NEWNESS OF LIFE

2 Corinthians 5:17

The Bible opens with a compact and dark narrative: God creates a world full of order and life that humankind quickly and completely corrupts, supplanting its rich goodness with disorder and death (*Genesis 1-11*). That grim scene introduces a long account of God's slowly developing plan to heal humanity's evil and restore His creation. God's plan introduces a hope that receives a memorable expression in the prophet Isaiah's writings – he calls it "a new heavens and a new earth"[1] (*Isaiah 65:17; 66:22*).

The New Testament announces the beginning of God's new creation in Jesus (*cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15*). While the fullness of what Jesus inaugurated has not yet arrived, we can experience a foretaste, a preview of it in our present lives. This lesson takes advantage of the New Year to explore the "newness of life" that Jesus gives to us now (*Romans 6:4*), a newness that anticipates the future fulfillment of God's plan to set everything right.

"The new has come"[2]

A group of John the Baptist's disciples asked Jesus a question in Matthew 9:14, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus' answer included an analogy about wine and wineskins (*Matthew 9:16-17*). He reminded John's disciples that one does not put new wine into old wineskins because the fermenting process requires the wineskin to expand. Old wineskins, already stretched by that process, can no longer grow. Jesus voiced the conclusion obvious to John's disciples, "the [old] skins burst and the [new] wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed" (*Matthew 9:17*). The analogy presented a crucial truth to John's disciples – **Jesus represents something new that requires new ways of thinking and living.**

The New Testament writers explored the new reality introduced by Jesus and its meaning for those who dedicate themselves to him. Consider the following features of Jesus' 'new wine:'

Jesus introduced a new covenant with new commandments that offer a new relationship with God.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Luke 22:20; John 13:34

1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:14-16

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[1] All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

[2] 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Jesus' new covenant offers everyone a new life and a new identity.
Ezekiel 11:17-20
Ephesians 2:11-22
Galatians 3:26-28; 6:15

The new life Jesus offers expects a new way of living.
Romans 6:1-14
Ephesians 4:1-3
Ephesians 4:17-6:9

Applications

- God is not content to allow us to live broken lives in a broken world. However, He does not merely fix that brokenness – God uses Jesus to introduce something new (*Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1*).
- God allows us to participate in that something new through Jesus. However, our participation does not primarily center on the future hope of heaven, but instead focuses on the ways Jesus transforms us in the present.
- That transformation involves offering our "bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (*Romans 12:1*).
- Becoming a "living sacrifice" requires us to rethink the assumptions about life we have inherited from our world (*Romans 12:2*).
- The transformation Jesus effects within us distinguishes us from the world, allowing the world to see God's reality and wisdom through us (*Ephesians 2:1-3:10*).
- The new life God gives us through Jesus allows us to be part of the new He will eventually create; we become people who serve as a preview of the new reality He will create (*2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21-22*).