

The New Creation (2 Corinthians 5:11–21)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (3/5/2023)

Introduction

It is important to read this letter, understanding its background. Paul was defending his apostleship and ministry against the *Judaizers*, Jewish “Christians” from Jerusalem who taught that the physical descendants of Abraham were the only true citizens of the kingdom, and that old-covenant rituals, ordinances, and festivals were still in effect. They objected to Paul because he, although a Jew, preached the new covenant and sought to reach Gentiles with the gospel. Paul argued that in Christ, all former distinctions were removed, and that God was building a new kingdom of believers from every tribe, language, people, and nation (Revelation 5:9, 10). Paul developed this understanding in Galatian, again arguing against Judaizers (Galatians 3:25–29).

This message focuses on verse 17: “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*” Interestingly, the rabbis used the phrase, *he is a new creation*, to speak of Gentiles that converted from idolatry to Judaism. Paul now puts this expression back in their face and testifies that *if anyone* [Jew or Gentile] *is in Christ, he is a new creation*—part of God’s restored creation.

I. The Work of God to Reconcile Creation (v. 18)

1. The *plan* of God’s work—the rescue and restoration of the creation and fallen world

a. Removing the old kingdom usurped by Satan as promised in Genesis 3:15.

As Adam represented the race in the fall, so Christ represents the new race in His obedience and sacrifice (5:15).

1) Satan’s beginning, fall, and reign on earth (Ezekiel 28:12–15).

When did Satan fall? It had to be after the creation week because God declared everything to be “*very good*” (Genesis 1:31), and He rested on the seventh day. There was no sin. Psalm 8 speaks of God’s creative work, especially His purpose for mankind: “*You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet*” (Psalm 8:4–6).

Did Satan become jealous of Adam’s dominion? Did he believe, being a heavenly being higher in the created order than Adam, that he should have that dominion, seeing he was the guardian cherub of Eden?

2) The deception of Eve, fall of Adam, and God’s plan to reverse the damage of the fall.

A simple recapping of the fall reveals that Satan deceived Eve by first questioning God’s motive, then denying God’s Word, and finally provoking a desire to eat the forbidden fruit. Adam stood by and was not deceived (1 Timothy 2:14). Perhaps Adam did not fully understand the extent of his disobedience, but he plunged the whole race into rebellion. First Timothy 2:15 reveals God’s plan to rescue and restore the race to His original purpose. This childbearing refers to the “*seed of the woman*” and the incarnation of the Son of God. The path of this rescue and restoration is seen in the progress of the covenants of God with man.

b. The major distinction between the old and new covenants—flesh and promise

Verse 16 uses the word *flesh* (*sarx*), which typically refers to the sinful bodies in which we are confined until the resurrection. However, sometimes it is used to distinguish the difference between the physical descendants of Abraham (God’s covenant people in the old economy after the flesh) versus

the church (God's new-covenant people in the new economy of promise after the spirit). This is explained in Romans 9 where Paul discusses his burden for "my kinsmen according to the flesh" (v. 3). He further explains, "But it is not as though the word of God has failed [Israel's rejection of their long-expected Messiah addressed in prophets might seem like God's promises failed]. For [Paul then explains why that has not happened] *not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel [true Israel, Christ], and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring [according to the flesh], but 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.'* This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring" (Romans 9:3–7). This includes all, Jew and Gentile, who have been born again. This is what reconciling is all about—uniting the whole redeemed human race into one new kingdom of God.

2. The *nature* of God's work (v. 19)

To reinforce verse 18, Paul uses an emphatic: "God reconciled us to Himself." The means He used was the sacrifice of His Son (v. 21). Reconciliation is the work of God whereby His former enemies are brought into a relationship of favor by settling the issues of enmity (Colossians 1:19–23). Paul uses the word *world* in verse 21 to indicate the *extent* of His work of reconciliation to include all nations (as in John 3:16), but not every individual who ever lived.

II. The Work of the Ambassadors

1. The *ministry*, a heavenly embassy (v. 20: "Therefore, [KJV has "now," which actually is better to show the force of the sentence] *we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.*) An ambassador is the resident of a foreign country who is sent by that country to represent the country in another.
2. The *message* to the Corinthians (v. 20: "On behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God")

The message is simply stated. Because of the work of Christ on the cross, "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them." The process is explained in verse 21: "He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." That is also the message the ambassador brings. We are to preach that Jesus became the substitute for His people. He took their sins on Him and suffered the wrath of God in their place. Therefore, God made those whom Christ substituted for righteous in Him. This work cannot be for everyone without exception. Jesus did not die to make salvation possible if something else is initiated (accepting Jesus into your heart) to activate that salvation. No. Faith, activated by regeneration, is the *evidence* of salvation, not the cause of it. A Christian is saved because Jesus died to save him. Consequently, God makes him righteous. The ambassador's job is to spread the message far and wide.

Conclusion

The *impact* on the Corinthians is seen in 6:1. Any failure of the Corinthians could not be laid to their having fallen away from salvation. Their failure could only mean they had made a claim for which there was no work of God in them to support. It was a false claim. The mark of a reconciled sinner is his willing submission to and obedience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He does the will of God happily for the glory of Christ.

Paul cited Isaiah 49:8 to prove it was God who saved His people: "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." What Paul did not cite from the passage proves God's new covenant plans for the whole earth (vv. 8, 12).