

I am a New Creation

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[0 : 00] Well, now we come to the preaching of God's Word. And as I mentioned, tonight we're going to be considering our identity as a new creation. And while there's many passages in the New Testament that focus on this theme, we're going to be concentrating on 2 Corinthians 5 this evening, starting in verse 14.

But let's turn to the Lord again in prayer before we read His Word. Thank you.

We pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen. 2 Corinthians 5, starting in verse 14. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this, that one has died for all, therefore all have died.

And He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who for their sake died and was raised. So from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view.

Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old is gone. The new is here.

[1 : 37] All this from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.

And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. And this is the Word of God.

Now, I'm sure many of you know the Christian author and apologist of the 20th century, C.S. Lewis. And probably many of you are familiar and have even read one of his most popular works, *The Mere Christianity*, where he makes his argument in defense of Christianity.

Much of the mindset and the thinking that he went through in coming to know Christ Himself. And in this book, there's four main sections. He argues for the existence of God. He gives a defense of Christian theology.

[2 : 47] He discusses Christian ethics and then considers the doctrine of the Trinity. But it's interesting how he concludes his book, because he anticipates a very basic question for anyone who's reading the book and has thought through and considered all that he says.

It's as if the question is, someone says, Okay, all that you've said is well and good, but if Christianity is true, why are not all Christians obviously nicer than non-Christians?

And C.S. Lewis admits this is a very reasonable question to ask. When someone becomes a Christian, we expect them to have some marked change in their life. We recognize that when a Christian behaves badly, this is a bad testimony.

It makes Christianity very unbelievable to the outside world. And so Lewis points out, he recognized that niceness, though, is not the goal of Christianity.

He says that although niceness is an excellent thing, we should make every effort to produce a world where people grow nice. He said we must not suppose that even if we succeeded in making everyone nice, we should have saved their souls.

[3 : 56] He says for mere improvement is not redemption. God became man to turn creatures into sons, not simply to produce better men of an old kind, but to produce a new kind of man.

It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better, but like turning the horse into a winged creature. Of course, once it's got its wings, it will soar over fences which could never have been jumped and thus beat the natural horse at its own gain.

And so what Lewis is discussing here is the exact topic that we're going to be focusing on in our passage this evening, this new creation. The fact that Christ didn't die for us to become better versions of ourself.

He didn't die for us to simply be able to alter our behavior or to alter our appearance. He died that we may bring about internal change and eternal change, that we are transformed from dead to living, from old to new.

And so this is a theme, like I said before, this resonates throughout Paul's writings. I could have chosen any number of passages this evening to consider what Paul talks about new creation. And so while we focus on 2 Corinthians 5, we are going to be jumping around a bit, considering a few different passages, especially in Romans.

[5 : 16] But the three things I'd like for us to consider this evening are first, our need for new creation. Second, the means of new creation. And third, the effect of new creation.

And so let's consider first our need for new creation. Now when we talk about new creation, it's with the assumptions kind of implied that this is not a first creation.

There must have been some old creation or original creation. And we see that by going to the very beginning of the Bible in the book of Genesis, where it talks about God creating the world out of nothing.

In the span of six days, He separated darkness from light. He made the sea and dry lands. We see that He made the sun and moon and stars, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea and land animals.

And each day, God looked at His creation and said, this is good. But on day six, we see the climax of His creation. Because on day six, this is when God created man.

[6 : 16] God created man to be distinct from the rest of His creation. He says that God created man in His own image. In the image of God, He created man. Male and female, He created him.

And so we recognize that the very essence of our beings, the very essence of our human nature, is being created in the image of God. And so after the creation of man and woman, God placed Adam and Eve in the garden, as we know, to work and to keep the land.

He gives them this priestly duty of ruling and subduing creation to extend God's blessing throughout the earth. And with His command comes, or with His role, rather, comes a command, that you shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if you do, you will surely die.

And so we see then, at the very beginning of this relationship, that God makes a covenant with Adam. What we call the covenant of works. It's a promise to Adam.

He says, keep the law. Keep it exactly, and keep it perpetually, and you will have life. And I will be with you. I will be your God and live with you, and you will live with me.

[7 : 27] But obviously we recognize in this story that this goal isn't achieved by Adam and Eve. They are tempted by the serpent. They eat of this forbidden fruit. And ironically, in this attempt to become more and more like God, they actually become less of God.

They become less than what they once were. And so because of their obedience, sin enters the world. This image of God that man had possessed becomes defaced. And we know when Adam fell, all man fell.

We are all corrupt. We are all totally depraved. It says in Romans, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And so consider the state in which we've fallen.

This is something that the Westminster Shorter Catechism talks about, the misery in which we have fallen. And it says, this is question 19. The answer is this. He says, So is there any question that we are in need of new creation?

Do we recognize the condition in the state that we were once in before Christ? If you are not in Christ, do you recognize the severity of the state in which you stand now? Without new creation, we stand as sinners condemned, unable to keep the gospel, unable to keep the law, unable to save ourselves, helpless and hell bound.

[8 : 59] And so in recognizing this reality, then this leads us to our second point, the means of new creation. We recognize our need for new creation. Well, how does this new creation come about?

How do we avoid this outcome of death and hell? The temptation may be for some within the church, certainly from those on the outside looking in, the thought that Christianity is about trying harder or being better.

Be a good person and God will accept you. Do your best and God will do the rest. But we recognize that's not the gospel. That's not how it works. It's important for us to understand the function of the law when we consider the means of this new creation because the law was created before the fall. And Adam and Eve had the ability to keep the law. They also had the ability to break the law. And we know that they chose to break the law. So after the fall, this dynamic changes.

No longer do we have the ability to keep the law perfectly. We certainly have the ability to break the law. And so consider what the law does for us then. The law serves as a mirror for us, first and foremost, that we may look at the law and recognize our own sinfulness.

[10:13] We recognize that we cannot keep the law. We think about the Westminster Confession again when it talks about the law. In chapter 9 it says, The law causes us to discover the sinful pollution of our nature, our hearts, and our lives.

And so while the law can still be useful to us as believers, it's a rule of life. It convicts us. It reveals our need for Christ. It shapes us into becoming more and more Christ-like.

It cannot save us. And so this is what Paul argues over and over again in his epistles. In Galatians 2 he says that if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Romans 8, throughout Romans actually Paul refers to the law, he talks about the law as being the law of sin and death. So he's not talking about a law that gives life. He's talking about a law that brings judgment.

And so to the church, even in Galatians, in thinking Galatians again, there's this desire within the church to adhere to religious ceremony and custom and thinking that's a way that God is going to be pleased with me.

[11:23] And Paul says there, Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision mean anything. What counts is new creation. And so that's the point that he's making here in 2 Corinthians 5.

It's not about our own efforts that bring about new creation. How does it happen? Paul tells us here, it's through Christ and his representation.

And so what does that mean when we think about Christ as our representative? Well, as some of you know, before I moved to Scotland, I practiced law. I practiced medical malpractice defense law. So I defended and represented doctors who had been sued by their patients. And so my responsibility was to represent these doctors in the course of their case going through the court system.

And so I would represent them in filing documents, in going to court for hearings, in depositions of expert witnesses, in arguing in front of a jury.

[12:22] And as I did so, I did so as their representative. But in the eyes of the court, it was as if that doctor himself was taking all these steps.

When I would sign a motion with the court, I'd write my name, but it would always say under it, as a representative for Dr. So-and-so. And so if we think about this representation from a spiritual perspective, there's two options when it comes to representation.

We can have a representative in Adam, or Christ can be our representative. And so Paul talks about this in Romans. Romans chapter 5, if you have your Bibles, you want to turn there, Romans chapter 5, verses 17 and 18.

He says this, For if by the trespass of one man death reigned through that one man, how much more, with those who received God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness, reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ?

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all men, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all men. So it's a lot of words to say this.

[13:41] As Adam as a representative, he brings condemnation and death. Christ as a representative brings justification and life. And so is there really any question who we want to be our representative?

Christ as our representative brings about new creation. How does this happen? Look at verse 14 of our text. It says, We have concluded this, that one has died for all, therefore all died.

All have died. Christ is our representative in his death. His suffering is our suffering. His death is our death.

And so this may be a little different for some of us, perhaps, when we think about this, when we consider our death along with Christ's death, because often we may think of Christ as being our substitute.

We think of the Passover lamb whose blood was placed on the doorpost. Christ's blood was shed for us. That's absolutely correct. Christ is our substitute.

[14:44] But Paul is saying more than that here. Not only is he our substitute, he is our representative. Because we see a substitute dies so that others don't have to. A representative serves as a delegate for his people, including them in his sacrificial act.

And so this is what Christ did for us. If he is our representative in our death, if we die in Christ, what do we die to?

Well, he says in verse 16, so from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

And so this worldly point of view, this is the NIV translation. I think it's probably more accurately translated in the ESV. It's literally according to the flesh. We regard no one according to the flesh. We no longer live in the flesh. The flesh no longer controls us. And so if we think and go back to Romans again, Romans 7 this time, verses 4 through 6, we see a passage that's very similar, a very similar parallel to 2 Corinthians 5 here.

[15:54] But Paul uses different language. Rather than talking about just flesh or dying to flesh, he says something else. He says, we have died to the law through the body of Christ.

And so we see in these two texts, Paul is equating the law and the flesh. And so if we stay in Romans 5, chapter, verse, Romans chapter 5, verse, I'll get this right, Romans chapter 7, verse 5, see how this comes together.

He says, for while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. Consider that deadly sequence he puts together here.

This language of flesh and sin and law and death. This is what we die to. In Christ, this is how we are crucified with him.

Our old self is no longer a slave to sin. We have been set free from the bondage of sin and death and law and sin. And so Christ is a representative.

[16:59] Yes, he is our representative in our death, but also our representative in our life. We are also raised with him. Verse 15 of our text. And he died for all that those who might live, those who live, might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Verse 17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone and the new is here. And so we see this drastic change and transformation from death to life.

We die with Christ and we are raised with Christ. And so this transformation is really something we see all around us in creation, right?

We think about this time of year, the autumn, the trees changing colors and falling to the ground.

We do not rake them up so that we can collect them and try to stick them back on the tree the next year, right? Because we recognize that with their death comes new life behind them, new leaves in the spring to come.

Think about seeds that fall from a plant and they go into the ground. What has to happen? The outer husk of that seed has to die so that new life will come through it. And so this is what Paul is saying here going back to Romans 6 again, Romans 6, 4.

[18:21] We were buried with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father we too might walk in newness of life.

This is a total transformation from death to life. And so it's important though what Paul gets at in this passage is not only pointing out this transformation but how it happens.

That it is the work of the Trinity that brings about this transformation in our lives. Think about this. Notice in verse 18 he says, all this is from God.

The one who created the heavens and the earth now brings about new creation working to restore his image in each one of us that was damaged by the fall. And so he says, the Father then, how does he do this through the Son?

We already talked about Christ as a representative but Paul goes further here. He says, this new creation comes to those who are in Christ. It is only in Christ that the veil is removed from our hearts.

[19:27] That's what he says earlier in chapter 3. So it leads to kind of the crescendo of this passage in verse 21. He says, for those who are in Christ we become the righteousness of God.

So you may say, well we see the work of the Father and we see the work of the Son but I'm not really sure where the Spirit fits into this passage. Well we already talked about how Paul can kind of

equate similar phrases or vocabulary here.

We talked about him equating death and flesh and law and sin and uses them interchangeably. And he does the same thing with the words life and Spirit. Go back to verse 15 again.

He said, he's died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves. And so when he's referring to those who live he's referring to those who have the Spirit.

We know this if we go back to our passages in Romans again. Romans 6 we said, we're buried with Christ in baptism raised to walk in newness of life. Think about our passage chapter 8 again.

[20 : 33] It says, we died to that which held us captive so that we may serve in a new way of the Spirit. And so this transition from death to life again. Walking in newness of life serving in a new way of the Spirit.

Two ways of saying the same thing. That the Spirit is a vital part of our regeneration. And so it's not Paul that's making this connection between the Spirit and life.

This is not his creation or his imagination here. This is what we talked about what we read earlier from the book of Ezekiel. We read that Ezekiel prophesied, I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put in you.

And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

The very next chapter, chapter 37, he says, I will put my spirit within you and you shall live. And so Ezekiel's new heart that he talks about, this is precisely God's spirit working within us.

[21 : 41] Just like Ezekiel, Paul recognizes that the chief significance of the Holy Spirit is his ability to produce life. For Paul, life is the defining feature of the Spirit.

One commentator, he puts it this way, he says, life is the comprehensive expression for all that the Spirit works in humanity.

And so our transformation into this new creation, it's accomplished solely by the loving and sovereign work of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And so the question for us is do we recognize just how drastic of a transformation this is? Just how drastic of a work it is of the Godhead in our lives?

Because I think sometimes that just doesn't sink in. We think of our own salvation, maybe we've changed or improved. That's not what God has done for us here. Maybe some of you are old enough to remember a TV show, I think this was during my years of uni, it was called Pimp My Ride, and I looked in the UK, it did exist in the UK for a few seasons, and in my mind this was like, oh this was a TV show from like three years ago.

[22 : 54] No, this was a TV show, it went off in 2009, so it kind of makes me feel old. But if you're familiar with the show, even if you're not, the premise of the show is they find these young kids that have this beat up car and they transform it.

They put in this new paint job and this new interior and lights and big screen TVs and gaming systems, but the thing is they never touch anything under the bonnet.

They don't touch the engine or the transmission, it's simply cosmetic work that they do. And so you're left thinking they've done all this to the car, but they're going to drive it off the lot, this car with 200,000 miles on it, and it's likely going to break down the very next week.

And so the work of God in us is not merely a change like this, not merely a superficial external change. It's not a mere improvement or rehabilitation. No, we are a new creation.

We were dead and we've been made alive. And so this transformation only comes when we receive God's grace through faith. And so this is our greatest priority in our life, that we may be found in Christ, that we may be united to Him, that we may become a new creation.

[24 : 10] And so for each of us here, the question is, do you believe this? Do you believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for your sins to provide salvation and new creation for you?

Because that brings us then to our last point. What is the effects of our new creation? Perhaps you've heard someone share their testimony before and they've talked about how they walked in sin before and the sin that they were involved in, the things that they did.

And they said when they came to Christ, their priorities changed, their behavior changed, and it was like they became a different person. When we hear this, we think, that kind of sounds cliché, right?

You've heard that kind of story a hundred times, but this is the absolute truth. What happens in new creation? When we come to Christ and he renews us, we should not be the same.

If we are in Christ, we should look totally distinct from the man or woman we looked like before, totally distinct from the world around us. And so in this final thought then, as we consider this transformation, the effect that it has in our lives, our passage, I think, points out about three ways that we're affected by new creation.

[25 : 27] We're affected in our attitude toward ourselves, we're affected in our attitude toward others, and then affected in our attitude toward Christ. And so look at verse 15 again.

It says, And he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised. And so as a new creation, it says we no longer live for ourselves, we live for Christ.

And so what does that mean? We no longer seek to fulfill our earthly, fleshly desires, to seek our own comforts, our own wants, we live for Christ. His desires become our desires.

His mission is now our mission. Paul goes so far to say in Galatians 2, that it is not I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. My life is Christ's life.

And so is this true of us? Do we hate our sin? Do we desire to become more and more like Jesus, to see his image restored in us?

[26 : 32] And so this should be a gut check. If we claim to be in Christ, but we do not see any mark of difference from ourselves or anyone outside of Christ, we must examine ourselves.

have we truly experienced the renewing power of Christ in our lives? Thinking secondly of our attitude toward others, verse 16, so now, so from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.

Like we said, we regard no one according to the flesh. One of the problems that Paul was addressing here in the church in Corinth is that believers were pitting Christ's servants against one another.

They were choosing these rivals and thinking, oh, this is my hero. You know, for I am Paul, I am of Paul, or someone says, I am of Apollos. Paul says, are you not behaving like mere men?

He feels that some in the church are turning a critical eye to him. Paul says, I'm not concerned about being judged by you and your worldly standards. He says, stop boasting in men, boast in the Lord.

[27 : 42] God, I am of God. And that's why he calls us in verse 20 to be ambassadors of Christ, that our message may be one of reconciliation. Our goal as believers is not to build up our own little tribe of who we think the best pastor is or what's the best denomination.

Our primary goal is bringing people to Jesus, wanting others to experience this transformation of new life that we have experienced in Christ. And so finally, the new creation will affect our attitude toward Christ.

Verse 16 again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view, though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Just as Paul viewed Christ before he was a believer, he viewed Christ as a heretic that was worthy of death.

Well, some in the church are still kind of trying to figure out who this Jesus character is. Was he just a good teacher? Was he a healer and miracle worker? Was he just a moralist of some sort?

Paul says, no, no, no. We do not look at Christ from a worldly perspective according to the flesh. We must see Christ as the divine son of God. Because if we don't have faith in Christ's true identity, then we cannot rely on him for new creation.

[29 : 04] Philippians 3, Paul says, I want to know Christ. Yes, to know the power of his resurrection, the participation in his suffering, becoming like him in death, and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

And so when we think about this new creation, when Paul's talking about this resurrection, we've been thinking about it as new creation when it talks about our own salvation. That's a proper way to view it, but there's something else we need to think about when we consider new creation.

We need to think about it from a future sense as well. Because when we come to Christ, we experience new creation now, right, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who gives us life, but the thing is we're still in our earthly bodies, right, we still have to deal with sin in our lives.

And so we still should have this desire, we should be looking forward to this day of Christ's return, where there's new creation, this new creation will be fully consummated, where a new heaven and new earth will be ushered in.

This is what John talks about in Revelation 21, this coming of this new heaven and new earth where we will be delivered from the presence of sin, where death will be no more, where Christ will declare from his throne, I am making all things new.

[30 : 31] Because it's at that point that we will experience an even better Eden, where we will once again perfectly bear the image of God and we may live in perfect communion with our Savior.

Where just as we died with Christ and we were raised with Christ, we are now glorified with our Christ. This is the ultimate effect of new creation.

This is what we should long for. And so if we are in Christ, if we have experienced this new creation, may this be our focus and our goal, to see Christ come again, to see his image in us restored.

And for those here that may not be in Christ, recognize that this is what is offered to us. Life in Christ now, the renewing presence of his spirit now, the freeing from sin and its bondage now, but also the coming completion of this new creation where we will one day live with our Savior as his children forever.

Let's pray.