

<b>Series:</b> Start with Scripture	<b>Reference:</b> 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Romans 8:1-17	<b>Title:</b> Turning the Page	<b>Date:</b> 01.01.23
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
New opportunities await those in the new year who keep their eyes on Jesus by developing healthy habits of turning the pages of Scripture to find our place and purpose in the story of God. As Believers we're given God's manual on finding hope & are invited to turn the page to unpack its message, valuing the opportunity to receive new life in Jesus, and appreciating the gift of growing in biblical knowledge.			

### Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

New opportunities await those in the new year who keep their eyes on Jesus by developing healthy habits of turning the pages of Scripture to find their place & purpose in the story of God. Having been given God's manual of hope, we're invited to turn the pages to unpack its message, valuing the opportunity to receive new life in Jesus, & appreciating the gift of growing in biblical knowledge. Finding in it a consistent message that the God of the old testament is the same as the new, orchestrating & unfolding a plan throughout history of reconciliation & salvation wrought solely by Himself, for His glory.

Thinking about change in the new year, we're reminded, Jesus offers & insists we're different creatures in Him. The old's no longer available as 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us... *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"* Do you consider yourself to be a new creation in Christ? Imbued with the ability to walk in righteousness & pursue holiness; one who's become literally the righteousness of God in Christ? Since, that's what God says about you in the Bible!

That little phrase 'in Christ' found in this verse is written 165 times in the new testament. Such frequent occurrence communicates importance. For instance, Paul tells us in Romans 8:1... *"...there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* A little prepositional phrase, easy to say, packed with intense theological truth about us! That's what we explore today, one small aspect of truth we find when we're in the good habit of flipping the pages of our Bible.

'In Christ' is the idea of residing in safety when stowed away inside something else. The story of the Ark holds the same imagery, one which foreshadows this little phrase, 'in Christ'. Those that were in the Ark, were safe from the destructive flood outside - as the world around them was destroyed & literally reformed. They rose above, floating over all the death & destruction enclosed in the safety of that great Ark until a new earth emerged below their feet safe to live life again.

The Lampungese of South Sumatra produce what they call, Kain Kapal, or ship cloths. They have ancient stories that a ship would come down from heaven at the end of days & take them all up to safety. A redemptive analogy used by Christians when witnessing to them, equating that ship to Christ. Possibly there's residual memory of the global flood in them which led to that story. In the old testament we also see the concept of Cities of

Refuge, if a person committed a crime they could run to a city, and while in it, they were safe. Nothing on the outside could touch or harm them.

This idea of being ‘in Christ’ means we’re absolutely safe in Him, no condemnation. He is our Ark, our City of Refuge. Meaning, He doesn’t just wipe away our past sins & zero out our past record, as if we had to keep working to stay in His favor with fear of being thrown overboard when we do wrong. Rather, past, present & future sin has been paid for by Jesus; a comprehensive safety of full salvation. *Colossians 3:3* tells us...*“For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”* In Christ you’ve been created anew, hidden away in Him; carried along by the ship of Christ through all the destruction this world brings waiting the new earth below your feet. This is because God is love, and as such, effects salvation because His heart has always been to reconcile & renew, the central theme which permeates all of Scripture from beginning to end.

Romans 8:1-17 clearly speaks in this vein. It says...*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup>because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin & death. <sup>3</sup>For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

Notice, Christ came in the ‘likeness of sinful flesh’, not ‘in sinful flesh’. This is why the virgin birth we celebrated last week is important. He was not born of human will & desire, but by the Spirit. This is why the bodily death & resurrection of Christ was important. He lived a perfect life in a human body in order to satisfy the requirements of the perfect & final spotless sacrifice. Because sin had to be paid for in blood, by death. And since sin was born by human will, it had to be by human sacrifice, but only God could accomplish salvation through forgiveness as the offended party. Not to mention, no human could accomplish a sinless record. Romans 3:23 tells us...*“for all have sinned & fall short of the glory of God...”* So, Jesus entered our reality as fully God & fully man. The perfect Lamb of God, foreshadowed in all of the Old Testament Temple sacrifices shed on the altar to make atonement for the sin of Israel. When you read the Scriptures over a lifetime, the story & image of our loving God only become more amazing & clear!

Paul continues...*<sup>5</sup>Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. <sup>6</sup>The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life & peace. <sup>7</sup>The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. <sup>8</sup>Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.*

Without repentance & faith we reside outside of Christ, governed by the flesh, buffeted & flailing in the waves of life where we would eventually drown. Since, staying in our sin, without Christ’s righteousness covering us, brings spiritual & literal death. But Paul was writing to Christians in Corinth who were already in Christ, yet tempted to forget who

*they actually are in Him.* So he continues...<sup>9</sup>*You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.* <sup>10</sup>*But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.* <sup>11</sup>*And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.*

So, not only do we experience new spiritual life in Christ, but eventually when it's all said & done, we'll be raised anew recreated in a new heavenly body for eternity! That's good news! *It continues in v12...<sup>12</sup>Therefore, brothers & sisters, we have an obligation - but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. <sup>13</sup>For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

Don't misinterpret Paul's words, he says it's the work of the Spirit to put to death the misdeeds of the body, not us. In other words, our job is simply to abide in Christ & His Spirit does the work of regeneration & transformation in us! Jesus said this in John 15:7...*"If you remain in me & my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."* Christ does the work, as we abide in His Word taking on His heart desires.

We could equate it with the process of gold plating. In that process a metal object is given a negative charge & the gold particle solution is given a positive charge. When you put the object into the gold solution the positive & negative ions are attracted & bond leaving you with a gold layer over the object. Our job is to immerse ourselves in Christ, in His word, allowing Him to cover & transform us. Change doesn't come by self-effort, but by putting ourselves in the position of being changed by Christ - immersion.

This is why Paul also writes in Galatians 5:16...*"walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."* Again, it does not say, 'Don't gratify the desires of the flesh, then you'll be walking by the Spirit.' The concept is keep your heart focused on Christ allowing Him to do the work in & for you. *It's a matter of believing truth about yourself as Romans 12:1-2 dictates..."Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* We're saved once for all by Christ's sacrifice, and are transformed over time by the renewing of our minds, not in trying harder to change ourselves. To put ourselves in that position is to immerse ourselves in the Word of God on a consistent basis giving it free reign to transform us.

It's kind of like drawing a portrait. If you've ever watched an artist do so, you'd notice most of their attention is on the subject, their hand almost moves without looking at the drawing at all. Allowing the subject, the form, shape & feeling of it, to dictate the movements of your hand. And when an artist is practiced at this, the end result is, not only a technically accurate drawing, but one imbued with life.

This is where modern psychology cripples us. We think if we just spend enough time working on ourselves we can overcome our sinful nature, but we can't. Maybe small

changes may occur, but the core issues go unchanged. We look at the drawing & not the subject, and if we're not focused on the subject, we don't know where the lines fall. **It's a work of the Spirit in us as we abide in Christ. Yet, we pigeon-hole people with concepts like the Enneagram where we assign a person a number with an accompanying personality description & we say, "Well, I'm a 2 ,or a 6, I can't change & just have to learn techniques to cope with others who aren't like me."** But the Gospel says you're made new & being formed into the likeness of Christ. That if you're not naturally compassionate, Christ can & will make you so, as you gaze on Him. If you're anxious, He can overcome that in you, as you gaze on Him. That if you're an unforgiving person, His Spirit will develop that in you, as you gaze on Him, etc. Transformation is possible! But self-absorption only keeps us locked in developing our own self-righteousness instead of resting in Christ-righteousness, and no lasting transformation occurs.

**Talking with a counselor may be good, and maybe Christian counselors should begin each session with the question, "Are you abiding in Christ? Are you walking in the Spirit?" And end each session with the challenge to keep their eyes focused on Christ, the author & perfecter of faith! To go back to the Scriptures, immersing ourselves in them, not for the purpose of self-help, but to know better your God, since as His creation, it's only in Him you find true value, worth & are made new.**

Paul ends that section like this...<sup>14</sup>*For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. <sup>15</sup>The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." <sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. <sup>17</sup>Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God & co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

Children, heirs, sharing in glory - wonderful concepts which birth gratitude! The Westminster Larger Catechism, written in 1648, opens with a question & answer: **Question - what is the chief & highest end of man? Answer - Man's chief & highest end is to glorify God & fully enjoy Him forever. The concepts we speak of today are reason to enjoy God forever!** Julian of Norwich once wrote, "The greatest honor we can give to God is to live gladly because of the knowledge of His love. What God most wants is to see you smile because you know how much He loves you." We delight in a God who delights in us!

As we face a new year, we have a chance to start fresh. To consider & live in the reality that..."the love of Christ is in our hearts, and the world is under our feet. The focus of all who profess Christ is that they're new creatures; a new heart, new nature. So great is the change the grace of God makes in the soul that *old things are passed away* - old thoughts, principles & practices passed away; and *all these things must become new*. Regenerating grace creates a new world in the soul; all things are new. The renewed person acts from new principles, by new rules, with new ends & in new company."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, commentary on 2 Corinthians 5, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/2Cr/2Cr\\_005.cfm?a=1083017](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/2Cr/2Cr_005.cfm?a=1083017)

Paul uses the word *kainos* twice in 2 Corinthians 5:17. A word used a total of 42 times in the New Testament, meaning “recently made, fresh, recent, unused, unworn, unprecedented, uncommon, novel.” The same word used to describe the new wineskins Jesus speaks of in Matthew 9:17...*“Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst & the wine is spilled & the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”*

It’s used in Luke 22:20 in reference to the 1st practice of the Lord’s Table when Jesus gave them the cup & said...*“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”* Or Galatians 6:15...*“For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.”* Signifying Christ has abolished the old order, satisfied the law & it’s now a matter of believing & living as a new creation in Him!

Or, Ephesians 4:21-24...*“...when you heard about Christ & were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup>You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; <sup>23</sup>to be made new in the attitude of your minds; <sup>24</sup>and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness & holiness.”* Putting off signifies the need for repentance, a turning away from sin. It’s not the struggle of saying, “Aaaah! I promise not to do that again!” It’s simply a turning away from one thing & filling it with another, since putting on signifies turning toward Christ to be renewed in our minds.

Because Hebrews 9:15 says...*“Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.”* Which all leads to Rev 21:5...*“And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new...”*<sup>2</sup> Amen to that!

Paul refers to us as being this new, unprecedented, uncommon creation, as the old’s gone, then he declares the arrival of the new creation a second time. Newness is a common theme in Scripture. Part of being this new creation is learning how to live as one. God’s story’s never changing; His offer of new life can be seen throughout the Old & New Testaments. At times, we need to be delivered from a situation, our unbelief, or a tough season; and God’s in the deliverance business!

The trick is not to ‘try harder in being better’ when in difficulty, but simply to abide in Jesus believing you have newness in Him. Identifying lies you may even be telling yourself & not conforming to what the world says about you. To know & live in the fact that your sins, past, present & future, are covered under this New Covenant of Christ. You’re not condemned or trapped. Transformation & healing can happen by the Spirit of God. You’re not old wineskins with new wine in them, you’re new wineskins with the wine of the blood of Christ poured into you.

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<sup>2</sup> Outline of Biblical Usage, s.v. “G2537, *kainos*,” <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2537&t=ESV>

Notice how much Scripture we've read today. Part of abiding in Christ is immersion in His Word because His Truth transforms. Truth which battles the lies. Turning the page to a new calendar doesn't mean our previous year's concerns or troubles are magically gone, but it does mean we can have a fresh outlook for what God's done in us, and does for us each day. As we turn the pages of Scripture, we find hope, as well as our place & purpose in the larger story of God. Committing to turning the pages of the Bible & reading it will be life changing.

Listening to a radio commercial this week a woman claimed our purpose in life is to stay healthy & strong for our loved ones; that's an overstatement. Our purpose is actually to glorify & enjoy God, expressed now in at least one practical way. That in the gratitude of renewal we bring this message to others! We see this in vv18-21 of 2 Corinthians 5...*"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ & gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup>that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

AW Tozer once wrote, "What comes into our mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man." Our thoughts about God determine not only who we are, but how we live & the relationship we'll have with Him. If we think He's harsh & demanding, we'll keep our distance. If we think He's vague & impersonal, our relationship reflects that. It's crucial to have the right image of God, because with false or low views, we commit idolatry since we worship something false. But when we come to know the God revealed in Jesus we fall in love! The more we know of the nature & work of the triune God, the more we're enthralled with the truth. The Scripture reveals a good, beautiful, loving, trustworthy, self-sacrificial, forgiving, powerful, caring God bent on reconciliation, wanting us to enjoy Him fully!<sup>3</sup>

Living as a new creation requires us to live in Christ & His purposes which may mean new patterns, behaviors, thoughts & habits. We're gifted the manual on how to know God. Use it this year. Spend daily time in the Word. Read through the Bible in a year. Immerse yourself. Be Christ-plated. Turn away from the patterns of this world towards Christ. Allow Him to define & develop your character & give you purpose. **Then Romans 15:13 will be true of you...*May the God of hope fill you with all joy & peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*** When you enjoy God in Christ, hope, joy & peace overflow, and anyone close to you gets wet - and you'll be fulfilling your purpose!

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<sup>3</sup> The Good & Beautiful God; Falling in Love with the God Jesus Knows, James Bryan Smith, pp88-89