

“Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

Ah, the New Year. It is often times a relief and a joy to be able to begin anew, free of the baggage and burdens of the past. At the New Year we often make resolutions to change our lives, to improve ourselves spiritually and physically, to make ourselves “new”, if you will. Many times we have the best of intentions but we are usually greeted by disappointment and disillusionment when we see that we have failed to fulfill our resolutions. We find that it is not so easy to make ourselves “new” and that we might have to settle for the “old” in our lives. We do not like it but often we resign ourselves to this.

What joyous news the words of Paul above are to you and me as we approach the New Year. See that in Christ you have been made new, a new creation. The old, sins and failures of the past, have been put away from us in the blood of our Savior. Day by day, through repentant faith in Jesus who though sinless was made Sin for us for our salvation, we are renewed by the Spirit of God. Daily as we confess our sins and believe on Christ for the forgiveness of those sins the Spirit stands us back on our feet, cleanses us and announces to us that we have been made new and have a place in the new heavens and the new earth to come when Jesus returns.

In other words, we do not have to resign ourselves to a life dominated and ruled by the Old Man of sin. Through faith in Christ we have the New Man of faith who can put down the sinful desires and impulses of the Old Man of sin. The New Man of faith directs and leads us by the Spirit’s power to live our lives more and more to Christ, more and more in the newness of life that is ours through faith in Jesus. The New Man steps forward and pushes the Old Man down further and further so that his influence becomes less and less by God’s grace. Being a new creation means we are alive in Christ and dead to sin and that the guilt, accusations, and condemnation of sin have passed away from us.

It is this newness of life given us by our Triune God through the water and the Word and received by us through faith that accounts for the new lives we live to God. This is why we strive to fulfill God’s commands. This is why we even resolve to do better in our lives as believers along with everyone else who makes New Year’s resolutions. For these new lives we have in Christ include a new will – one that wants to do God’s will; a new heart – one that follows and loves the Lord; a new mind – one that conforms its thinking to the Word and wisdom of God.

Yet, we know even as we read this that this New Man of faith doesn’t always rule the roost, as the saying goes. Since the Old Man of sin still resides in us we often do the “old” things and sin. Try as we may to take ourselves in hand, resolve to do better, and take control of our lives, we find ourselves still influenced and tempted by our sinful side and we sin.

For us as Christians there is a difference from those who are not believers and make resolutions. We are able to turn to Christ and have the burden of failure, the weight of guilt, and the shame of our sin pardoned us and taken away and made a thing of the past. We are able to do this through faith in Christ Jesus because of what He has done for us in being made Sin for us and reconciling us to the Father in heaven. For Jesus took on Himself, though holy, blameless, and free of sin, our sins, our failures, and our iniquities. He imputed, charged Jesus with our sins and thus required Him to bear our judgment and sentence so that we, through faith in His redeeming work, may be righteous and sinless in the sight of heaven.

Through faith in His redeeming work and resurrection from the dead, we have had our slates wiped clean. We have been made new and given renewed hearts, minds, and wills that seek more and more by the Spirit's power to live in the newness of life in Christ. We, by our baptisms into Christ, have died and been raised with Jesus and have been promised life without end in the New Jerusalem on account of the work of reconciliation performed by Christ Jesus our Lord. We are new creations by faith created in Christ Jesus for good works.

You see then, what most people long for and, quite honestly, wait for with the New Year with their resolutions we are granted daily through faith in Christ. The "old" has passed us by having been washed away in the blood of Christ. The "new" is renewed in Christ who will make all things new when He comes to judge the living and the dead. We do not have to wait for the New Year to resolve by the Spirit's power to change our lives, to get rid of those bad habits, those sinful activities, and the like. We can do it each and every day knowing that by faith in Christ we are forgiven and renewed day by day.

"Wouldn't it be great," people often wonder, "if you could start over?" We do not have to wonder as God's people. We know that God starts us over as we live in repentant faith every day. We know that by faith in Christ who reconciled God to us we have been made new, given the New Man of faith, new hearts, new wills, and new minds. Like one rescued from the brink of death, we live our lives in Christ anew knowing by His death He rescued us from death and by His resurrection has given us life now, new lives in faith and life forever where everything will be new eternally. God grant you such faith and support you in your resolutions this coming New Year to the glory of His name.

Kindest regards in Christ for a blessed New Year,

Pastor Cullen
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