

Romans 8:18–23 (NRSV)

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the **creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay** and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

2 Corinthians 5:14–27 (NRSV)

¹⁴For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a **new creation**: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

Galatians 6:11–15 (NIV)

¹¹See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!

¹²Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. ¹⁴May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the **new creation**.

We know that the best lies ahead.

Have you ever noticed that when we mess up, we will sometimes say, “I was just being human.” Do you think that is how God intended it for the creatures made in his own image? That “just being human” would mean us at our worst? Or how about this phrase, “you can’t change human nature,” again, when we are speaking of ourselves at our worst.

I imagine all this brings a tear to God’s eye. “Just being human,” truly human, should be us at our best. Jesus was really truly human. He was also really truly God, but that didn’t diminish his humanness. So I guess we could say that Jesus was the most human human. We are being most human when we are being most like Jesus. Perhaps it is true that *we* can’t change human nature . . . but God can.

And that is just what God has done. God has given us new natures, new hearts, new selves. We are God’s new creation. The phrase “new creation” is only used twice in the NT, both times by Paul (the passages above). But God’s *re-newing* of his creation undergirds all of the New Testament. And it is crucial to grasp that this “new creation” is far more than simply our own regeneration, it is the keeping of a promise God had made long ago to put all things right. In these two words, “new creation,” Paul captures the whole of the gospel. Ernest Best helps us to see the fullness Paul has in mind:

When Christ died all died (2 Corinthians 5:14), but they were not dead and finished. They enjoy new life. Paul expresses this with an idea he draws from the Old Testament—God acts to recreate the world that has turned away from him (Isa. 42:9; 43:18–19; 65:17). The theme of the restoration of an original Golden Age

is found in many cultures; it appeals to something in all of us which longs for a fresh beginning. With Paul, however, this longing is no longer a wish about a faraway future but a present reality. Through his cross and resurrection, Christ has already created his followers anew. Paul does not mean that Christians have been given new ideals to live by or that they will experience a slow moral change brought about by a new desire to be good. They would then be recreating themselves. It is God who makes the new creation as he made the first, and as, according to Genesis, the first was not a gradual process and neither is the second. It took place in the death and resurrection of Christ. At that moment Christians became new people. That is the way God looks at them. They, for their part, have still to work this out in the actual way they think and behave, no longer living for themselves but for Christ.¹

In his landmark book, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Richard Hays asserts that there are three primary lenses through which we must read the New Testament writings: community, cross, and new creation. It might seem odd to suggest “new creation” as one of the three, since it only appears twice in the New Testament. But Hays is spot on. Every bit of the Good News is eschatological (dealing with last things) in that the point of all God’s work has been to remake his creation and banish sin and all its terrible effects. Hays writes:

The eschatological framework of life in Christ imparts to Christian existence its strange temporal sensibility, its odd capacity for simultaneous joy amidst suffering and impatience with things as they are. We can never say—as do the guys in a popular beer commercial -- “It doesn’t get any better than this,” because we know it will; we are, like T. S. Eliot’s Magi, “no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation.” The church is, in Paul’s remarkable phrase, the community of those “upon whom the ends of the ages have met” (1 Cor. 10:11, RH). In Christ, we know that the powers of the old age are doomed, and the new creation is already appearing. Yet at the same time, all attempts to assert the unqualified presence of the kingdom of God stand under judgment of the eschatological reservation: not before the time, not yet. . . . As often as we eat the bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the Lord’s death. . . until he comes.²

In the above passage from Galatians, Paul has picked up the pen from his secretary. He wants to be heard on this loud and clear. These new believers are part of a new Israel and there can be no going back. The old divisions, those of the present world, have no place in God’s family. Richard Hays writes:

For many readers in our time, the deepest ethnic divisions will not be those between Jew and Gentile, but between different racial groups, even within the church. Sadly, it remains true, as Martin Luther King, Jr. observed a generation ago, that 11:00 A.M. Sunday is the most segregated hour of the week in the United States. If we hear Paul’s letter as a message spoken not just to ancient Galatians, but also to us, we will hear it as a call to racial reconciliation. If we can read Galatians 6:15 and echo it in our hearts by confessing, “Neither whiteness nor blackness is anything, but—new creation!” then peace and mercy will be upon us indeed.³

Creation and New Creation – our challenge

Even those who may know little else about the Bible are familiar with its opening: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, . . .” Most also know that

¹ Best, E. (1987). *Second Corinthians* (pp. 54–55). Atlanta, GA: J. Knox Press.

² Hays, Richard. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethic* (Kindle Locations 5483-5499). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

³ Hays, R. B. (1994–2004). The Letter to the Galatians. In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Vol. 11, p. 348). Nashville: Abingdon Press.

God pronounced it good: “And God saw that the light was good; . . .” God created all that is -- all matter, all energy -- and, not surprisingly, it is a good creation, for God is good. The final chapters of Revelation are a vision of the God’s restoration of his creation. When Revelation ends, the cosmic warp and distortion of sin has been washed away; creation again is as God created it to be.

Yet, despite all this, we humans seem to be drawn to the idea that the physical world is somehow inferior to the spiritual or, as some might say, “it is our souls that really matter, our bodies are just smelly, easy-to-break vessels for our souls.” But this is not the Christian view.

Why does this matter? It matters for more reasons than I could touch on here, but let’s look at one. Embracing the goodness and the inherent value of God’s creation helps us to understand and to accomplish the work God has given us. This world is not a place to be escaped from or even just tolerated as we await our trip to heaven. Yes, the world is in much need of renewal and restoration. There is often little evidence of God’s kingdom. But our charge is to do all we can to make God’s kingdom evident to all. We can’t build the kingdom, that is God’s work, but we can build *for* the kingdom. Every kind touch, every mouth we feed and body we clothe, every act of selfless giving, every word of truth, every work of beauty we create, all compassion, all sacrifice – none of it will be lost, all of it will be incorporated into God’s renewal of creation, a restoration of the physical *and* the spiritual. Here’s a few words from N. T. Wright on our God-given responsibilities in this new creation.

If the creation is to be renewed, not abandoned, and if that work has already begun in the resurrection of Jesus, it will not do simply to consign the present creation to acid rain and global warming and wait for Armageddon to destroy it altogether. Christians must be in the forefront of bringing, in the present time, signs and foretastes of God’s eventual full healing to bear upon the created order in all its parts and at every level. If the world is to be put to rights, brought under the saving lordship of God’s restorative justice, and if that work has already been unveiled prototypically in Jesus’ death and resurrection, it will not do to concentrate on individual justification while allowing wider issues of justice to go unaddressed. Christians must be in the forefront of bringing, in the present time, signs and foretastes of God’s healing justice to bear upon the world that is still full of corruption, injustice, oppression, division, suspicion, and war. And if the world is to attain its full beauty and dignity as God’s liberated new creation, a beauty and dignity for which the present evidences of God’s grandeur within creation are just a foretaste, it will not do to regard beauty, and its creation and conservation, as a pleasant but irrelevant optional extra within a world manipulated by science, exploited by technology, and bought and sold in the economic marketplace. Christians must be in the forefront of bringing, in the present time, signs and foretastes of God’s fresh beauty to birth within the world, signs of hope for what the Spirit will yet do.⁴

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

The discussion questions for this series are drawn from the curriculum for our Connection Groups, which will be meeting throughout the series. The questions were written by Rev. Allison Jean.

1. Where do you see brokenness in creation as a whole? How do you respond to this brokenness? How does this impact your relationship with God?
2. How do you respond to the idea that creation is waiting on Christians to take up the responsibility of caring for creation? How does this impact your faith?

⁴ Wright, N. T. (1994–2004). The Letter of the Romans. In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Vol. 10, pp. 605–606). Nashville: Abingdon Press.

3. What do you feel is something creation is *waiting* for, groaning for as Paul says? What is something that you are waiting for in your own life, your relationship with God? How does this waiting impact your relationship with God?

Daily Bible Readings

This week: *More on creation and new creation*

Monday, Genesis 1:1-2:3 God creates all that is.

Tuesday, Genesis 3 The rebellion that wrecks God's good creation

Wednesday, Isaiah 43:14-21 God is going to do a new thing.

Thursday, Isaiah 65:17-25 What is this new thing that God is going to do?

Friday, Romans 8 Our life in the Spirit and our present suffering, even as we wait and we build

Saturday, Revelation 21:1-5 The culmination of God's great rescue project

An archive with more than 700 of these studies can be found at www.scottengle.org

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the gospel of John.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Samuel.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our current series: *Rescue: Images of Salvation*

Coming soon: *The Messiah Comes to Middle Earth*

There are still a few spots open for the October 2018 cruise to Israel with Robert Hasley, Pam White, and Scott Engle. For more information go to www.scottengle.org.