

## WHERE THE NEW BEGINS

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

"So that if anyone be in Christ, there is a new creation: the old things passed away; lo, all things have become new."

Souls are in one of three states -- without Christ, in Christ or with Christ. Those who are without Christ are in a state of nature, which is the most unhappy condition of all. It is inconvenient to be without money, miserable to be without health, without a friend or without a good reputation, but to be without Christ is the worst condition of all. Those who are in Christ are in a state of grace. Those who are with Christ are in a state of glory.

God created man and stamped His image on him to attest his great worth. Man was given the God-like faculties of intellect, emotion and will. It was great for man to be made like God in his intellectual excellencies, but his greatest glory was in being made like Him in His moral perfections. Adam had an unclouded perception of truth. His will was in beautiful harmony with God's perfect will. His life was immaculate, peaceful and happy.

When Adam disobeyed God and sinned, he fell from that blessed state of perfection and defiled all of his posterity. Since that time the natural condition of man has been one of depravity and guilt. By nature all are the children of wrath.

Each of my listeners is either a child of wrath or a child of God. Each of you is in a state of nature or a state of grace. The change by which you are brought from the state of nature into the state of grace is called the new birth or regeneration. Where the new really begins is where and when one enters the state of grace and finds himself "in Christ." One can never be with Christ in glory until he is first "in Christ" in grace.

Few things are more frequently misunderstood than what it means to be a Christian. Paul tells us that it is having that change of heart which transfers one from the state of nature to the state of grace, and makes one a different kind of person.

Does the phrase "in Christ" puzzle you? To many people the phrase is meaningless, which of course indicates that they have never received the new life. Yet, these people apparently know exactly what you mean when you say that you are in politics or in business. If a man says that he is in politics, you know that politics has become the ruling interest of his life. You know that in his absorption in politics may be found a decision and a commitment. The decision was to make politics his career to the exclusion of other careers, and this decision was followed by the commitment of himself -- his time, his training, his abilities and his energies -- to this chosen field of activity. So, the person who is "in Christ" is one who has decided that there are not a dozen saviors, but only one Saviour -- the crucified, buried and risen Christ -- and that to Him he has completely committed Himself. Such a decision and commitment have resulted in the floodgates of life flowing from Christ into the soul.

### I. A New Position.

When we are regenerated by God's grace we are said to be "in Christ." This suggests a state or position entirely different from the one in which we found ourselves when we were "without Christ." "Without Christ" is the condition in which we were born and nurtured. Until we were regenerated we were without Christ, without God and without hope. One may have Christ preached to him every Lord's day, but he will still be without

Him until he accepts Him by faith. Being without Christ is the most unhappy condition imaginable. Out of Christ is apart from life, for "He that hath not the Son hath not life." Out of Christ means "condemned already." Without Christ means "no hope in this world or in the life to come." It would have been far better never to have been born than for one to go through life and come to death without having come to be "in Christ."

It is wonderful to have a good education, but it is infinitely more important to be "in Christ." To be moral and upright in every way is most commendable, but to be "in Christ" is the all-important thing. Regardless of what one may have or be, if he is not "in Christ," he is not saved. Whoever is "in Christ" is in the state of grace, is saved and has eternal life. "In Christ" one is saved eternally, but when one dies without Christ he is lost eternally. Before one is saved and "in Christ" he is under condemnation, but after he receives Christ and eternal life "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). When one receives Christ as his Saviour an indissoluble union is established between them. Thereafter he is in a new position, namely, "in Christ."

## II. A New Person.

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." There must be a divine operation upon one before he gets into Christ. Let us never miss this truth. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:10). He who is "in Christ" is a new creation. This does not mean that the old man is patched up. It is not the improvement of the old life, but the implantation of that which is entirely new.

To create is to make out of nothing, so creation is necessarily the work of God alone. If any doubt this fact, let him attempt to create something out of nothing. God alone can call into being that which had no previous existence, and bid that be which before was not.

Salvation is something called into being by divine power. It requires the grace of God to make a Christian. In regeneration the divine nature is imparted to the believer, who did not have it before. If any man is a new creation in Christ, then manifestly it is the Lord's accomplishment. Everything pertaining to salvation is supernatural. When one believes on Christ as a personal Saviour, a mighty miracle is wrought and a new creation comes into being.

In the first century Saul of Tarsus, a young Pharisee who had come to Jerusalem for post-graduate studies at the feet of the eminent scholar, Gamaliel, watched Stephen die. Saul was one of the leaders of the mob that killed him. The murderers laid down their clothes at Saul's feet, in order that they might better hurl the stones which would silence forever the eloquent young Christian, Stephen. With implacable hatred, Saul of Tarsus watched while the dying martyr lifted himself up and, with his last expiring breath, cried: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." In later years, when the persecutor was describing this incident he added, "And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

From the day of Stephen's martyrdom, Saul's hatred of Christ and His followers became intensified. At the same time he was uneasy lest he should be found fighting against God. He illustrated what the psychologists mean by a divided self. With Faust he could cry: "Two souls, alas, dwell in my breast apart." Instead of repenting of his sins and trusting Christ for salvation, he flung himself more furiously against the Christians. He secured the necessary official documents and set out for Damascus, "breathing threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." It was his plan to bring them bound to Jerusalem, where they would stand trial. As he drew near Damascus a marvelous thing happened. He found himself prostrate on the ground, dazzled by a blinding light. A voice was crying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" When the voice

was identified as that of Christ, Saul surrendered unconditionally to Him. Thereafter, this man who had made it his business to hunt down, to imprison, to torture and to kill Christians was the fearless advocate of the glorious gospel of Christ. His life and ministry constitute an outstanding example of a new creation when one is in Christ.

### III. A New Perspective.

"The old things have passed away; lo, all things have become new." The Greek verb which is used here conveys the idea that the old things pass away spontaneously. A good illustration of this is that of the snow which melts in the sunshine. On numerous occasions I have awakened in the morning to see all of the trees in the beautiful mountains festooned with snowy wreaths, while down below the ground was completely covered with a beautiful blanket of snow. Before long the sun arose, its beams shed a genial warmth, and in a few hours the snow had passed away. That is what the Lord does in the new creation; His love shines on the soul, His grace renews it, and the old things pass away as a matter of course. Beneath the power of the Holy Spirit those old things pass away without difficulty. You hardly know how it takes place, but they go away completely.

To the person who is "in Christ" the world is a new place.

"Heaven above is softer blue,  
Earth beneath is sweeter green;  
Something lives in every hue,  
Christless eyes have never seen."

After his memorable meeting with Christ on the road to Damascus everything was different for Paul. The persecutor was transformed into the greatest of all the apostles. He had gone out of Jerusalem hating Christ, but he came into Damascus a Christian. He had gone out of Jerusalem a persecutor, but he came into Jerusalem a contrite sinner, clinging to the cross of Christ as his only hope. His old ideas, desires, ambitions, motives, deeds and habits gave place to new ones. His affections became new, because they were directed to a new object, and were thereby purified, strengthened and elevated. Instead of living for self, he lived for Christ. His desires were changed to such an extent that the things which he had formerly craved he was content to do without, and those things which he once despised he was longing to possess.

### IV. A New Pursuit.

"The old things have passed away; lo, all things have become new." This remarkable change, called the new creation, involves the passing away of the old sinful practices and evil habits. Before one is saved he is under the rule and domination of Satan. He does those things which please the world, the flesh and Satan. But, after he is saved he is a different person. He is under new management. He detests his former life of sin. To the people who formerly enticed him to sin he now says, "I am no longer the same man." He has broken away from his former evil manner of life, avoids his former evil companions and refuses to indulge in his previous sinful habits.

What our age needs is the Christ-life translated into character and expressed in service. This sinning, sorrowing world needs to see Christ in us. Christians need to preach Him with their lips and their lives. This world can be made over only by made-over men and women.

God is not pleased with the kind of world we are making. He wants a righteous world; a world of brotherhood based on love. He wants a world of international good-will; a world in which love replaces hatred; a world in which understanding replaces mistrust. Such a world will never be built by politicians. It cannot be built and maintained by force of arms. It can only be built by made-over men.

During World War I, some soldiers who had been in the frontline trenches for forty-eight hours were relieved. Muddy and tired and hungry, they had made their way back to a canteen where coffee was being served. As they drank the coffee the Salvation Army lassie, who had served them, thinking that she might cheer them up, said, "Well fellows, it is tough now, but be of good cheer, you are building a new world."

"No," said one of the fellows, "we are not building a new world, we are tearing up the old world. If a new world is ever built, it will be by soldiers of the cross and not by soldiers with guns." And how truly he spoke!

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation, a made-over man. If you are not a Christian, won't you receive Christ as your Saviour now, and let Him make you over. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, confess Him as your Saviour, study His Word, learn His will, live close to Him, yield yourself completely to Him for service, and depend on the Holy Spirit to empower you to render the service which the Lord requests of you.