

A New You

2 Corinthians 5:17

Think back to the winters you've experienced in your lifetime. Remember the gladness you felt when the cool autumn brought welcome relief from the stifling heat of the summer. Recall how eagerly you looked forward to winter, if only because the cold would be a change. But think also of the very brief time you enjoyed the cold, before you were saying to yourself, "I can't wait until springtime comes!"

Springtime is my favorite time of the year, as it may be perhaps for many of you. Spring is very special to me because it was in the Spring, on April 4, when I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior, and He became Lord of my life. But Spring is the time of year when nature seems to be reborn. There is new life, new warmth, a new everything. There is a freshness and vitality in the air that reaches out and envelops our very beings.

There is a much deeper, much more meaningful sense in which we can experience springtime in our souls, when our spirits are re-created by Christ. The person who is reborn in Christ is like a person who has been freshly created for the very first time. Christ changes that person's life so drastically that it is quite proper to say that that person is a new creation altogether. He has new views about God and Christ. He has a new attitude about the church. He has a new attitude about reading and studying God's Word and praying. He has a new attitude about other Christians.

There is no area in that person's life that has not been changed dramatically by Christ. Christ invades that person so that every purpose, every plan, every goal, every hope and aspiration are changed, remolded, redirected. The change is "so deep, so clear, and so abiding, that it is proper to say that here is a new creation of God."

Read with me from the Word of God:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

2 Corinthians 5:17

In order for us to understand more fully what is meant by the phrase, "new creation," let's compare the new birth in Christ to the new birth of nature in the Spring of the year. There are several points of comparison which deserve our attention.

1 What was dead is now alive.

In the wintertime, most of the trees, flowers and grasses die down during the cold weather. That apparent death caused by the lower temperatures results in the leaves falling from the trees. It causes the fading of color in the landscape until everything is a dull, boring lifeless brown. It causes the disappearance of the beautiful flowers and clover that we see and enjoy so much at other times of the year.

Oh, but when Spring comes, all that is changed. There is no living plant which does not respond to the warmer weather. There is no living plant which does not respond to the gentle yet firm influence of the sunshine. The clover comes up again. New leaves appear on the trees, at first a tender shade of light green which deepens as the days pass. Patches of color are seen again, now that the flowers are here. What was dead is now alive.

When a person comes to know Christ for the very first time, what a change takes place in that life. That change is so drastic, so invading, so pervasive, that the new man in Christ appears to have been raised from the dead! And that is exactly what has happened, for having died to sin, he is now raised to walk in newness of life with Jesus.

Romans 6:8-11 tells us, Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Having lived in Jackson for a large portion of my life, I've become quite familiar with the potholes in the streets. I've also grown used to the way those potholes are patched. Over time, the new patch develops a hole in it, too, so a patch is put on top of a patch. A few years ago, city officials had decided that McDowell Road in south Jackson was beyond repair. For years they had been putting patches on top of patches, and the road was past the stage of a simple repair job. Road crews went in and literally dug up the old road to a depth of several feet. They hauled in new fill dirt from elsewhere, then completely rebuilt the road.

Christ doesn't just patch up your life. Our method is to put patches on top of patches, but the way Christ does it is to completely remake you. It is as though you have been raised from the deadness of sin, to walk in newness of life with Christ. What was dead is now alive!

2 What was barren is now fruitful.

Think about the majority of the things in nature. Remember how, in an ordinary winter, there are no rosebuds on the rose bushes. There are no patches of clover in the fields. There are no beautiful green leaves on the trees. There is no fruit, at least not summer fruit. There isn't supposed to be any of these things, because it's wintertime.

The person outside the body of Christ does not produce fruit in his or her life. They live lives of barrenness. But when Christ enters that life, all that is changed. The person begins to produce other Christians. The new man in Christ exhibits the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control. The new man in Christ lives a fruitful life. What was barren is now fruitful.

Jesus taught this to His disciples, too. In John 15, we find several references to the fruit in the Christian's life:

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing....In this way my Father is glorified, when you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Colossians 1:10 tells us of the prayer offered by Paul for the Christians there. *And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.*

A well-known preacher in another century was George Whitefield. He had been preaching up and down the countryside for several years, when one day he was stopped on the street by a man who clearly had been drinking. He was anything but sober. The man asked Whitefield if he could recall his name. When Whitefield said that he could not, the man replied, "Why, you converted me ten years ago!"

Whitefield came back with, "I guess you are one of my converts, sir! If you were the Lord's convert you wouldn't be where you are today." That man's life was not demonstrating the fruit of repentance. His life was still barren. Had Christ actually come into that man's life and changed him, his life, barren before, would have been fruitful.

3 What was hidden is now seen.

Think about a flower bulb. Some of them have to be buried deep in the soil during the cold, winter months, so that they can burst into life in the Spring. The life is there all along in the bulbs, but it is hidden from view. The snow which covers the earth hides what is underneath it. Springtime uncovers what has been hidden for months.

Just because a person is not a Christian does not mean that that person does not have natural talents and/or abilities, which were given to that person at birth. When that individual is re-created in Christ, those natural talents and abilities are changed, re-directed, so that they are magnified. And sometimes a person may not even realize his own qualities until Christ comes in.

An example for us can be found in Peter, the rough fisherman who became a disciple of Jesus. On the surface, Peter may have looked like any other person who earned his living by working with his hands. But Jesus saw deeper than that. He knew the potential that this man had, and how he could be used in the Kingdom of God. It was Peter who was so transformed, so changed, so redirected, so re-created, that he became one of the boldest witnesses for Christ the world has ever seen. Christ could see what was hidden. He could see the potential Peter had in his life to be a leading spokesman for God.

You may have that same kind of potential. What has been hidden in your life all this time may be the ability to speak a kind word to someone in need of it. You may be an artist, whose natural talent is magnified when you are reborn. Your ability to speak before people may be enhanced because of Christ. Now you've got something to say. Now you've got a picture to paint on the canvass. Now you've got a reason to heal. Now you've got a Master to serve. Now you've got a witness to give. Now you've got a message to share. Sure, God gives us spiritual gifts at our conversion, but that's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about the natural talents and abilities which are magnified and enhanced whenever Christ comes into our lives. What was hidden is now seen.

4 What was silent is now heard.

Winter has a deathly calmness about it. The slightest sound, such as the crunch of snow or the snapping of a twig, echoes through the brittle air so loudly, and seems to be so amplified. But there are no birds singing. You do not hear as many children at play. There are no bees buzzing around the flowers. All is still. All is calm. All is silent.

But then, one morning, you wake up quite suddenly. What was that you heard? Could it really be? Yes, it was! It was the singing of a bird! Spring time is here! The buzzing of the bees and the wasps is growing louder and louder. The children are out again, exploring the brand new world, and their voices soon echo back and forth as they call to each other. What was silent is now heard.

That's a wonderful picture, isn't it? But as pretty and glorious a scene as this is, it does not compare to the tongue which has been silenced because of sin, which is suddenly released and freed to tell of what Jesus has done. The tongue, the heart, the spirit, all join together to praise God, to share the Good News of Jesus, to encourage others, to read His Word aloud, to sing, to exalt our God!

The springtime in the soul is accompanied by a sincere desire to spread abroad the message of Christ. The person who could not bring himself to speak of Christ to anyone now finds that it is a natural thing to do. The person who never praised God now finds that praise is a part of his life. He is a new creature now, and he finds it much easier to speak a word of encouragement to someone who is depressed or discouraged. The message of Christ is now heard by many for the very first time. What is silent is now heard.

The woman at the well in John 4 is a classic example. She was an outcast to the majority of the people. Her life was a life of sin, and she probably never spoke of God in a redemptive way, to anyone. But after she had a confrontation with the Messiah, she went back to the town, the very town where she was so unpopular, and began to tell everyone that the Messiah had come. What was silent is now heard.

What a change is wrought in the life of the person who has been reborn! What was dead is now alive. What was barren is now fruitful. What was hidden is now seen. What was silent is now heard.

Is your life dead to sin but alive to God? It can be, today. Is your life fruitful? It can be, today. Are the natural talents and abilities God has given you magnified in your work for Christ? They can be, today. Has your tongue been released from silence, so that you are able and willing to speak of Christ without shame or embarrassment? It can be, today.

The new life Christ offers can be yours this very day, if you will accept it as yours. *Come, whoever will, accept the water of life as a gift, whoever wants it.* Revelation 22:17