

## **New Creations in Christ**

II Corinthians 4:16 – 5:21

Some of you may notice that I have gotten a haircut. It was part of my Mother's Day gift to my wife Cindy, who was tired of looking at my long, shaggy hair. Because barber shops are closed, Cindy eagerly volunteered to cut my hair. What I had momentarily forgotten is that Cindy doesn't do anything half-heartedly. A fitting name for her is "honey bee." She is happiest when she is busy doing helpful, needed things. It is one of her qualities that I have always found endearing – except maybe on haircuts.

I want to start my message this morning by sharing some endearing names God has given to people who love and fear Him. Each name expresses a truth about followers of Christ. We are called: God's beloved, His fellow workers, His friends, His redeemed, His saints, heirs of His promises, we are the Bride of Christ, and God's new temple on earth – just to name a few. Today, however we are going to look at our name: new creations in Christ. The Apostle Paul celebrates the truth expressed by this name in II Corinthians 5.

But first let me remind you that in II Corinthians 3, the Apostle Paul rejoices in being a member and a minister of the New Covenant, which was inaugurated by means of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. In chapter 3, Paul also testifies that the long awaited New Covenant far surpasses the glory of the Old Covenant, which was itself – quite glorious. The far greater New Covenant can only be entered into by embracing the life-changing gospel. All true followers of Christ are in the New Covenant – and as a result we have been rescued from the domain of darkness and

transferred us into Christ's Kingdom of light.

In Matthew 13:45, Jesus says that people who have embraced His Kingship, and have become citizens of His Kingdom – are like a businessman, who discovered a pearl of such great value – that he sold everything he had to obtain it. In other words, Jesus declares that Christians are a spiritually wealthy and enormously blessed people. Do we view ourselves that way? We should.

However, in II Corinthians chapter 4, Paul reminds us that we carry this great treasure inside jars of clay, referring to our present flesh and blood bodies, which are fearfully and wonderfully made, **and yet** are fashioned from the dust of the earth and are therefore temporary. Let's begin reading at II Corinthians 4:16-18,

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self [our body] is wasting away [Paul doesn't sugar coat that], our inner self [our spirit, our soul] is being renewed day by day [because of our union with Christ].<sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction [caused by living in a fallen world with bodies of clay] is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,<sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

Paul is not counseling Christians to be ungrateful for our amazing bodies – or for our tangible, earthly blessings. He just wants us to keep in mind that these blessings are fleeting. Cindy and I are both grateful to live at a time in history – when we have electricity and indoor bathrooms – rather than lanterns and outhouses. But we will enjoy these blessings only for a brief lifetime – in contrast to the blessings Paul speaks of in

**Ephesians 1:3**, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” Those are forever blessings. And Christians, we need to remind ourselves regularly that our eternal destiny is to be completely holy and blameless, completely healthy and strong, completely filled with love and joy, and to be a vital part of God’s forever family. Whatever hardships we bear during this life – cannot compare with the joy we have in store. Let’s continue reading II Corinthians 5:1-4,

“For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home [speaking of our body which houses our spirit] is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands [a house is way better than a tent and our future house is going to be], eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup> For in this tent we groan [more so when we get older], longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, <sup>3</sup> if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked [a spirit without a body]. <sup>4</sup> For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened, not that we would be unclothed [Paul is changing the metaphor of our bodies being tents, to that of our bodies being clothes which cover our spirits. At death we do not want to be merely spirits], but [rather] that we would be further clothed so that what is mortal [our present bodies] may be swallowed up by life.”

Whatever we are going to be clothed with, when we die and go to heaven, will last forever. And yet this does not mean that at death we will be instantly clothed in our ultimate glorified bodies. I say this because in I Corinthians 15:50-54, we learn that all of God’s people will receive our ultimate glorified bodies at the same time, when Christ returns to raise the dead and abolish physical death. I believe whatever God clothes us with, when we die and go to heaven, will be incorporated into our final glorified bodies – which will be made for life on the New Earth – as described in Revelation 21:1-4. There will be no flesh and bodies on that New Earth.

In II Corinthians 5:5, Paul tells us, “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” [of what is to come]. But how can we know if we have the Holy Spirit and therefore possess the promise of eternal life with glorified bodies? Paul gives us some clues in verses 6-11,

“So we are always of good courage [in this context courage is referring to the fact that Christians do not need to fear death. That doesn’t mean we have a death wish, but we are confident that when we die, we will be fully present with the Lord. And that confidence is one of the proofs that the Holy Spirit is a reality in our lives. Paul goes on to say in verse 6]. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord [that is to say we are away from the ultimate presence of the Lord – which is in heaven. However, if we are Christians, then we have Christ dwelling with us now – in our tent – along with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit – according to John 14:23-26. But these tents in which we presently dwell, will one day become dilapidated and unfit to live in. And so at the time of our death, Jesus takes our spirits to the Father’s house, and clothes them, so we can continue our fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in a far greater way. And we know this **because**],<sup>7</sup> . . . we walk by faith, not by sight [the ability to believe God’s promises is another indicator of having the Holy Spirit].<sup>8</sup> Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.<sup>9</sup> So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him [that is another indicator of having the Holy Spirit, who promotes within us a genuine desire to please God by walking in His ways].<sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others” [it is a horrible thing for lost people to die lost].

Let’s think about the last two verses we have read. Verse 10 tells us we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. I believe one of the jobs of the Holy Spirit is to teach believers to live with that reality in mind –

which gives us a willingness to forego instant gratification in order to achieve lasting joy and peace. So let me ask: Are we all learning to live with eternity in mind, rather than living just for the here and now?

Secondly, does it startle you – that we will one day be shown all the right things and all the wrong things we have done during this life? Why would God show us all the wrong things? Haven't our sins and wrongs been forgiven in Christ? Yes. But Jesus says in **Luke 7:47**, “. . . he who is forgiven little loves little.” Friends, we may need to fully know how much we have been forgiven, in order to love God as much as He deserves to be loved.

Thirdly, we are told in verse 11, that the Apostle Paul, who longed to go home and be with the Lord, also feared the Lord. Let me explain how that reality works with me. I love having an intimate relationship with God, which enables me to pray to Him, thank Him, and enjoy Him throughout the whole day. But if I get uppity with God, and insist that I am going to do what the world is currently enamored with – even though God says it is wrong, then I will take a trip to the woodshed. God disciplines those He loves. But even beyond that deterrent, I have discovered, now that the Holy Spirit lives in me, I just get miserable when I am knowingly out of God's will. We cannot love God and be happy when we are doing things that grieve Him. Because I love my wife, I am also miserable when she is unhappy with me – even though she never has a valid reason for feeling that way :)

What the Apostle Paul writes in the rest of verse 11 through verse 15,

is due to the fact that he was being attacked by false Jewish teachers who had invaded the Corinthian Church [see II Corinthians 11:13-22]. Let's listen to Paul's response to their attacks,

“But what we **are** is known to God [and God's opinion of us is ultimately the only one that counts], and I hope [that who I am] is known also to your conscience.<sup>12</sup> We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart [the Jewish false teachers loved to boast about their circumcision in the flesh, their kosher diet and their feast days. Paul maintained all those regulations were merely shadows of Christ and are no longer necessary now that Christ has come. The false teachers also accused Paul of being mentally unstable. This was serious because if Christians were deceived into doubting Paul's stability, it would be easier for them to doubt Paul's teachings].<sup>13</sup> For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God [Paul was willing to die for Christ, which may appear extreme and over the top to baby Christians]; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.<sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died [with Christ to our old way of living];<sup>15</sup> 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.”

As Christians, our justification before God, took place the moment we repented of our sins and put our trust in Christ. Our sanctification is a lifelong work of the Holy Spirit, whereby He enables us to daily walk out the ramifications of our justification. We are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works.

I am shifting gears here, so please stay with me. When I came alive spiritually, through repentance and faith in Christ, it did not change my physical body whatsoever. If doctors listen to my heart and examine my blood under a microscope, they will see nothing to indicate that I am a

Christian. Paul says we have this treasure in jars of clay. Let's keep that truth in mind as we continue reading verses 16-17,

“From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer [there was a time when Paul believed that Jesus was a false Messiah, who got exactly what He deserved – death by crucifixion. Paul believed this way because he accepted what the Rabbis said about the Messiah, rather than what the Bible says about the Messiah. But when Paul met the ascended Lord Jesus on his way to Damascus, all of that changed].<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

Paul's physical body did not change after he became a Christian. The change Paul experienced was on the inside. And so there is a **now** and a **not yet** about the truth that we are new creations in Christ. Because we still have flesh and blood bodies, we are not yet the full new creations that we will one day be. Our full transformation will not happen until Christ returns for His completed Bride and we receive our glorified bodies, which will be perfectly suited to live in God's very presence upon the ultimate new earth.

Does it sound strange to you when I speak about a new earth and an **ultimate** new earth? When I was studying Advent services, put together hundreds of years ago, I was surprised to discover that Christians used to believe there was a form of the new earth which was birthed when Christ inaugurated the New Covenant, two thousand years ago. In their thinking, there was a **now** and a **not yet** even with the new heavens and new earth spoken of in the Bible. Let me show you why by reading a description of God's new heavens and new earth recorded in **Isaiah 65:17-23**,

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people . . . <sup>20</sup> No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days; for the youth will die at the age of one hundred, and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred shall be thought accursed [a really bad sinner]. <sup>21</sup> They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit . . . <sup>23</sup> They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD.”

Isaiah’s new earth still has sinners and physical death, even though life spans are much longer and peaceful conditions are much greater. But the ultimate new heaven and new earth has neither sinners or death. Listen carefully to **Revelation 21:1-4**,

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the **sea** was no more [in the Bible, the sea can represent unbelieving humanity. In the ultimate new heaven and earth there will be no unbelievers] . . . <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them [on the ultimate new earth], and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, **and death shall be no more**, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’”

This is not the same new heaven and new earth described by Isaiah. Did you notice that in Isaiah’s vision of a new earth, there will be a believing Jewish people, enjoying great blessings? This is why hundreds of years ago Christians saw a connection between Isaiah’s new heaven and earth, and the New Covenant Age inaugurated by Christ. To see this connection more clearly, we need to look at **Jeremiah 31:31-34**,

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah [Jewish people] . . . <sup>33</sup> I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” [this means a great number of Jewish people will enter into the New Covenant through faith in Christ].

Let’s review some New Testament history. The first people to become new creations in Christ were Jewish, and they formed the first New Covenant Church – at Jerusalem. Unfortunately, the majority of Jewish people initially rejected Christ. The Apostle Paul knew this would one day change. Listen to what Paul writes in **Romans 11:25-26**,

“. . . I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. <sup>26</sup> And in this way all Israel will be saved . . . .”

Initially the Gentiles were dependant upon a remnant of Jewish believers – to share the gospel with them so they could become new creations in Christ. But as the New Covenant Age has progressed, great numbers of Gentiles have come into the New Covenant through repentance and faith in Christ. These great numbers of Gentile believers will at some point be used by God to make unbelieving Jews jealous – which will then open their eyes and help them come to Christ in great numbers. **Isaiah 19:23-24**, implied this truth over 700 years before the Apostle Paul wrote about it,

“In that day [sometime during this New Covenant Age] there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria [modern day Iraq], and Assyria will come

into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians [and these great numbers of Gentile believers will bring about what we read next].<sup>24</sup> In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth.”

The fastest growing church in the world, is presently in Iran, which is in the neighborhood of the countries Isaiah mentions. Friends, the more people who become new creations in Christ, the more blessings this earth will experience, but the ultimate new earth awaits Christ’s coming in His glorified body to give all His followers glorified bodies – which then completes the process of making us New Creations in Christ. Let’s now read II Corinthians 5:18-21,

“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;<sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.<sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Lost people need to know that Christ has reconciled God to man, if we repent and trust in what Christ has done. Did you notice in verse 20, that Paul mentions another name God has given to followers of Christ? We are “ambassadors” of Christ. An ambassador is someone who represents the king of one nation to the people of another nation. Our job as Christians is to accurately speak for King Jesus – and to model His will and His ways to the peoples of this earth. Because God has called us to be Christ’s ambassadors, His spokesmen, we must not shirk our responsibility to rightly interpret the Word of God. Ephesians 4 indicates that the Church

should be doing better at this as we grow older and more mature. So Christians need to put on our big boy pants, just as **Hebrews 5:12-14**, commands us to do,

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers [of God’s Word – instead], you need someone to teach you again the basic principles [the abc’s] of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,<sup>13</sup> for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.<sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”

I am amazed at how undiscerning Christians can be in recognizing what is good and what is evil. And the reason for this is because so many Christians do not study the Bible deeply, nor apply it thoroughly, nor attend churches that do. Our culture desperately needs mature, discerning Christians to shine the light of God’s Word upon the lies of our culture. Friends, the main problem of our culture is not the prevalence of darkness. It is the scarcity of light. Light overcomes darkness. As New Creations in Christ we need to grow up – stand up – speak up and apply the truths of God’s Word to every area of life. Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, I have shared some truths this morning that were once well known, but have been lost along the way. I am grateful that the truth of gospel is still being proclaimed and that millions of people are coming to Christ all over the world. But I am sad, that the ramifications of the gospel for all of life are not being nearly as well proclaimed or understood. Please help us to do better, because Your promises, Your plans and Your glory demand it. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

The Benediction this morning comes from Paul's prayer for the believers at Ephesus: May the Father of glory give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called us, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when he raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named . . . And He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.