

New Creation

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Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor 5:17).

At the heart of Paul's understanding of the salvation of man is the concept of new creation in Christ. What happened to all men because of the sin of Adam has been reversed because of the incarnation of God in Christ. God was "in Christ" reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19). "For as in Adam all die," writes Paul in 1 Cor 15:22, "so also in Christ shall all be made alive." To Paul, this is an act of divine reversal.

The death of Christ brought death to his existence in Adam but his resurrection ushered in a new existence for himself and for those who follow him into new existence through the re-creation of the human spirit which indwells every descendent of Adam. All those "in Christ" have experienced a new spiritual existence, even though they are yet "in Adam" in terms of the Adamic body.

Christ's Resurrection and New Creation

Even though there are numerous reference in the NT to the death of Jesus as a sacrifice, the fact remain that it was not redemptive in and of itself, or by itself. It is in its relationship as a precursor to Christ's resurrection that his death may be understood as redemptive. Christ died to existence in Adam but his resurrection was the means of effecting new creation for man. The one cannot be separated from the other; in fact, Paul states in 1 Cor 15:17, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile (*mataios* - ineffective, useless, folly), your are still in your sins." Paul's understanding of the relationship between Christ's death and his resurrection cannot be

separated in that the resurrection was the means of his being the firstfruit of new creation existence. Paul's words here create a problem for some doctrines of the atonement, but this is more a problem for the Western Church Fathers, Augustine and Anselm than Paul.

At the heart of Paul's understanding of the saving effects of the death and resurrection of Christ is his view of "new creation." New creation was accomplished by the resurrection of Jesus and those who wish to experience new creation in Christ must do so through death and resurrection, death to their existence "in Adam," and resurrection into new existence "in Christ."

This is reinforced by Paul's language in Romans 6:3-4, where he instructs his readers, "we were buried with him through baptism into death that just as (*hosper* - "just like") Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also (*houtos* - in the same way) we may walk in newness of life." The newness of life Christ created was accomplished not through his death but through his resurrection from death. His death was essential to the redemption of mankind, but not apart from the resurrection.

In conversion to Christ, one undergoes a spiritual transformation from existence in Adam to new existence in Christ, that begins at the time of conversion and continues until earthly life is fulfilled at the time of human death. One dies to his or her old existence, which is symbolically buried in the waters of baptism, then raised up out of the water into new existence. All is symbolic of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ as per Romans 6:1-6,

Do you not know that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death 4Thus we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

This imagery is consistent with Peter's words of 1 Peter 3:18-21,

For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit: 19 in which also he went to the spirits in prison and preached. 20 To the ones having disobeyed when the longsuffering of God was waiting in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls (lives) were saved through water. 21 The like figure which also now saves you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh (not for purification purposes as immersion in Judaism), but the profession of a good conscience toward God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christ's death to sin brought death to sin for those in Christ, who have experience deliverance by means of water, not an immersion of purification as was common to Jews before feast days, and the baptism of John the Baptist's, or the daily ritual cleansing of the Essenes of the Dead Sea community, but an answer (*eperotema* - literally, the answer to a question) from a good conscience toward God, which is all possible because of new creation through the resurrection of Christ.

New Existence through Regeneration

There are several expression used to communicate the concept of being made new again. Paul speaks of those who become new creations through spiritual union with Christ, which he calls, "regeneration" (*palingenesias* - to generated again), or renewal (*anakainoseos* - to make new again), as Paul expresses in Titus 3:4-5,

*But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us **through the washing of regeneration** (*palingenesias*) **and renewal** (*anakainoseos*) by the Holy Spirit.*

A synonymous expression to regeneration is "new creation,"

(*kaine ktisis*) found in 2 Cor 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation** (*kaine ktisis*); old things have passed away; behold, **all things have become new.**" Also, in 4:16, "Even though our outward man is perishing, yet **the inward man is being renewed** (*anakainoutai* - made new again) day by day; and in Eph 2:10, we read, "we are his masterpiece, **having been created in Christ Jesus** (*ktisthentes en christo Iesou*), for good works," and in 2:15, he speaks of Christ, "having annulled the law in ordinances in order **that he might create** [*ktizo*] **in himself one new man,**" (*kainon anthropos*)," and 4:24, Paul speaks of those who have experienced regeneration and informs them that they are to live as newly created beings,

. . . you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard him and were taught in him, in the truth that is in Jesus: 22 that you put off your former manner of life, the old man, the one being corrupted by deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed (*ananeousthai* - made new again) *in the spirit of your mind* (to pneumatic tou noos) *24 and that you put on the new man* (ton kainon anthropon), **having been created in accordance with God** (*ktisthenta*) *in true righteousness and holiness* (Eph 4:20-24).

This same imagery is found in Col 3:8-10,

But now you yourselves put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man (*palaion anthropon*) *with his practices, 10 and have put on the new* (*neon*), *the one being renewed* (*anakainoumenon* - to be made new again) *in knowledge in accordance with the image* (*eikona*) *of one having created* (*ktisantos*) *him,"* (Col 3:8-10 - my translation).

One of Paul's most explicit statements concerning the identity of Jesus as a second Adam is found in Rom 8:29,

For those he foreknew (those who would be created anew in Christ), *he determined beforehand that they be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

This imagery of “regeneration” or “renewal” stands at the heart of Paul’s theology, and a major motif of his every discussion of renewal or regeneration is that of “divine reversal.” Only God can reverse what man has done to himself through self-willed rebellion, which has led to his self-destruction. In the faith of Paul, God redeems man by recreating him. But recreation does not occur for every man; it occurs only for those believe in God’s ability and will to recreate man; i.e. those who after the example of Jesus in faith and obedience.

“You Must Be Born Again”

This concept of salvation is also found in the teachings of Jesus as seen in his conversation with the rabbi Nicodemus (John 3:3-5). Jesus instructs him to embrace or enter into the reign of God (a realm of new existence ruled by grace - Rom 5:21), **he must be born anew** (*gennethe anothen*). Nicodemus’ response to Jesus was drawn from Jewish theology; although God is “spirit” he only moves within that which was physical. Man was of the flesh and in traditional thinking it was only through the physical (Temple sacrifice, study of Torah, alms to the poor) that a relationship with God could exist.

Nicodemus’ question was honest confusion. “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4). Jesus informed this teacher of Israel that he must think of reality differently than he was taught to think. The nature of man, as a being created in the image of God, was not as Nicodemus was thought to believe. God was a spiritual being and man, who was created in the image of God, was also a spiritual being although having a physical existence. Man’s life did not consist simply of body and soul (life); he was more than matter filled with animated life. There was something more to man, something that was of God, something the Hebrew Scriptures called “*ruach*” - spirit. In general usage *ruach* was breath or wind, or the life force associated with breath. *Ruach* was often used interchangeably with the Hebrew *nephesh* or soul, but there is a difference and Nicodemus was being introduced to this difference. “Unless one is born again,” says Jesus,

“he cannot see the reign of God.”

*Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, I say to you, **unless one is born of water and the spirit** (pneumatōs), he cannot enter the reign/rule of God. 6 **That which has been born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is of spirit (pneumatōs) is spirit (pneuma).** 7 Don’t be filled with wonder that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind (pneuma) blows (pneī) where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. **So is everyone who is born of the Spirit (pneumatōs).**” 9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?” 10 Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? (John 3:4-10.)*

Behold, All Things Have Become New

The key passage on new creation is found in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, 2 Cor 5:17-19. Here Paul instructs the Christians at Corinth that they are part of something wondrous that God has done; he has created them anew.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; old things have passed away; behold, **all things have become new.** 18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:17-19).*

*But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law (that which condemns man to die) so that **we serve in the new way of the spirit**, and not in the old way of the written code (Rom 7:6).*

In 2 Corinthians Paul encourages the church by reminding them that they are on a journey or pilgrimage, wherein their Adamic

nature is being conquered by their new created spirit. In 4:16 he tells them, "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." After Paul and Barnabas had converted a number of Celts in the region of Galatia, certain Jewish Christians from Jerusalem, more faithful to Moses than to Jesus, followed behind them and tried to convince the Galatians that they must be circumcised and avowal faithfulness to the Law of Moses. When Paul learned of this he dispatched a circular letter to all the house churches he and Barnabas had established in the region of Galatia that those troubling them did not understand that in Christ there was neither Jew nor Gentile and that they had all become new creations in their conversion to Christ, both Jews and the nations (*ethnoi*). In Gal 6:15 he writes, "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is new creation," (Gal 6:15).

A similar problem seems to have appeared in Ephesus at a later time when Paul was in prison in Rome. When Paul learned of what was happening he wrote them, instructing them that before their conversion to Christ they were Gentiles (*ethnoi* - nations) in the flesh and were not a part of Israel, and even more, they were "in Adam" where the curse of death awaited them, but God had created them anew and this had happened not because of the Law of Moses, but it was through his grace (2:8) that he had recreated them, "For we are his workmanship," says Paul, "created in Christ Jesus," (2:10). Paul then moves to the issue of what God had done to bring the whole of mankind back to him, not only the Israel but the Gentiles (actually *ethnoi* - nations) as well,

. . . at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now "in Christ Jesus" you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in his flesh [by means of his death and resurrection] the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances [which condemned all sinners to death], so as to create in himself one new man [anthropos - human race] from the two [Jews and Gentiles], thus making peace, 16 and that he might reconcile them

both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were afar off [Gentiles] and to those who were near [Jews], (Eph 2:12-17).

From prison in Rome Paul also wrote the Colossians informing them that they had been rescued from the dominion of darkness (their existence “in Adam”), and brought into the reign of God’s Son, in whom they had redemption and forgiveness of sins. He then makes one of the most significant statement of the whole of his writings as to the identity of Jesus; he declares Jesus as “the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation [i.e. the new creation Jesus effected by his resurrection].” Then later in the epistle he informs them that they cannot conduct themselves in an immoral life-style (fornication, impurity, lust, anger, malice, slander, filthy language, etc), and in verse 9 admonishes,

*Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on **the new man who is renewed in knowledge in accordance with the image of the one who created him** (Col 3:9-10).*

The renewal of all those of the human race who would accept regeneration from God must have been a powerful concept to Paul in that he addresses it repeatedly in his prison letters. In next to his last letter Paul writes to Titus encouraging him to admonish those in Christ to continue in their pilgrimage through the vale of soul-making and make them mindful of what a marvelous thing had happened in to effect their salvation. In Titus 3:5-6, he calls to mind what God had done,

*But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through **the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit**, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:4-6).*

Even though the concept of “new creation” was a large part of Paul’s theology, it was not unique to him. In his first circular letter Peter makes reference to the new birth which the resurrection of Christ has made possible, “Praise be to the God and Father of our

Lord Jesus Christ," writes Peter, "in his great mercy he has regenerated (*anagennao* - to be begotten again) into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). In the Gospel of John and in his letters and the apocalyptic composition, the Book of Revelation, John fills his writings with the new birth motif. It appears in the discussion of Jesus with the rabbi Nicodemus (John 3:3-18). The rebirth motif is found in many of the sermons Jesus preached in Jerusalem. In the sermon on the bread of life in John 6, Jesus says in verse 61, "The spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing; the words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." In John 8 Jesus makes reference to his having come from God; his words contain a subtle reference to his identity as someone who was not only a son of Adam, he was more, he was from above and the Jews who were his antagonist were from below.

And He said to them, "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. 24 Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins (as will all men "in Adam"); for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." 25 Then they said to Him, "Who are You?" And Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning (John 8:23-25).

Further in John 8:51, Jesus tells the Jews, "I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word he will never see death." How could he make such a promise unless he knew what he would do to fulfill such a promise? He would do it by dying and rising again, thus creating a new humanity that would not see death, only the Adamic body would die (see also: John 10:27-30; 11:25-26; 12:23-26, 30-32; 14:8-10, 28-30; 15:9-13; 16:5-6, 8-11, 16-22, 28; 17:1-8, 11, 13-26 [in these verses the concept of salvation for those "in Christ" gives significant meaning to his words]; 20:16-17, 19-20, 26-27). In the book of Revelation the theme of "renewal" is found in subtle motifs, as in the following:

To him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on

him my new name (Rev 3:12).

*Now I saw a **new heaven** and a **new earth**, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "**Behold, I make all things new.**"* (Rev 21:1-5).

Conclusion

In his letter to the Romans Paul admonishes his readers:

*I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual worship. 2 **Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will* (Rom 5:1-2).

Before one can experience renewal, he must cease his walk in the darkness in service to the satanic influences of this world. This walk of life Paul calls, "being conformed" (*suschematizo* – to be formed with or made like, to be conformed to) to this world (*aioni touto* – this age). The word "pattern" found in most English translations is not found in the Greek text. Paul is saying, "do not become identified with this age;" it is as simple as that. This warning is consistent with Jesus' warnings to the twelve concerning the power of the attraction of this world. One must be transformed by the renewing of the mind.

The word "transformed" is from the Greek *metamorphoo* meaning, "to change one's form, to be transformed." In Matt 17:2 it is

applied to the “transfiguration” of Jesus. It is the word from which derives the English word “metamorphosis,” meaning to undergo a change in form or appearance as in biological change from a cocoon, to a butterfly. The word suggests a significant change in appearance. In the Greek myths their gods and goddesses could change their appearance as Zeus changes into a swan in order to seduce and rape the mortal woman Leda. The imagery associated with the appearance of Jesus in Matt 17 is one of emanation of glory or illumination. Paul is saying something great significance with reference to the change that is to occur with those who are “in Christ.” One of Paul’s terms for the believer is *hagios* - saint, meaning one who is separated from the ordinary.

Paul gives the means of this change; it is to occur through the renewing of the mind. The word for “mind” is *nous* meaning, “one’s intellectual activity or thinking process.” One is to change the way he or she appears, which is directly related to the way he or she thinks. It is an axiom of human behavior that a person behaves as he or she does because they think as the do. We are to think in such a way as to demonstrate (*dokimazo* - prove by demonstration or testing) what is the good, acceptable, and complete will of God.

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