

The Blessedness and Scope of the New Creation

2 Cor. 5: 14-19; Gal. 6: 12-16; Eph. 1: 19 - 2: 10.

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When looking at the crossing of Jordan by the children of Israel, we observed that the case of believers now is not like that of God's people of old who, when they crossed the Jordan, left the wilderness and had done with it for ever. With us it is not so; we are, in a certain sense, both in the wilderness and in Canaan at the same time. Egypt we have done with totally and for ever, because in fact the wilderness is just what Egypt becomes to the child of God. That is to say, the world, where once we had all our pleasures, and all our resources, becomes to us now a place which can only be described as a moral desert, where we find nothing to strengthen, to refresh, or to cheer.

In connection with the same subject we noticed the remarkable fact, that of the great army of six hundred thousand men who came out of Egypt only two crossed the Jordan and entered the land — Caleb (the man of faith), and Joshua (type of the energy of the Spirit of Christ in a man). This, I have no doubt, is intended to teach us that we can only take possession of our heavenly inheritance on the principle of faith and in the power of the Holy Ghost.

Jordan, no doubt, presents to us the death of Christ, but not His death for us; it is rather *our* death *with* Him, where all that we are in nature disappears. This does not mean, as some have fancied, that we are, or should be, dead to nature. A person claiming to be dead to nature is not a Christian. But while this foolish thought is totally absent from, and contrary to, the scriptures, the serious truth which we do find there is that we are dead *in* nature. This is what is very definitely presented to us in the portion of the epistle to the Ephesians which we read together.

In the epistle to the Romans man is regarded as a living, active sinner, and the character, extent, and variety of sins are fully set forth. A living sinner manifestly needs two things; clearance from the guilt of his sins, and deliverance from himself as a sinful man. These two things the epistle to the Romans supplies. The first is met by Christ dying instead of us: "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God." The other necessity is met by our death with Christ: "He died unto sin once. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin." The greatest and most necessary blessing that a living sinner can have bestowed upon him is to be dead, for in no other way can he escape out of the place of responsibility in which he is as a man, and in which he is lost because unable to meet it.

When we come to the epistle to the Ephesians, however, we find nothing of justification or of deliverance from a State of guilt, or a position of responsibility as a child of Adam. A totally different aspect of the state of man by nature is here presented; the darkest and most desperate that can be set forth. It is not merely that he has committed enormous sins, either in character or in quantity, but that he is beyond all possibility of repair or recovery. It is not merely a very bad case. A physician might have a very bad case on hand, a patient most seriously ill and almost on the brink of death, but as the adage goes, "while there's life there's hope," and he does not give up his exertions for his patient while life remains. But if death has actually taken place, what can he do? Now this is the state of man as presented in the Ephesians. It is not that he is guilty of trespasses and sins, but that he is *dead in them*.

Let me ask you, my friend, have you ever accepted in your own soul what this means? Have you ever entered into it as a great reality, true of you, that the moral and spiritual condition of all mankind is that they are absolutely dead? You do not think of applying remedies to a dead person, and hence in

the epistle to the Ephesians, where this aspect of man's condition is presented, we find no such thing as justification. What do we find there then? Is there any blessing? Yes, blessing of the very highest order. Just as the natural condition is the lowest and most degraded — governed by the prince of the power of the air, and doing only the things which the flesh willed to do (Eph. 2: 2, 3) — so the blessing is the highest, for it does not stop short of seating the believer in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

It is of the greatest importance that we should get hold of this in our souls; that it is not merely blessing from God we need, in the sense of the removal of our guilt so that we may not come into judgment. *That* we do need, and get in its own place. It is fully set forth in Romans, as we have seen, but it is not what we have in the Ephesians. It is not surely to make little of the epistle to the Romans that I contrast the two; but we must remember that the scriptures are written with the most perfect order, and that everything is found in its own place, and not elsewhere.

In Ephesians we find that the whole wide world presents to the eye of God nothing but what I might call a moral graveyard. There is not a single pulse in the heart of man toward God. If this is our spiritual condition, how is anything to be got out of it? The answer is that nothing can be got out of it. God, if He is to work at all, must work from Himself absolutely and independently, for there is no material to work upon. Hence, what we find in the scriptures which we have read together is that an absolutely *new creation* is called into being by God, perfectly distinct from the former creation, but no less real. Just as God, when there was nothing, spoke into existence all that is, so when morally there was not a living thing for God's eye to rest on, He (not by the mere breath of His mouth, but) by "the exceeding greatness of his power," by the might of His strength, wrought to bring into moral existence a creation, absolutely new and distinct from anything that ever existed before. To this new creation believers belong.

This is what I desire that you should get the sense of — that we not merely need and get forgiveness of sins, practical cleansing and deliverance from the moral state in which we were, but that we belong to a scene and sphere where all is absolutely of God, without any admixture whatever of the human element. All that is of nature — not merely the flesh, not merely the *evil* that is in us, but all that is of ourselves — completely disappears from view, and God begins a new and distinct work for His own glory, and by His own power, into which nothing enters but what is divine. This is not my statement merely, nor does it need arguments to prove it; we have it in the simple and direct words of scripture.

In 2 Corinthians 5 the apostle tells us that he was constrained by the love of Christ, because his spiritual judgment showed him that the fact of Christ having died for all proved that all were dead. If there had been a single person living there would have been no need for Christ to die for him, and hence He would not have died for all. But He did die for all, and with a purpose in view, too — that whoever would live in this scene of moral death might have a new object to live for. The man who belongs to the first creation, whether amiable or the reverse, has himself for his object; those who have this new life are to be governed by a new object — the One who died for them and rose again.

From this aspect of Christ's death two conclusions are drawn. The first is, that we no longer know anyone according to flesh. Even if we had been Jews, and had known Christ as a living Messiah on earth, we cease to know even Him in that way, because He died. He did come as Messiah and was known according to flesh by the Jewish nation, who should have received Him, but He was not received. We know Him now as risen and glorified at God's right hand. All the former state and character of moral existence has completely passed out of God's view, and for faith it has passed out of our view, too. For faith, in this sense, is just receiving the thoughts of God into our souls and being

governed by them. I repeat, it is not our sins or forgiveness we have here. We need deliverance from our sins, and, thank God, we get it. But has God nothing more to say to us in this death of Christ, and this work which He has wrought? Are we to rest satisfied with getting clear of our guilt and responsibility? Is there to be no living unto Him who died for us and rose again? Surely God has a purpose for us, and He wants us to enter into His thoughts, not merely as so much information, but in order that they may form our minds, govern our hearts, and guide our lives.

The second conclusion is, "If any one be in Christ — new creation" (there are but the two words — *καινή κτίσις* — employed in the original.) It is not merely that the person is a new creature; in fact it is not a question of what is done in the individual at all. So also, if we turn to Ephesians we shall see that, even though quickening be spoken of, it is not in the sense of giving life to an individual soul. It is the whole mass of both Gentiles and Jews that are in view. Both are on a common level. Those who had all the privileges which God could bestow upon them are children of wrath even as the others. All are alike dead in sins. What takes place? God quickens them. Is it by an operation in their souls? Not so, but in a totally different fashion — "together with Christ." The next step is that He has raised us up together, not with Christ, but with one another. "And hath made us sit together [with one another] in heavenly places in Christ." In all this what is in view is not any operation wrought in certain individuals at particular times: it is the operation of God, according to the might of His strength. Where and when? "In Christ, when He raised Him from the dead." The power is "toward" us, but the operation itself took place in Christ. It was a mighty, sovereign act of God, which He accomplished in His own Son. All we alike, Jews and Gentiles, were dead in trespasses and sins; the Lord Jesus Christ in perfect grace goes into the same place — the place of death — as a man; and now when all are in death — we dead in trespasses and sins, and Christ gone into death in grace — God comes into the scene and begins a new work in His own sovereign power. He raises Christ out of this place of death, and we are quickened together with Him.

This is a work of God in which man can have no share. There is no human material to enter into it, for that had all gone in death before this work was wrought. Justification has here no place, for it is a living man, not a dead man, who needs to be justified. The whole question of responsibility as children of Adam is at an end, for Christ having gone into death for the very purpose of meeting our responsibility, and having settled that question for all that are His, has been raised from the dead in a new character of life (in resurrection), to which responsibility does not belong. He is in a sphere into which responsibility never shall enter, and we are there in Him. It is a work absolutely and entirely of God, a new creation, the character of which is that "all things are of God." (2 Cor. 5: 18) The old things are passed away, gone in death never to return; the things that we have now are all new — new, not in the sense of being fresh merely, but as never having existed before. The great thought in the passage is that all that is of man has entirely disappeared from view, and what is of God alone is now seen. The day is coming when this will be true actually, when all within and around will be characterised by being of God, but in the meantime this is true of believers, of all who are in Christ, "if any man be in Christ there is a new creation."

This, I repeat, is not a man having a moral operation performed in himself: that is the new birth — a totally different thing. Being born again is a moral operation which takes place in a living person. The word and Spirit of God act upon a man and he is born anew; but in Ephesians there is no man to operate upon — he is gone in death. You never can understand what new creation is until you have got some sense in your souls that the old creation is morally gone from before God. We are not speaking now, of course, of the material creation — of the trees, and fields, and rivers, or of our bodies, which belong to the first creation — but of moral existence. As to our souls, as to our moral and spiritual

existence before God, we belong as believers, as those who are "in Christ," absolutely and entirely to this new creation where all is wholly of God.

Have you ever got the sense of what it is to belong to a new creation, as real as the material creation which you see around you? I do not deny that to us the material things seem more real, but that is because we so little live in faith. If we accepted in clear and simple faith the thoughts of God as He presents them in His word this new existence would be as tangible to our souls as this book in my hand. But, alas! believers, as a rule, are contented to live in material and natural things, and those things which belong to another sphere are but feebly laid hold of in our souls.

Why, then, should we insist upon the fact that believers do belong to a new creation which is entirely of God? Because this gives us the rule by which we are to guide our steps, as we learn from Galatians 6, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. [The same two words, *καινή κτίσις*.] *And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.*"

Circumcision and uncircumcision both apply to the old creation, and therefore, the apostle tells the Galatians they were on a wrong line altogether. They were resuscitating that which God had put completely out of sight, reviving the first man, which He had made an end of. They wanted to have feast days and holidays, to observe new moons and sabbaths, to restore those ancient institutions which had come to an end in the cross of Christ. They wanted to add to what God had done, and their addition would really have destroyed God's work. Seeking to be justified by the law they were fallen from grace. What the apostle winds up his earnest epistle to them with is this: it is all vain, circumcision is nothing, uncircumcision is nothing, the only thing that is of any value is new creation. And he pronounces peace and mercy upon as many as walk by this rule. What rule? The rule of new creation. There is a certain walk then for those who apprehend their place in the new creation and a rule for it. The Israel of God are here blessed, not the Israel of Palestine, but those truly separated in heart to God.

This wonderful work of new creation was not a mere arbitrary act of God to show either His power or His love (though it does in the highest degree manifest both); it had a purpose in view. It was surely God's "great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins," which moved Him to quicken us out of this state of death, and to give us a place in the heavenlies. But, while displaying His love and His power, this work had an object in view, both in the future and in the present. In the future it is "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." We are saved by grace, by means of faith, and even this is God's gift. Works of men have no place here, for where there are works there is room for boasting, and God is determined that no one shall have anything to say but Himself. It is a blessed thing for our souls, and an immense relief too for those who have found out what they are in themselves, to get the sense of this one thing; that man, be he good or bad, amiable or unamiable, religious or profane — man in nature as belonging to the old creation — passes here completely out of view, and we have nothing more to do with him. God comes upon the scene and works in His sovereignty, and now all that we are connected with, and have to carry out, is absolutely of God.

But there is to be a present effect as well as a future result of this wonderful work of God. "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." God designs us not for a life of mere ecstasy, like that of a monk shut up in a cell, but for a life of practical, real, good works. Believers are not to be idle spectators but actual workers. What are the good works? Is it whatever we take into our heads? Is it to do what we consider

good, and nice, and amiable, to benefit our fellowmen, to elevate mankind, and such like ideas, by which so many are governed? No, we are not left to follow our own fancies. God has before prepared the good works in which it is His will that we should walk. Not only are we ourselves His workmanship, but the very sphere and character of the works which we are to do are already prepared by Him for us. How are we to get into these things and carry them out? Faith, which accepts what is of God, and absolute dependence, which characterises the new man, make all quite simple. If we forget, or neglect, or disregard the fact that we have been taken out of all that which belongs to man naturally, and brought into this new sphere, we shall very readily drift with the multitude, and find ourselves engaged in a hundred things which God never intended us to be engaged in, and practically leaving aside those things which He would have us occupied about — much less imposing, perhaps, but far more agreeable to Him. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Nothing can please God so much as to do His will; nothing pleases us so much naturally as to do our own will. If we have really got rid of ourselves we shall have done with our will as well as with our responsibilities, for both alike go in the death of Christ. And if we through grace have accepted God's will instead of our own it will be just as real a pleasure to us — indeed, a far more real pleasure — to carry out what we find to be His will than it would be to do that which our own hearts might suggest.

Well, it is God alone who can give effect to these things in our souls. Still it is blessed for us to have them before us, for it is by means of this word of His that the Spirit makes these things good in our hearts. Just one remark, and I have done.

It may be said or thought, was not the first creation a work of God, good and agreeable to Him, when it was made? It was so. God viewed it over and pronounced it "very good." But it is not so now. It pleased God to make that first creation dependent on its head, the first Adam. He listened to a voice which he ought not to have listened to; sin came in by him, and by sin death, and now the whole creation groans in bondage. (Rom. 5 and Rom. 8)

But if this has taken place with the first creation, may not the same thing happen to the new creation? No, it cannot. Just as the first creation depended entirely on its head and came in for all the consequences which he might bring upon it, so this new creation depends on the One who is its Head and Centre — the Lord Jesus Christ — no less a person than the blessed, eternal Son of God. It will never be subjected to any failure, or to any effects of our failure in our responsibilities, because the Lord Jesus Christ, before ever He entered on this new headship, had already taken up, and effectually dealt with, all questions of responsibility before God, in reference to all those who belong to this new creation. Hence, whereas in the first creation responsibility lay *in front*, in the new creation responsibility lies *behind*, it is already over. All depends on Christ, who is the Head of the new creation, "the beginning of the creation of God." We are identified with Him in life and blessing — created in Christ Jesus — and the more we know of Him, the more we enjoy Him, the more our hearts are taken up with Him, the more we listen to His voice and walk in His footsteps, the more real will this new scene and sphere be to us, and the better shall we be fitted to serve Him therein.

APPENDIX.

Some have felt a measure of difficulty in reconciling the truth of new creation with the maintenance of natural relationships. As there was not time to speak of this when the foregoing lecture was delivered (about seven or eight years ago), perhaps I should add a word on the subject now.

Every one subject to the word of God will be greatly helped by remembering that the scripture which speaks most of the new creation speaks very plainly of the necessity of carefully maintaining

every relationship set up or sanctioned of God. This can easily be seen by reading the epistle to the Ephesians, and is sufficient as a mere reply to the difficulty raised. But such need more than a naked reply, they need help, and ought to get it, seeing it is so easily supplied.

Keep in mind that *all* natural relationships which have been established or sanctioned of God have their origin and end *on earth*. They are necessary in the ways of God, and therefore it is evil to violate or speak lightly of them. (Compare Matt. 19, Heb. 13, etc.) But, important as they are in their place, they have *no place* in the new creation. A person may be in the new creation and maintain these relationships in their integrity at the same time. But this would not be enough., He should observe and practise all the duties and responsibilities devolving thus upon him in a new and distinct manner, in harmony with the new and elevated place into which he has been introduced. Just as a man who had been raised from mediocrity to the peerage would treat his wife and family in a manner suited to his new and dignified position.

Every man should love his wife, but a new creation man should love his wife after the manner of Christ's love to the church. Every right-minded man should train up his child "in the way he should go," but a new creation man should bring up his "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Servants should always be obedient to their masters, but those belonging to the new creation should serve "in singleness of heart," "with good will," and "as to the Lord." And so with other things.

The new creation itself, for so far, only applies to our souls; but it gives a character to those who are in it which is seen in, and has an effect on, the commonest affairs of human life. Thank God, the day is near when we shall have done with the present things in every way — bodies, relationships, and mode of existence; and shall be entirely the workmanship of God, and according to His mind. But, in the meantime, it is with this as with all else, our duty is to maintain in its integrity what God has set up till *He* sets it aside. And we can truly thank Him for being so considerate of us while here on earth as to establish these relationships for us, and maintain us in them. This would be a dreary place without them, not to speak of the practical benefits that accrue from them. For in these relationships dependence is developed, confidence established, affections drawn out, our hearts enlarged, not only with reference to the objects of our care or esteem, but also to Him who has placed us in such close and happy associations with each other.

May we have grace and wisdom to know how to combine the two things, to live in the spiritual and heavenly element in such a way that it will influence and control us in the natural things. If this is not the case, rest assured the natural will have the upper hand.

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