

Scripture Reading

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

17Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.^b The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. **18**All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; **19**that is, in Christ God was reconciling^c the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. **20**Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. **21**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This is God's word!Thanks be to God!

I've been trained as an Engineer and consequently (or unfortunately, as my wife might say), I try to think logically and structurally about "things". As a kid I was always taking things apart and putting them back together again. I like to ask the question, "Does this make sense and how does it work?" My dad had an old watch that I once took apart and then put back together...mostly. Fortunately, it was an old watch and he was a pretty good sport about it!

There was a time, when I was reading and thinking about the above verses, that a couple of puzzling questions came to mind.

Question 1:

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**".....is this a figure of speech or is this meant in the literal sense? After we become a Christian are we an improvement of our old selves or are we literally a new creation?

Christine and I were shopping for a banjo for our son and found one for sale near the U of M. We met the seller who turned out to be a professor of botany. He said that had decided to sell his banjo because he was moving to Russia to study a poisonous plant species with some very weird properties. Anyone who touches the plant will break out in a rash and blisters when the affected area is exposed to the sunand the effect.. is permanent. The effect of the contact does not go away. Contact with the plant results in a permanent physical / biological change to the person.

When I was told this story by the botanist, 2 corinthians 5:17 came to mind. Hmm..permanent change....but improvement or something new? Something permanent or something reversible? For the moment, Lets put a pin in this question and go to second related question that I struggled with.

Question 2:

What is wrong with the old creation? Is it fair that just because my great great great great.....great great ancestors sinned, I get punished for it? Does this seem fair? In order to get to the bottom of this question, we need to dig a bit deeper into the identity of our old self.

The following concepts are adopted from Herb Hodges' book "What is Man?" and also from Neil T. Anderson's book "Victory Over The Darkness" as they both studied what Gods word says regarding our old selves.

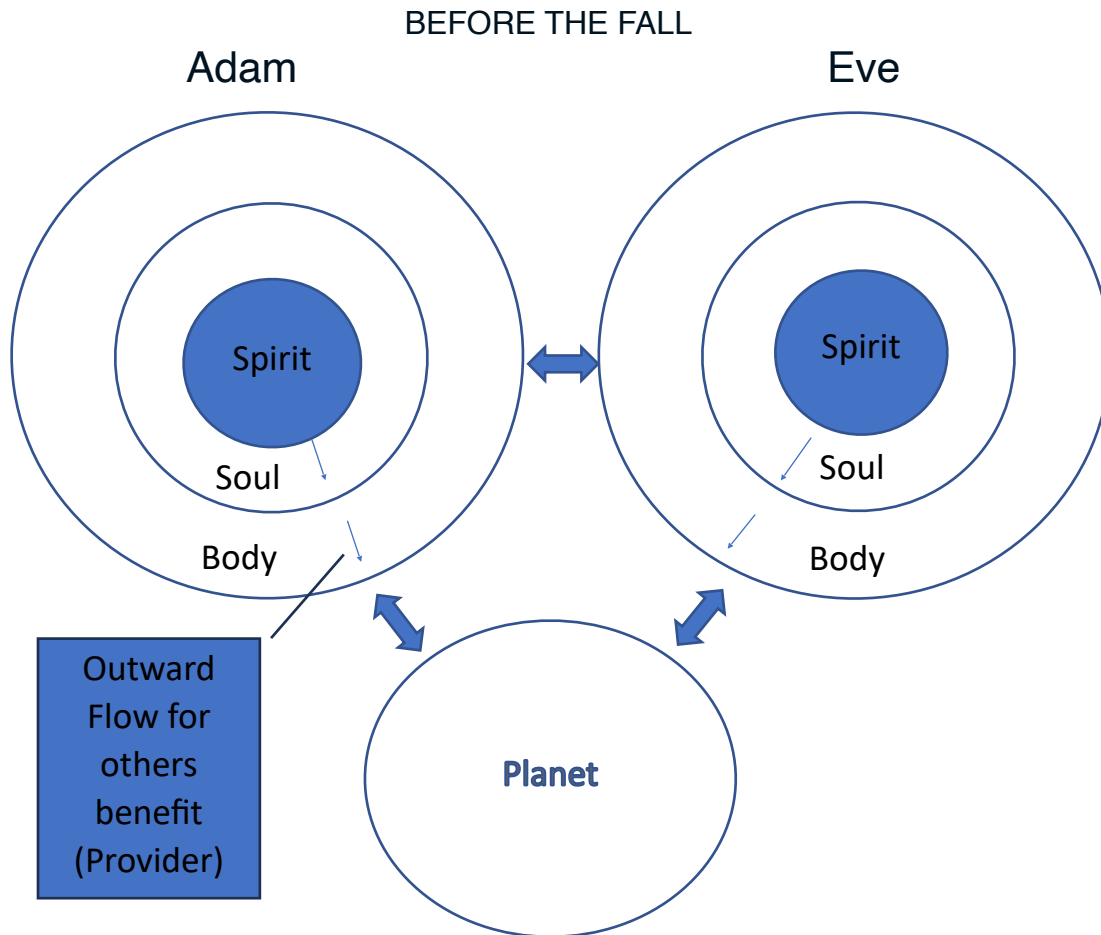
Paul writes in

1 Thessalonians 5:23

"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole **spirit and soul and body** be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In the beginning, God made man in his own image ... a tri-unity of spirit, soul, and body. Adam's being consisted of sprit, soul, and body. God's own spirit indwelt man. Think of it, Gods spirit, interacting directly with and influencing (but not controlling) Adam's mind, emotions and will (his soul) working out through the bodies of Adam and Eve to accomplish the caretaking of all the earth. In that union with Gods spirit we were perfect and complete. In harmony with God, with each other, and with the planet. God's spirit and energy flowed through Adam and Eve and into His creation. Adam and Eve were providers.

Here is an image of Adam and Eve’s structure, function, and relationships according to God’s design, before the fall. God’s spirit guided them and they cared for each other and God’s planet through the use of their bodies. God’s planet provided for their bodies.



Genesis verses...care for the planet and each other

Genesis 1:26-28 (ESV)

26Then God said, “Let us make man^h in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

27So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

28And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Gods provision for man and his creation on earth was complete and lacked nothing. Gods spirit worked in concert with Adam and Eve’s souls to affect how their bodies were used to care for each other, and God’s planet. Their souls were nourished by God’s spirit.

His protection for man consisted of only one command,

Genesis 2:15

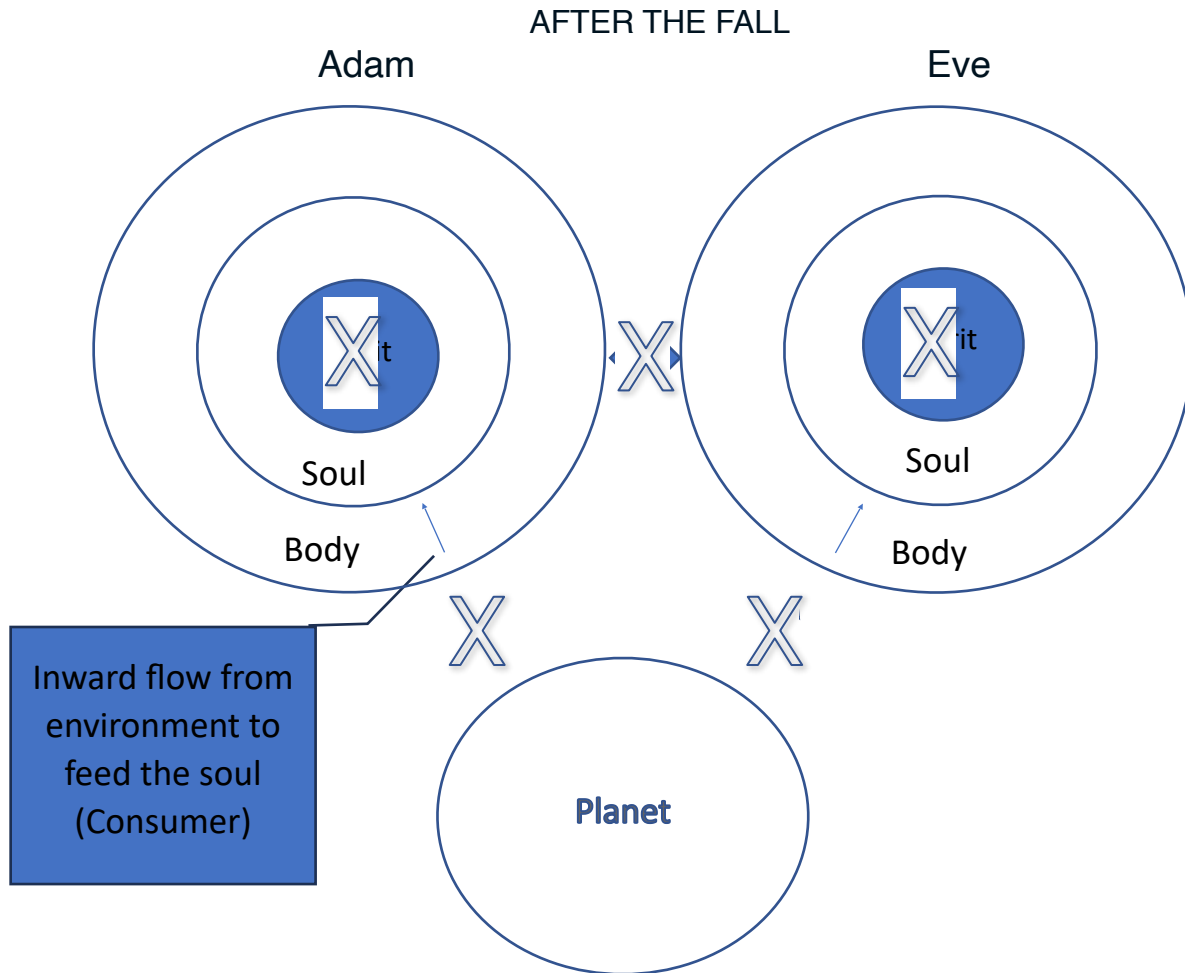
15The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. **16**And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, **17**but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat^a of it you shall surely die.”

In other words, “Do not seek knowledge of good and evil outside of your relationship with me. There is danger and chaos there. You weren’t designed for this. If you do, my spirit will depart from you and you will be changed....you will spiritually and physically die.”

Warning! Nerd alert!

In chemistry class we learned that Sodium Chloride (table salt) is healthy and essential for life.. until the two elements (sodium and chlorine) are separated. Sodium becomes explosive and chlorine is toxic.

Adam and Eve sinned by choosing to operate separately from God. Their relationships with God, each other, and the planet were destroyed, by their own choice.



Notice what changed regarding Adam and Eve. They no longer were indwelt by the spirit of God. Their spirits were turned into stone. Their souls were no longer fed by God's spirit. Instead, their souls sought nourishment from their bodies (the flesh). Their being (their makeup / identity) was fundamentally changed.

What were the results of this change? Souls are hungry and must be fed. If not by the spirit, then by the flesh. Notice how the flow is reversed. Rather than the spirit of God flowing outward, the world and it's pleasures became the souls new source of sustenance. Our bodies crave the pleasures of this world and our souls crave the pleasures of our bodies.

1 John 2:15

15Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. **16**For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. **17**And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

This new state of Adam after the fall is a sad state of affairs.

“Whatever else man is, he is not what he was made or meant to be”.

G.K. Chesterson

We can see now the answer to the question I asked earlier. Is it fair that I’m held accountable for the sins of my great great...great ancestors? The answer, when Adam and Eve sinned, they were changed. “It is no longer a matter of action. It is a matter of composition.” Like begets Like. Fig trees cannot produce apples. According to Matthew 7:18, Jesus said “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.” After Adam, We were born without the indwelling spirit of God. We are by nature, simply put, “corrupt trees”, incapable of producing good fruit.

“Biblically, for what is man made and meant to be? God made man to be a vehicle, a channel, a conduit. He is meant to be a carrier and a conveyor of a person and power far greater than he. He is made to be a receptacle and a release-point for Gods’ own person. But, as a vehicle, he may default into carrying and conveying a wrong thing instead of the right thing he was made to carry. Thus, the entire answer to man’s nature, actions and destiny lies in what he permits himself to become the vehicle for.”

Herb Hodges

All of this brings us back around to the 1st question. Something new or an improvement when we become followers of Jesus.

Once we become followers of Jesus, how are we changed and what is our state?

Ezekiel 11:19

19 I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. **20** Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

Our state? The spirit of God once again indwells us and our relationship with Him is restored and our identity / composition is changed.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 (ESV)

²¹ And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.^[a]

Neal Anderson in his book "victory over the darkness" compiled this list describing our new identity. Let's read this together.

WHO I AM IN CHRIST

I AM ACCEPTED...

I am God's child. John 1:12

As a disciple, I am a friend of Jesus Christ. John 15:15

I have been justified (declared righteous). Romans 5:1

I am united with the Lord, and I am one with Him in spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:17

I have been bought with a price and I belong to God. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

I am a member of Christ's body. 1 Corinthians 12:27

I have been chosen by God and adopted as His child. Ephesians 1:3-8

I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins. Colossians 1:13-14

I am complete in Christ. Colossians 2:9-10

I have direct access to the throne of grace through Jesus Christ. Hebrews 4:14-16

I AM SECURE...

I am free from condemnation. Romans 8:1-2

I am assured that God works for my good in all circumstances. Romans 8:28

I am free from any condemnation brought against me and I cannot be separated from the love of God. Romans 8:31-39

I have been established, anointed and sealed by God. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22

I am hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3:1-4

I am confident that God will complete the good work He started in me. Philippians 1:6

I am a citizen of heaven. Philippians 3:20

I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind. 2 Timothy 1:7

I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me. 1 John 5:18

I AM SIGNIFICANT...

I am a branch of Jesus Christ, the true vine, and a channel of His life. John 15:5

I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit. John 15:16

I am God's temple. 1 Corinthians 3:16

I am a minister of reconciliation for God. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

I am seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realm. Ephesians 2:6

I am God's workmanship. Ephesians 2:10

I may approach God with freedom and confidence. Ephesians 3:12

I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

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There is a final gem from verse 21 that I would like for us to explore. Once again, let's step back a bit into biblical history to better understand what is being said here. Let's start with Adam, then move to Abraham, and then to Jesus.

after Adam's fall, God said to the serpent in

Genesis 3:15

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring^g and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”

If we didn't have the rest of the bible to interpret what was said, this would be a mystery. There is a sense, however that God was promising in front of Adam and Eve to do something significant. We begin to see a bit more of the picture in the story of Abraham

In Genesis chapters 12 and 15 we read of promises in the form of a special covenant that God made with Abraham.

God promised Abraham that he would have many descendants, that he would possess the land, in which he was living, where he could worship God, and that through one of his descendants, all nations would be blessed.

Today, we know that God was promising to Abraham that through him, He would create a nation of people from Abraham through whom He would produce the Messiah and this Messiah would restore the world to Himself.

Abraham didn't fully understand the details of the promises that God was making but he knew that it was something special.

Hebrews 11 (ESV)

8By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. **9**By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. **10**For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. **11**By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. **12**Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

13These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. **14**For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. **15**If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. **16**But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Abraham had a special open and honest relationship with God. When he didn't understand, he asked questions. When God told him that he would have many children, Abraham said "I'm childless and Sara is old. How can this be?" God told Abraham to look up at the sky and count the stars. (Gen 15:5). We are told that Abraham believed the Lord and it was counted to him as righteousness. Next, God told Abraham that he would possess the land in which he was living. This was remarkable to Abraham as at the time, he didn't even own a place to bury his family. Once again Abraham asked God, how will I know for sure that this will happen?

God asked Abraham to take a heifer, a goat, and a ram a dove and a pidgeon. He was to sacrifice the large animals and split their carcasses in half in order to create a path of blood between the halves of flesh. Then he was to sacrifice the two birds also.

Abraham knew exactly what was about to happen as this was how blood covenants were made in his time.

Kings in his time, in the middle east, would make royal land grant treaties with dwellers on their land. The king would agree to grant the use of land to the dweller and require that the dweller use the land in a certain way. A covenant was an agreement between a wealthier (greater) party and a less wealthy (lesser) party. The king would say, I will

give this, in return you will do this. If either party does not keep the covenant then this will happen to them.

Ray Vanderlaan tells the story of when he lived with a family of Bedouins in the desert of the middle east. While there he attended an engagement party and witnessed a remarkable thing. The father of the daughter brought an animal to the party to use in a wedding covenant. The animal was killed and the blood of the animal was collected into a large rock shaped like a bowl. The father of the groom then made certain promises to the father of the bride as to how his son would provide for the bride. Next, the father of the bride made promises to the father of the groom as to how the bride would provide for the groom. The father of the groom then took off his sandals, lifted his robe and stepped into the pool of blood. He began to stomp. He stomped his feet until the blood splattered everywhere, all over his robe and the guests nearby. Next the father of the bride stepped into the pool of blood and stomped his feet and the blood flew. A friend of Rays later explained that a blood covenant was being made between the two fathers. The message of the blood was this. "If my son (or daughter) does not honor the promises that I have made to you, you may kill me and stomp in my blood."

To this day, in some countries, one will occasionally find a father, in the bottom of a canyon with his throat cut and footprints in his blood.

The agreement between God and Abraham was this...God would give Abraham descendants, land, and a special descendant that would bless all nations. Abraham's requirement was to walk blameless before God (be perfect). (Gen 17:1). Abraham says OK, let's make a deal.

After Abraham prepared the sacrifices for the covenant he waited. After dark he first saw a smoking firepot appear and pass through the path of blood between the animals. This would have been the greater party, God. (In the OT we read that the temple was filled with smoke, mt Saini was covered with smoke.) God was saying, Abraham, I love you so much and I am so committed to what I've promised you that you may do this to me if I do not keep my word. What should have happened next is that Abraham should have walked through the path of blood. It says that a great terror overcame him. Why, because Abraham knew that the minute that he dipped his little toe in the blood, he was a dead man and he would not live to receive what was promised. How could he walk blameless before God? Before he could step in, knowing that when he did, he would die, a second symbol appeared, a flaming torch. Not once in the OT does fire ever represent a human, only God. In that moment with the second symbol, God said to Abraham, if you and your descendants do not walk blameless before me and keep my commandments, you may do this to me. In that moment, God sentenced his Son, Jesus Christ to death. As There was no doubt that Abraham and his descendants would sin.

For the rest of the old testament God wanted His people to understand and remember His promise that he would pay for their sins, someday, somehow. He instructed the Hebrew priests to make a sacrifices at the place where His Name is every day at mid-

morning (9:00 am) and 3 PM in the afternoon for all believing Jews everywhere. Every day 9 and 3 without fail. As the priests were throwing the blood against the altar what were they saying? God, we have not walked blameless before you, please, please remember, you promised to pay for my sin, please keep your promise.

In Jesus' day the temple sacrifices had become a very elaborate ceremony. The priest would stand at the altar with the knife to a lambs throat and wait for the signal, from another priest who would stand at the pinnacle of the temple with a shofar. When the sun dial or hour glass marked the time of 9 or 3 the priest would blow the shofar and the sacrifice would begin. All believing Jews, wherever they were, whatever country they were in, would stop with their face toward the temple, and pray at 9 and 3, God, please remember your promise.

It's a Friday in Jerusalem, a holiday....passover. Josephus wrote that as many as 2 million people had flooded into the city. On this day at about 9 in the morning as the priests were preparing the morning sacrifice another event was unfolding. On a stone hill just outside of the city three men were being attached to crosses by Roman soldiers. One could hear the sound of a hammer striking nails....

Later that day just moments prior to the 3PM afternoon sacrifice, the priests were waiting at the temple for the signal to be given. On the hill, outside of the city, the three prisoners hung. The middle man looked dead. In the temple, the signal to begin the sacrifice was given and the shofar was blown and the lamb was slain.

Outside the city, the man in the middle raised his head, looked up to heaven, and screamed..."It is finished" and he gave up his spirit.

And in that instant, Jesus paid the blood covenant for the sins of the world, Just like his Father promised to Abraham 1800 years ago.

2 Corinthians 5:21

[21](#)For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Friends, some of you may not be able to relate to the truths that we read together earlier this morning. To those of you I would say, "I implore you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

How? Talk to God and confess your sinful state and ask Him to forgive you and to create within you a new spirit.

Examples to guide you if you would like to follow Jesus

Luke 19:1-10: The story of Jesus and Zacchaeus

1 John 1:7-10: Confess and believe that He is faithful and just to forgive you.

Communion:

Matthew 26:26-30 ESV

²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the ^[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.