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THE CONCEPT OF NEW LIFE IN CHRIST (2 CORINTHIANS. 5:14-17) AND ITS APPLICATIONS TO CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The New Life in Christ is the very essence of Christianity. Biblical Christianity is not merely one of many competing religions, nor a system of belief and practice that will hopefully make a better person but an intimate relationship with God through Christ with an experience of New life. There is a need for the proper understanding of new life in Christ as relates to Christian experience. This paper examines this concept in the light of 2 Corinthians 5:14-17. In this passage, Paul used the word or term "new creation" to express the experience of the concept of new life in Christ. The exegetical-descriptive method was adopted in carrying out this study. It was discovered that new life in Christ is not a suggestion that Christians will no longer have struggles and disappointments but a new factor has come into their life that touches and modifies every experience. This paper posits that anyone who becomes a new creation comes into a new relationship with God and the responsibility to serve Him.

Keywords: New Life, New Creation, Christianity, Experience, Religion.

Introduction

The focus of this paper is the concept of new life in Christ with reference to Paul's teaching in 2 Corinthians 5:14-17. Paul made significant contributions to the formation of Christian doctrines and practices. Apart from Jesus Christ, no one made such significant contribution to Christianity as Paul. Most Christian doctrines are from his epistles. One of them is the doctrine of salvation which brings about new life in Christ. Paul took time to talk about this new life in Christ in all his epistles. He uses much metaphor to describe the new life in Christ to illustrate its significance, nature and demands. One of such is found in 2 Corinthians 5:17 which is the direction of this paper. According to Paul in this passage new life in Christ is a new creation. Therefore this paper examines the concept of the new creation as relates to a new life in Christ with its applications to Christian life and experience. To achieve this, an overview of the general concept of new life in Christ was discussed for proper understanding. It is followed by an extensive discussion on the concept of new life in Christ with an exegetical study of 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 and its applications to Christian experience.

The Concept of New Life in Christ

The concept of the word "new" in the phrase "the new life" can be deduced from the two Greek words mainly used in the New Testament for "new" (*kainos* and *neos*) which are essentially synonymous but also distinct. *Kainos* means "new in nature" (with an implication of better) while *neos* means "new in time". The two words suggest that the word 'new' means

"unfamiliar, "unexpected", "wonderful" and distinction fades with time (Bromiley, 1992, 388). The New Testament uses the word *kainos* for something new; something just made which there is nothing like it in existence (Practical Word Studies in the New Testament, 1998, 1415). "not yet used"(Matthew 9:17), "unusual" (Acts 17:21) and new kind" (Matthew 13:52; Eph. 2:15) (Bromiley, 1992, 388). The word is the epitome of the wholly different and miraculous things which is brought by the time of salvation (Practical Word Studies in the New Testament, 1998, 1415).In agreement Harrisville insists that the word 'new' used in the New Testament must be interpreted eschatologically, signifying the appearance of the new age in Christ(Harrisville, 74:69-79).

More significantly, *karinos* carries over the basic eschatological orientation of the Old Testament prophets who spoke of the new age to come, the new age of messianic fulfilment. Jesus first coming introduced radical changes in salvation history inaugurating the new age anticipated by the prophets. By his death, He fulfilled the prophecy of a promise of a new covenant written on the heart of God's people and introduced all sort of new things (Mounce and Noch, 1988: 526). The significance of the word "new" in the term "New Testament" expresses the importance of newness for Christianity. According to Motyer (1984, 759), The title "New Testament" was intended to summarize the relationship between Christ and what preceded him as that of new to Old.

New Life in Christ begins at the point of conversion, where one has an encounter with the person of Christ. Once a person is freed from sin and death he begins a new life. This new life is referred to as regeneration. The word "regeneration" literally means, to make alive again, to be given a new life, to be given new birth; to be renewed or revived, to be spiritually reborn or converted (Practical Word Studies in the New Testament, 1998, 1706). Salvation is a spiritual rebirth; it is a person being born again by the Spirit of God.

In the Old Testament, there was no technical expression for the process of regeneration but it is an eschatological idea. Most people of Israel were scarcely aware that the conditions to the attainment of divine promises were more than ceremonial and ritual. Bromiley (1988, 68) noted that the sin of Israel was recognized as the sin of the individual, which could be removed only by individual repentance and cleansing. This is best seen in the stirring appeals of the post-exilic prophets, who frequently preached that a change of attitude toward God is necessary for such regeneration. This attitudinal change can only be understood as the turning of the individual to the Lord. The promised regeneration lovely offered by God is to be the token of a new covenant between him and His people.

The concept of regeneration receives its fullest expression in the New Testament, where it is seen as the transformation of an individual's soul from estrangement from God to the right relationship with Him. The new life in Christ is necessary apart from it all persons are dead in trespasses and sin. In affirmation of this need for new life or regeneration is demonstrated in Jesus conversation with Nicodemus (John 3). Jesus taught Nicodemus about the absolute necessity of new life as a condition to enter the Kingdom of God. The necessity of this new life according to Bromiley (1988,68) is based on two reasons, the first human begins no matter how they try to keep the law are dead and unable to meet God's demands and second, humanity has fallen from its divinely appointed sphere and now lives the earthly life. The

implication of this is that for the human being to meet God's demands in a fallen state requires a new spiritual nature to be imparted on them.

In the New Testament, the new life is referred to by use of the designation "eternal life" Frank Stagg (1962, 112) described eternal life as the opposite of destruction or perdition. It is participation in the kingdom of God. This life is the life of God given to those who by faith know him as king and who live under the absolute and ultimate claim of his rule. In the words of Alan (1959, 71) the new life which is given to the Christian is such a fullness of life. When it is described as life eternal, this adjective refers not so much to the infinite duration of this life but to its connection with the time of salvation in which it is to break forth in fulfillment.

The new life in Christ is viewed as the beginning of life which is described with the analogy of new birth. Frank Stagg (1962, 114) explained that the new birth analogy is variously set forth as regeneration, as birth from above, and as being begotten of God. All these emphasis the inception of the new life, as well as characterize the life itself. New life is having the knowledge of God and Christ.

The Concept of New Life in Christ In 2 Cor. 5:14-17

The text chosen for this paper is one of the texts that expressed Paul's concept of New Life in Christ. His concept of new life in Christ is reflected in the word of vs 17 "New Creation". Paul uses the language of "New Creation" to describe God's way of bringing a new spiritual life. His view, becoming a Christian meant passing over from an old life to a new life. The concept of life goes beyond the ordinary meaning of existence or physical life. The old life and the new life were quite separate, having different characteristics and even opposed to one another.

Greek Text

> 14 ἡ γὰρ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ συνέχει ἡμᾶς, κρίναντας τοῦτο [a]ὅτι εἷς ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν· ἄρα οἱ πάντες ἀπέθανον· 15 καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν ἵνα οἱ ζῶντες μηκέτι ἑαυτοῖς ζῶσιν ἀλλὰ τῷ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἀποθανόντι καὶ ἐγερθέντι.
> 16 Ὥστε ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν οὐδένα οἴδαμεν κατὰ σάρκα· [b]εἰ καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν κατὰ σάρκα Χριστόν, ἀλλὰ νῦν οὐκέτι γινώσκομεν. 17 ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν [c]καινά·

English Text

> 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 New International Version (NIV)
> 14 For Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.
> 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:[a] The old has gone, the new is here!

The focus is on vs 17 "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:[a] The old has gone, the new is here*". The verse has its immediate context in vs 14-17 and the larger context in

vs 11- 6:10, the ministry of reconciliation. The background study of the immediate and larger contexts will give proper understanding of vs 17.

Background and exposition of 2 Corinthians 5:14-17

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul is in the middle of his appeal to the Corinthians Christians to recognize his integrity and apostolic authority. This appeal and defence is developed in between references to time spent in Macedonia awaiting the arrival of Titus (2 Cor 2:14; 7:4) (Turner, 1989, 79). Martin (1986, 137) is correct in saying that this section is not a digression or a rehearsal of the past. Rather

> it is an extension of the same spirit he [Paul] had shown them in calling them to repentance (2:2; 7:8-11) and obedience (2:9), and it is a fervent yet reasoned appeal to any who were still unyielding to the pressure of his earlier appeal and whose friendly attitude toward himself he still has reason to doubt. The plea is a renewed call to them to leave their hostile dispositions and suspicions of both his message and his ministry and accept his proffered reconciliation, already given to the ringleader (2:5- 11; 7:12).

In 5:14 Paul explains that he is also controlled by the retrospect of Christ's love demonstrated by his death. This constraint of the cross is due to Paul's conviction that the death of Christ represented the death of all. Further (5:15), the death of Christ means that those who live should live not for themselves but for the one who died for them. The theological framework behind this is that the Adamic order, characterized since the fall by selfishness and death, has been superseded by the order of the second Adam, characterized by selfless living for Christ. Paul's ministry is characterized not by living for himself but by living for the one who died for him and rose again. Paul sees believers dying with Christ in the past and standing before him at the future judgment. Therefore life in between these two epochal events can never be the same again. Self-commendation and pride in appearance cannot characterize those who are controlled by the love of their redeemer and future judge (Turner, 1989, 81).

Second Corinthians 5:14-15 has stressed Christ's death as a representative act and as an act of renewal. Due to Christ's representative death, Christ-centered rather than self-centred living is required of those who would identify with the gospel. Paul in 5:16-17 describes two consequences of Christ's death. First, Christ's death means that from now on a radically different way of viewing reality is present. No one is to be viewed according to the old order with its "fleshly" priorities and values; Even if Paul has known Christ in this manner, those days are gone forever. Further (v 17), the former fleshly worldview has been replaced by a distinctively Christian one (Turner, 1989, 81).

Schellenberg (2017,6) summarized Paul motives in vs 14-16 in three ways; first being controlled by Christ's love (v. 13-14 NIV), second being defined by Christ's death as "the love of Christ is defined in terms of his death for us, that death being looked at in terms of its necessity" (v. 14 NASB, "therefore all died" and its objective v. 15 NASB, "that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him") and how the "love of Christ is defined by the fact that when a universal need existed, Christ died to meet it. and third the two-fold consequences of living for Christ.

New Creation

> Vs 17, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:[a] The old has gone, the new is here!

The majority of English Bible versions translate this verse into either "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" or "he is a new creature." On the other hand, NRSV and NJB have a slightly different translation; "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation." NAB puts the two phrases together: "So whoever is in Christ is a new creation." Chun (2012) noted in his dissertation that scholars have more diverse translations. Many of them are following the popular translations of the English Bible: "he is a new creation," "he is a new creature," or "there is (a) new creation."

The opening word of this verse "Therefore" or "Wherefore" indicate a further consequence of preceding verses (14-16). The consequence of the Christian's identification with Christ in His death and resurrection not only does he no longer know any man according to the flesh (Hughes, 1962, 201). Many scholars pointed out, vv. 16 and 17 are closely related and parallel to each other because both verses start with the same word, ὥστε and both refer to radical changes. In v. 16, the people who are living for Christ who died and were raised come to have a new way of knowing other human beings. In the old creation, the normal way of perceiving others was κατὰ σάρκα, "according to the flesh (Chun, 2012, 160).

"In Christ" is an important phrase to be considered in this verse. Paul uses the phrase "in Christ" seven times in 2 Corinthians (2:14, 17; 3:14; 5:17, 19; 12:2, 19). An understanding of the expression, εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ is an important step in obtaining the meaning of καινὴ κτίσις (New Creation) because it functions as a conditional clause for it (Chun,2012, 160). This expression "in Christ" is one of Paul's most characteristic formulations and its precise meaning has been vigorously debated (Ladd, 1974, 481). Thrall (1994, 425) summarize the meaning of "in Christ" into four categories. "Belonging to Christ by faith"; "Being in Christ's sphere of power", "Personal unity of the believer with Christ"; and "Becoming incorporated through baptism into the community which is the body of Christ. The most accepted in this context of 2 Corinthian 5:17 can be expressed in the word of Collins (2013, 120), who said that the phrase "in Christ" suggests union between the believer and Christ, the believer's participation in Christ. Chun (2012, 163) sees it as a condition through which believers can realize that God's eschatological new world is already present in their lives and they are participating in it through Christ.

The word, *καινὴ κτίσις* "New Creation" is the focus of the verse. It is an expression Paul used in Galatians 6:15 which was an idiom used only by him among New Testament writers (Collins, 2013, 120). The word κτίσις is used in three senses in the New Testament. The act of creating, as Romans 1:20. The sum of created things, as Revelation 3:14; Mark 13:19. A created thing or creature, as Romans 8:39. The Rabbis used the word of a man converted from idolatry. "He who brings a foreigner and makes him a proselyte is as if he created him."(Vincent, https://www.studylight.org).

Paul used the *Kainos* which is translated as "new" which means new, a new kind, describing the believer as being a new creation. Paul capitalizes on biblical and Jewish notion that points to God's eschatological and all-encompassing renewal. The idea of newness is distinctly

eschatological. The prophets looked forward to the day when God would do a new thing (Isaiah 43:19; cf. Jer. 31:21). When God completes his redemptive work, he will make a new covenant with his People, he will implant a new heart and a new spirit within them, he will call them by a new name and create heavens and a new earth (Ladd,1974,479). Hughes (1962, 201) described this experience of the new creation as a reborn microcosm belonging to the eschatological macrocosm of the new heavens and the new earth.

The expression "The old has gone, the new is here" is the direct result of the word "New Creation". This is an eschatological statement. "The new *aeon* which has dawned with Christ brings a new creation, the creation of man. The new creation does not refer to a renovation of the physical world, this new creation awaits the eschatological consummation (Romans 8:21) (Ladd, 1974, 480). Paul's statement or language is reminiscent of Isaiah 43:18-19, where the prophet contrasts a new order with an order that is about to pass away. In this verse, Paul reprises Isaiah language, notably in the expressions "old things" "new things" and "Behold". Collins (2013, 121) stated that Paul sees the eschatological expectation of a new creation as being fulfilled in Christ.

Christ's death and resurrection mean that the old order has passed away, to be replaced by a new order that has already come into existence. In Christ, men need no longer be conformed to the old age (Rom.12.2). The new covenant with God has already come into existence. God has wrought a new creation in Christ that should express itself in good works. When Paul declares that for the Christian old things have passed away, the tense of the verb points back to a definite moment or event, namely, the experience of the new birth (Hughes, 1962, 203). The believers live in the old age but belong to the new age with its new creation. Therefore believers are to live a life that is expressive of the new existence.

The Applications of the Concept of New Life in Christ to Christian Experience

Christians are a community of new humanity as a result of their new life in Christ. There are three applications of the concept of New life in Christ as expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:17, the condition, the nature and expectation of the new life.

The condition for a new life in Christ

New life can only be possible when a Christian is in union with Christ, an intimate and personal relationship with Christ. To be a true Christian is to be in Christ. This process of this union is new birth experience. The expression "if a man is in Christ" according to Motyer (1984,760) is an invitation to an individual to participate in a greater eschatological reality. To be "in Christ" is a condition through which believers can realize that God's eschatological new world is already present in their lives and they are participating in it through Christ. According to John MacArthur(2005, 1630) the words "in Christ" comprises a brief yet profound statement of the significance of the believer's redemption, which includes the following, the believer's security in Christ, the believer's acceptance in Him, the believer's future assurance in Him, and the believer's participation with Him in the divine nature of Christ. The consequences of living for Christ constitute the formation of a new creature.

The nature of New life in Christ

The promise of a new creation is now a reality, a radical change in a person that make him new nature created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. The new way

of life characterized by the radically new manner of knowing is part of the new creation that Jesus brought through his death and resurrection. The nature of this new creation is explained by Ladd (1974, 480) to be the glorious end of the revelation of God's salvation.

The expectation of the new life in Christ

Christians are expected to walk in the newness of life and serve in the newness of the Spirit. A new creation by the Spirit releases from the bondage to sin and law and gives a new quality to life and service. A new life in Christ demand rejection of worldly standards as an individual and community. Levison (1993, 190) emphasized that believers as a new creation cease to live and judge according to worldly standard. The presence of new creation means a new standard must replace the old standards. The standards apply, not only to ethnic groups or church leaders but to every believer who participates in the new humanity. It involves laying aside the old nature and putting on the new man (Eph. 4:25-30) created after God's likeness and expressing in practice the newness of life proper to the new creation. This new humanity is characterized by compassion, patience, truthfulness and reconciliation of peoples once hostile to one another.

Conclusion

A new life in Christ is a new creation, created by Christ with holy nature and incorruptible life. It is opposed to the old man with a corrupt nature. It is a man who is in fellowship with God, Obedient to God's will and devoted to God's service.

It is quite clear that Christ's death and resurrection have inaugurated an eschatological new world and caused a radical turn of the ages. Those who participate in the Christ event as a result of God's grace on them and their positive response to it begin to realize that the newly created world is already being established in their daily lives as an eschatological reality and that they are required to live by a different standard, which is far from knowing others according to the flesh. Although the completion of the new creation is laid in the future, the old age has already passed away and a new one has already come. They are living in an eschatological time.

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