

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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**Broadcast Date:** 9 August 1998

**No.** T0018

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## The Great Salvation: The New Creation

Mrs. Jones surveyed her new washing machine with joy. It seemed too good to be true! For too many months now, she had struggled on with the old one which was always breaking down. Her husband, Fred, was a good sort and could usually mend it, when he had time to get round to it! With five children, life without a washing machine was too awful to think about. But money was always in short supply, and a new one was just a dream. But then an uncle had died, leaving them a small sum of money - hence the machine.

There it stood in all its pristine whiteness. It almost invited her to use it, and with a great pile of washing waiting to be done, she scarcely needed a second invitation. Yet, at the same time, she was strangely reluctant to spoil its newness.

Those of us brought up in the '40s and '50s had to accept the idea of 'make do and mend'. In the disposable society of the '90s, it's often easier and cheaper to buy a new one.

The subject of our talk today is "New Creation". This is the last in this series of topics under the general heading of "The Great Salvation". It comes last because, while it has a vital message for Christians today, it also takes in what will be the unfolding of the future, final chapter in God's great plan of salvation.

The first mention of the term 'new creation' in the New Testament is in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" - or 'new creation' as many translations have it. What do we understand by the term 'new creation'? It might help to go back and think about God's original creation.

The Bible opens with the majestic utterance: "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Of that creation, we read, "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). The book of Genesis then goes on to record how, through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, sin came in and spoilt God's creation. It spoilt Adam and Eve - they lost their place in Eden and came under the sentence of death. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19). The animal creation was spoilt and came under sin's curse. To the serpent, God had to say, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman" (Genesis 3:15). The earth itself, with its plant life, was not exempt from that curse. God said to Adam, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake ... thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth" (Genesis 3:18).

What would God do with this sin-spoilt creation - with men out of harmony with God and with each other, out of harmony, too, with their environment? Was it going to be a case of 'make do and mend'? "No," the Bible insists. "A thousand times 'No'", we happily add, in the light of its teaching. So the unfolding record of the Bible shows us how God, His sabbath rest after creation having been broken by sin, sets to work to bring about His plan of salvation. This plan would ultimately usher in 'new creation'. Crucial to that plan would be the coming of His Son, Jesus, to be the Saviour. It is not surprising, then, to hear Jesus saying to those Jews who insisted on the observance of a Sabbath rest, even if it meant that a paralysed man should not have been healed, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17).

Our text in 2 Corinthians 5:17, if translated literally, would read, "So if any one in Christ, new creation". According to the cold rules of English grammar, that is an ungrammatical sentence. Yet the words stream from Paul's pen, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, in a way which indicates that this glorious news of 'new creation' is one that cannot be confined by ordinary grammatical rules. It bursts out in all its wonder.

This old creation, this sin-spoilt world of men and women far from God, will not go on forever, however much men may plan for its continued existence. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us: "Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away" (Hebrews 8:13). God's new creation will be seen in all its beauty and perfection in the glory of a future eternity, God's eternal day. It is surely appropriate that, just as the first book of the Bible gives us the details of His first creation, so the last book of the Bible tells us the little we know of that eternal day. It is worth reading the account in Revelation 21:1-5: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the

tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new."

Just think of that! Of those wages of sin, death, the rightful and righteous judgment of God upon Adam, and upon every generation of Adam since, God says, "No more death"! To the sorrow first pronounced upon Eve, and felt ever since, God says, "No more sorrow"! To the outcries (for that is the force of the word 'crying' in our verse) of suffering and oppressed mankind from Abel onwards, God says, "No more crying"! To the pain first felt by Adam and Eve, a pain which only mirrored that in the heart of God at that time, pain which continues to be felt on hospital beds, in refugee camps, and, indeed, all over the world, God says, "No more pain"!

The prophets of the Old Testament had long looked forward to a day when the old order of things would give place to a new. Thus God can say through Isaiah, "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered" (Isaiah 65:17). Then God would rejoice in Jerusalem and His people Israel. It would seem that Isaiah is speaking of that time which, in other parts of the Bible, is spoken of as the 1,000 year (or 'millennial') reign of Christ. This is the period some time after the coming of the Lord Jesus for His Church, but prior to the eternal state. Even then, however, there will be marked changes in the creation. "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock ... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 65:25). In many ways, that millennial reign will be a foretaste of the far greater splendour of God's eternal day, but with significant differences. It will be lived out on this old earth. In the millennium, sin will not yet have been finally put away. Righteousness reigns - where sin rears its ugly head, it will be immediately dealt with.

By contrast, Peter writes of the eternal state thus: "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). When sin has been finally put away, righteousness will be in its natural habitat; it dwells.

So far, we have talked only about new creation in its future form. But what about new creation for us today? Is there a message for us in this world where Satan, with all his power, is still rightly known as the prince of this world? Most assuredly there is! And the message is this: that when it comes to the problem of man's sin and his estrangement from God, God is not prepared to put up with a 'make do and mend' job! Nothing less than 'new creation' will suit His designs of love and grace. How many of us have started a new year with good resolutions, only to find them frustrated by our own inability to keep them! How often have we resolved to turn over a new leaf, only to find that our old ways will not go away! No amount of 'make do and mend' will put right our human, sinful situation.

The Christians at Corinth, to whom Paul wrote, lived in a city with one of the worst reputations in the civilised world at that time. Indeed, a new expression, 'to corinthianise' had been coined to describe the worst kinds of immorality. To these Corinthians, Paul could write, "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Note the past tense: "And such were some of you". What had brought about the transformation in the lives of these Corinthian Christians? Nothing short of new creation. Not, of course, in what will be seen to be its literal display in that eternal state, but in a no less real but spiritual way. As they had turned from their sins to the Saviour, so they had received not only the forgiveness of their sins but also a new life, eternal life, in Christ. This was no 'make do and mend' job of God with them. Rather, in this spiritual way, He had made them anew in Christ. This new life in Christ would be lived out in bodies which were still liable to sin and in a world of sin.

So it is that Paul writes, "If any man in Christ, new creation"! Through faith in Christ, the Corinthians had stepped out of their position of being "in Adam", with its consequent condemnation, to that of being "in Christ", with its consequent blessing. In the preceding verse, Paul writes, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more" (2 Corinthians 5:16). Here is an entirely new relationship based on Christ's death and resurrection.

On that first Easter morning, when the risen Lord Jesus made Himself known to Mary Magdalene, it would seem that she instinctively reached out to touch Him. But Jesus had to say to her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God" (John 20:17). Mary simply wanted to follow the Lord as she had known Him and followed Him prior to His death. But Jesus has a far greater blessing to bestow upon her as a result of His death and resurrection.

There are three vital elements of that blessing:

Firstly, a new relationship has been forged. "I ascend unto my Father and your Father". Up until now, Mary had known God only as the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Through the redemption accomplished at Calvary, Mary could now address Him as "Father", in all the closeness and love of that relationship.

Secondly, Jesus said to Mary, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father". This was no cold greeting, intended to keep Mary at a distance. The risen Lord loved her too dearly for that. Rather, He would teach her that her relationship with Him would no longer be with that lowly Man on earth but, by faith, with the risen and glorified Man at the right hand of God.

Thirdly, as promised to His disciples earlier, Jesus would send down the Holy Spirit as the Comforter, to be with her and the other disciples. He would never leave them. In the new power of that same Holy Spirit, Mary would learn to say, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

All these blessings were to be hers. Those same spiritual blessings are ours today as part of new creation. An altogether new life, a new relationship, a new hope, a new power - new creation indeed! But a price had to be paid in order to bring us into such new creation blessing. So 2 Corinthians 5 ends on one of the most solemn and profound verses in the Bible: "For He (that is God) has made Him (that is Jesus) to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (verse 21). Just as we imagined that new washing machine, at the beginning of our talk, inviting Mrs. Jones to use it, so these new creation blessings are there for every Christian to enter into and enjoy.

But just as Mrs Jones felt a sense of responsibility lest she spoil her new machine through misuse, so we, as Christians, must be challenged as to the use we are making of our new creation blessings. Paul reminds the Ephesians, and us today, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Peter described his Master as "Jesus of Nazareth ... who went about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

Our new life is that same life that was seen in Jesus. It should be seen in us in the same kind of way. The goodness of our new life in Christ, and not the badness of our old life of sin needs to be on display. We shall not then criticise our fellow believers who rub us up the wrong way, or ignore those difficult neighbours. As a result of our new life in Christ, and in the power of the indwelling Spirit of God, for we have no power of our own, we shall learn to see each of them as those for whom Christ died. We will love them in that same love which He has for them. We will then be able to say, with the hymn writer,

*"Heaven above is softer blue,  
Earth around is sweeter green;  
Something lives in every hue  
Christless eyes have never seen:  
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,  
Flowers with deeper beauties shine,  
Since I know, as now I'm known,  
I am His, and He is mine."*

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