

What's New? ZCC12.28.14

2Cor 5:14-21: For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for all, therefore all died. 15 He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again. 16 Therefore we know no one after the flesh from now on. Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. 18 But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

I'll bet you got a lot of new things since I saw you last—new things for Christmas. Clothes, toys, books, phones, all kinds of new things.

New things are wonderful.

For instance, there is nothing as clean and sweet-smelling as the inside of a new car. We take the old one to town—the one with the coffee stains in the carpet and the crumbs in all the cracks of the seats and the one with dog hair everywhere—and we trade it in and then we are in a new environment—a clean, sweet-smelling environment. Right then and there, we resolve to keep it that way. No spilled coffee and no dog hair will ever touch those new carpets! We won't take one bite of food into it—ever!

That works just fine for a while—then we wind up late and hungry and without your morning coffee and here we go again...coffee stains and crumbs and then we let the dog in and pretty soon the new is all gone...

I was thinking about old and new things—and I realized that those of you in school have a new semester coming up. I've been in school several different times, and it really has not been that long since I was back in school.

So I know how it feels to have a not-so-good semester.

Any of you know what I am talking about? Sometimes we try to take too many hours or too many hard classes or too much outside work—and if you add all of those together, you have a semester that you simply have to survive.

When the semester is fresh and new, you are excited about your classes—at least some of them—and you are thinking how well you are going to do and how your grades are going to look and what a big chunk the semester is going to take out of your requirements.

By the end of it you are more concerned with trying to just pass the classes—and even that will require writing a paper or some other extra-credit work!

Well, the good news is that a new semester is coming and you get a chance to begin again and get started on the proverbial right foot.

In fact, in a few days we ALL have an opportunity to start new and begin again.

The year 2015 will be new and fresh. We've never been there before. All potentials are there and we get to make of it what we will—at least to the degree that you and I are in control.

Of course, the “newness” is really in our minds—but as a new year and a new semester begins, it is a great opportunity to wipe our slate clean mentally and start fresh.

This also works in the spiritual sense. As we take stock of the past year and look at what we accomplished and what we want to do better, the new year is often a time we commit to a renewal of our hearts and minds and of our relationship to God.

Since faith can be an important guide for our actions and our very being, taking stock and re-committing spiritually can be life-changing.

The passage I read a little bit ago talks about newness and what happens as we open ourselves up to God and let him re-make us.

Verse 14 says: *For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for all, therefore all died.*

In the verses before this passage, Paul has been talking about service and about the fact that some see the followers of Christ as being crazy. Here he is saying that they are crazy because of the job God has given them to do—and that God is providing the strength for them to spread the Gospel.

The Gospel here being that Christ died for all who would receive and all who will believe. This is important to believers BECAUSE they know that all have sinned and all are dead before God and because ALL need salvation. God is holding them up to do the work because it is work that MUST be done. An alternate understanding of the “all” here is that Christ died for all and therefore all must die to themselves.

This is supported by verse 15: *He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again.*

So, Paul says that all were dead and that the one—Christ—died so that they might live, yet not for themselves, but for him. This is his explanation for their “craziness” and willingness to face anything for Christ. They are no longer living for self, but are living for Christ and for his work—which for them as evangelists was to preach and teach the Gospel and make sure that it was spread to one and all.

Verse 16: *Therefore we know no one after the flesh from now on. Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more.*

Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees, according to his own testimony, and he was aware of the clean and the unclean and the Jew and the Gentiles. Now he no longer thinks in the flesh—in the circumcision or the rituals of the Jews. Even more importantly, he no longer thinks of or knows Christ in body or flesh, but in the resurrection and in the power of the Son of God.

Even those who saw and who heard Jesus as he walked and talked and as he taught and ministered were now to see him in a different way—not as a great teacher or a Rabbi or a good man—but as the resurrected Lord of all.

How can that be? How could they and how can we see him differently? By having spiritual eyes as well as physical eyes.

Verse 17: *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new.* This verse is the one that caused me to choose this passage in connection with the new year.

As followers of Christ, we have new eyes and new desires and new directions—why is that? Is it because we try harder and we work harder and all of that? Not really—though we should be trying, in the power of the Spirit, to do our best.

It is because salvation changes us for the better and forever. Knowing the risen Christ—not in the flesh, but the Spirit—makes us new creatures.

How is that? How does that happen? Our relationship—our knowing him spiritually changes us. And that changes our focus and our work. Being reconciled to God means that we are to do his work—and that is the work of reconciliation.

Verse 18: *But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation;* Having reconciled Paul and his fellow Christians—God then gave them a ministry of reconciliation—not of person to person (though that is a good ministry) but of reconciliation between God and humankind—and, I believe, between human beings also.

Verses 19-20: *Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

Here Paul is asking his audience to repent and to change and to become new creatures in Christ. Interesting, isn't it—that Paul was at first explaining himself and then he turns it around and seeks converts. Why? Because God had given him the task—the task of seeking the lost where ever they might be found.

In the last verse of our passage, Paul explains the “how” of salvation. *For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

How can I be made new? How can my imperfection be made perfect?

It is through the work and the person of Christ—not in the flesh, although he certainly was flesh at one time, but the person of the Christ in the power and the glory of the resurrection—of the defeat of sin and the grave.

When the new semester begins, you have a fresh start. When the new year begins, we get a new chance. BUT we are still connected to our grade-point and our transcript will still reflect last semester too.

The new year brings new resolutions to diet and exercise, but we are still beginning with where we are right now—a few pounds over and a few exercises short of fit. This is the way of the flesh. There is no free lunch and there is no real new beginning.

BUT in the spirit, there is such a thing and it comes through Christ.

If we know Christ in the spirit, and accept the work he did for you and me—then we can be made new, be recreated and be new and start fresh. Let's look again at the “how” of that renewal:

1. When we come to understand—to believe—that Christ died for all of us, we become empowered to live for him, not just for ourselves.
2. When we receive those “spiritual eyes” then we come to know him in a different way. Rather than head-knowing, we move into “soul-knowing” which is a relationship on the spiritual level.
3. Knowing Christ in the spirit brings renewal. It is just as automatic and real as a chemical reaction. It reminds me of one of my favorite verses—which is about the resurrection.

From 1st John 3: *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears,[a] we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* This seems to say that when we see him as he now is, we will automatically be changed in the spirit and in the flesh. We shall become like him.

We can have part of that change now—as we, through the Scripture and relationship, come to see him with spiritual eyes.

4. Knowing Christ—being reconciled and being changed brings responsibility. Just as he is reconciling the world to himself, we are now tasked with a ministry of reconciliation ourselves. We are to share our faith and to work with bring others into the kingdom. Why? Because we represent God and we are ambassadors of Christ.

What does an ambassador do? An ambassador goes to a foreign country and represents a person or a government. It is said that Christians are no longer of this world—and if that is so, the word ambassador fits perfectly. We are to continue the work of Christ, seeking to expand the Kingdom of God.

Just as Paul did in this passage, I challenge you today. If you don't have that relationship, this is the time to make that happen. God seeks to make you a new creature. We have just celebrated Christmas and we are looking at the newness of a new year. What a great time to embrace him.

But what about the rest of us? How about those of us who got “new” and yet we have spilled coffee and we have dropped crumbs—what about us?

If you will bear with my new-car analogy a bit longer, let's just say that the call today is not just to being re-created, it is also a call to be detailed and cleaned and waxed and washed and straightened.

Come to Christ and he will do what is needed. Have you never accepted him in the Spirit? He is seeking to make you new.

Have you managed to get that new creation dirty again? He will wash us again and renew our mind and spirit.

All we have to do is ask.

As we open up the altar today, come to be remade or to be cleaned-up or to commit anew to working for Christ—and it just so happens that Zion is a great place to do that.

Profession of faith.

Renewal.

Join with us as we work for him.

As we sing.