

"The New Creature"

by
Henry Martyn

***"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature;
old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."
2 Corinthians 5:17***

There are few subjects so imperfectly understood by Christians as the doctrines of their own religion. Other branches of science are cultivated with care, and the want [lack] of a certain degree of acquaintance with them is supposed to argue a defect either of education or of intellect. But ignorance of the Bible is attended with no disgrace.

Were we now in the predicament of our forefathers, who were debarred the free use of Scripture by the obstacles of a foreign language, such ignorance would excite less surprise. But happily the period of Romish bigotry is past. The sacred volume is now accessible, and the small degree of literature necessary for understanding it has descended to the lowest classes of society. It might therefore be reasonably expected of us all that we should be not merely acquainted with the facts recorded in Scripture, but able to discern the distinguishing features of that way of salvation which is pointed out in it.

The want of such discriminating knowledge of the peculiar nature of the Gospel leaves us exposed either to the attacks of unbelievers, who would challenge us to show what greater evidence there is for believing this religion to be of God than another, or to the still greater danger of self-deceit. Hence it is of importance that we set before you from the words of the text, first, the state of a real Christian; secondly, the evidence of his being in that state.

I. The state of a real Christian, or his situation in reference to God, is thus expressed by the Apostle: *he is in Christ.* To be a Christian is not to have been born in a Christian country and of Christian parents, to have received the sacramental ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, and to live a moral and honest life. But it is to be in Christ, the strength and peculiarity of which expression suggests the idea of a state very different in nature and importance from the mere external possession of Christian privileges or the performance of relative duties.

To illustrate the meaning of this expression, let us contrast it with our state as we are in Adam, partaking of his guilt and inheriting his corruption.

God in his covenant engagements with Adam treated [dealt] with him as with the head and representative of mankind. Adam fell, and with him fell the whole human race (every individual as he comes into the world being now considered by God as involved in the first transgression). Hence the natural condition of men, whether their lives be more or less stained with actual wickedness, is a state of guilt as well as depravity at its very beginning. *"We are by nature the children of wrath"* (Eph. 2:3). Such is our state in Adam.

In this state all of us remain who have not turned unto God from the world. To be in Christ is to be related to him in the same sense as we were said to be related to Adam; and the blessings

flowing from the former relation correspond to the miseries of the latter. For as those that are in Adam are considered by God as partakers of his guilt, independently of any disobedience of their own, so those that are in Christ are regarded by God as partaking of Christ's merit and possessed of a justifying righteousness in him, independently of any previous obedience of their own. And again, as those that are in Adam receive from him at their natural birth an entire depravity of nature, so those that are in Christ receive from him the renovation of their nature. Over the former, the anger of an offended God is continually suspended, and will fall on them with overwhelming weight if they die unchanged. On the latter, the blessings of a gracious God rest perpetually. His protecting Providence, his influencing Spirit, his tenderest compassion and everlasting love, are secured to them for time and for eternity. He looks upon them as free from guilt, innocent in Christ's innocence, and righteous in Christ's righteousness; and will give them the reward of his merits when they die.

Those who do not attend to the Scripture account of this subject are more accustomed to consider God as dealing immediately with ourselves than as in Adam. It will be of use therefore to contrast our state in Christ with what may be called the *being in ourselves*.

In whatever degree we depend on our own works for recommending us to the divine favor, or imagine [that] the ability to be holy is originally in ourselves, in that degree a mediator becomes unnecessary for us. We transact our own affairs with God; we stand on our own foundation; and God deals with us accordingly. He beholds us under that law of works which requires perfect obedience; and when once we fail of absolute perfection, [He] passes sentence on us as condemned criminals. Alas, how sad and pitiable is the condition of natural men, [and] chiefly pitiable because they know not their case! "*He who keeps the whole law and offends in one point is guilty of all*" (James 2:10). One act of dishonesty brands a man a thief, and one transgression of the divine law exposes [men] to its condemning sentence, though they will not believe it.

The state of those who have fled from this danger to be found in Christ, is to be contrasted with the former in this particular: that God no longer deals with them immediately in their own persons. The whole method of his proceedings towards them is changed. He regards them in a new light, adopts and adheres to a new system respecting them. He always thinks of them as in Christ [and] overlooks what they are in themselves. All he gives to them, all he receives from them is through Christ, who is now the sole channel of grace and the repository of spiritual blessings. Once he looked to them for merit; now he looks for it in Christ. Once he remembered their sins; but now he has now forgotten them. Formerly every blessing was suspended upon the performance of conditions; but now all is freely given, or freely promised, and every promise [is] not left conditional but made and secured in Christ. There is no longer any uncertainty hanging over those that are in Christ [as to] whether at the end of life they shall be accepted or rejected. For already are they pardoned and justified; already are they made the children of God by adoption; already they are at peace and have everlasting life.

If Christ is worthy, then are they worthy. Did the Son of God fulfill the law in their stead and thus obtain righteousness? Then they also are perfectly righteous in the righteousness of Christ. Was he filled with the Spirit? Then shall they also receive the anointings of the Holy One. Did he rise from the grave and ascend to his glory? Then they shall rise and dwell with him in heavenly places, and walk with him in white, and sit with him on his throne, and reign with him forever and ever.

The peculiar term *in Christ* is borrowed from one or other of the following circumstances. Cities

of refuge were appointed among the Jews with this design: that he who had been guilty of manslaughter might escape to one of them and be safe. These cities are emblems of the Savior. Whoever, conscious of his desert of eternal death, flees with brokenness of heart to him, is in Christ safe from the punishment of all his past iniquities. Again, as a sheep in a [sheep]fold, so is a sinner in Christ (John 10). It is not the manner of a good shepherd to cast off every untractable sheep and send it astray in the wilderness, but to bear with it, and correct it, and feed it with the rest. So those that are in Christ are not cast off from God for their sins of infirmity, but made to cease from them; not given up to the power of Satan, but strengthened to conflict [do battle] with him; and brought safely from this and every other danger to their everlasting inheritance in the heavens. This, the attentive hearer will observe, is the Christian doctrine of Justification by Faith in Christ.

Now our text points out the consequences flowing from this doctrine and completely obviates all the objections that are raised against it as unfriendly to morality. The Scriptures provide sufficient [information] for sinners in Christ, through faith. It brings them into a state of friendship and favor with God, but does not then leave them to themselves. The Holy Spirit is then vouchsafed [granted by favor] to be a Sanctifier and Comforter, and to prepare the justified soul for communion with the holy God.

As it may possibly be an inquiry in your minds whether you be in Christ, many of you having scarcely a reason for believing that you are and yet unwilling to believe that you are not, we must attempt the determining of this critical question by considering,

II. What are the proper evidences of our having made the transition from ourselves to Christ. *"If any man be in Christ, then he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

Here is a twofold evidence: there has been a *divine operation upon him*, and [there has been] a *universal change in him*.

1. There is a *divine operation upon him*, for he is a "new creature" (or as it is in the original, a new creation). Creation is the work of God. He only can call into being that which had no previous existence and bid that be which before was not. Religion in the heart is not the effect of our own reason acting by itself, or the consequence of moral persuasion. But it is a work wrought by the immediate supernatural power of God the Holy Ghost.

We call it supernatural because it is not one of those effects which God works upon all in the natural course of things, nor does it resemble God's natural gifts bestowed equally upon all. But it is peculiar to those that are in Christ and takes place on their union to him. *"A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you,"* is the promise of God by Ezekiel (36:26). *"And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh; and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my statutes and do them."* Here the necessity of a new heart, and of the exertion of Divine power to produce it, are expressed in the plainest terms.

In other passages the same truth is conveyed with equal plainness. St. Paul, addressing the Ephesians, compares the power of God in making us new creatures to that whereby he raises the dead: *"You has he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins"* [2:1]. And in the second Epistle to the Corinthians, it is likened to that act of creation which brought light out of the

original darkness: "*God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined into our hearts*" (4:6). These passages furnish us with an incontrovertible truth that there is a certain period in the life of every true Christian at which he becomes the subject of an inward change, the effect of the power of God--not that it can be known by any momentary *feeling* when the hand of God is upon us (as the inspired prophets could know) but only the *reality of such a change*: [that reality] is certainly capable of being ascertained. It began perhaps in fear; it was attended with faint resolutions to amend; and then by various steps it ended in a cordial application to Christ and an unreserved self-dedication to God. Yet all this perhaps took place by imperceptible degrees. When the morning succeeds the night, light and darkness are blended in continually different proportions so that we cannot say when night is ended and the day begins.

It is scarcely necessary to be observed that no change takes place in the original constitution of our minds by our becoming new creatures. No new faculty is introduced into the soul nor mental power super added, but a new turn and direction is given to the passions we already possess.

2. This will be more apparent if we consider that *universal change* which ensues in the heart and life. "*If any man be in Christ, old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*" The change in the conduct is in most cases remarkable.

Observe how all the grosser habits of evil are care cast off and are succeeded by opposite virtues. If the man has been dishonest, he becomes upright. If a drunkard, he becomes temperate. The sensualist grows chaste, the churl liberal, the proud man humble, the vain man modest, the backbiter charitable; and the malicious, envious, and deceitful [man becomes] kind, generous, and sincere.

There is a change of conduct towards God. Once he presumed to pass the sabbath as he pleased; to sanctify or profane it, to be absent from the house of prayer or to visit it, as most suited his convenience or inclination. But now he cautiously excludes both business and amusement from it and dedicates the whole to holy exercises. He will not occasion others, even heathen, to violate the sabbath by giving them secular employments which are unnecessary, because God's commands are equally binding on them as on us; and therefore we are enjoined to give rest on that day *to the stranger that is within our gates*.

Once he could live without secret prayer, or satisfy his conscience with the dull repetition of a form. But he now regards prayer as one of the most important employments of life. The word of God heretofore lay neglected. But henceforth it is daily perused for the purposes of spiritual instruction. His views of himself are become new. He will not now be heard speaking of the goodness of his heart, or justifying his defects, or presuming upon his comparative innocence for recommending him to God; but with deep self-abasement acknowledging his desert of God's wrath, yet resting his steady hopes on the atonement of Jesus Christ.

With respect to the world and its pleasures, he has done with them. Without retiring from his station in society or the duties attending it, he withdraws from that pursuit of riches and distinction in which others place their happiness. And he will never willingly countenance the dissipation of the world by his own presence and example. On the earth it is his profession to be a stranger and pilgrim. His heart is in a better country, his affections are set on things above, and his treasure deposited there. And when obliged to mix with the world, it is his purpose and prayer to be kept unspotted from it. [His purpose is] to grow in holiness, looking for and hastening to the coming of the great day of God.

Let us observe his relative conduct. To the man who is in Christ a "new creature," the government of his temper becomes an object of serious attention. For according to his new views, all disorders of the temper must be considered as arising from pride, prejudice, or discontent, and therefore unbecoming a Christian. He therefore labors to be poor in spirit, meek, forgiving; patiently bearing with the perverseness and obstinacy of those with whom he has to deal; and he will really love and pray for those who injure or speak evil of him.

In conversation with others, the man who is in Christ a "new creature" will never think of defiling his lips with an indecent allusion, though veiled in ambiguity; because he knows it is equally detestable to God and more dangerous to men than the open language of impurity. On the contrary, he has so learned Christ as to be pure in heart, and will therefore seldom fail to testify his abhorrence of anything of this nature. He defends the ways of the righteous and shows a decided preference for their company. Yet even with the world he is not morose or forbidding. He is serious but not severe; pitying sinners but not despising them; an opposer of all sin, but especially of his own.

With respect to what he has in his own power, he does not conceive himself at liberty to use his time, fortune, or influence as may suit his humor. But bearing in mind that he is not a master but a steward of these things, he prepares for the strict account of his stewardship, which he must give at the end of life before the tribunal of God. His fortune therefore will not be all spent in vanity while there are any poor in the world who have a claim upon him by their misery, or any ignorant whose spiritual benefit may be any way promoted by a proper application of pecuniary aid. Nor will his time be devoted to excess of business, nor trifled away in unnecessary amusements, but he will employ all in the way that shall appear most to conduce to the glory of God and the benefit of mankind. Such a conduct will undoubtedly subject him to the charge of singularity and preciseness. But unconcerned at the opinions of men, he determines neither to be guided by the customs nor maxims of the world but simply to follow the word of God as an all-sufficient rule of life. In short, if any man be in Christ, he is altogether another man. *Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

Still there may appear to some to be nothing extraordinary in all this, nothing but what any man may accomplish by his own efforts. We should consider therefore the change of heart or inward disposition which preserves the alteration visible in the life. "*A new heart will I give you,*" said God in a passage before referred to. To the same effect are St. Paul's words: "*Put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind*" [Eph. 4:22]. And again, "*Be ye not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewal of your mind*" (Rom. 12:2). Here is a certain change spoken of, perfectly distinct from a reformation of life however extensive that reformation be. [It is] such a change of the heart as presupposes its evil condition; and that though we retain our natural faculties, the heart is in the most abject, corrupted, and forlorn condition, with all the passions affecting objects which are either false or dangerous. This is it which renders a new creation necessary.

There must be a new disposition of the heart. The bent of the will, the direction of the passions, the habitual principles, motives and ends must be different from what they were before. The taste and inclination must be different. The whole state and nature, in short, different. Here is the work of God! Man cannot teach the soul; but it is upon it that God's new creating influence is principally exerted. And the result forms a wide line of discrimination between a divine work upon the soul and mere human efforts. The moving principle of the new-created soul, in all that

it does in a moral point of view, has no longer a regard to character or the advancement of temporal interest, nor even the fear of hell merely and hope of heaven, though it is very powerfully influenced by these. For all these are no more than the motives which naturally impel every man to action, and may exist where the heart is in its native unregenerate state. But its moving principle is love--the love of God which an unregenerated man never felt.

"The love of Christ constrains us," says St. Paul [2 Cor. 5:14]. We serve God not as slaves but as children. Our motive is the love we bear him and our end his glory. We would not be as persons who are, so to speak, making a hard bargain and who would know the precise quantity of virtue necessary for salvation. But we wish to serve him with the full flow of affection, to offer up to him hearts glowing with gratitude and love, and to have body, soul, and spirit unreservedly dedicated to his service.

There is also in the renewed heart a love to holiness, which was once the object of its dislike. This attachment to holiness is not therefore merely as it is necessary to salvation, but because it suits our renewed taste. It is therefore superior to all legal consideration. If on a sudden we should discover that there is no place of punishment or reward, our pursuit of holiness would not be given up; because through the renovation of our minds, it is from choice and deliberate preference that we would be holy. We act not from a calculation of loss and gain resulting from the practice of holiness, but from a real liking to the thing itself.

In conformity to the same principle, we inquire not how far we may indulge ourselves; nor determine to have everything respecting right and wrong proved to a demonstration [so] that we may advance to the very limits of what is lawful. But we stand at a distance and abstain as carefully from temptation as from sin itself. Thus the hatred of sin implanted in our new nature discovers itself by leading us to avoid all that may lead to it.

All this forms a manifest distinction between regeneration and outward reformation because it proves the disposition to be altered. Natural men may be conceived to do outwardly all that the purest saints can perform. But what man loves God and holiness from seeing them to be intrinsically amiable or hates sin from feeling it to be essentially detestable, except the man in whose heart the Spirit has begun to draw the lineaments of the divine image?

One or two instances may be added to illustrate the change that has taken place in the new-created heart. Persons of strict and serious piety are often asked why they abstain from most of the amusements to which the world are so attached, and they are called upon to show the harm of them. Without undertaking to prove the unlawfulness of them, the Christian can always reply: *"When I was a child I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things"* [1 Cor. 13:11]. He once found his pleasure in such things and was very unwilling to be deprived of them. But since he has become a new creature, he has lost all taste and relish for them, and can now be satisfied only with divine and spiritual enjoyments.

Another circumstance worthy of observation is the manner in which we treat the sins of others. There are some sins which in the opinion of some are less injurious to society than others, such as intoxication [and] impurity. A natural man hearing of instances of these in others, not thinking or caring what view God has of these things, will either make a matter of mirth of them or at least smile at what he hears of this nature, as if it rather amused than grieved him. Thus with an outward conduct, correct possibly and unblamable, he betrays the wickedness and

unregeneration of his heart by smiling at that at which God frowns. The really good man, besides possessing a quick sensibility for God's honor, is endued with a similarity of sentiment with the Deity, and can therefore take no pleasure in that which offends God and subjects his fellow creatures to everlasting misery.

Examine, then, your own selves brethren. Prove your own selves. Review the text and ask, are you new creatures? If the question appears strange to you, if the whole idea of the thing seem novel or, as it is to some, ludicrous, you need not reply. You have manifestly not experienced the new creation. On what then do you ground your hopes of salvation? You say that you discharge your relative duties--doing as you would be done by--giving to all their due; that you are no extortioner, no adulterer, no slanderer; having failings, but not worse in general than others. But all this is of no consequence in the present inquiry. Therefore the question recurs, are you new creatures?

What though you are kind parents, dutiful children, faithful friends, charitable neighbors, honorable in mercantile concerns--in short, entirely correct in all social and relative duties; nay, that you wait upon God in public and private and are regular at his house and table? Of what use will it all be in the matter of your salvation if there be not something more--if there be not a new creation of your hearts? *"In Christ Jesus,"* says St. Paul, *"neither circumcision avails any thing nor uncircumcision, but a new creature"* [Gal. 6:15].

Neither is the necessity of this change to be found in the Epistles alone (of the obscurity of which some are pleased to complain who have no inclination to study them). Our Savior Christ himself has set forth the same thing with equal strictness, when he said to Nicodemus, *"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* [John 3:3]. And, *"Marvel not that I said unto you, Ye must be born again"* [John 3:7]. And where is this change to be wrought on us except on this side [of] the grave? Death cannot itself alter the habitual temper, nor will God exert his power on the soul which has lost the opportunities which were offered in this world! As the tree falls, so it lies. *"He that is unjust let him be unjust still; he that is filthy let him be filthy still"* [Rev. 22:11]. If a man die [who is] not born again, let him not expect to rise a new creature from the grave.

Then be persuaded of your danger, my dear brethren. Awake from delusion and turn your thoughts inward. Deceive not yourselves with supposing that morality is holiness, or that a reformation in the life is equivalent to a divine transformation of the heart. If you would follow the saints of God you must with them *enter in at the straight gate, and walk the narrow road*, and experience with them the heart renewing energies of the Holy Ghost. Let not the pleasures of this world tempt you to defer the consideration of it to another season; for it may be that on your deathbed this passage shall recur, and you will then regret that you had not earlier yielded to the convictions which it must have produced.

If any with reasonable alarm are inquiring what is to be done, the answer is, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; for since the new creation of the soul is the effect of our being in Christ, the first step in the way of salvation is to apply to him. And happy is it for us that to warrant [give reason for] us to expect his grace, no previous merit is necessary. The way is open, the gift is free, the invitation is couched in terms of unbounded fullness. Wait not till your hearts are better, but apply at once to the Savior and you shall be created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that you should walk in them. As the scyon [cutting] engrafted on the stock receives sap from it and then brings forth fruit, so you by your union with Christ

shall be holy in heart and life.

There are not wanting [lacking] in this assembly some who have pondered this portion of the word of God, have been actually giving themselves to seek of God the new creation of their hearts and have in consequence become partakers of a divine nature. Let them not be discouraged if they find not such evident appearances of a change as they desire. For though the renovating energy extends universally through all the faculties, and the change is proportionate through this life, yet there will remain to the end of life much of the original corruption, which will indeed be a source of disquiet in proportion to its activity.

But [this corruption] need not, while opposed, be an occasion of serious alarm, because the image of God thus drawn anew on the soul shall never again be defaced--this second image restored in Christ being superior to that lost in Adam in this respect: that whereas the former exhibited the colors more bright and orient [iridescent], this shall prove them more lasting and durable. In future days a new scene will be unfolded which will be more congenial to our renewed nature, for he that sits upon the throne says, "*Behold, I make all things new*" [Rev. 21:5]. New employments, new thoughts, a new society, [and] joys ever varying and ever new shall engage the new created soul and give new scope to its renovated powers, when this world and all that belongs to it shall have passed away.

Sermon XI, "The New Creature," by Henry Martyn in *Sermons* (Boston, 1822). **Note:** The text has not been modified, except that punctuation and KJV-era pronouns and verb forms have been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided.