

Classic Christianity

2 Corinthians 5:17

I saw it on my way home from high school one day. It was in the driveway of a home on a street near our house. I had only dreamed about this classic. It was 1967, I was a senior and I had \$300 burning a hole in my pocket. I already a car, but this one was way better. Mine was a 1954 and this was a 1955. Mine was blue and white. This one was deep maroon. Mine was a four door and this one was a two door.

Now, my 54 Chevy was a one owner, and had been well cared for, but after all, it was an “old mans” car. The 1955 Chevy Bel-Air was the first of three years of muscle cars that every boy my age wanted. I’d have done nearly anything to get that car. I called the number on the sign and asked how much. The lady told me it was \$250. I couldn’t wait to buy my dream car.

As I arrived, I jumped out of my car and ran the 75 feet to my dream car. It was shiny, clean and had new tires and mag wheels. I couldn’t wait to drive this thing home. I figured I’d just leave my old car there and come back for it later. I ran my hands over the paint on the driver’s side front. It was magnificent. I saw the steering wheel, original, not one of those Mickey Thompson teeny wheels. I got to the driver’s side door and opened it up. The foul smell was overpowering. I didn’t know what caused the smell, but I quickly closed the door. I looked through the glass and saw that the inside had been torn to pieces. It looked like lions had used it for a scratching post. The seats were in shreds, the floor boards were rusted through. I went to the front and popped the hood. No engine!!! Now this was a problem. Come to find out this car was a salvage from a flood. The buyer would need to install an engine, transmission, rear end, and an interior. I began to see that looks can be – well – deceiving. What I thought was a classic car was a wolf in sheep’s clothing. I was deflated, but happy that I had not just bought the car without examining it. In today’s dollars it would have taken \$20k to fix it.

Do you know what the bible said about Christians.... 2 Cor 5:17 says, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"* (NIV)

I've thought about that 55 Chevy many times in connection with this verse. It would have taken more work than the car would ever be worth to restore it. Not enough value for the investment. It took more work on me than I'm worth too, but it was an act of love that restored me to God.

When people see us as Born-Again Christians; classics for Christ, what do they see? We can wear the name Christian and profess Christ, but sometimes –well – looks can be deceiving! We look good outside – but the inside is a mess.

Look with me again at this great scripture – and let's break it up a bit... *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*

Let me share a couple of thoughts from this classic passage about classic Christianity. Paul gets beyond mere theology and takes Christianity to a base level. Paul takes our life in Jesus to the lowest common denominator. Christians are known for a great deal more than this passage shares, but here are **two important things to think** through as we look at our Christian life. If we are in Christ then:

1. There's An Indisputable Newness.

In my preaching I have had many people sit across the desk from me in tears; tears of regret; tears of wrong decisions. I've had bi-polar, schizophrenics, clinically depressed, drug addicts, alcoholics, child abusers, wife abusers - folks at the end of their rope come see me. They come with wasted, lost years – with life-shattering regrets about their children, their spouses, or their illnesses. Most of these people wanted one thing. They wanted to know if they could start over. To just once more feel the freshness of being made new!

I'm fond of this passage of scripture because it boils the answer down to a simple yes. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"* We can be new again! The years that sin has eaten, can be redeemed! We can start again!

1 Peter 1:3 says, *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."* (NIV)

The great news about Jesus is He is our Savior! He can save us from the past. He can take a life broken by our own sin, or the sin of others and put it together and make it a new and a good life. *"If anyone is in Christ...."* I like the word *"anyone."* You see it doesn't matter who you are, or what baggage you carry, or what events and situations of life you have faced. **Anyone** can come to Christ. **Anyone** can be in Christ.

As Christians we focus on any person that is not in a saved relationship with Jesus. To borrow Paul's words – we're after *"anyone."* Another worthwhile word is *"if"* - as in *"if anyone."* I don't want to make too much of a simple word, but it is worth noting that the newness promised by Paul is **only** for those who are in Christ.

Our world offers many alternatives experience newness. From Plastic surgery, to medication, illegal drugs, even hypnosis, the list is endless. However, the only opportunity that is genuine, lasting, and eternal is the newness we discover by being in Christ. This newness in Christ, this difference, this peculiarity as Peter refers to it is something not only for us to experience but for those around us to witness.

When the demoniac met Jesus and He cast out the legion of demons within the man, sending them into a herd of pigs, the man was free, for the first time in years. **He was new again.** Notice in Mark 5:18-20 what Jesus told him...*As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said,*

"Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. (NIV)

When we surrender our lives to Jesus, when we say, "Yes Lord", an amazing thing happens to us. Also, people should be amazed as they witness the growing difference because Jesus lives in us! Jesus does amazing things! He changes lives.

Where does the 1955 Chevy Bel-Air fit? When I looked at the Chevy sitting there, I knew it was a classic. I knew it was everything I had dreamed about. But the hard truth was - it wasn't. It wasn't new. It wasn't a classic it wasn't what it appeared to be.

As Christians it is as important that our newness is genuine, growing, exciting and lasting. But not only is this important for us, but also **for those who know we are children of God**. When others who have not yet come to know Jesus, see us, they need, and they are seeking to be amazed. If they only discover a clean outside person with a filthy inside, well they may just politely turn away and look somewhere else. I want my life, and you want your life, to tell the story of the amazing new life Jesus has to offer. This is the witness, this is the testimony that we want to have because of the newness Jesus has brought into our lives.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" Secondly, consider with me...

2. There is an Unbeatable Trade-in Agreement.

I don't know if I will ever tell our son this or not. Many moons ago while I was asleep, he borrowed my car and blew a tire on it. It's never a good thing to have one of the kids wake you at 1:00 a.m. with the words, "I know you're going to be mad, but..." After grounding him for life, we got the car home, and the next day I went to the tire company and had the tire replaced. The cost of replacement? Nothing!

You see, I had a road hazard warranty. Did I tell my son it was free? Nope. He lost his allowance to the tune of \$50.00.

The tire company took off the old tire - blown side-wall, useless, and put on a new tire for me. I then had one nice tire and three old ones. Jesus has a great deal for anyone who will take him up on it.

Those of us who are already in Christ need to heed the following few thoughts as we continue growing in our Jesus Journey. When we come to Christ – **The Old Is Gone and The New Has Come**. In Jesus – the old attitudes, the old philosophies, the old ways of doing things, the old way of thinking, the old actions, the old – yes – *the old sins* are gone!

They are replaced with new opportunities! As we grow in Christ, we learn new attitudes, Christ-like ways of living, and different ways of thinking, Godly ways to live. It is truly an adventure!

If we are to grow in the Lord; if we are to be victorious in life; if we are going to overcome sin; if we are going to be God's person - two things I know: The old ways must go and the new, need to come in and reside! What are the old ways and what are the new ways? The Word of God helps us to understand the new so well. It helps us to realize what God considers to be old news.... things that must go so we can grow.

I've tried it; some of you may have too. The old and the new don't mix well, but we've attempted to mix them. Like new wine in an old wineskin – it just doesn't work. All you wind up with is an explosion that simply leads to spiritual frustration. If we are in Christ, we will continually reach out for the new we discover only in Jesus. As we stretch ourselves, we will soon be stunned to discover the truth of this passage: *The new has come*.

3. Wrapping It Up.

I drive a Hyundai Santa Fe. It's a nice car, but it **will never be a classic!** Thirty years from now it will have long been in the junkyard.

No one will one day say – "Wow, can you believe it? A 2017 Hyundai Santa Fe. What a great car – I'm so glad I found it!

What will be great in 30 years is that you and I came to know Jesus - as the result of that decision - we became new in Christ, and the old things that were chains around our souls bogging us down were gone – and that others came to know Jesus because of the amazing difference He made in our lives. Alive or dead – it will be the greatest decision of our life!!

It will be great to have someone say of us – *they were a classic Christian*. Or to hear someone pray “Lord I thank you for putting this person in my life as an example of what a mature loving Christian should be.” Let's take time for one more verse? Want to know how to start and where to begin?

Roman 6:4 says, "*We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*" (NIV)