

In the early days of IBM personal computers, there was a big red switch on the side of the CPU, so that when things went wrong and weren't working right, you could just hit the switch and turn everything off.

Then in a few moments, you could reboot and start all-over again, and whatever problems or mistakes you had made were gone. Ever wish you could go back to some critical point in your life, knowing what you know now, and just start over and have a chance to do or say something different, and thereby perhaps change the course of your life? perhaps avoid someone who turned out to be a bad influence, maybe dodge a situation that led to a destructive outcome, or amend an opportunity that somehow slipped away.

Wouldn't we all welcome a chance to reboot some of our decisions, make some different choices, perhaps change some things toward a new and better lived life. Sometimes I wish I could just yell, "Rewind", back up to a previous indiscretion and do or say something kinder, gentler, or more Christ-like. Wouldn't life and relationships be easier and more harmonious if we could go back and "unsay" hurtful words or somehow "undo" and avoid the consequences of our mistakes & misunderstandings. Of course life doesn't work that way, but still there is hope as the Apostle Paul writes,

vs. 4:16, 5:17

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! "everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

That sounds like life will be completely different from now on, almost like magic, life's problems & struggles will vanish **but that's not what Paul means.** Years ago when I was a youth-group advisor at my church, we went on some wonderful and inspiring weekend retreats. Typically the students didn't get much sleep on Friday night, and after a very busy and active schedule all day Saturday, they would be physically and emotionally exhausted. But it troubled me that sometimes guest speakers would try to exploit these weary teenagers and their condition with highly coercive, guilt & emotion-driven presentations that pressed for promises about how they were going to change. I objected because it was all about **good works and trying harder**, and I knew that on Sunday they were going back to reality, where their problems back home were still there, waiting. A bad report card was still a bad report card, and arguments with angry parents were still not resolved. Back in school on Monday, and returning back to their world, many were unable to live up to the ideals of a weekend retreat, - **some walked away hurt and disillusioned, for there was no magic. We still live under the limitations of our created existence.**

Christians still live with the consequences of sin & bad choices, so in what sense has the old passed away, a new creation in Christ? In the original Greek, the verb tense and form are very specific, in describing a **continuing process** that happened in the past but has not yet been fully completed or perfected. So the promise is not that situations or what happens in life are any different for Christians than for anyone else. **The difference is in how we can respond to what happens to us.** Assured of God's grace and steadfast loving kindness toward us, we can see people and situations in more hopeful ways, **possibilities beyond just the cold-hard facts of reality.** We are not governed by events or circumstances around us but ruled according to the grace and healing purpose of God. As Paul experienced and wrote of God's grace,

Romans 8:38-39

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

e.g. praying for an enemy or for a situation may not change them, but what might change is our attitude and our perspective **and so for the child of God, the question is, what does it mean to walk with Jesus**

Christ in this situation?, and how can I be most faithful & grace-filled here and now? I believe it is in this sense Paul said, "there is a new creation", and perhaps he had in mind his own road to Damascus experience, for that decisive event completely changed Paul's life. For Paul, there was life before meeting Christ, and then there was a different life after that experience. When Jesus Christ became his Lord, he saw life in a whole new light, and over the course of the rest of his life he saw and experienced transformation by God's grace, as the Apostle explains,

vs. 18-19

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us."

The specific Greek word for reconciliation that Paul uses (x4) means to restore a damaged or severed relationship. Reconciliation is a work of God's grace whereby broken lives and relationships are mended. And by this act of God, we are being formed into a faith-community of those who already have been **and still are** in the long process of being reconciled to God by grace. **So together we are this "new creation" and at the same time, we are still becoming "new creatures"**. Being "in Christ" means that we are called to continue God's work of reconciliation among ourselves and out into the world. What God has accomplished is now entrusted to us to continue **and so, to be reconciled with God, necessarily, involves practicing reconciliation with our neighbors**. For Paul, once he knew the truth, the Good News about Jesus Christ nothing else mattered or was nearly as important, and his whole life from then on was about serving his Lord and Paul's ministry of reconciliation was all about letting the world know that God loves us and cares for us all. As God has reconciled us to himself in Christ, we are becoming agents of reconciliation to the world,

vs. 20

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us.

Back in DC, a good friend worked at the Jordanian embassy, and whenever I met him there, he would always greet me by saying, "Welcome to Jordan", for the embassy property was a tiny bit of his home country. **Though we were in Washington DC, the embassy was a piece a Jordan**. The church is like an embassy, a tiny, local presence of the Kingdom of God in this world, and the church exists, for the reconciliation of the world **as a colony of God's grace on earth toward sinners and outcasts, as we embrace the work of God's grace together & in our own lives**. Beyond his work and assignments at the embassy whenever my friend was out in public people looked at him, to form their impressions of the nation and of Jordanians. He could either reflect favorably or unfavorably on his country. So too, the world looks at us, the world look to us - to reveal - to reflect God's truth and beyond just "churchy" words of proclamation, our very lives speak and display God's truth and glory. Our families, our friends, our neighbors and acquaintances all look toward us for Christian definition of, 'Christ-like' to see if the love and the power of God are real or not, and to see if the promises of God can really be trusted **for we are all entrusted with God's revealed power and truth, which Paul calls the ministry and message of reconciliation**.

The promise of God's love and absolute certain victory that is the power and message of reconciliation **and our hope beyond any past or present circumstance as we embrace the grace of what God has done for us. God's love and promises are way beyond this world's perspective and limitations, and call us conduct our lives on the basis of the gospel**. We don't live by appearances or the successes of this world, but by the love of Christ that affirms and guides our lives.

For example, two next-door neighbors got into a terrible feud over a waterway and inlet that ran between their two properties. The fight, threats and hard feelings were increasingly bitter and nasty as the years of struggle and strife went on and on. By the time I arrived as the new pastor, their battle had become a secret and ongoing resentment, always beneath the surface, always there, but something no one ever talked about. Years afterward, one of the men told me how after a sermon one time, he recognized that he could not claim to love and follow Jesus and hold such hatred and resentment toward his neighbor. So he prayed,

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then went over to talk with his embittered neighbor. They got past their past by allowing reconciliation to happen **he allowed God's grace and reconciliation to flow through him**. Paul's message is not to try harder, to do more or by will-power do better. **But neither is it to do nothing, or rest in complacency and be lazy about our faith**. The call as we come to the Table is, to listen, to trust, to obey, to let God's grace & reconciliation bring healing transformation by flowing through us and out into the world... as Paul wrote,

Phil 3:13

"forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead."