

in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20).

even when we were dead in our trespasses, (he) made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved — and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:5-6).

Our new life in Christ means a ‘radical transformation, a passing over from a condition of death and slavery to one of life and liberty.’¹ God has provided for us a transformation from the old order of the flesh to the new order of the Spirit because of Christ’s victory over sin and death on the cross.

My friend tells of her experience in being transformed from life in the flesh to the new life in the Spirit:

I grew up in a Christian home, attended a Bible-believing church, and made a profession of faith in high school. However, by my junior year in college I had left Christianity and believed that there was no spiritual dimension to life.

I married a Buddhist man and moved to Thailand, where I became immersed in a culture rooted in animism and spirit worship. At first I was fascinated by such a different way of looking at the world. We had a tiny doll-sized house on our property called a ‘spirit house’ to provide a resting place for the spirits of the land. Every day my

¹ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, William. B. Eerdmans, 1975), p. 224.

husband and the maids presented food and prayers at this shrine to appease the spirits and gain favor. They did the same with the Buddha statues in the house. We all wore amulets to ward off evil spirits. We visited temples and shrines to pray and offer incense and respect.

I became involved with fortune tellers on a regular basis. I participated in a ghastly séance. Over time, what I saw and experienced convinced me that this was REAL; there was indeed a spiritual presence which was active and powerful in the world. And this presence was often unpredictable and malevolent.

As the years passed, my marriage crashed and burned, bringing me a deep emptiness and hopelessness. I felt powerless and had nowhere to turn and I never once thought of turning to Jesus. But although I had rejected Him, God had not rejected me, and when I was at my lowest, He dropped three books into my lap that spoke of Jesus and the Christian faith and spiritual warfare. And all of a sudden, in the midst of reading the third book, the spiritual blinders came off and I saw very clearly that those I had chosen to put my trust in, my fortune tellers and Buddhism were tools of Satan. The author challenged me to choose which side I was on, the side of the flesh or of the Spirit and I didn't hesitate. Right then and there I prayed and chose Jesus, and I knew I was somehow changed.

God confirmed this very dramatically within minutes of my coming to faith: while entering a room in my home, I experienced a strong, visceral sensation of a presence which was evil and malevolent, which I had NEVER felt before.

The presence of the Holy Spirit within me had made me sensitive to the spiritual darkness around me that I had been blind to previously. From that time on, whenever I passed in front of the Buddha statues, I would feel unsettled by a similar sensation, and I took care to avoid the line of their gaze. This sounds totally otherworldly, but it was very real and quite powerful. The Lord also showed me that I had crossed from flesh to Spirit in positive ways as well. He led me to a godly church and my first time there I walked through the doors and was overwhelmed by the feeling that I had come 'home'; I could not stop crying the entire service. I bought a Bible and devoured it. On its pages I found words and passages I had never seen before that jumped off the pages at me. Were those words really never there before, or was it that I now had eyes to see?

Many changes and challenges followed in the next weeks and months, but my joy in the Lord and the newness of life He gave me replaced the emptiness and hopelessness of before. Thirty-eight years later He is still my good God and He continues to give me joy and light in Him.²

² My friend continues: 'Our loving Lord who brought me out of darkness into His marvelous light has been faithful to care and provide in the most tender and thoughtful of ways. He led me into remarriage to a godly Christian man; together we parented seven children and welcomed eighteen grandchildren. A widow now, I remain actively involved at my church of thirty-eight years. He has used sorrow and loss and blessing and fruitfulness to knead into my soul the truth that He will never leave me nor forsake me. He has given me so much—family and friends and fellowship and purpose in my life—but His greatest gift is Himself.'

Paul, A Persecutor, Becomes A New Creation

2 Corinthians 5:17 describes Paul's own experience. When he says 'if anyone is in Christ' he is marveling that he, too, who persecuted Christians, is now in Christ and belongs to the new creation. This verse 'summarizes the changes in his own life.'³ This verse is a gracious invitation to anyone to come to Christ, to participate in this new creation. If Paul could be transformed, so can anyone.

But I Don't Feel Very New

It could be lack of sleep, envy of other women, an unco-operative husband, rebellious kids, headaches, or discouragement about the sin in our life—any number of things, which deflate us and defeat us. We don't feel new at all. And yet, we are not who we were before we believed in Christ. Never forget that. It is crucial to our whole outlook. Even though we don't see much personal progress, we need to take hold of this truth.

When you get up in the morning with a migraine, remember that migraine is of the passing order of sin and death, and that order is disappearing because it was defeated on the cross. Someday you will have a head free of pain. Today, perhaps you can benefit from some medication, but you also have a Lord in heaven who is refining you like gold in the process.

³ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 297.

You are one who ‘has put on the new man which is after God in contrast with the old man which is after the flesh.’⁴

A New World Order Has Dawned

You and I don’t each stand alone as a new creation here and a new creation there. Rather we are part of something much bigger; the new world order ushered in by Christ’s victory namely, His kingdom. He rules over the entire creation.

The new creation ‘is not merely individual, but the new world of re-creation that God has made to dawn in Christ.’⁵ He who is in Christ, therefore participates in, belongs to, this new world order of God.

This is a cosmic matter. That’s why one day, at the last judgment, God will renew this physical world and raise our physical bodies so that we will be fully perfected in His new creation.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not

⁴ Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1962), p. 202.

⁵ Ridderbos, *Paul An Outline of His Theology*, p. 45.

only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:19-23).

‘[T]hings that are not formed anew by the Spirit of God’⁶ are passing away, the new has come. The old persists, of course, and the new has not yet fully come, but our lives are of the Spirit, not any longer of the flesh. These are hard, even dizzying concepts to comprehend, aren’t they?

Can you see why thinking of our salvation only as a fire escape from hell, misses the glory for which we have been saved? We are part of the new creation that God has inaugurated where all that belongs to the realm of evil will be vanquished forever and is now passing away because of the decisive victory of Christ on the cross and in His resurrection.

How To Live As Belonging To The New Creation

As one who is part of this new creation, our first priority as women is to sit at Jesus’ feet, to learn about Him and to learn from Him. He is our perfection. He is our righteousness. He gives us His Spirit and His Word. In Jesus, and only in Him, we are and are becoming truly new because we are becoming more like Him.

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1959), p. 234 (on 2 Cor. 5:17).

QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. List some deeds of the flesh. What would the opposite of these deeds look like in those who are a new creation in Christ?
2. Since you have believed in Jesus, you have been transformed and made new at the core of your being. Does this imply that we can be sinless? Can you find some verses that would answer this question? E.g. 1 John 1:8-9.
3. What of the old you is gone? What is still 'warring' in you? Read Romans 7 to see how Paul describes this battle.
4. Are you encouraged or bewildered when you hear that you are part of a new creation in Christ? Why?
5. How is God's strength made perfect in our weakness as His new creation?
6. Can a person who is of the new creation order revert to his or her former self of the flesh? Why or why not?

PERSONAL JOURNALING AND REFLECTIONS

- Have I laid all my sins at Jesus' feet for His forgiveness?
- Do I still feel guilty? Why?
- What are the obstacles to my thinking I am a new creation in Christ?
- What standards do I use that are not biblical?
- Reflect on Ezekiel 36:26; Colossians 3:9-10; Galatians 6:15; Romans 7:6.
- What do they tell us about this newness?

