

A New Creation: A Paulin Devotional
2 Corinthians 5:17-21

"If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!"

Paul writes this in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, while imploring them to give themselves over to Christ to be reconciled to God. The new creation - a transformed life. Paul is taking such vital Old Testament concepts together here and tying them together through Jesus.

In Psalm 51, the King David begs God, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me." The Hebrew word that King David uses for create is "Bara" (בָּרָא) - and this is a verb reserved exclusively for God - it's the divine act of creation with which the Bible begins in Genesis.

David asked individually for a clean heart. But the prophets spoke repeatedly of a coming transformation for all of God's people. In Ezekiel 36:26-27, God promises to replace a "heart of stone" with a "heart of flesh," and put His spirit within them.

For Paul, that heart exchange happens through Jesus. Faith in Jesus, through whom we are reconciled to God, changes us, recreates us. We become a new creation.

There are two Greek words for "new" that Paul could have used: "Neos" or "Kainos." Neos means new in time - brand new on the timeline, new, recent, young - a car, say, fresh off the assembly-line. That's good, sure. A fresh start, a new beginning.

But Kainos - that's a wholly different take on "new." Kainos is new in quality, intrinsically in very nature. It implies something unprecedented, fresh, and completely different in substance than what came before.

Paul chose Kainos. It's not just a fresh start, it's being remade into an entirely different being.

Paul himself had a pretty good grasp on what it was to have an utterly changed life. He writes this letter after 20 years in ministry, serving God, going from place to place (arrest to arrest, shipwreck to shipwreck, beating to beating - the man did not have an easy time of things) spreading word of the transformational work of Jesus Christ. But before his life-altering encounter with the risen Christ that completely turned him around, Paul was one of those religious leaders actively persecuting Christians as an out of control, heretical sect of Judaism. But in Christ, Paul became a completely new creation.

Theologians have been expounding on this one concept for 21 centuries. Life as a Christian should be transformational. Life in Christ changes everything in our relationship with God, where he sees us as utterly righteous because of Christ standing in our place for our sins.

When we know that, we need to share that knowledge. The freeing, life-altering truth of a life in

Jesus should be so exciting, so important, that we need to tell everyone about it. Paul committed the rest of his life to telling anyone who would listen about the good news of a transformed life in Jesus.

It's no wonder Christians so enjoy using the metaphor of the caterpillar changing into a butterfly for the transformed life. The butterfly isn't just a caterpillar with wings added on. The caterpillar is GONE when the butterfly emerges. The butterfly is something entirely new.

Everything old has passed away, Paul says. "Parerchomai." Passed out of sight, perished, come to an end.

That was certainly true for Paul. He lost his social status, his position among the ruling elite in Jerusalem, his safety, his reputation, his freedom, and ultimately his life. And he literally said that he counted everything he lost as garbage - lost, so that he could gain Christ.

St. John Crystostom (archbishop of Constantinople in the 4th Century AD) said, "There is no miracle like that of a changed life. To change a man from vice to virtue, from selfishness to love, is a greater work than to command the elements, or to raise the dead."

St. Athanasius of Alexandria (276-373 AD) wrote, "He who is dead can work nothing - but let him who is incredulous look at what is done in the world. Let him see how people who used to be cruel and lawless are now gentle and law-abiding....Who then is this Christ who does these things? Is He a dead man, or is He alive and working these miracles every day."

The bottom line - being a Christian is meant to utterly transform us. We, as Christians, are meant to convince the world of our truth by the lives we live. We aren't going to be perfect - we'll still make mistakes. But a radical, transformational, self-sacrificing life of love is meant to be that by which the world recognises us. It's that radical transformation that testifies to the active work of a living God in us.

As the hymn goes "They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love - yes they'll know we are Christians by our love."

When Paul talked about his ministry, and of going to the churches in Syria and Cilicia, he admitted freely that no one had known him there. All they knew was the report they heard: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." But that very thing didn't make them skeptical - it was the most convincing evidence he could give them, and they praised God because of Paul's transformed life.

So the question we need to ask ourselves inevitably becomes - are we recognisable by the life we're leading? And if not - have we really surrendered ourselves to the God we claim to worship, to live a life truly rooted in Him?

