

## “New Creation”

*The Way of Jesus – part #1*

2 Corinthians 5:1-21, 6:1-2

**[title]** *Welcome. Happy New Year. New series – The Way of Jesus. Journeying together. Prayer*

**[home remodeling]** Since working in ministry, my wife, Katja, and I have only bought two homes. Our first home was a real fixer-upper, though. Has anyone here ever renovated a home? Then you know the joy and despair of ripping out drywall, rewiring, replumbing, and repainting a house. Fortunately, I knew a great contractor, but for about a year and a half, we had major work to do. The old had to go. We needed a new roof, new windows, new floors, new insulation, new doors and a new bathroom. My parents helped us refinish the basement with wood from our own property. We even had to tear down and rebuild an entire exterior wall. And when the project was finally over, we relished our new home...until we had to move and sell it to someone else!

If you’ve ever watched a home improvement show on HGTV, you know the best part of the show is the final reveal. The expression on the homeowners’ faces is priceless. They often say something like, “I can’t believe this is the same house.” Truly, the old is gone, and the new has come.

**[resolutions]** Today, of course, is New Year’s Day, a day we think about changes we’d like to make in our lives. We make resolutions, but we don’t often keep them. I heard someone resolved to open a new gym, and after two weeks, renovate it into an ice cream store!

Why don’t our resolutions seem to stick? One reason is, in any human endeavor, change is hard. I heard a pastor once say, in a cage match between Change versus Comfort, Comfort always wins. Change has to be more desirable than not changing for it to last.

Still, we humans are naturally wired for renewal. Think about our own bodies’ tendency to heal. Thank goodness for that! I’d be full of scratches and bruises otherwise.

**[bible]** One of the best ways to experience true renewal is by reading the Bible. Spiritual renewal is not a simple paint job and an exercise program. As the

Apostle Paul wrote in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5, real renewal is a total remake of ourselves, starting at the foundation. We can become new creations.

**[Jesus wall]** Jesus is God’s ultimate standard of spiritual renewal for us. Colossians 1:15 says Christ is the firstborn over all creation. Jesus is the image of what we hope to become, in terms of his heart, mind, attitude and actions.

In the Christian church, we teach the doctrine of the Resurrection - the Christian belief that our bodies will be renewed and made perfect like Jesus. Remember, after his resurrection, Jesus still had scars, but he was different, so different that his own disciples at first didn’t recognize him. And yet, Jesus was the same person, and the disciples, when they rediscovered him, worshipped him.

**[verse]** Someday, our physical bodies will be resurrected, but for now, it is our spirits that seek everlasting life. Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us that God has set a longing for eternity in our hearts. Eternal life starts with a decision to follow Christ, and continues forever. Through our resurrection from death, we will be completed renewed and made to live with Christ in heaven. This is the greatest hope of our faith, and a driving force behind sharing the gospel. In fact, Paul pleaded with the Corinthians to be reconciled to God through Jesus and his death on the cross. Just as Jesus rose from the dead, we have the same hope in a resurrection.

**[conflict-fighting]** Still, the General Resurrection is a long way off...I hope. At least not before I finish this message! So while we believe and hope in a physical renewal, we focus on a spiritual renewal, here and now, which is not only possible, but necessary. How many times have we thought, “If only people would stop hating each other!” or “If only people would worship God together and practice kindness and love”?

The reason we struggle with spiritual renewal is we keep measuring ourselves and others according to our own standards, by their money, car, house, job or family. We look at outward appearances and make some pretty stingy judgments.

**[verse]** Paul understood spiritual renewal was possible for all, and he stopped “regarding people from a worldly point of view.” (2 Cor. 5:16) Paul refused to look at people as objects or stepping stones to a purpose. Paul saw

them all as children of God. That’s what spiritual renewal does to your heart. You begin to see others’ needs – for forgiveness, for reconciliation, for hope. And you begin to ask, “God, would you renew me, so that I can renew them, too?” That what Paul meant in verse 18, when he said God reconciled us through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. The type of renewal we seek is contagious, in a good way.

**[new creation verse]** This year, if you want to buy a gym membership, eat less chocolate and more fruit, open a savings account and give more to charity, go for it. But don’t miss the greatest renewal of all, the gospel. It’s summed up beautifully in verse 17. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come.” When you say yes to Jesus, when you believe in him for salvation and follow him as Lord and Savior, your old life is dead, scrapped, and bulldozed over. And your new life is glorious, shiny, and sustainable.

One of my favorite holiday stories is Dr. Seuss’s “The Grinch.” I love how he gets a new heart. Wouldn’t that be great? Would you like a new heart? Would you like an end to the sinful habits that depress you and hold you down? I know I would.

**[heart]** Paul says, this is actually possible. So claim that promise. Everyday can be New Year’s Day in Christ. God is for us, not against us. God desires an end to our sin and suffering. First Corinthians 10:13 says God always provides a way out for us. Second Corinthians 4:16 promises us, even though our physical bodies are wasting away, “inwardly we are being renewed.” Paul pleads with us: Be reconciled to God! (2 Cor. 5:20)

A Readers Digest Article in 1980 described a fascinating medical discovery about children, healing and renewal.<sup>1</sup> The author explained, starfish and lizards are pretty good at regrowing body parts, but us mammals, not so much. Yet a doctor in 1974 discovered that young children (under 12) could regrow finger tips in about 12 weeks, including the nail. There were some requirements: First, it had to be kept clean, and second, you couldn’t try to fix it with surgery, which was tempting to do. However, the finger could be restored by the natural, God-given

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/r/renewal.htm>

power of the body to heal. This actually happened to my cousin when he was a few years old.

**[prayer]** Spiritual renewal is like that. If we try to force renewal on ourselves like it's some sort of elective surgery, it's not likely to work. That will only build up bitterness, resentment, and self-loathing. Instead, we must ask God to renew us by the Holy Spirit, working from the inside out.

Friends, believe the promise. You are a new creation in Christ. Not “You will be”. Not “You might be.” You are a new creation in Christ, presently, here and now. The only requirement is to be reconciled to God. Admit your sins. Admit your brokenness. Admit your rebellion. Christ became the embodiment of sin for us so that we could become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:21) It's not a fair deal; it's a great deal! That why we call it grace.

**[title]** Share this good news with others. It is not meant to be kept secret. Paul became an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor 5:20) We need to be, too, by caring, loving, and showing grace others. By inviting them into a relationship with Jesus. By inviting them to church. By offering to pray for them. Let your renewal show.

Remember, renewal doesn't mean perfection. Those TV shows got one thing wrong – as the families began to live in these new homes, they found some imperfections. They made some scratches in the walls, spilled a few things on the carpet. But the effect of the renewal – being in a new home – lasted as long as they remembered that joy of that first reveal. The same is true of our lives. Remember that you are made new in Christ, and your spiritual renovation will last. It is already happening.

Let's pray.

Memory Verse: Ezekiel 36:26

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

Reflection Questions:

1. What sort of resolutions do people like to make in the New Year?
2. Why are those resolutions often hard to keep?

3. What does it mean to be a new creation in Christ? What sort of things change when Christ comes to live inside us?
4. How many of us urge others to receive God’s grace? What happens to a church if no one ever shares the gospel invitation?
5. What does it mean to represent Christ? How can our church better share the gospel of grace, new life and renewal?