

All Things Have Become New

*“Therefore if any
man be in Christ,
he is a new
creature: old
things are passed
away; behold, all
things are become
new.”*

*—II Corinthians
5:17*

THE APOSTLE PAUL’S reference in our opening text to those who are “in Christ” as new creatures, together with his statement that to these old things have passed away, and all things have become new, is found in an interesting and revealing context. The three preced-

ing verses read, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then all were dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.”—II Cor. 5:14-16

Here we have brought to our attention that those to whom Paul refers as new creatures are those who have been so moved by divine love, as

revealed through the sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of the entire world, that they have concluded that their lives belong to the Lord. Henceforth, these have resolved that they should no longer live for themselves, but for him who loved them and died for them. Looking throughout the world, we find that the majority of the human race has as their goal in life the attainment of material advantages which they are persuaded will contribute to their happiness, and to the happiness of their families. Their outlook and desires are not necessarily sinful. It is just that their own interests, and the interests of those who are near and dear to them, are their foremost concern.

Many, of course, are dedicated to noble causes, such as the aid of the sick and helpless. These are to be commended for their sacrificial service to humanity. Some in this category think of their service as, in some fashion, being done unto the Lord; this also is good. However, whether we think of those who live almost entirely unto themselves, or those who devote their lives to the service of others, the vast majority do not fall into the category described by Paul. He describes a small, unique group—those who have concluded that because they have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, they do not actually belong to themselves at all, but to the Lord. Motivated by this viewpoint, they devote themselves wholly to the doing of his will.

These give up the idea entirely of living for self, or for any other purpose than to do the will of God. They accept the headship of Christ over their lives and have been baptized into his body. This is described by Paul as being “in Christ,” and it is

these, the apostle declares, who are new creatures. Those of this class who remain faithful to their vows of consecration will become part of a “new creation,” and will be “partakers of the divine nature.” (II Pet. 1:4) Paul speaks of these as being “created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” (Eph. 2:10) Even now, while still in their fleshly “embryo” condition, they are “new” and different from all the world around them.

WHAT IS NEW?

To begin with, this creation is “new” in the sense that those who have entered into this relationship with God have renounced self and self-will and have dedicated themselves completely to the doing of the Heavenly Father’s will. This they have done of their own volition. Having been brought into contact with the great fact of divine love as expressed through the sacrificial work of Jesus, this love has constrained them to give up their earthly hopes, aims and ambitions and to follow the example of Jesus, who laid down his life in the doing of his Father’s will.

It is to this point of full surrender that God is drawing those whom he would make new creatures in Christ. When they thus give themselves wholly over to God and to the doing of his will, he begets them with the power and influence of his Holy Spirit. This newly “begotten” life in Christ Jesus is what Paul identifies as a “new creature.” It is concerning the new creature that the apostle says, “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

The next three verses tell us more about these “all things.” Paul states: “All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ,

and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."—II Cor. 5:18-20

Herein is God's response, given through the apostle, to our consecration to do his will rather than our own. We have given up our vocation of serving self, and now the Lord gives us a new vocation, which is to serve as ministers of reconciliation, using the "word of reconciliation." Since reconciliation to God is possible only through Christ, we act as ambassadors of Christ in this important ministry, or service. Instead of working for self, we are now working for and with God. Paul subsequently states the matter clearly: We are "workers together with him."—II Cor. 6:1

MUCH INVOLVED

This new vocation in which we are fellow workers with God and his Son, Christ Jesus, is possible only through divine grace. As members of a fallen and dying race, God could not use us in his service except by providing redemption through the blood of Christ, and the resulting covering of his "robe of righteousness." (Isa. 61:10) However, God has made this provision, and we have the assurance that in this new vocation our imperfect works will be acceptable to him. Truly this opportunity to be co-workers with the Heavenly Father is a glorious new treasure!

In II Corinthians 6:3 Paul speaks of “giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.” This suggests the necessity of great carefulness on our part. Our share in the ministry must be conducted in a way that will be pleasing to the Lord, and a glory to his name, and so far as possible we should be in all things properly approved “as the ministers of God.” (vs. 4) We should do this, Paul says, “in much patience.” In our fleshly vocation we might have previously given little thought to patience. When things failed to go as we would have liked we may have displayed a great deal of impatience, but now spiritual principles must override the fleshly responses in all areas of our lives.

Paul continues, “In afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings.” (vss. 4,5) In our vocation of making a way for ourselves in the world there are difficulties of various sorts. We may often find it necessary to discipline ourselves along various lines, and for most of us much labor is involved. We have considered it part of the cost to go through all these experiences in our earthly vocation in order to obtain what Paul elsewhere describes as a “corruptible” crown.—I Cor. 9:25

Here again, however, a great change has taken place as a result of being “in Christ” and having become “new creatures.” We still have many trials and difficulties, as have all the footstep followers of Jesus throughout the present age. More than ever we need now to be on the alert, not to make sure of success in our own temporal business, but that we might know the Lord’s will for us in all of life’s affairs and be faithful in doing it. More than ever,

also, we need to discipline ourselves in order to bring every thought, word and deed into subjection to the will of God through Christ. (II Cor. 10:5) We do these things now, not to promote self, but that we might be the better prepared to serve in our new vocation as ambassadors of Christ and to obtain an “incorruptible” crown.

NEW METHODS

Paul continues: “By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.” (II Cor. 6:6,7) When self-advantage and promotion were our chief interest, we may not have been too seriously concerned with the qualities here mentioned by Paul. We may not have deliberately violated accepted human ethics, yet perhaps we were not too rigidly careful along these lines. With these things, also, a great change has taken place.

In the pursuit of our vocation as ambassadors of Christ, nothing but the highest degree of purity, Paul says, is acceptable. Indeed, God’s standards along all lines of character are higher than those of the world. Our habits of thought are also very important in this regard. Paul wrote, “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”—Phil. 4:8

“By knowledge,” Paul says. In our temporal vocation a certain amount of knowledge is necessary to

successfully carry out those responsibilities. In our new, spiritual vocation knowledge is also necessary—knowledge of the work we have been called to do. The Lord has given us this knowledge in his Word of Truth, and in his wonderful plan of the ages revealed therein. It is this knowledge that we use as workers together with Christ, and as ministers of reconciliation.

We also need to be longsuffering, Paul reminds us. We certainly need to be longsuffering in our earthly vocation, because there are often trying circumstances we must endure. However, we need this quality of character even more now because we have to endure the tests of faithfulness which the Lord permits to come upon us. If we are to be loyal ambassadors of Christ we must be faithful and longsuffering in this service, even to the end of the way, for it is only those who are faithful unto death who will receive the crown of life.—Rev. 2:10

Kindness is another virtue, Paul states, that is very much needed by those “in Christ.” Some are more kindly disposed by nature than others, but when we only pursued our fleshly careers, we probably did not give a large amount of thought to the matter of being kind. Now, however, the exercise of kindness is a necessity in all the affairs of life. We should be kind to all those with whom we come in contact, even to the unthankful and the unholy. (Luke 6:35) In this, as in all things, we have Jesus as our example, and he was kind even to those who persecuted him and put him to death.

“By the Holy Spirit,” Paul adds. Prior to coming into Christ, we did not have the Holy Spirit of God to guide and motivate us. We had, to either a

greater or lesser degree, the spirit of self and the spirit of the world. Even the spirit of the Adversary may have influenced us. Now, however, God has given us a new spirit, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a very precious part of our present heritage as new creatures in Christ. By it we are begotten to a new life and anointed to preach the glad tidings. It bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. (I Pet. 1:3; Isa. 61:1; Rom. 8:14,16) We are sealed by the “holy Spirit of promise.”—Eph. 1:13; 4:30

To the extent that we are emptied of self, we can be filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit. In its various manifestations it is the spirit of love, of patience, of goodness, of sympathy, and of all the other righteous qualities of our Heavenly Father’s character. How blessed indeed we will be in our new vocation if we are filled, guided and controlled by the Holy Spirit of God and exemplify these characteristics. In this we will be approved as the ministers of God.

“By love unfeigned,” Paul continues. True love is completely unselfish, and this is one of the qualifications which must be possessed by new creatures in Christ Jesus, to whom has been given the ministry of reconciliation. In every aspect of this ministry in which we have the privilege of participating, we must be motivated by love—love for God, for the brethren, for the world, and even for our enemies. (Matt. 22:37-39; I John 3:14; Luke 6:27,28) So far as our flesh is concerned, this will, at times, place us at a disadvantage. However, as new creatures this will not matter, for, after all, we have covenanted to sacrifice the flesh and all its interests in our effort to know and to do God’s will. *(Continued on page 36)*

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In our conduct of the ministry of reconciliation we are to use the “word of truth,” Paul explains. In our earthly vocations we may have previously sought to attain our ends by the aid of human philosophy and the wisdom of this world. Now, however, the Lord has given us the “word of truth” to use in our service to him. It is God’s plans and purposes which we present in our ministry, not our own. At the very center of that plan is Jesus as man’s Redeemer and Savior. Paul endeavored, and we should do likewise, to be “determined not to know any thing” among those with whom we come in contact in the Lord’s service “save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” (I Cor. 2:2) This is the very basis of our spiritual profession as ministers of our Heavenly Father.

THE POWER OF GOD

Before we became new creatures in Christ Jesus, when our goal was more or less to get along well in life, we utilized whatever “power” suited our purposes best. Sometimes it may have been the power of money, influence, or perhaps of prestige. Now we have been given something new. We conduct the ministry of reconciliation in the power of God. It is a rich blessing to know this, for it should do away with the temptation to use worldly methods in the conduct of the Lord’s work.

Knowing that the power of God is enlisted on behalf of his work, we will know that there can be no failure. As a consequence, we will realize that when we present the word of reconciliation and there are no apparent results, it is the Lord’s will

that it should be thus. Understanding this, we will continue to be faithful in the proclamation of the truth regardless of what the fruitage may be. “In the morning” we will sow the seeds of truth, and “in the evening” we will not withhold our hands, knowing not which will prosper, or whether the power of God will produce results from both our morning and evening efforts.—Eccles. 11:6

God’s power is infinite and unlimited. There is nothing that can interfere with the accomplishment of all his good purposes. The word which has gone forth from him—the word of reconciliation which he has given to us—will not return to him void, but will accomplish all that he pleases, and it will prosper in all the purposes for which he has sent it. (Isa. 55:10,11) How wonderful it is to know that we have been made co-workers, partners, with the Almighty Creator, and what peace of mind and of heart this should give us! We realize our own limitations, but when we consider that our Heavenly Father is our partner in our new, spiritual vocation, we have nothing to fear, for everything will be accomplished exactly as he has planned.

THE ARMOR OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

In our earthly vocation we may have surrounded ourselves with all the protection we could muster. In the world generally, even carnal weapons are not considered out of place as a means of offense and defense against enemies. In this also the Lord has given us something new. He has provided us with what Paul refers to as “the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.” In Ephesians 6:10-18, the apostle presents in considerable detail the

various items of this spiritual “armor.” In a general way it would appear that each part of this spiritual armor represents a particular application of the truth which is designed to protect us. Let us note below Paul’s words.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

What a marvelous provision from God! This armor protects our heads, our hearts, and our feet. It encircles us by the girdle, or belt, of truth, which is a symbol of servitude. Indeed, in our spiritual vocation, we are dedicated to the service of the “word of reconciliation.” Our armor has a sword also—“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” This sword is not used to destroy our enemies, but to provide words of reconciliation. It is also designed to refute the evil devices and cunning, crafty lies of the

Adversary. This sword assists, too, in putting down the selfish ambitions of our own flesh which rise up against the new creature and seek to hinder faithfulness in the new vocation given to us by the Lord.

While prayer may not be, strictly speaking, a part of the Christian's armor, it is nevertheless most important to us in maintaining contact with our loving Heavenly Father. Thus Paul mentions it in the immediate context of his description of the armor. (Eph. 6:18) "Prayer keeps the Christian's armor bright," wrote the poet, and even "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees." Therefore, symbolically, we are reminded that through prayer all the sources of divine power are made available to new creatures in Christ.

GOD'S PROVISION OF "ALL THINGS"

Truly the "all things" which are of God, and which are precious to us as new creatures, and so vitally important in our new vocation, are a wonderful evidence of God's love. In Romans 5:5 Paul speaks of the love of God being "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which he has given unto us."

May we, by the Lord's grace and help, daily endeavor to be emptied of self, that we might be filled and controlled by his Spirit. Being filled by his Spirit, let us engage daily in the development of its various fruits and graces of Christian character. (Gal. 5:22,23; II Pet. 1:5-7) As we abound in the Spirit and its fruitage we can continue to go forth in our spiritual vocation as new creatures, confident of the Lord's approval and blessing. ■