

Text: II Corinthians 5:16-21  
Title: Reframing Creation  
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Roger Allen Nelson

I saw a doctor recently about my recovery from the crash and was a bit taken aback when she said, “It looks like you’ve really embraced acceptance.” I thought, you have no idea about my internal landscape and how far away I am from acceptance....

When I recounted that conversation with a therapist/friend he said, “Acceptance is an emotionally charged word and not very helpful. Rather than acceptance think of adaptation. A measure of health is how we adapt to change.”

That little one-word-shift, from accept to adapt, has made a big difference. Rather than struggling with acceptance, I now think about how best to adapt to these challenges. Changing how I frame these ongoing issues has helped change how I approach recovery.

As it turns out, there’s a method in therapy called “reframing.”

The therapist doesn’t provide answers or offer techniques, but they ask questions in such a way that the frame changes. Like from accept to adapt. The picture doesn’t change; the frame changes.

Think of it this way: the meaning that any life-event has for us depends upon the frame in which we perceive it. So, if we can change the frame the meaning changes; and if the meaning changes our responses or behaviors can also change. Reframing is probably

more art than technique,  
more grace than law,  
more imagination than skill,

but as the frame is changed, we see the picture differently.

Paul writes to the church in Corinth that because of Christ creation has been reframed. As the frame changes, the meaning changes, and our responses or behaviors change.

Consider...

Part of Paul’s story is a dramatic conversion. He was bowled over and blinded on the road to Damascus. Metaphorically speaking, when his vision was restored, he saw things differently.

He saw Jesus, who he’d been persecuting, in a new frame.

He saw the relationship between God and humanity in a new frame.

Listen again to Paul:

*So, from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.*

*Though we once regarded Christ this way, we do so no longer.*

In Greek it reads that we regarded Jesus and one another “according to the flesh,” or from a “fleshy” point of view. In other words, Paul once regarded Jesus as no more and no less than any

other flesh-and-blood human being wandering this planet. But then Paul encountered Jesus and he had to reframe everything.

*From now on we regard no one according to the flesh...*

Paul sets up a sort of parallel between seeing Jesus differently and seeing everyone else differently. He's not suggesting that we see one another as divine (like Jesus) but there's a new perspective,

a new point of view,  
a new frame.

Therefore, dear friends, what's the outline of this new frame?  
What's this new point of view?  
What if we came at it this way?

We're all broken.  
We all have issues.  
We're all fleshy and flawed.  
We're all dead in sin.

And yet, we're reconciled to God through Christ. We're made right with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. That's a done deal. Paul puts it this way, literally:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ – new creation!  
The old things have passed away, the new has come into being.*

Thanks be to God.

The question here is: Is Paul writing about individuals as new creations or is he referring to something bigger, broader, more inclusive, more cosmic? Something that requires a new frame? Are only individuals who are "in Christ" a new thing, or is creation itself somehow changed?

Traditionally we've been given a frame that sees people in different categories. We see others as lost, damned, prodigals, the fleshy enemies of God. But, as the frame changes, how we view the picture changes.

So, in Christ there's a new creation, a new frame. Therefore, rather than seeing others from a worldly point of view what if we saw others as belonging to God in Christ? What if we saw others as reconciled to God in Christ?

They may not know it. They may not recognize it. They may deny it, fight it, ignore it, besmirch it, and be too cool for it, but that doesn't change the reality.

*So, from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.  
Though we once regarded Christ this way, we do so no longer.*

What would it mean if we saw friends, neighbors, and enemies not as objects of mission, targets for conversion, or simply not one of us, but we changed the frame and saw them as we are: broken and loved by God in Christ? Would that change how we love, serve, welcome, and walk with friend, neighbor, and enemy?

I know this makes us nervous....

Here he goes again – all fuzzy on hell. Clearly some of us are new creations and others are old creations. We live in a world that's rent asunder by evil. Clearly not all people belong to God in Christ. The reformed tradition has long held that Jesus died only for those whom Jesus chose. We like those categories. You can't muddle that up with talk of a new creation. We're happy with the old frame.

But Doug Bratt writes about it this way:

*God didn't let people kill Jesus before raising him from the dead just to offer people some kind of religious deal. In Christ God creates something "new." God's work in Christ changes the world. God transforms history, making all things new. Those "things" include not just the whole creation and its creatures, but also Christians' attitudes toward our neighbors. God doesn't just long to be reconciled to people who declare ourselves to be God's enemies. God also longs for people who view our neighbors as our enemies to be reconciled to each other.*

I mentioned a few weeks ago that recent changes in the American church have been referred to as the "great sorting." We're retreating into political/cultural silos. If we're still going to church, we're finding our way to congregations that affirm and encourage our self-interests. We're sorting out....

Maybe that's all we can do. We're weary of pandemic politics, denominational discord, covid controversies, and issues of sexuality or race or whatever current-culture-war-trope is being trotted out. At least in church we should be with our tribe.

But, and this a big but, but Paul proclaims that we should regard no one from a worldly point of view. Because, in Christ there's a new creation where love trumps fear, forgiveness supplants judgment, reconciliation is the will and work of God, and death no longer has the last word.

And, this new creation doesn't hang in the balance. Today we may only catch a whiff, only see a spark, and only hear a whisper, but ultimately this new creation will overwhelm and fill up every square inch.

And we're emissaries of that reality, ambassadors of that reconciliation. So, don't look at yourself or at others in an old frame, but reframe as a new creation....

And dear friends, that would mean church communities that are not reflections of tribalism, political hubris, or theological certitude but are full of broken people, who belong to God in Christ, simply trying to welcome, love, listen, and bear witness to this new creation. We long for churches that are busy building new frames in keeping with a new creation. N.T. Wright summarizes it like this:

*Made for spirituality, we wallow in introspection. Made for joy, we settle for pleasure. Made for justice, we clamor for vengeance. Made for relationship, we insist on our own way. Made for beauty, we are satisfied with sentiment. But new creation has already begun. The sun has begun to rise. Christians are called to leave behind, in the tomb of Jesus Christ, all that belongs to the brokenness and incompleteness of the present world. It is time, in the power of the Spirit, to take up our proper role, our fully human role, as agents, heralds, and stewards of the new day that is dawning. That, quite simply, is what it means to be a Christian: to follow Jesus Christ in the new world, God's new world, which he has thrown open before us.*

You know, in one frame this is just cubes of Wonder Bread and Welches Grape Juice in service of a religious ritual with little drama or expectation.

But, reframed this is a foretaste of a new creation. Reframed this is an appetizer for a banquet thrown for one who was lost but now is found, was dead but now is alive.

Reframed this a sign and seal of the feast of a coming Kingdom. Reframed this is the hint of a table set for the last, the lost, and the least...

So come to table, where all are called and all are welcomed.

For God in Christ is doing a new thing.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.