

NEW CREATION AND LIFE TRANSFORMATION IN CHRIST: An Exegetical Study of *en Christo* in 2 Corinthians 5:17

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Abstract

The inconsistency between Christian confession and daily conduct calls for a biblically grounded understanding of life transformation. This study examines the meaning of the phrase *en Christo* (“in Christ”) in 2 Corinthians 5:17 using grammatical and lexical exegesis. The analysis shows that the phrase denotes not merely a positional union with Christ but a dynamic, participatory relationship resulting in *kainē ktisis*—a new creation. The perfect tense of *gegonen* (“has become”) indicates that the new reality has already arrived, while the aorist *parelthen* (“passed away”) marks a decisive break with the old. This transformation is not superficial moral improvement but a radical, divinely wrought renewal that affects identity, character, and daily practice. The study contributes to practical theology by grounding life renewal in textual analysis rather than abstract doctrine.

Keywords: transformation; life in Christ; exegesis study; expression *en Cristo*; 2 Corinthians 5:17.

INTRODUCTION

The discrepancy between religious identity and daily behavior remains a serious challenge in Christian communities. Many believers profess faith in Christ, yet their thoughts, attitudes, and actions often fail to reflect genuine renewal. This gap between confession and conduct raises fundamental questions about the nature of authentic Christian living.¹

The presence of God in believers is often no longer evident in their actions. Many forget their identity as renewed persons in Christ, even though Christ has already dwelt within them and brought regeneration. God’s work of regeneration has in fact been completed, and everything necessary for forgiveness and justification has been provided.² However, a person’s acceptance of Christ’s redemptive work remains crucial.

¹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 473.

² Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 27.

On the one hand, some hold the view that a believer's sin no longer counts because Christ has borne it. God's wrath against sin is not an abstract concept but a reality experienced through an accusing conscience, guilt, and despair.³ Paul affirms that the gospel acknowledges this reality and takes it seriously, which raises debate about how believers should respond. Some theologians argue that the gospel does not treat sin or wrath as an illusion but proclaims that God, through His love, has removed them through Christ's sacrifice.⁴

The debate intensifies when a believer's life shows no genuine renewal. This leads to a pressing question: does regeneration truly produce profound change, or is it merely a theological concept without practical impact?⁵ Everyone who truly becomes a Christian should undergo a profound transformation—not merely in name or outward appearance, but in heart and character. God's grace brings about genuine change, reshaping old thoughts, principles, and habits.

Regeneration is not simply a doctrine; it is a reality that transforms one's inner life, enabling a person to live according to new principles.⁶ Thus, the study of the corruption of the *imago Dei* and regeneration in Christ confirms that the renewal of life lies at the very heart of the Christian faith. The believer's life should reflect the new identity received through Christ's work. Regeneration leads believers to pursue new goals, build new relationships, and live according to God's commands, ensuring that faith does not remain at the level of confession but is demonstrated in action.⁷

One of the primary guidelines for living a new life in Christ is found in 2 Corinthians 5:17. The verse states: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Although this verse is frequently cited, the phrase *en Christo* ("in Christ") is often treated superficially—either as a mystical union without ethical content or as a purely forensic status.⁸ Existing studies tend to emphasize either the doctrinal aspect of union with Christ or the eschatological dimension of new

³ Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study*, 27.

⁴ Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2013), 372. Comp. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

⁵ Jay Twomey, *The Pastoral Epistles through the Centuries, Blackwell Bible Commentaries* (Hong Kong: Utopia Press, 2009), 65.

⁶ Williams J. Rodman, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective*, Three Volumes in One (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 65.

⁷ Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas, eds., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 474.

⁸ Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas, eds., *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 474.

creation, but few integrate both into a coherent framework for daily transformation.

This study fills that gap by asking: What does it mean to be “in Christ” according to 2 Corinthians 5:17, and how does this union produce a transformed life? Using the method of exegesis—drawing out the original meaning through lexical, grammatical, and contextual analysis.⁹ This paper uncovers the intended significance of Paul’s statement for its first readers and derives implications for contemporary believers.¹⁰ The result is expected to enrich practical theology by offering a framework for understanding life renewal that is consistent with professed faith.

DISCUSSION

The Syntactic and Lexical Shape of 2 Corinthians 5:17

The verse opens with the conjunction ὥστε (*hoste*), which functions as an inferential particle introducing a logical conclusion based on the preceding statement in verse 16, namely that believers no longer know Christ according to the flesh.¹¹ This grammatical connection signals that Paul is not making an isolated claim but drawing a deliberate theological inference from the resurrection and exalted status of Christ. Just as Christ has entered a completely new mode of existence through His resurrection and ascension, so also everyone who is united with Him by faith participates in that same newness of life.¹² The conditional clause εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ (*ei tis en Christō*), rendered as “if anyone is in Christ,” establishes a universal condition that applies to every believer without exception, regardless of ethnic, social, or religious background. Therefore, the entire structure of the verse demonstrates that union with Christ is not an optional addition to salvation but the very ground and source of all transformative change in the believer’s life.

The preposition ἐν (*en*) combined with the dative Χριστῷ carries a rich range of meanings, but within this specific literary and theological context it signals a close,

⁹ For guidance on exegetical method, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981); Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006); Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *Handbook to Exegesis of The New Testament* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002).

¹⁰ This biblical theological approach is in line with Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992).

¹¹ Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1976), 470.

¹² Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 372.

personal, and participatory relationship between the believer and Christ.¹³ As Fritz Rienecker observes in his linguistic key to the Greek New Testament, one of the primary functions of *en* in Pauline writings is to designate an intimate, life-giving union with God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit, far beyond mere spatial or instrumental usage.¹⁴ This relational dimension means that being “in Christ” is not about physical location or abstract identification but about a dynamic, organic connection in which Christ’s life flows into the believer just as sap flows from the vine into the branches. Such a union implies complete dependence on Christ for spiritual vitality, moral direction, and eschatological hope, leaving no room for self-sufficiency or autonomous religious effort. Consequently, the phrase *en Christo* in 2 Corinthians 5:17¹⁵ functions as the theological engine that drives the entire declaration of new creation, making union with Christ the non-negotiable prerequisite for genuine transformation.

Throughout the history of biblical interpretation, four distinct but interrelated senses of the expression “in Christ” have been proposed, each shedding light on different aspects of this profound union.¹⁶ The first sense refers to Christ’s ever-sustaining energy, in which all people, whether righteous or wicked, live and move and have their being because Christ upholds the entire cosmos. The second sense concerns Christ’s dispensation or providential governance, under which all of human history has unfolded for centuries, regardless of individual recognition or faith. The third and more intimate sense speaks of dwelling in Christ’s love, an experiential reality where the believer can truthfully declare, “He lives in me,” expressing deep affection and conscious communion. The fourth sense, which is most relevant to moral transformation, describes living in Christ’s character, where believers gradually absorb His thoughts, dispositions, and habits until their conduct mirrors His own. Paul’s usage in 2 Corinthians 5:17 emphatically prioritizes the third and fourth senses, because authentic new creation cannot occur without both heartfelt love for Christ and practical conformity to His moral example.

¹³ Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 470.

¹⁴ Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 470. Compare the translations in the English Standard Version (2025), King James Version (2019), New American Standard Bible (2020), and New International Version (2017).

¹⁵ Literal translation: “so that if any one is in Christ -- he is a new creature; the old things did pass away, lo, become new have the all things.” Robert Young, *Young’s Literal Translation of The Holy Bible* (Williamstown, MA: Griffin Publishing, 2005).

¹⁶ John Gill, *John Gill’s Exposition Bible Commentary of New Testament* (Fort Wayne: Allen County Public Library, 2003), 94.

To be “in Christ” in the Pauline sense is therefore to share not only in Christ’s legal standing before God but also in His personal love and in the progressive shaping of one’s character after His likeness.¹⁷ This understanding transforms the phrase from a static positional declaration into a dynamic, ongoing reality that demands continuous growth and active participation. As John Gill explains in his exposition of the New Testament, just as a foundation supports an entire building, a spring continuously feeds a river, a root sustains a tree, and a head directs a body, so Christ serves as the indispensable foundation, source, and director of a righteous life.¹⁸ The believer who truly abides in Christ becomes a new creation not merely in name but in actual moral and spiritual substance, because the relationship itself generates the change. Without this close, abiding union, no amount of external religious activity or moral effort can produce the kind of radical renewal that Paul describes as a new creation.

New Creation (*Kainē Ktisis*)

The Greek phrase *καινή κτίσις* (*kainē ktisis*), which appears prominently in both 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15, represents one of Paul’s most powerful and concentrated descriptions of what happens when a person comes to faith in Christ.¹⁹ The adjective *καίνος* (*kainos*) fundamentally means “new in kind, quality, or essence,” as opposed to *νέος* (*neos*), which simply means “new in time or recent.” This crucial distinction indicates that Paul is not describing a minor update or a surface-level improvement but a transformation that affects the very core of a person’s being, making them qualitatively different from what they were before. The noun *κτίσις* (*ktisis*) can refer either to the act of creation itself or to the created order, but when joined with *kainos* it points to an act of divine re-creation that mirrors the original creation of the universe out of nothing.²⁰ Together, *kainē ktisis* signifies that the believer is not merely repaired, reformed, or rehabilitated but is actually recreated by God’s sovereign power, as if being brought into existence for the first time.

As Matthew Henry observes in his classic commentary, those who truly abide in

¹⁷ John Gill, *John Gill’s Exposition Bible Commentary of New Testament*, 94.

¹⁸ John Gill, *John Gill’s Exposition Bible Commentary of New Testament*, 94.

¹⁹ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 378.

²⁰ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 398. See also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Westmont, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

Christ are not patched up or superficially improved; rather, they are completely and utterly recreated by the hand of God Himself.²¹ Henry further notes that such transformed individuals become a kind of “small world” within themselves, a miniature cosmos in which what was formerly chaotic, disordered, and darkened by sin is now systematically reordered, illuminated, and declared by God to be very good, just as He declared the original creation good. This re-creation is so profound that it surpasses any merely human notion of moral improvement, because it involves nothing less than the same divine power that spoke the universe into existence. The believer receives not just new habits or new beliefs but an entirely new mode of existence, rooted in Christ and oriented toward God’s glory. Therefore, the phrase *kainē ktisis*²² necessarily implies that divine power is actively and irresistibly at work in the repentance and conversion of sinners, just as it was at work in the original creation of the world from nothing.

The verb *παρήλθεν* (*parelthen*) stands as the grammatical anchor for the declaration that “the old has passed away,” and its form carries significant theological weight.²³ This verb is the aorist active indicative of *παρέρχομαι* (*parerchomai*), a compound word that means “to go past, to pass by, or to disappear completely from the scene.” The aorist tense, as Daniel Wallace explains in his Greek grammar, views the action in its entirety as a single, completed event without focusing on its internal development or duration.²⁴ This grammatical choice means that Paul is not describing a gradual process of fading away but a decisive, once-for-all break with the old order of existence, including old prejudices, old sinful habits, old self-centered goals, and old ways of relating to God and others. Consequently, the old things are not merely suppressed, hidden, or temporarily set aside; they are declared to be definitively gone, having lost all their power and authority over the believer’s life.

The following clause, *ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινά* (*idou gegonen kaina*), introduces an element of exclamatory attention that Paul uses to jolt his readers into recognizing the extraordinary nature of what has happened.²⁵ The particle *ἰδοὺ* (*idou*), which is an aorist

²¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2003), 81.

²² For the background of the use of *ktisis* in the LXX, see Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton, *The Septuagint LXX: Greek and English* (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1851).

²³ Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 470.

²⁴ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 556.

²⁵ J.D. Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney, and Moisés Silva, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2011), 517.

active imperative meaning “look!” or “behold!” functions as a rhetorical device that demands immediate, focused attention and conveys that something truly new and unprecedented is taking place before their eyes. The verb γέγονεν (*gegonen*) stands in the perfect tense, third-person singular, of γίνομαι (*ginomai*), meaning “to become, to be created, to come into existence,” and the perfect tense indicates an action that has been completed in the past but whose results continue fully into the present.²⁶ Thus, Paul is not speaking of a future hope or a gradual development but of an accomplished reality: the new has already come, and it remains present and active in the believer’s life, producing ongoing effects in thought, word, and deed.

In the Byzantine text tradition, represented by the STE and BYZ variants, the sentence concludes with the additional phrase τὰ πάντα (*ta panta*), meaning “all things” or “everything,” which serves to universalize the scope of the transformation.²⁷ This addition emphasizes that no dimension of the believer’s existence remains untouched by the new creation: the mind, the will, the emotions, the conscience, relationships, work, worship, and even the way one looks at the physical world all become new. The purpose of life, the disposition of the heart, the guiding principles of action, and the standards by which one judges right and wrong are all comprehensively renewed.²⁸ This is not a partial renovation but a total reorientation, affecting the believer’s understanding of God, of Christ, of the world, of other people, and of oneself. Therefore, the declaration that “the new has come” is not a poetic exaggeration but a precise theological description of the radical and all-encompassing change that union with Christ produces.

New Characters as Believers

When Paul declares that “the old has passed away,” he is referring specifically to the old way of viewing the Messiah, other people, and the entire framework of religious and moral existence that characterized life before encountering Christ.²⁹ This comprehensive passing away includes the dismantling of long-held prejudices against Christianity, the abandonment of pride in ethnic or religious identity, and the relinquishment of reliance

²⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 474.

²⁷ Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas, eds., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 475. See also Robert Adam Boyd, *The New Testament: Byzantine Text Version* (Middletown, DE: Tcent, 2021); dan Robert Estienne, *The Greek New Testament Textus Receptus (Stephanus 1550)*.

²⁸ Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas, eds., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 475.

²⁹ Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas, eds., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 475.

on outward ceremonies and rituals as the basis for salvation. For Jewish believers, this meant that their former confidence in circumcision, temple sacrifices, food laws, and Sabbath observances had to give way to a new reliance on the finished work of Christ alone. For Gentile believers, the passing away of the old involved the renunciation of idolatry, the forsaking of ingrained sinful behaviors, and the rejection of self-effort as a means of earning divine favor, replaced by humble faith in the Savior. In general terms, the old things that pass away include all forms of spiritual pride, worldly attachments, sinful habits, and relationships that once took precedence over loyalty to God.³⁰

The new creation is not merely an improved version of the old person but an entirely different kind of being, possessing a new spirit, a new orientation, and a new destiny that distinguishes them sharply from their former identity.³¹ The Apostle Paul himself stands as the most dramatic illustration of this truth, because before his conversion he was a fierce persecutor of the church, a Pharisee of pharisees who sought honor within the Jewish community by destroying Christians, but after encountering the risen Christ on the Damascus road, he became the foremost missionary of the gospel, suffering willingly for the name he once sought to obliterate.³² This transformation was so radical that many of his contemporaries could scarcely believe he was the same man, and Paul himself described his former way of life as dung compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. The change that occurs in the new creation is not a surface-level behavioral adjustment but an inner transformation of the heart, as the stony, rebellious heart is removed and replaced with a heart of flesh that responds willingly to God's commands. As Herman Ridderbos explains in his commentary on Galatians, this is a work of God's almighty power, in which the believer dies to the old ruling power of sin before being raised to walk in newness of life, a process that mirrors the death and resurrection of Christ Himself.

From Paul's letters, we can identify at least five distinct aspects of the character transformation that defines the new creation, each of which touches a different domain of human existence.³³ First, in relationship with God, the believer moves from fear,

³⁰ On the incarnation of Christ as a pattern for the believer's life, see Susanto Dwiraharjo, "Inkarnasi Kristus Sebagai Pola Hidup Orang Percaya Menurut Filipi 2:5-8," *Manna Rafflesia* 12, no. 1 (2025): 48-68. https://doi.org/10.38091/man_raf.v12i1.512.

³¹ John Gill, *John Gill's Exposition Bible Commentary of New Testament*, 96.

³² John Gill, *John Gill's Exposition Bible Commentary of New Testament*, 96.

³³ Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 278.

condemnation, and alienation to filial intimacy, peace, and joyful confidence, addressing God as “Abba, Father” rather than as a distant judge. Second, in personal character, the reign of sin is broken, so that although sin may still be present, it no longer functions as the master or ruler of the believer’s life, and the image of God, defaced by the fall, begins to be progressively restored. Third, in associations and friendships, the new creation shows a marked preference for the company of God-fearing people, not out of exclusive elitism but because shared love for Christ creates natural bonds of affection and mutual encouragement. Fourth, in daily work and enjoyment, every task, whether sacred or secular, is performed for the honor of God, transforming ordinary labor into an act of worship and filling ordinary pleasures with thanksgiving. Fifth, in eternal prospects, the believer adopts an entirely new perspective on life, measuring success not by worldly attainment but by faithfulness to God and by the hope of resurrection and glory in the age to come.

The change that Paul describes is not a minor adjustment or a gentle improvement but a radical, comprehensive, and irreversible transformation that replaces the old self rather than merely adding new features to it.³⁴ As John Walvoord and Roy Zuck note in their Bible knowledge commentary, the soul must first die to sin before it can be revived to a righteous life, which means that genuine new creation always involves a decisive break with the past and a fundamental reorientation of the entire personality.³⁵ This is why superficial moral reforms, such as when a drunkard becomes sober or an angry person learns to control their temper, do not necessarily constitute new creation, because such changes can occur without any saving relationship with Christ. The true new creation, by contrast, is rooted in union with Christ, powered by the indwelling Holy Spirit, and oriented toward the glory of God, producing fruit that lasts for eternity rather than merely rearranging external behaviors. Therefore, to claim fellowship with Christ while continuing unchanged in heart and life is to misunderstand the very essence of what Paul means by being “in Christ” and becoming a new creation.

The implications of this radical transformation are both comforting and sobering, because they affirm the sufficiency of God’s grace while also demanding authentic, visible

³⁴ Herman Ridderbos, *The New International Commentary on Galatians*, 617.

³⁵ John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 1984), 574.

change in the believer's daily conduct.³⁶ The true believer, the one who is genuinely in Christ, has Christ dwelling in the heart through faith, and this indwelling presence inevitably produces a new quality of life that differs markedly from the former condition. Whereas once the believer was a child of Satan, following the prince of the power of the air and living according to the passions of the flesh, now the believer is a child of God, adopted into the divine family and sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Whereas once the believer was a slave to sin, leading ultimately to death and judgment, now the believer has been set free from sin's dominion and has become a slave to righteousness, pursuing holiness and eternal life. Because of this comprehensive change, the old things—the former loves, former loyalties, former ambitions, and former ways of thinking—have truly and decisively passed away, leaving the believer standing in a new world of grace.

New Experiences in Everyday Life

The transformation that results from being "in Christ" is not confined to the invisible realm of the human spirit but manifests itself in visible, tangible, and experiential ways that can be observed by the believer and often by others as well.³⁷ The imperative ἰδοὺ (*idou*), "behold" or "look," functions as a divine summons to pay attention to this visible dimension, indicating that the new creation is not a secret or purely internal event but something that can be perceived and testified to. Believers are therefore called to live in such a manner that others, looking at their lives, can genuinely recognize that they have been with Jesus, just as the Jewish leaders recognized Peter and John as having been with the Lord. This transformation is qualitatively different from any merely human change, because while human character improvements are often superficial, temporary, and limited in scope, the Pauline new creation is profound, radical, and enduring, reaching down to the deepest roots of personal identity. As Walvoord and Zuck emphasize, this is not a reformation that merely restrains evil impulses but a regeneration that eradicates the dominion of sin and communicates genuine, supernatural goodness to the soul.³⁸

In the Byzantine text tradition, where the words τὰ πάντα (*ta panta*, "all things")

³⁶ John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 574.

³⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 372.

³⁸ John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 578.

appear at the end of the verse, Paul's meaning becomes even more comprehensive, because he insists that absolutely every aspect of the believer's existence has been made new.³⁹ The purpose of life, which once revolved around self-gratification, social status, or material accumulation, now revolves around knowing God, enjoying His presence, and advancing His kingdom. The disposition of the heart, once inclined toward pride, anger, lust, and envy, is now progressively inclined toward humility, patience, purity, and love. The guiding principles of action, once determined by cultural convention, peer pressure, or selfish calculation, are now determined by the will of God as revealed in Scripture and applied by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, there is a new view of the Father, who is no longer seen as a harsh judge or a distant deity but as a loving, compassionate, and accessible Father; a new view of Jesus Christ, who is cherished not merely as a historical teacher but as a living Savior, constant companion, and coming King; and a new view of the world and the age to come, in which present sufferings are seen as light and momentary compared to the eternal weight of glory.⁴⁰

This change is not imaginary, fleeting, or merely subjective, but real, durable, and objectively verifiable in the way a person lives, speaks, and relates to others.⁴¹ Everything truly becomes new: the believer receives new life that is eternal in quality, new spiritual senses that perceive divine realities previously invisible, new abilities to serve God and others, new affections that love what God loves and hate what God hates, new desires that hunger for righteousness and thirst for holiness, and new perspectives that evaluate everything in light of eternity. As Adam Clarke observes in his commentary, after this transformation, God, humanity, creation, heaven, earth, and all that exists within them are seen in a completely new light, because the believer has been made new in Christ Jesus, and a renewed eye sees a renewed world.⁴² The old categories of judgment, fear, and selfish ambition fall away, and in their place arise wonder, gratitude, and a deep sense of calling to participate in God's redemptive mission.

³⁹ Susanto Dwiraharjo, "The Incarnation of Christ is a Great Mystery in Righteousness: Study Exegesis in Timothy 3:16," *MAHABBAH: Journal of Religion and Education* 5, no. 2 (2024): 114-133, <https://doi.org/10.47135/mahabbah.v5i2.119>.

⁴⁰ To see the perspective on suffering in the Book of Job, see Lewi Frank Francis, Handreas Sudarmiko Akimas, and Yusak Tanasyah. "Between Ashes and Hope: Practical Responds of Job's Suffering Today." *MODERATE: Journal of Religious, Education, and Social* 2, no. 2 (2025): 143-156. <https://doi.org/10.46362/moderate.v2i2.21>.

⁴¹ Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary: I Corinthians – Philemon* (Concord, CA: Wesleyan Heritage Publications, 2013), 73.

⁴² Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary: I Corinthians – Philemon*, 73.

For young believers who have recently repented and placed their faith in Christ, this experience of newness is often particularly intense and memorable, serving as a powerful confirmation of the reality of their conversion.⁴³ The Bible, which may have been read before as a confusing or even boring book, suddenly becomes alive, vibrant, and personally addressed to them, revealing beauties and truths they had never noticed despite years of exposure. The natural world—hills, valleys, rivers, the sun, the stars, gardens, forests—appears transformed, as if a fresh layer of beauty has been spread over everything, and they recognize with joy that this is their Father’s world, filled with evidence of His wisdom, power, and goodness. Even the faces of family members and friends look different, because the believer now sees them not merely as blood relatives or casual acquaintances but as souls for whom Christ died, potentially fellow heirs of grace. A new affection arises not only for fellow believers but also for enemies, for strangers, and for all humanity, because the love of Christ has been poured out in the heart by the Holy Spirit, breaking down old walls of hostility and indifference.

Thus, the change that Paul describes is a genuine passage from nature to grace, from the old realm of sin and death to the new realm of righteousness and life, accomplished entirely by God’s grace and received through faith.⁴⁴ This is the same transformation that all true children of God experience, regardless of their cultural background, social status, or previous moral history, because being in Christ transcends all such distinctions. The change is entirely different from any merely human process of self-improvement, because it does not simply add new powers to an old nature but replaces the old nature itself, affecting the understanding, the will, the conscience, and the affections all at once. At its core, this is the profound inner change for which David longed when he prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God,”⁴⁵ recognizing that external cleansing of the hands is worthless without internal renewal of the heart. Consequently, without such inner renewal, all external religious observances remain hollow, but where the new creation has truly occurred, the whole person is transformed from the inside out, and the life

⁴³ Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989), 54.

⁴⁴ John Muddiman and John Barton, *The Oxford Commentary on the Paul Epistle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 75.

⁴⁵ See more Mazmur 51:12, *Alkitab Indonesia Terjemahan Baru* (Jakarta: Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia, 1974) and Yusak Tanasyah, Wahyudi Purnomo, Handreas Sudarmiko Akimas, and Steven Phang. “Psalmsic Prophecies as Evidence that Jesus is the Messiah”. *Journal of Religious and Socio-Cultural* 5, no. 2 (2024): 86-99. <https://doi.org/10.46362/jrsc.v5i2.232>.

becomes a living testimony to the power of the gospel.

Practical Implications for Daily Life

The new creation that Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5:17 is not a momentary emotional experience or a one-time event that can be checked off a spiritual to-do list, but rather a lifelong process of growth, maturation, and progressive sanctification that continues until the believer is finally glorified.⁴⁶ Paul's own life provides the clearest illustration of this truth, because although his conversion on the Damascus road was sudden, dramatic, and instantaneous, the process of becoming a mature, effective, and Christlike apostle took many years of training, testing, suffering, and learning. In the same way, every believer who is truly in Christ will grow over time into a better person, with faith that becomes more robust, love that becomes more selfless, and character that becomes more closely aligned with the moral beauty of Jesus. This growth is not automatic or effortless, but requires intentional cooperation with the Holy Spirit, disciplined engagement with Scripture, active participation in the life of the church, and persistent resistance against the remaining vestiges of sin. Therefore, being "in Christ" means embarking on a journey of continuous transformation, not arriving at a static destination of moral perfection.⁴⁷

As the believer grows in union with Christ, spiritual realities that were once dim or distant become increasingly vivid, and the presence of God becomes more consciously experienced in the ordinary routines of daily life.⁴⁸ The Bible, far from being a collection of ancient documents or a rulebook of tedious obligations, becomes a living conversation in which the believer hears the voice of the Good Shepherd and discovers the heart, mind, and purposes of its divine Author. Life itself, even in its most mundane moments—eating, working, resting, conversing, playing—becomes fresher, more joyful, and more meaningful, because Christ dwells at the center of it all, infusing every activity with eternal significance. Even death, which for the unbeliever remains the ultimate terror and the final enemy, loses its power to frighten the one who is in Christ, because such a

⁴⁶ Luka Wassif, *Acts and Pauline Letters* (United States: Diocese of the Southern United States, 2006), 57.

⁴⁷ Widjaja Sugiri. "The Many Faces of Christ: Responding to Suffering and Transcendence in the Thought of Barth and Moltmann". *Indonesian Journal of Religious* 7, no. 1 (2024):47-62. <https://doi.org/10.46362/ijr.v7i1.65>.

⁴⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Systematic Theology*, 473.

believer knows that to depart and be with Christ is far better, and that death is merely the doorway into fuller, richer, and unending life. This profound reorientation of the whole person, from the smallest thought to the largest life decision, is the practical outworking of being a new creation in Christ.

Living as a new creation requires concrete, daily practices that reflect the reality of the old's passing away and the new's having come, and the New Testament provides clear guidance for these practices.⁴⁹ First, believers must learn to grieve over remaining sin, as Paul did when he cried out, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24), because genuine new creation produces a sensitive conscience that no longer treats sin lightly. Second, believers must cultivate a holy hatred for the old things that once enslaved them, as the psalmist declared, "I hate the double-minded, but I love your law" (Psalm 119:63), because love for God and hatred for sin are two sides of the same coin. Third, believers must actively struggle against sin, engaging in the daily battle that Paul describes in Galatians 5:17, where the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and victory requires persistent resistance and reliance on divine grace. Fourth, believers must put to death the old lusts and passions that characterized their former way of life, as Paul commands in Galatians 5:24 and Romans 6:11, treating the old self as crucified with Christ and therefore no longer having any rightful claim on their obedience.

A close, abiding relationship with Christ—remaining or dwelling *in Christ* (*en Christō*)—is the non-negotiable foundation for all genuine character renewal and for the practical outworking of the new creation in daily conduct.⁵⁰ As Warren Wiersbe observes in his Bible commentary, the new creation that God brings about through union with Christ will never die, because it is born not of perishable seed but of the eternal, imperishable Word of God that lives and abides forever.⁵¹ Such believers, having been born of God and made partakers of the divine nature, are destined to inherit glory and immortality, being made like the angels and ultimately like Christ Himself when He appears. The world, by contrast, has largely ceased to see authentic new creation on a wide scale, as much of what passes for Christianity has grown old, dull, and conformed to

⁴⁹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Systematic Theology*, 354.

⁵⁰ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 518.

⁵¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*, 518.

the patterns of this age rather than radiating the freshness and joy of the gospel. Yet wherever true new creation occurs, it appears again on earth with a freshness reminiscent of Eden itself, producing Christians who live with unfading joy, unfeigned love, constant prayer, and deep delight whenever the name of Jesus is spoken.

In conclusion, the Christian life, as revealed through the exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:17, is not a matter of religious routines, external observances, or mere mental assent to correct doctrines, but is rather a continuous, dynamic participation in the new creation that God has inaugurated in Christ.⁵² This study has demonstrated that the phrase *en Christo* in 2 Corinthians 5:17 denotes a participatory union that results in *kainē ktisis*—a radical, divinely wrought renewal of the entire person, affecting identity, character, relationships, work, worship, and eternal hope. The old has decisively passed away, as the aorist *parelthen* declares, and the new has already come and continues, as the perfect *gegonen* affirms, placing the believer in an already/not-yet tension that requires both grateful acceptance and active pursuit of holiness. Future studies may explore how this Pauline vision of new creation shapes not only individual spirituality but also community ethics, ecological responsibility, cross-cultural mission, and the church's witness in a world that desperately needs to see lives that have truly been made new. The call to every believer is therefore clear and urgent: live as a new creation, because in Christ, the old has truly passed away, and behold, the new has come.

CONCLUSION

The exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:17 has demonstrated that the phrase *en Christo* (“in Christ”) signifies far more than a positional or forensic declaration of righteousness, reaching instead into the very core of the believer's being and producing a radical, divinely wrought transformation that Paul describes as *καὶνὴ κτίσις* (*kainē ktisis*), a new creation.⁴⁵ The grammatical analysis of the aorist verb *παρῆλθεν* (*parelthen*) confirms that the old order of existence—including old prejudices, sinful habits, self-centered ambitions, and former ways of relating to God and others—has been decisively and irreversibly left behind, not merely suppressed or gradually improved. Conversely, the

⁵² Susanto Dwiraharjo and Bobby Kurnia Putrawan, “The Trinity and Cyber Culture: Crafting Theologically Responsible Analogies in the Digital Age”: a11206; Bobby Kurnia Putrawan & Ester Agustini Tandana, THE TRINITY IN CHRISTIAN LIFE: Exploring the Interconnections of Contemplation, Community, and Compassion. *QUAERENS: Journal of Theology and Christianity Studies*, 7, no. 1 (2025): 34-50. <https://doi.org/10.46362/quaerens.v7i1.301>.

perfect tense of γέγονεν (*gegonen*) in the clause “the new has come” indicates that this new creation is not a future hope but a present reality, already completed in its inception and continuing to produce effects in every dimension of the believer’s life. This transformation affects not only the believer’s legal standing before God but also personal character, social relationships, daily work, and eternal perspective, leaving no aspect of human existence untouched by the renewing power of the gospel. Therefore, to be “in Christ” is to participate in a dynamic, life-giving union that continuously reshapes the believer into the likeness of Christ, starting from the moment of conversion and progressing throughout the entire course of the Christian life.

The implications of this study for practical theology and for the daily lives of believers are both profound and urgently needed, especially in an age where the gap between religious confession and actual behavior remains wide. Authentic Christianity, as Paul presents it in this passage, cannot be reduced to baptism, church attendance, doctrinal assent, or any other external religious routine, because such activities, however valuable, do not automatically produce the new creation that God requires. Instead, genuine transformation flows from a living, abiding union with Christ, in which the believer draws strength, wisdom, love, and direction from the risen Lord just as branches draw sap from the vine (John 15:4-5). This union is maintained and deepened through intentional spiritual disciplines: grieving over remaining sin, hating the old things that once enslaved us, struggling against the flesh, and actively putting to death old lusts while cultivating the fruits of the Spirit. Consequently, pastors, teachers, and all who disciple others must emphasize not merely the initial decision to believe but the ongoing process of abiding in Christ, because only such abiding produces the visible, durable, and Christlike character that testifies to the reality of the new creation.

This study contributes to the broader field of Pauline theology by offering an exegetically grounded framework for understanding life transformation that integrates both the positional and the experiential dimensions of union with Christ, and it opens several avenues for future research. Future studies may explore how the concept of *kainē ktisis* in 2 Corinthians 5:17 relates to Paul’s teaching on the renewal of the cosmos in Romans 8:18-25, where the entire creation waits eagerly for its liberation from bondage to decay. Additionally, researchers could investigate the implications of the new creation for Christian ethics, particularly in areas such as racial reconciliation, economic justice, ecological responsibility, and cross-cultural mission, where the breaking down of old

barriers and the formation of new communities in Christ are directly relevant. The relationship between the already/not-yet tension of the new creation and the process of sanctification also deserves more detailed attention, as does the question of how churches can better cultivate environments that nurture abiding in Christ rather than merely managing religious programs. Ultimately, this study affirms that the Christian life is not a static state but a journey of continuous renewal, and every believer is summoned to live as a new creation because in Christ, the old has truly passed away, and behold, the new has come.

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