

The Privilege of Newness

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[0 : 00] Okay, just for a few minutes this morning, we are going to look at 2 Corinthians 5, particularly one verse, but really the theme that that verse speaks of covers that passage.

And also the passage in Ephesians we read, which I'm going to dip into, parafrastically, we're going to paraphrase some of the truths in that as we go through.

So it's really verse 17, you may have guessed it already on the first day of the year, the theme is, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the oldest passed away and the new is coming.

Now we know that's true of the year, but it's also a great truth spiritually for us, and not a once for all truth. Well, it is a once for all truth, but it's also a day to day truth for us in our Christian lives.

And obviously, today's a great day to be highlighting. You probably, well, all have got new things in the last few days at Christmas, and I'm sure the kids up the back would have got some lots of new things at Christmas.

[1 : 04] I tend to get clothes at Christmas time. Don't buy clothes any other time of the year, but get lots of, no, not lots of clothes, but enough clothes to keep me going during the year, which is great, it's always good.

But it's not very exciting anymore, because you usually have to go shopping for the clothes first, so that, you know, your wife doesn't get you a horrendous thing that you'll never wear, or you get the wrong size, so you have to go shopping with them, and it kind of loses the magic of Christmas a little bit for us.

And it's a good thing to do, and it's a nice thing to get new clothes. But I always think about when you get new clothes, and particularly new shoes, particularly when I get new shoes.

It's actually a nightmare in some ways, when you go with the shoes that you're very happy with, and they're extremely comfortable, and you've had them for a while, and you take them and you go to the shoe shop with them, and then the guy comes along, in fact, I was in a shoe shop before Christmas, we were just looking, and I saw the assistant just taking one disgusted look at my shoes, and turning away, and then this guy really needs new shoes.

We didn't get any, but what's worse is when you sit down and you've found a pair that you really like, and you have to try them on, and it's only then that you realise how dirty and scruffy and useless the pair that you're quite comfortable with looks like beside the new ones.

[2 : 34] And immediately you see the difference between the two, and usually the shoes that you're getting rid of that you've worn for a long time, though they're comfortable and familiar, they've become tatty and ugly, and also not fit for purpose because you walk out in them in the rain, and they leak, and your socks are wet before you've left the end of the street.

And I think there's a comparison there, sometimes with who we are as Christians, because we're new creations, and we continue to be new creations, and it's important for us as Christians not to settle for our conversion experience, 30, 20, 10, 5 years ago, whatever it might be, and not to settle for familiarity at one level.

I know there is a way in which we do that God is unchanging and always familiar and increasingly familiar, but what I mean is not settle for the familiarity of half-heartedness and comfort spiritually, not moving forward, just, well, I was a Christian last year, and I was a Christian this year, and it's a new year, and I'll be a Christian over this year, but not pushing the boundaries of your Christian faith, and being content with a kind of half-hearted faith where you feel you're almost going to just... you've got a once-removed relationship with Jesus Christ.

It's not vibrant, and there's not a newness about it, and you know that for yourself, and I know... I can't answer that for anyone other than myself, and neither can you, but you know what it's like,

don't you?

That sense of, just, well, I know these things, and I'm living this life. No, I'm aware that we need to persevere, and there's a sense of perseverance within the Christian life, but the great thing about the perseverance is not persevering with boredom or with dullness or with dryness, it's persevering into newness all the time as Christians, and remembering that the Spirit of God in us strikes a willingness to change and a willingness to grow and a willingness to push the boundaries spiritually in our lives.

[4 : 50] Whether you've been a Christian here today for 70 years or just for seven minutes, it's very important that we have that mentality of being new creations, and that's hard for us.

It's really hard, we talk about the new year, but it's already an old year, and we're already in our routines, and we're creatures of habit. And so it's difficult for us to break moulds, it's difficult for us to break bad habits, to break sinful thoughts, to break selfish and careless attitudes, and to break that way of living that isn't progressive and developing and maturing.

So I think it's important to remember who we are, that we are new creations, and Paul is making that clear to the church in Corinth, he says that we are new creations.

Therefore anyone in Christ is a new creation. The old is past and the new has come. It's a very striking language that he's using. He's saying that in your life, the old way of thinking where God is not on the throne and where Christ is not your Lord has been put in the bin, it's no longer part of your life.

You know what you do with all the stuff, all the wrapping paper at Christmas, you put it away, you get rid of it. And we have to keep that ongoing reality in our mind and hearts as Christians that we are dead to a way of thinking that leaves God out of the throne room of our heart.

[6 : 22] It's so easy for us to keep our old self-centered control near to our hearts. And it's recognizing that there's an absolutely fundamental shift.

In verse 15 he speaks about that, he says, Christ died for all so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died because he says, in Christ he died for all, therefore all have died, so a death has taken place in our life, a spiritual death, and that's hugely significant.

So it's much more for us than simply going to church on a Sunday. It's much more for us than simply knowing about gospel truth and knowing about the Bible.

It's not less than that, but it's much more than that. It's that Christ in every thought, taking captive as it says, every thought to Christ, that Christ becomes Lord of our lives, Lord of our hogmoney, Lord of our first of January, Lord of our birthdays, Lord of our funerals, Lord of our weddings, Lord of our workplaces, Lord of all that we are, Lord of our illness, Lord of our health.

And that is a complete newness about who we are therefore because of an ongoing newness.

Since then John, when John speaks about Jesus in the gospels and in chapter two of the gospels, particularly of his gospel, rather, he speaks about Jesus being like new wine, he speaks about Him building, a new temple, he speaks about new birth, new kind of water, living water.

[8 : 03] There's a real freshness and a vibrancy that comes from recognizing and knowing who Jesus Christ is in our lives.

And so we do all experience newness at different levels, whether it's a new job or a new year or a new home or a new adopted family. And we see that when these big things in life happen, they do affect us, they do change us.

How much more as we are recreated with the indwelling Holy Spirit of God and recognize that. And this may be particularly for this audience today, most of whom I know and many of whom I reckon would have been brought up in a Christian home.

It's easy for us to take that truth for granted. Or it's easy for us to forget about that, the radical reality of what it means to be a new creation.

And you know, I think what we really need, we really need to see people coming to faith to remind us of that again. We need to recognize the truth and apply it.

[9 : 10] But it would be amazing. And we pray that for this year, to see people for whom it's a completely new thing. And I don't think, maybe sometimes you don't grasp how different it's going to be for them.

If they've been drug addicts or if they've been homeless or if they've never gone to church, have never had a routine, have gone to church on a Sunday, if they've never read their Bibles, maybe

they're not even that good at reading, it's going to be a radical transformation for them. And we need to be part of that, and we long for that among us new creations. And that's what we look for. So we're new creations. And just to say one or two things about what it means to be a new creation, I think it's clear that it speaks about having, therefore, a new heart.

In verse 12, it speaks about, we are commending ourselves to you again by giving you cause to boast about us so that you may be able to answer those who boast about an outward appearance and not about what is in the heart.

Now, there's a real indication of newness, because what do we spend a lot of our time thinking about?

[10:16] Thinking about what other people think about our outward appearance. And I don't mean by what we look like in the mirror necessarily, although that might be part of it. But it's how we present ourselves outwardly.

And that becomes very important to us. Even drive sometimes our attendance at church, maybe you're only here today, because you thought, well, it'll look good. Or I don't want to not be here, because people might speak about it.

I don't think they will. But again, we're hardwired to that outward appearance thing. And yet the newness is recognizing that all that we seek to be and all that we seek to are life stems from having a new heart.

Now, if any of you are your relations, your friends, or you personally have had a heart bypass or stents put in, you know how it can just give you a new lease of life almost immediately?

And that's an amazing truth. How much more, if that does that for you naturally, how much more does it do that for us when we recognize that we have a new spiritual heart?

[11:29] You know Ezekiel 11, 19 speaks about that so beautifully. And the newness of it, I will give them one heart and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.

And that's just a spiritual truth that's reminding us that there's a...we're not stony and cold in our relationship to God. But there's a...I love that heart of flesh because what other kind of heart can you have?

That's the only kind...you know, a heart of stone is not going to beat. But this picture of a heart of flesh which is a living, relational loving reality that we have with the living God and knowing that the source of all living, the creator of all the universe comes to dwell in us, Galatians 2, 20 speaks about that also.

I have been crucified with Christ, I no longer...it's no longer I who live but Christ who live, Christ who lives in me. So you have very ordinary bunch of people this morning, not so.

Because Christ Himself, if we are Christians this morning, dwells in us. And the life I live, I now live in the flesh. I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

[12:45] So that is...no one who's not a Christian can say that. No one who is not a Christian understands that because it's a radical transforming power that's happened in our lives.

And so I hope we find when we remember that and the grace and love behind that, that we...we want to move away from trying to serve God grudgingly with a kind of heart of stone, ritualistically, or trying to appease Him or please Him by doing the best thing we can ourselves.

It's a completely new way of thinking and of living. It's starting...you know, Jesus talks about that.

I've kind of gone on a wee bit in the last week while about a series you can get on Netflix, and not Netflix on your app called The Chosen, which is an amazing...I'll not go into the detail, but it's just the story of Jesus, an eight-part series initially, and they're hoping to make more right through to the whole of history.

And it's pretty accurate to the Gospels, and it's very well done. But it's a fascinating episode where...and in the first...I'm not gonna...I'll not do spoilers, you're okay.

But in the first eight series, Nicodemus plays up quite a big part. And there's such an interesting episode when Nicodemus goes to meet with Jesus, and Jesus talks about him needing to be born again.

[14:21] And it's just...it brings it very much to life, and the confusion that Nicodemus had, well, kind of, man entered again into his mother's womb and be born again, and how weird a concept it was for him, and how it's probably been misunderstood in so many ways now, or misappropriated in some ways, that whole phrase of being born again.

But yet Jesus used that because we are new creations, and He says, we're born again. And you know when a baby's born, and maybe you'll be with cousins or grandchildren or whoever over Christmas, and you see them, you remember again, they have to learn to eat, they have to learn to drink, they have to learn to walk, and they have to learn to talk.

And it's a long process. And that's descriptive of what it's like for us as Christians. It's that ongoing process where we're needing to learn a whole new language as Christians.

We need to think in a different way, we act in a different way, we talk in a different way, we eat in a different way with thanksgiving, and we live in a different way, we're new creations.

And that brings for us a life of tension in the here, and I think I've got this verse as well, Romans 7, 17, I think that's the last of the verses. Yes, sin, so now long is not longer I do, but sin that dwells within me, is that sense of battle with newness and with the remaining, defeated, dying old nature that we have.

[15:50] And it's a battle for, you know, in verse, we didn't read this, but in verse 2 of that chapter, chapter 5 of Corinthians, it said, for in this tent we'd grown longing to put on our heavenly dwelling.

I think for movies as you get older particularly, you grow in a lot more. Which is sad because when your kids are so happy and cheerful and laughing all the time, but when you hit 21 you just start growing.

And we do grow in, we grow in as Christians, but I think there's a right growing and a wrong growing. There's a longing for heaven and a longing to be no longer in the battle.

But there's also a moaning, which I think is different from that, where we're moaning at God and not recognizing that we have the Holy Spirit and the Spirit is our deposit and our hearts have changed.

And we do love God, we do love God. And it's good to think about that in your relationship. Don't you love that reinstatement of Peter after he had betrayed his beloved Savior?

[16:59] Peter, do you love me? Yes, Lord. Peter, do you love me? Yes, you know I love you.

Peter, do you really love me? Yes, I love you. There's a sense of Peter's failure, but yet his authenticity of it, it was love, it was a broken love, but it was, yes, Lord, I do love you.

And we sense that tension as well. We love the Lord, but we want to love Him more. So it's a new heart, it's also a new head, verse 20 of the chapter we read, a great verse which says, therefore we are ambassadors for Christ.

God make him as a pupil through us. Now ambassadors are always people who kind of think differently because they're not just thinking for themselves, they're thinking as ambassadors of the country that they represent.

And that's the image that's given to us here. And the newness in us is that as we live our lives, now I'm very conscious of it even more so maybe sometimes as a minister that you're representing the church that you belong to, you are representing Christ, but you're also representing the church.

But all of us as Christians represent Christ, we are Christ's ambassadors. That means in our living, in the steps we take, the walks we do, the places we go, the people we're in contact with, we're always representing Jesus.

[18:29] Isn't that an amazing thought? And it's an amazing change of attitude. It means that we don't close the door and leave Jesus on the other side.

There's not places we go or things we do or attitudes we have or behaviors that we engage in where Jesus Christ is not being represented. We're either shaming Him or we are His ambassadors.

And that's a new head in us. It's a new way of thinking. As Christians, our go-to thought is developing along the lines of, am I representing Christ well in this?

Am I living the way He would want me to live? Am I dependent on His grace and His help? And so I think a good attitude in our thinking is living for His glory in 2020.

Our task to bring a flavor of heaven into every situation that we're in, because heaven is our home and He is our, we are His ambassadors, into the brokenness and darkness and lostness of the world in which we live, which we interact.

[19:41] Go anywhere. I'm saying to you, go anywhere this year. I don't care where you go. Go anywhere. Go into any place. But go with the flavor of Christ and go with the grace of Christ and go as ambassadors of Christ and make it our privilege and our joy to bring the grace, the beauty, the values and the principles and the flavors of God's grace to wherever we are.

That's a great reality. New head. And I think also in you eyes, verse 16, therefore from now on we regard no one, we regard or we look at or we see no one according to the flesh.

In other words, we look differently at people. How easy is it for you and for me to judge people on appearances or on their belief system or on their brutality or on their hurtfulness, but we're not to judge on worldly, fleshly terms.

But as broken image-bearers healed by Jesus to love and to serve and to share Jesus Christ with others who are broken and need the healing of Jesus in their life, we don't, when we share our faith, we're not just sharing propositional truth.

We're not just sharing facts. It's not a magic formula. If I say the right words, boom, they'll become Christians.

[21 : 15] We're sharing our lives. Paul reminds us of that. We share our lives and we share our attitudes and our humility and our grace because of what has happened in our own lives.

It's the ultimate putting ourselves in another man's, another person's shoes. That's what Jesus did in the incarnation. And recognizing their needs and being gracious and kind, seeking their good, their healing and their renewal.

And that's a huge different way of thinking for us. So I'm just going to close with paraphrasing some of the thoughts that lie behind Ephesians 4, the second passage we read, because that's entitled, A New Life.

And it's really, the epistles are great at just putting into words a little bit of what the character of Jesus looks like in our lives.

And it's very challenging for us. So it's 1 Corinthians 5, 17, you're a new creation explained in many ways, Ephesians 4, 17 to 30.

[22 : 32] And if you want, make it, can you make it an all year round kind of read? I'm not a great one for resolutions. I always break them by the third. But it's a great thing to seek to live the kind of life and the characteristic of Ephesians 4, 17 to 30, which is a new life.

Live it all year, make it a year long, new year resolution as it were. Because you know, in anything, there's no, there's not any growth if we don't know how to grow, or if we don't know in which direction to grow, if we have no vision for growth, if we don't see areas of growth, and if we don't see where we ought to be in Christ, or we'd love to be by grace, then we're probably not going to grow terribly much.

It's a great question at the beginning of the year. What are my goals? Spiritual goals as an ambassador of Jesus. Where do I need to change? What attitudes?

What thinking? What behavior? What language? What relationships? And how can I walk in grace with Jesus more as a new creation?

So very much Ephesians 4 is from verse 17 is an exposition of being a new creation. So don't do what unbelievers do. Don't be separated from God.

[23 : 59] Make it your duty, and I'll make it mine, to not be separated from God this year. Whatever difficulty you find prayer and walking with Him, keep doing that. Keep praying, don't harden your heart.

Make it soft. Take all your doubts and fears and struggles and battles. Take it all to God in prayer, and make that your day-to-day living.

Consciously put off your former way of thinking. Take responsibility for your heart and life, because you're the Holy Spirit and you're empowered to live a different life. You know when you go to bed, if you're fit and healthy, you go to bed, you go to bedtime, you're fit and healthy, you take off your own clothes to go to bed, and you put on your pajamas or whatever you wear going to bed.

It's your own responsibility. You're not going to stand there and wait for people to do it for you. It's your own responsibility, ordinarily, in bed. And the same is true spiritually.

We have to consciously put off the old self. It's an image of taking off clothes and putting on new clothes. That's what we're asked to do. No one else will do it. Yes, we need the Holy Spirit and we need God's help, but we must do it.

[25 : 09] You know, if you're in a illicit relationship, if you're an alcoholic, if we're deliberately aggressive against someone unfairly, no one else has got to change that behaviour.

Because we have the responsibility to put on grace and to put on the reality of God.

We're to recognise that we're to be holy like Him. We're to value truth greatly and not lie within the Christian community and not lie at a broader level.

Truth matters just because we're endowed by the Spirit of truth and truth matters. We're to deal with anger issues, with temper issues.

It's not going to be enough for us as we go into the New Year to say, well, it's just the way I am. I've got a bad temper. God says, you know, don't let the sun go down in your anger. Deal with it.

[26 : 10] Even if it's just rage, deal with it. It soon becomes sinful in the lives that we are and recognise that. Don't be lazy, don't steal.

But we're to be hardworking and generous in our day-to-day living. Your wage packet at the end of January. Remember it's the Lord's.

That's going to be hard, isn't it, at the end of January. But remember that He has given us every good gift and that the first fruits of all we are and all we have are to be His.

And we're to give generously to those, especially those who need, reminding ourselves that we, in humanly speaking, we're in the top 0.5% of the richest people in the universe, in the Western world. So being a new creation is not a kind of religious, a pious religiosity. Who cares about that? It's not pious religiosity.

[27 : 07] It's tough love and it's recognising the need to change what's weak in our lives. Not to excuse what's weak in our lives and look proudly at others who are, not look at what's strong in our own lives and look proudly at those for whom that particular characteristic might be a weakness.

But it's to recognise our own weaknesses and to deal with them and to be generous in the way we mimic Jesus Christ.

Deal up others with what we say, don't knock them down, don't grieve the indwelling Spirit of God who's the guarantee of life to come. Don't grieve Him. And that's a very personal term.

The Spirit of God is not an impersonal force. He's an individual and we're not to grieve Him. You don't want to grieve the people you love.

Be kind and compassionate to one another because God was kind and compassionate to us. And I think as we work through that in our community, in our church, in our family, in our lives, I do believe we will see deeper beauty and a deeper attractiveness about one another and about our community and about our faith.

[28 : 34] And the great thing about this picture of the new life in Ephesians is that it's not a to-do list. It's not a list that we have to tick off or try and do in our own strength. We have the indwelling power of Christ Jesus as new creations to live His way and all His forgiveness when we fail and fall.

And He's only too willing to forgive. Isn't that great? It's a great message. Let's pray. Father God, we thank You for who You are.

We find it so difficult to understand grace and to be new creations. We're always scrabbling around so often anyway in the dark or having been freed from the prison of unbelief and darkness, how often do we find ourselves crawling back there in sadness and in unbelief?

Help us to breathe the great fresh air of the Spirit of God and of the freedom of knowing who we are in Christ, our identity in Him, our forgiveness, our friendship with God, our belonging to His family, His plans for us, His amazing future which reminds us of the compulsion of knowing Christ in us and the great future which no eye has seen nor mind has conceived of, which you can't even imagine is beyond our limited capability to understand or imagine what He has prepared for those who love Him.

The depth of His generosity, the depth of Your provision, the assurance of Your future purposes of a people from every nation, tribe and tongue and generation will be together in a glorious new creation.

[30 : 40] And Lord, we pray that we would put our hope more firmly and more securely in You as we enter this new year, knowing that it is a year of Your grace and a year that is known absolutely at every level to You.

We pray for our nation, we pray for the world in which we are apart, we see the environmental crisis, we see the crisis of humanity fighting one another, killings, deaths, we see the raging forest fires in Australia with all the harm and heartache and misery and the droughts and all that reminds us, along with all the gifts and the goodness of a broken world needing redeemed and renewed. So help us to live clearly with clear vision this year for Jesus' sake. Amen.