to be a "deviant" from the righteousness of God revealed in the cross. For Paul's point in 2 Corinthians 5:17 is that those swept up into the inauguration of the eschatological "new creation" are already becoming identified by God's righteous character as revealed in Christ (2 Co 3:9; 4:4–6; see 9:8–10). This point is corroborated

<sup>17</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 31, in regard to Php 3:10–11: "The twin themes of conformity to Christ's death and the imitation of Christ are foundational elements of Paul's vision of the moral life...Obedience to God is defined paradigmatically...by Jesus' death on the cross" (pointing to Ro 6:1–14; 8:17, 29–30; 15:1–7; 1 Co 10:23–11:1; 2 Co 4:7–15; 12:9–10; Ga 2:19–20; 5:24; 6:14).

<sup>18</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, 24, stressing Paul's use of the verb γίνομαι (*ginomai*; "to become") in 2 Co 5:21: "Thus, Paul's defense of his own apostolic ministry turns out to be inextricably fused with the proclamation that the church community is a sneak preview of God's ultimate redemption of the world."

by the “mutually illuminating” structural and conceptual parallels between 5:17ab and 5:21b as presented by Hubbard:<sup>19</sup>

ὥστε	εἶ τις	ἐν Χριστῷ	-----	καινὴ κτίσις
<i>hōste</i>	<i>ei tis</i>	<i>en Christō</i>		<i>kainē ktisis</i>
ἵνα	ἡμεῖς	ἐν αὐτῷ	γενώμεθα	δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ
<i>hina</i>	<i>hēmeis</i>	<i>en auto</i>	<i>genōmetha</i>	<i>dikaiosynē theou</i>

The fact that Christ’s love for all impels *Paul* to live for Christ by loving the Corinthians thus undergirds Paul’s conviction that *all believers*, by means of what Jesus accomplishes on the cross, become an embodiment of God’s own righteousness through their love for others. In this regard too the Corinthians are to imitate Paul, who imitates Christ (1 Co 4:15–16; 11:1; cf. 1 Th 1:6; 2 Th 3:7, 9). For like Christ, Paul the apostle’s identity is formed by the reality that his life is governed, eschatologically, by the “rule of love” (cf. 2 Co 5:14 with 5:21).<sup>20</sup> Paul’s pastoral wisdom in this regard then leads him to apply this rule in two very “practical” ways. Concerning the repentant majority of the Corinthians (cf. 2:6), this rule of love will entail completing the collection for others (2 Co 7; 8:7–10, 24; 9:13; see esp. 9:9: as an expression of God’s provisions to them, the righteousness of the saints is seen in their giving to the poor). On the other hand, for the minority of the Corinthians, who are still in rebellion against Paul (cf. chs. 10–13), God’s righteousness entails giving them yet another opportunity to repent before Paul returns a third time to judge them as the final “proof” that Christ is indeed speaking powerfully through his ministry (cf. 2 Co 13:1–5 with 5:19–20). And in both cases, their identity as Christians is on the line.

<sup>19</sup> Hubbard, *New Creation*, 178. Commentators such as Kümmel, Wendland, Bultmann, Lang, Wolff, Breytenback, and Souza also point out a relationship between 5:17 and 5:21 (178nn.253–254). Kümmel even draws the equation, “Neuschöpfung = Gerechwerdung” (quoted by Hubbard, 178). Based on these parallels, on a similar parallel between 2 Cor 3:16 and 5:17, and on the “mutually illuminating character of the ‘in Christ’ formulas in 2 Co 3:14–16, 5:17, and 5:21” (178, 178n.251), Hubbard concludes that “transformation – so important in the argument of Ga 3 and 4 – surfaces again in 5:17 and, as elsewhere in this letter, it is an anthropological-soteriological motif (τις [*tis*])” (179).

<sup>20</sup> Following Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 325–326, 328–329, who uses the image of the “rule of love” to describe the point of 5:14, emphasizing that, for Paul, to live for Christ means, concretely, to live for others, and pointing to 1 Co 8:12 (for the point put negatively) and to Ro 15:1–3 in view of Ro 14:18 (for the point put positively). Here too Furnish turns to Ga 5:6 as a parallel (328), though without a reference to the motif of new creation in Galatians as the link between the texts.