

Privilege of Newness

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[0 : 0 0] We are going to look back this evening at the theme of being new. The privilege of newness is what I have entitled the Sermon this evening and that is continuing in the theme that we have looked at from the Gospel, from the New Testament looking at the theme of salvation.

We have looked at how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were involved in salvation and now we are looking at what that means for us in terms of newness. Yeah, I thought it was a bit dull here, I couldn't think why. That light is not on and these lights are not on. I don't know if Calamom was the other one. But anyway, that's fine.

So yeah, the theme of verse 17, very well known theme for us, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come. That is what we are going to look at this evening, that's the theme in our ongoing study of simple basic gospel truths which there are questions for the young people to look at this evening.

That's what we are going to look at. The theme is the privilege of newness. Now I don't know about you but I get very comfortable with the shoes that I am wearing.

Maybe not these particular ones, especially, but generally shoes, I like wearing the shoes that I have got and I like wearing shoes for ages. I don't get many new pairs of shoes, I don't get much pocket money from Katrina so any time that I do, it's usually spent on essential things. But once in a while I am able to go out for shoes and you know, it's amazing, you are very comfortable with your shoes and you love them and they are good and they fit your feet and then you go into the shoe shop and it's really embarrassing to have to take your shoes off when you are trying on new shoes because all of a sudden these shoes which seem great and perfectly legitimate to you, all of a sudden look hugely scruffy and a bit tatty beside all these new shoes and it's a bit like that isn't it?

[2:12] Then you get the new shoes and they are beautiful and they are great. You have to break them in, I know that but then you can't be bothered with your old shoes, sometimes anyway, because they just look so old and tight and you never thought about them as being old and tatty until that point. And it's sometimes a bit like that with the gospel is that we can become very comfortable with something that isn't really what the Bible teaches the gospels about and it's a bit old and tatty. I know the same can be true if you get something that you've never had before and how often have you said it when you get something, I am not sure how I lived before without this. It's made such a difference to my life. That was me with a mobile phone in January this year, first time ever I had a mobile phone and since then I've had to say how did I live before without this mobile phone and iPhone 4, no less. But we did, it's strange isn't it, you did, you lived fine, in fact they are great that I could live without a mobile phone but of course it becomes handy, it becomes something that is important to you, opens up a whole new world. And also paralleling that many people will say that about Jesus Christ, they'll say why did I not become a Christian earlier? How did I live before I became a Christian? And they think why couldn't I see it more clearly? And so for them, everything is new because they see things and they understand things that they could never understand before and that's also what has been spoken about here, is this newness, this perspective, this dimension to life that we haven't had before. And what I'd like to do is just briefly go through some of these things this evening for us to remind us because I think in our Christian lives we need to see Christ afresh. You know you might say oh well here's the thing going on about newness and things, having a Christian for years. We need as Christians for years to see Christ afresh as well, we need to see newness and what it means to enjoy that newness because sometimes I think our lives go into that tatty old shoes mold as Christians.

We're comfortable with what's old and familiar. Now I know in terms of shoes that might be not a big deal but you know as Christians we can become comfortable with what is tatty spiritually and what is familiar. But if only we could see ourselves as others see as we would see it's actually an eyesore. Our Christianity is a bit of an eyesore, it's a bit of an embarrassment when it's placed alongside what Christ is offering and what Christ will do for us. It's not fit for purpose. We've let ourselves mold ourselves into this grubby old pair of shoes spiritually speaking that is not fit for purpose and we're not living as Jesus wants us to live. We're satisfied with absolutely third or fourth best because it's comfortable.

Because these old shoes are really comfortable and we really feel comfortable in them and that might be fine for shoes but for Christianity we don't want to be in that place in our Christian lives where everything is absolutely comfortable because we're in control and because we've just got ourselves into that rut where we are not willing to consider the newness and the new challenges of being Christian and what that involves for us. And for young Christians here this evening, I don't want you to settle for second best. I don't want you to settle for a kind of second hand Christianity or an old kind of something that is old and dull and is not something you haven't investigated or haven't learned from or finding out for yourself, exploring the person of Jesus. I didn't really get many of the talks yesterday but the lady who was speaking yesterday at the conference was brilliant in sharing the truth that it let Jesus speak for himself in his word. Let him just speak for himself in his word and be excited by him and be challenged by him in every day and every moment of every day because that's what he's like. He will do that for us if we allow him to do that.

So in this passage we have Paul speaking about what is absolutely new. We spoke about the Holy Spirit last week and being born again, born and new. Well here he talks about what that looks like, it means becoming a new creation. The old is gone and the new has come. That's God's language for becoming a Christian. The old is gone and the new has come. He's saying something very important and very significant. He's saying we're moving from a place where we are no longer living for ourselves but we're living for Jesus Christ. The way we think about Jesus Christ, the way we deal with Christ is completely different because we have come to know Him and love Him through His salvation and through accepting Him as our Lord and God. Before that we're dead to Christ and we don't pray and it's all about me. It's all about me being at the centre of my life. However moral and however upright that might look like, it might be pretty good to everyone else around us. But that's gone.

That goes when we become Christians. Me being at the centre, Christ being dead, prayer being something that never happens, that's gone because we have been touched by grace and we are in dwell as we saw last week by the Holy Spirit so that everything for us becomes new because of that. I think our biggest problem is we don't really think that. Part of it might be, and we had the privilege today of hearing many people's testimonies downstairs becoming members with us, say more about that in a couple of weeks. One of the interesting things that many of those who are sharing their faith were talking about coming to faith gently and through Christian homes and through Christian families. I think that for many of us is what we've experienced. So newness, it seems a little bit odd for us to talk about that because we've almost, can I say, we've almost drifted into the Kingdom. So we don't feel this old is gone, new has come, this change over. So we don't appreciate what we have in Christ. We don't really understand it and therefore we don't live it. But I don't think it needs to be something that is a Eureka experience. It doesn't need to be something that immediately we move from one place to another. In our understanding, as God looks down as we will have been dead and became alive and it would have been an instantaneous thing at some point, outwardly maybe it doesn't make a great deal of change to our lives. But knowing this truth, knowing that we are new, knowing what that means will transform what we think about being Christian. And that is what we're going to consider this evening for a few moments. Jesus was always wanting to get across the importance of newness and what it means to be a Christian. And John, John's written so that people may believe in Jesus Christ, that's why the Gospel's written. It's interesting, the first verses, chapters 2 to 4, introduce a whole lot of new things that Jesus is kind of blasting away the Old Testament ways and introducing the new way of the Gospel. And there's new wine and there's a new temple and there's a new birth and there's new water, living water, and there's new life. And all of these illustrations, Jesus and John is using to point to the message of the Gospel which is that it's about newness. It's about new. And the great thing is that if you've been a Christian for 17 years, it's still about newness. Still newness in that, there's still refreshment in that. My favourite verse is outwardly though we're struggling outwardly, inwardly we're being renewed day by day. There's this great remarkable renovation of our internal reality of our general being so that we're being renewed because of God's work. But what does it mean in kind of some more, maybe a little bit more practical ways for us this evening? Well I'm going to just say three things, three ways in which it's new and then finish it up with a character, a recognition of how our character is moulded by all that. It means that we have a new heart. That's hugely significant for us is that we have a new heart. And Ezekiel, this is prophesied in Ezekiel 11 verse 19,

[11 : 25] I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them. I will move them from their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. That's now a spiritual talk obviously, but he's saying there's a cold hard, stony spiritual heart that is difficult to relate to others, difficult to relate to God, impossible to relate to God and it's replaced with a heart of flesh as it were, something completely new, a new heart. Galatians 2, 20, I've been crucified with Christ, I no longer live in my old heart, but Christ lives in me. So it's still me, I'm still there, me still there, but it's Christ living in me rather than I living for myself, I have been crucified. People talk about sin, having I in the middle, S-I-N, and that's changed, isn't it, when we would come to Christ, I is crucified but it's still me with Christ and that's a new heart in our lives, we've been cleansed,

I've been renewed, we've been humbled. And so the old engine room of our life which was a cold spiritual heart, which is dominated by sin and by Satan and by self, is removed.

And within that heart, people try impossibly and try grudgingly to please God. And you know who do that most? Church people, religious people. They come to church, they've been involved in church, they've heard about church and they try impossibly to live the Christian life and grudgingly to live the Christian life because they still have a heart that has not been changed. And so it takes us back to kind of what we talked about last week, you must be born again, you must be born anew, you must be born a fresh, you must be born of the spirit. So God gives us a new heart. We have as Christian, we are new creations, we have a new, it's like a bypass is taking place, a spiritual, well, I don't know what, so heart disease has been dealt with. It's probably, it's more than a bypass, isn't it?

It's a new heart altogether. And that's what God gives us. It's a heart that can, from the inside, dwell by his spirit that can love him and serve him because of what he has done.

The motive changes, you must be born again. Now within that we recognise and know that there is tension and conflict. I am talking about Eunice and Eunice is great. Eunice is wonderful. But why don't I like going to get a new pair of shoes? Because the old shoes are molded to my feet. And when I get new shoes they hurt and I get blisters. I don't like that because they're new, stiff. So you have to go and wear them and break them in as it were. So there's tension there, physical conflict in your feet. And that is true in a sense spiritually. There is Eunice and there is life, but there is tension. There's a battle because there's a remaining sinful nature which rebels against God and which struggles with God. And sometimes we simply just want to wear our scabby old shoes of sin because they're easier and because there's less hassle. But ultimately they're going to damage our feet. Ultimately it's going to damage our life spiritually to live that way. We need to deal with Jesus Christ and we need to recognise the tension but recognise his grace and his empowerment and his help to live that way. So it's a new heart, this creation. It's also a new head that we have. A new head which understands, a new authority as it were, a new Lordship in our life where Christ is Lord in Romans 6, 14 says, sin shall no longer be your master, you're not a laundrel under grace. And then it says you have been set free from sin and become slaves of righteousness. So we have a new head that is a new authority in our lives and a new King, a new Lord of our life. Now that's a little bit like, and it's only a little bit like, leaving a job and going to a new job where you've got a completely different boss and it's far, far better. You simply can't believe how great it is that his boss is much more considerate, he gives you more time off, he respects what you're doing and he doesn't take advantage of it. And it's being under new management. You know, sometimes people go to different jobs and they're under new management and it's brilliant, it's like a new lease of life for them. It's a tremendous thing for them to do. And spiritually that is what it is to be a Christian. In many ways it's simply to come under new management.

[16 : 54] It's to recognize a different Lord over your life. And it's to recognize that Jesus Christ is your Lord. You're no longer slaves to sin and sin no longer can master your life unless you choose to let it. Because what sometimes we're doing inexplicably, inexplicably, inexplicably is going back to the old office to our old boss who abuses and treats us badly. Why do we do that? When we have this great new Lord and King Jesus Christ, well there's the kind of paradox and the irrationality of sin that we like the old ways. And sometimes because somewhere along the line we're still in control back there. But sin and self, Romans 6 tells us, is no longer the governing force in our lives. And we serve Him in the power of the Spirit. We serve Him not by trying to obey outward rules and regulations. That's the way of the old covenant. It was a struggle, it was a difficult way in Christ way of the

Spirit who gives us the heart and the desire to serve Him and to follow Him. And again, that's tough. It's great of this newness and I'll emphasise this newness but it's tough you know because sin says, you're the boss. You make up your own mind. You do what you want. Don't let Christ be your Lord. And yet interestingly, paradoxically, I'm always mentioning paradoxes, aren't I? Paradoxically, without Christ in our lives, if we're living as under the authority as it were, under the rule of sin, we're conformists. We're just rebelling like everybody else is rebelling. It's not really terribly anarchic at all.

It's copycat anarchy. We're just doing what everyone else is doing. We're slaves to popularity. We're slaves to how everyone else is living. We're slaves to popular thinking. We're slaves to our own sinful desires. We're not free at all. And we are really in a poor place that we've been blinded and deceived by sin and by Satan. The Lordship of Christ gives us newness. It gives us release. It gives us freedom. It gives us hope. It gives us future.

It's where we are genuinely individual. We're genuinely rebels. We're genuinely going to be transformed and we can live life to the full, breaking out of a mold that the world would have us live in, enslaved by that. So we've got new, I mentioned three things, new heart, new head and also new eyes. We've got new head because Calvary makes sense. We've got a new heart because we've been to Calvary and we've got new eyes because we've seen the Christ who is at Calvary. And that changes us. In verse 16 of this chapter that we read in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, it says, So from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view, though once we regarded Christ this way, we do so no longer. So it's about seeing Christ differently and therefore it's about seeing everybody else differently. And Galatians 6 speaks about that as well. And Galatians 6 speaks about the way that we used to be where we used to always, all we were interested in before was making a good outward impression.

But as now we're seeking to please God from the heart out. And we see, because we see ourselves differently, we've new eyes. You know, for many years people will come to church and say, What is the minister going on about? What's he speaking about when he's talking about my sin and my darkness? It's so oppressive and harsh. And I'm not a bad person. There's nothing within me that's really rebellious or evil or wrong. When we see Christ, we come to know Christ. We see ourselves differently. We see our hearts differently. We see our rebellion differently. And we see other people differently and we treat other people differently.

[21 : 32] You know, people who leave home, young people, not just young people, old people leave home. And they go and have a completely new experience. Maybe they go to the shanty towns in Delhi or they go to a place in Africa and serve there for weeks or months. And they see life completely differently when they come back. They see themselves differently. They see other people differently. And they see maybe Western society or civilization differently because they have had this experience. And you know, when we've gone to the cross, when we've met with Christ, we see things differently. We see a group like this differently. We don't just see it as a bunch of hypocritical churchgoers. We see things differently. We see people differently.

We see their needs differently. We don't immediately, as we look with through the perspective of the cross, we don't immediately judge and condemn and find fault and are self-righteous.

We don't see people as what we can get from them. We see opportunities to serve them. And we see them as important and significant in our lives. We see Christ and we see each other from a new point of view. And the difference is, I am no longer in the middle. I am no longer in the middle at the centre of this universe and everyone else is around me, including God. Now that might seem impossible to change. And I think it remains a battle for us all through our Christian lives. But the change is to put Christ in the centre of the universe, of our universe, and see ourselves and others from that perspective. That is radically new and radically different because whatever else it is, it tends to be about me and my life and what happens. I was thinking this morning, you know, all the people that have lived in the world for so long and how short a time we are here, 60, 50, 40, 50, 70, 80 years, how short, somehow we think we are at the centre of this universe, we will be gone before long. And with a couple of generations they wouldn't even know what our graves are. Graves are, no one will know. You don't know who your great-great-grandparents are, generally speaking, we don't know where they are buried. They have gone. Life has gone, moved on. And yet we have got this great privilege of newness and significance in Christ when He is at the centre and when we serve Him because He is eternal life rather than us looking out from the centre. So we have got new eyes, we have got a new head, we have got a new heart.

And briefly, what does it look like as we live our lives? How does it affect our character, in other words, every day? Now, Rhoda read from Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 20 to 32.

And that passage is just the outworking of newness, isn't it? It's got this lovely, I've used the illustration tonight of shoes and new shoes, it's got this lovely illustration of clothes, new clothes. Put off the old self and put on the new. In being new in Christ, we have this responsibility. We have this conscious need in our lives to get rid of what belongs to that old self, sinful self, dead spiritually self, self that is at the centre of the universe and all that goes with it. And you know what? The Bible makes it perfectly clear, the kind of things that we are to get rid of. We are to get rid of practically, put off practically because we are new and because we have the Spirit and because we have Christ in our hearts, we are to put off unjust anger, unwholesome talk, bitterness, rage, malice, lust. And you know, you could list lots of things, there's more than that in that chapter and there's more again in Colossians 3.5, rules for holy living it's called, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming, you used to walk in these ways. That's what God says. In the life you once lived, there's a change. There's a change in our thinking and our philosophy and our understanding.

[26 : 17] You used to live like that, I want you to change and live and be reconciled and renewed in knowledge and the image of your Creator. And that involves some of the things that Rhoda was reading about there, building others up, being compassionate, forgiving, sharing.

You know what they are. You know what they are. The characteristics, the moral ethics of belonging to Jesus, of being a new creation, putting on this new life. You know, putting on it's a very individual at one level and it's a very practical thing that we need to do. Generally speaking if we're healthy and fit, we don't need other people to clothe us, we clothe ourselves. It's a responsibility we have. And so Christ wants us to spiritually recognize that also. We have this responsibility to live this way. And you go out tomorrow, you go to university, you go to work, you go to school, you're on holiday, you go to school the next day, whenever, or whatever you do, there will be times when you need to put off certain temptations and put off certain behaviors and put on another behavior.

Because we're new creations in Christ. We have a new life, we have a new person, it's a victorious life but it's not an easy life. It's a hugely rewarding life and Christ empowers you to live it. You are not an orphan in living this life. He empowers you to live this life.

So you need to go and ask, are you struggling to pray? Do you understand what prayer is about? Do you wonder what on earth you can pray for and what the kind of things you should pray for? Well read Colossians 3, 5 or Ephesians 4, 2032 and you'll find a whole lot of things there that will enable you to know what to pray for in your life. And I think when we recognize the character of the Christian, the old that we get rid of, the new that we put on, and we're always doing it right up to our very last day as a Christian, whenever that will be, maybe tomorrow, maybe 40 years hence, then we will continually be looking for the grace and the mercy of Christ to give us new eyes, to give us a new head, to give us a new heart to live for Him. And newness is great isn't it? Newness is a good thing.

It's nice to get new things. We like getting new things and new things are good. As long as we're not materialistic. But in Christ there's newness. And it's sad I think that we live a lot of our Christian lives thinking it's dull and everything else but Christ attracts us and everything else but Christ is appealing. I think it is often because we haven't recognized our hearts and we haven't recognized what He's done. And really this series has been trying to, in a fresh way, but just in another way to remind ourselves of the greatness of the gospel and of salvation. Let's bow our heads and pray.

[29 : 37] Father God we ask that you would help us to understand a little bit more about newness. We know that we simply can't understand it without your Holy Spirit. We need your Spirit to introduce us to and to teach us about the things of Christ. And we long for Him to breathe powerfully into our worship, into our lives, into our preaching, into our reading of scripture, into all that we do. So that we have a spiritual skip in our step, a sense of newness even though we are outwardly wasting away and maybe sometimes going through real blackness and difficulty and trial and trouble. That we can still know the security of newness in our hearts protected by God and newness of answered prayer and of revelation of God's compassion even in ways that we could never have imagined when we have cried or prayed for or looked for something for ages and we think that the heavens are like stone, they're like brass, they're like that hard heart that we have sometimes. We think God isn't interested or

God hasn't answered or God doesn't care. As we trust in you Lord we pray that we would sense newness and sense grace and sense goodness and sense hope and no direction and leadership from this great Savior who loves us and who has made us new. May we live as new creations as we live, as we go from here increasingly in our lives. We ask these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen.