

A NEW CREATION_ (*Keep The Change*)

My theme for January is “*Keep the Change*” and I’m not referring to money. This morning’s text can be found on page 1799 of our pew Bibles. I’ll begin reading in verse 17 of 2nd Corinthians 5. After asserting that the Lord has made us to live in glory with Him now and forever, the Apostle Paul writes this: ¹⁷ **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!** ¹⁸ **All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.** ²⁰ **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.** ²¹ **God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.**

According to verse 17, if we have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, something has already changed. That change is remarkable, even incredible, and without a doubt, phenomenal. We have been “*created*” anew. Yet, verse 21 makes it clear that we are in a process of “*becoming*.”

Nearly everyone I’ve been privileged to interview on this subject over 30+ years of ministry has told me that they “*felt*” something when it happened. Some experienced a warm glow or a surge of power. Others felt a refreshing, as if they were being immersed in the purest stream. Though most praised God aloud, even a few speaking in tongues, extremes have ranged from shouts of joy to silent reflection. In each case, there was a sense of God’s love and the Spirit’s acceptance.

However, the overwhelming majority reported that their feelings were fleeting. Before much time passed, ranging from a few hours to a few months, most believers said that the newness wore off. The “*new creation*” soon wilted. Context will certainly confirm that this is not the way it is supposed to be. God’s intention is for us to become genuine imitators of Jesus, as we exchange our sin for His righteousness. So why is this not always the case? The problem often stems from faulty perceptions and expectations.

I cannot adequately address this subject further without careful consideration of Romans 12:1-2. **“I urge you, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is--His good, pleasing and perfect will.”**

The word that the Apostle Paul used for transformation is the word “*metamorphosis*” and the most common illustration of this that of a *caterpillar becoming a butterfly*. You don’t have to be an entomologist to know that this is not a singular event, but a process.

It doesn't happen all at once. We perhaps have also been trained to think that it begins with the caterpillar, but it does not. The process starts much earlier with conception - and then there's an egg before the larva. These are necessary initial steps in the transition. This reminds me that Jesus spoke of being **"born again"** in John 3:5 referring to the onset of spiritual transformation. When we are convicted by the Holy Spirit to accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, new life is conceived within us, and we become a new creation. As John 1:12-13 asserts, those of us who receive Christ are granted **"the right to become children of God - not of natural descent or human decision or a husband's will, but born of God..."** Still, though we are new and pure, we are NOT mature.

I do not wish to belittle the work of God in any stage of our growth, for without Him life is not even possible, let alone growth. But the initial stages of our metamorphosis are completely by grace through faith. As in the physical realm, we are passive participants, incapable of nurturing and feeding ourselves. It is all God. But, eventually, He calls us to participate in the process, to respond and take responsibility for our development.

Did you know that a caterpillar sheds its skin 3-4 times before it spins the cocoon (*chrysalis or pupa*) in which it will undergo the final transformation? Each phase is a struggle, and absolutely essential to the process. Growth is stunted without struggle. We'll talk more about *"shedding our skin"* next week.

Imagine a caterpillar that not only did not shed its outer skin, but never spun a cocoon. It would never become what God intended. Similarly, if we welcome forgiveness, but resist - even personally refuse to be involved in - transformation, though we become **"a new creation"** we will not develop. Paul says the place for our transformation however is not a cocoon, but the mind. We'll spend our third lesson in this series on that concept. And in our final lesson on January 22nd, we'll consider the final phase in our metamorphosis in which we *"spread our wings and fly."*

For now, I ask you to do a little **personal inventory**. Where are you in the process? Have you been born again? Do you even want to be? Do you want to change and acknowledge that the kind of change you want is impossible without God? Have you accepted Jesus as your Savior, but not as Lord? Have you longed for change, but resisted the Spirit's leading required for it to happen? Are you stuck somewhere in the process, tired of struggling because you aren't seeing instantaneous change? Are you just hanging around, expecting God to change you without your cooperation?

If any of this describes you, I invite you to pray with me now - that is if you really want God to save you and transform you.