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The Essential Newness of the New Creation

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First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Mar-Apr 1935, Vol. 13-2. This version republished in Sep-Oct 1969, Vol. 47-5.

"Thou hast heard it; behold all this; and ye, will ye not declare it? I have shewed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, which thou hast not known. They are created now, and not from of old; and before this day thou heardest them not; lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them" (Isaiah 48:6-7).

"Wherefore if any man is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17 - R.V. margin).

"And no man putteth a piece of undressed cloth upon an old garment; for that which should fill it up taketh from the garment, and a worse rent is made. Neither do men put new wine into old wineskins: else the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins perish: but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved" (Matthew 9:16-17).

Familiarity with words and ideas very often takes something from their value. Few passages in the New Testament are more familiar to us than 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, there is a new creation...", but the full force of the one governing word there has, I am quite sure, not fallen upon our hearts, and we have still very much to learn as to that essential newness of the new creation in Christ. Indeed, we may say that many of our troubles, our difficulties, our weaknesses, our failures, our problems, our perplexities, are the result of our having failed to grasp sufficiently the import of that one word "new". We have, very largely, proceeded into the new creation with a good deal that is old, or we have tried to do so, and we have discovered sooner or later that that cannot be done, that we are attempting an impossibility. So it may be quite profitable for us to dwell for a little while upon this essential newness.

We begin by reminding ourselves, or acquainting ourselves with the fact that there are two sides to the new creation. There is the vessel, and there is that which is put into the vessel. It takes both of these to constitute what is called the "new creation," the human side, and the Divine side; but while newness applies to both sides, the newness is not the same newness. There are two main words which are translated into our English word "new", and we are perhaps familiar with the difference. One implies something which is fresh, not necessarily just originated, but bearing the mark of freshness. The other word implies more strictly something which is quite recent, which was not necessarily there before; it is new in the sense that it has just come in, it is not something revived but something new. It is interesting to notice that the Holy Spirit uses the two words in connection with the two sides of the new creation.

In this vessel in Matthew 9 you have both words used. As to the wine-skins (translated in the Authorised Version as "bottles") the word used is that which implies freshness. When the Lord Jesus speaks of new wine He uses the other word, that is, something which is quite new, quite recent. When you pass to the passage in 2 Corinthians 5 and it is stated that: "...if any man is in Christ there is a new creation; the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new," there the word which means freshness is used twice. That is strictly consistent with the truth as to the real nature of the new creation.

You are dealing, first of all, with the vessel. Now, as vessels in the new creation we are not something which never was before, something quite recent. The vessel of the new creation is our old spirit brought back into life. Our human spirit fell out of fellowship with God, and that meant spiritual death. The new creation activity is to bring back the human spirit from spiritual death into life, and it is the same spirit, raised in union with Christ, becoming the vessel of the new creation.

That is, however, only half of the process. Something which was never in that spirit before is deposited in it; a life which is not fresh but new, recent, absolutely new, which was never in the human spirit before, is now put into that vessel, and that which is so completely new, says the Word, is never put into an old wineskin. That vessel has to be made fresh, brought into a state of life in order to be the receptacle of this utterly new life of the Spirit of God.

These are the two sides of the new creation. The point is that, first of all, something has to be done in the vessel, as well as something having to be put into the vessel.

That is a principle, to which God has bound Himself and which governs Him in all His activities. It applies in every direction where Divine work is in view. God never builds His new thing upon an old foundation. He never uses the old thing as the material for His new work. That has to be completely renewed. That He does not put *His* life, His new wine, into old skins is a truth which relates not only to regeneration, to our salvation, to the new creation man, but it also applies to every work of God. Whenever God does a thing the characteristic is newness. Although there may be an old vessel, that vessel has got to be made fresh in order to effect God's end.

That applies to truth as much as to anything else. It may be Divine Doctrine, God given revelation, that which at one time by the Holy Spirit, was living truth; but that can never be taken up at any subsequent date or period of time and used again unless it becomes fresh in the experience and life of those who come into it. It is just there that a very great many of the mistakes have been made; that what in the way of revelation was a living revelation so long ago has been adopted as truth, without that subsequent generation, or those subsequent generations, coming into the living reality thereof. That is vital.

It applies to the new creation man. You cannot bring the old creation man over into the new creation without his becoming fresh in a living way. That applies to truth, revelation and doctrine. You cannot carry it on unless it is perennially fresh. Ezekiel's vision of the river and the trees on either side - very many trees whose leaves never fade and whose fruit is continuous - is simply a revelation or a vision of the Testimony being maintained by the principle of life in freshness right down the whole course of the ages. Truth has to be like those leaves which never fade. Truth has to be like that fruit, luscious fruit, which is always there,. All doctrine is not like that. Unless it is like that its essential element has gone. It is the essential newness of what is of God.

Every fresh step of God is marked by this freshness, this newness. God may have done that same thing again and again in the course of history, but the next time He does it, it is as though it had never been done before in the case of the people in whom He does it. That is the glory of things.

We have seen this work in simple ways. Some of us have been so familiar with certain things, and we have said those things again and again. To us they were living realities, but we have known of certain people who have heard them, who have listened to them, who have been under the ministry by which those things have been declared again and again, over a course of, perhaps, years, and then suddenly, as by a touch of the Spirit, they have seen them, they have caught the inner sound, the truth has broken upon them and has become living to them. The result was that they commenced to talk about those things as though no one in all the world had ever heard them before, and as though the very person who had been talking about them for years did not know anything about them! It is just like that. That is the living Testimony. It is the freshness of things, and things must be like that to be of God, for what is really of God is like that. It is not that we hold the truth, but that we have the life of the truth.

What is true in the case of the new creation man, and in connection with truth or doctrine, revelation or light, is also true in the direction of the work of God - what we call Christian work. For every one who enters into the Divine vocation, the calling to service, it ought to be as though there had never been any Christian work before. It ought to be as though they were the first ever commissioned. In their spirit, in their outlook, in their passion, it should be as though they were right at the beginning of things, as though the Christian activity, the Christian Gospel, was only just starting on its way. That is the consciousness which they should have, and that is just the opposite of entering into a long-standing, accepted, crystallised system of Christian work, becoming a part of a great existing machine. The freshness about things should be of this character: that in our service we are conscious that the hand of God has come upon us as though it had never come upon any other person, as though no one else had been called but ourselves. I do not mean that to be taken in a wrong way - that we are the only ones - but that this thing is such a living, tremendous reality to us that we feel as though nothing had ever been done for the Lord before.

Do you understand what we mean by that? Christian work has become an order, as we have called it, a crystallised system of Christian enterprise, activity, organised work, and people are called upon today to enter into it, to take it up, and they do so and become a part of a great Christian machine for accomplishing a certain purpose. Then they go into some kind of a factory to be turned out a Christian worker. You are not surprised that these factory-turned-out workers have not got that thing by which men and women today are fed and brought into the full glory, beauty, grandeur and magnificence of Christ! No! The work of the Lord is something which, to the one who is apprehended of Christ Jesus, is as though there had never been any Christian work before. There is the freshness of life about it.

This applies to the thing which God does, for when He does a thing there is that about it which is fresh, and there is the sense that here is something which, as an element, makes this work of God a new work.

God must have newness of every kind in His vessels. If the vessel, or the vehicle, is a man; if the vessel or the vehicle is a revelation; if it is a collective instrumentality, or some piece of work which God is doing in the world, when it is of Him it bears that hallmark of freshness. There is no staleness about it, nor death. It throbs with vitality.

I believe the Lord has a very definite object in our being led to this thought at this time. Undoubtedly, the need today everywhere is just this sense of God in a new way. There is plenty of work, plenty of doctrine, and there are many Christians; but, oh, for this sense of God, this sense of keenness, freshness, vitality, and knowledge of God in all! *That is the need.* Without it things will go on as they are, and they are very dead, and tragically weak and ineffective.

The measure, then, of the newness of the vessel will be the measure of the newness of what God puts into it. God demands the newness of the vessel in order to commit Himself to it.

Look at that passage from Isaiah 48: "I have shewed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, which thou hast not known. They are created now, and not from of old; and before this day thou heardest them not lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them." Is not that the attitude today toward a great deal? 'Oh, yes, I know it all! I know, there is nothing new about that! The doctrine and everything else, I know it! We have heard that before! We know it! There is nothing new about that!' Dear friends, if you have caught the inner significance of this you are not talking mentally like that! You are seeing, and as you see you are feeling intensely that there is this need everywhere today. You have the intelligence of a living insight, and you know that there is no hope whatever in simply propagating doctrine and truth and trying to do the old work in the old way. The need is not more work, more doctrine, more truth and more light, so much as more of this living element in all.

There are two sides. There is the vessel, and there is that which is in the vessel. The vessel may be quite a good vessel doctrinally, and in other ways, but there needs to be also the deposit in the vessel, the new wine. So the Word says here quite clearly that there is a hopelessness about the old, and all the hope lies in the direction of renewal and freshness on the one hand, and of God's living, new deposit on the other hand.

What is the ultimate conclusion about this? It is the conclusion to which 2 Corinthians 5:18 comes: "But all things are of God..." That follows the statement: "...we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him..." That is the one side: everything having died as to its own self-productiveness. It cannot produce this Divine end and result. It has died to its own productiveness, and now it is unto Him, and when it is all unto Him then all things are out from God. When all things are of God, all things carry this vital element, this essential freshness of a new creation.

You and I should have heart exercise about everything that the Lord has brought to us. Do we really do that? Do we go back over what has been said and say, 'Now the Lord said such, and such, and this and that comes out of it. What am I going to do about it? Do I know that in a living way? Does that really represent the Lord's mind for me, and His people? Is that something that the Lord desires for all His own? If so, on any one of these matters I must get before the Lord and definitely be exercised in heart about it.'

Piled up, mountains high, are words, language, teaching, truth, light, and the percentage of living, effective value in it all is all too small. If there is one thing about which we should lay hold of the Lord it is this: 'Lord keep this Testimony a living thing! Do not let it become mere doctrine, mere truth, something to be passed on which will be taken up by others and talked about, and the phrases and terminology used. God forbid that that should be!'

The point is the essential newness of all that is out from God; the essential newness of that which proceeds from the Lord, and which is really related to the Lord; and freshness on the part of those who are concerned, and newness on the part of that which is coming out from God Himself. Let us pray very much about that, because that is the very essence of our ministry, not only of our life and what we call our Testimony. Bread must have vitamins in it, and it is the same in spiritual food, for there must be a living attribute. There must be the newness; not old things dead, but - it may be old things - living. "Therefore every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Matthew 13:52). But if he brings old things out there is a newness about them that conveys the impression that they never were before, something at any rate, which is altogether fresh.

The Lord maintain us, and all with which we have to do, in that essential freshness and newness which is the hallmark of Himself.