

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Introduction

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17) is one of the most well known texts in the Bible, and frequently quoted in sermons. It is a classic description of the Christian, and lies right at the heart of evangelical belief. In a few words it sums up the Christian answer to complaints that Christianity is out of date and has nothing to say to the twentieth century.

The Christian can talk about a new society and building a new world, but everything must start with having new men and women. The text here describes the most radical and effective form of newness possible.

The shortest letter ever sent to the Times was by G.K.Chesterton, in response to the question, "What is wrong with the world?" His letter read, "Dear Sir, I am. Yours sincerely, G.K.Chesterton"

The basic need is for men to be made over again, thoroughly renewed within. God who created the world and mankind at first needs to perform another act of creation in the inward life in and through His Son. Why is this new creation necessary? What does it involve? How may it be recognised? How may it take place in my life?

Why is this new creation necessary?

This great truth presupposes that by nature man is in the wrong, far off from God, alien, enemies, strangers and rebels. And despite all their religion and morality and culture, they have one basic and fundamental fault. Though all different, we have this in common – we have inherited, ultimately from parents of race, a certain kind of nature and character. We are spiritually dead and blind. We talk about God and discuss Him, but do not know Him and are not in fellowship with Him. He is not a reality. He is an idea, name and concept, but not a living person. His Word, the Bible, is a closed book, and the great truths are not read. We say prayers, but do not know the person we are addressing. We can preach from the pulpit or teach theology, but not deal with living truths. We cannot be alive to God, nor God to us.

It is a frightening thought, that we can have a sincere belief in God, sing hymns, even preach, but all the time be spiritually dead. We could in fact not know what we are talking about. Despite our ideals and fine talk and outward appearance, when the wrappings are torn away, our state of heart is revealed. Our natural bias to evil. Easier to do wrong than right. Broken every one of the Ten Commandments, at least in thoughts and desire. Not happy if inner life is thrown onto the screen and made public. What we say and our outer attitude does not always reflect the real us.

Then for all our standards – at the centre of life is self not God. It is self we love, please, glorify and serve. All revolves around self and not God. God is on the edge, there to serve us, help us, rescue us, support us, and help us get our own way. With such a nature we are not fit for God or His presence, here or hereafter. Everyone says

they hope to get to heaven after death. But how many would be happy there? When they realize what heaven is like – a holy place, in God’s presence, where the inhabitants are holy, spending their lives worshipping and serving God. Till there is a revolutionary change, and they become new creations in Christ Jesus, they would find heaven a wretched and miserable place. The last thing they would desire is to spend eternity there. People who live for themselves have no interest in spiritual things, no love for God, are embarrassed by real Christians, and think the Christian life is too precise and strict – how would they ever be comfortable or content in heaven for a day, let alone for eternity? They would be out of place. There is no common ground, and they would long to escape.

So here is the position of human nature till touched and transformed by God. N.B. it is the description of every man, with no exceptions - high or low; male or female; rich or poor. It is not just a description of the criminal or moral leper. But it also describes the believer in God, the churchgoer, the good citizen, the solid citizen, and the pillar of society.

What does being a new creation in Christ involve?

This is a miracle wrought by God – “regeneration”. The Holy Spirit comes on a man and imparts new principle of spiritual life. The new nature imparted is God’s own nature. Vital effect on heart at deepest level. Alters whole bent, tenor and direction and current of life. We are not talking about being mended, patched up, minor adjustments, new religious practices, better habits, outer reformation, psychological change of adolescence, repair of personality disorder.

Variously described in the Bible. **I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts** (Jeremiah 31:33). **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you** (Ezekiel 36:26). **Unless you change and become like little children..** (Matthew 18:3). **No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again** (John 3:3). **Alive to God** (Romans 6:11). **Born again through the living and enduring word of God** (1 Peter 1:23). **Participate in the divine nature** (2 Peter 1:4).

All these descriptions indicate a radical change, from the root of the personality. Not because of supreme effort by us. This change is divine in origin. Effect which no other change can bring. God alone is the source. To say that we become a “new creation” is no exaggeration. We see everything with new eyes; we have a new foundation, new resources at our disposal, and move in a totally new direction. C.f. in certain Christian circles, there is a lot of excitement over miracles – and they seem to neglect that the greatest miracle is the new birth, having passed from death to life.

That the old has passed away and all is new is perfectly illustrated in believer’s baptism. It demonstrates the end of the old man, with his way of life, and the birth of the new man, now alive to God. The old has died and been buried in Christ’s death, and the new has come to life and been raised in Christ’s resurrection. Only God can do this. We are dead and helpless; God alone can breathe in new life. This is a supernatural event, by a power above and beyond us.

Augustine spoke of his heart being flooded with light and peace. Luther spoke of being delivered from the tortures of his conscience, and being ashamed of what he

had once loved. Wesley said, "The new birth is as miraculous and supernatural a work as it was 1700 years ago." When D.L. Moody was converted, he said he left the shoe shop where he worked a new man. "I fell in love with the sun and the birds on Boston Common." Billy Bray said, "What day of the month it was, I don't know, but I know this – everything looked different and new to me.. I was like a new man in a new world.. the Lord set my feet on a rock and established my goings." Spurgeon described the new birth as being quickened, and being distinctly conscious of new life, living in a new world, being illuminated, and guided into all truth.

The whole person and pattern of life is changed at the new birth, and it is a change we desperately need in this crazy mixed-up world. No wonder there is a note of urgency in what Paul says.

How may this change be recognised?

What are the signs that this change has occurred? There is no suggestion that they will be equally strong in every individual. The work of grace is a gradual process. But the roots will be there from the start. Lets be clear – one of the signs is *not* perfection. No one is perfect. But nevertheless there needs to be a clear change of direction in various ways. Although we are not perfect and free from sins, we become aware of sin and find our attitude has changed to it. We feel temptation strongly, and sense we have a battle on our hands with sin. We hate it, and are out of our element when we are involved in it. Sin is no longer a joke or of no importance. It gives us concern and upsets us.

Our one hope of being free from sin is the Lord Jesus Christ. We know His death is our only plea, and our only hope, so we place our firm trust in Him. We know God and have a sense of love for Him that makes us want to do what He wants, to please Him, and see things from His angle. We look at other people from His viewpoint. We long for them to know God and love Him and become His children. God who was once on the edge is now our number one, and self is on the edge.

The Bible is a new book to us. There is much we do not know or understand, but as we search this new book we find God speaks to us and guides us through it. We feel the importance of putting it into practice.

Prayer is easier sometimes than others, but it is no longer an empty ritual. We feel we are speaking to someone we know.

God's house, God's day and God's people become important to us. Sunday worship is not a duty we reluctantly perform, but something we prize and look forward to. Although there may be things we don't like about certain of God's people, yet they are our people, and we belong to them.

We want to be like Christ and to serve Him. His love constrains and compels us. We know we fall very short of being like Him, but it earnestly is the desire of our hearts to be like Him. Following His plans for our life is more important than fame and money. So we are concerned to find out His will and to do it. Consequently the things that so many people live for and feel important actually leave us cold, for we see they are trivial and only lead to empty lives. Only the eternal and spiritual is important to

us. We do right, not because we fear the consequences, but because we want to and because of our gratitude to God.

We have an entirely new set of values and standards. Our attitude to work changes. There is new thoughtfulness, carefulness and conscientiousness. And our attitude to death has changed. Though we will be sorry to leave behind loved ones and so many lovely things on this earth, we know where we are going and who we are going to see, and the fear and terror of the unknown has gone.

How may this new creation take place in my life?

If any man is in Christ.. “In Christ” is the key. If God is going to work in my life, I must be reconciled to Him. Sin is such a barrier, for it shuts God out. But the Lord Jesus is the bridge over which I may go to get to God. He died, bearing my sin, that I might be reconciled to God. So I need to stop heading in the direction I am going, repent, forsake my sins, and completely commit myself to Christ. I must trust Christ to save, forgive and take away my sins. He alone has the power to do so because He took my sins and my penalty on the Cross. He alone has the authority to forgive and give me a clean start.

Then I must yield my life to God’s complete control. He must be Lord and Master of my whole being, taking charge of me, my possessions, my future and my life. He will fill me with His Holy Spirit, remake, change, transform and renew me. I become a new creation. God alone does this vital work in my life.

God calls men to Christ in different ways and different circumstances. But in every true conversion, there must be (1) confession of one’s sin and need; (2) trust in Christ alone to remove sin; (3) new heart and vital change as God takes complete possession of us. If any of these are absent, it is not a true conversion.

Have you experienced this? Do not rest till you have truly yielded yourself completely to Christ, and found peace with God and received the gift of new life which He has promised to all who receive Him.

Conclusion

These matters really sort the congregation into two. Those who are the same as they ever were, and those who are new creations. Those with sins unforgiven, and those who have peace with God for their sins are forgiven. Those out of Christ, and those in Christ. Those with self at the centre, living for self, and those with the Lord Jesus at the centre of their lives. The spiritually dead, and the spiritually alive. Those in darkness and those in light. The condemned and the accepted. There is a very sharp line of distinction. There would be no love in me if I were to blur this truth. There would be no wisdom in you if you were to put these things off. Do you have solid reasons to believe you are a Christian? If not, turn to the Lord at once.