

“Are You A New Being?”

In addition to my interest in Biblical Studies, especially the Gospel of John, I have also focused on Systematic Theology. An important systematic theologian during the 1900’s was Paul Tillich. Although he died a few years before I entered Eden Theological Seminary, he is my favorite systematic theologian. Among his books, I found “The New Being” to be especially valuable. That book is a collection of sermons, which includes one titled, “The New Being”. Perhaps you noticed the Apostle Paul referencing *“a New Being”* in the final verse of our Lectionary Epistle Reading for today. Tillich referred to that verse in the opening paragraph of his “The New Being” sermon. **Tillich wrote, “Christianity is the message of the New Creation, the New Being, the New Reality which has appeared with the appearance of Jesus who for this reason, and just for this reason, is called the Christ. For the Christ, the Messiah, the selected and anointed one is He who brings the new state of things.”**

The Apostle Paul wrote about this “New Being” and our relationship with it in our Scripture. Although Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians provides a powerful message on this subject, his history and background kept the Apostle from fully recognizing and sharing Jesus’ radical message about the New Life – the New Being for you and me. Paul had been steeped in the beliefs and views of the party of the Pharisees. That group’s existence depended on their rigid demand that everyone fulfill every last detail of Jewish Law, so they could make themselves worthy of God’s Love – be righteous. This “works righteousness” frequently reasserted itself in Paul’s writing and thinking, even though he recognized one’s forgiveness – salvation – New Life in Christ (pause) was not the result of works righteousness but of God’s Loving Grace alone, as revealed in the Divine Parent’s Son, Jesus the Christ.

The Apostle’s insights and testimony about the way God has given us the gift of a New Relationship with the Almighty and made us New Beings in Christ are extremely valuable. However, Paul allows his past as “a Pharisee of the Pharisees” to creep back into his thinking and writing. For example, that happened in verse 10 when Paul wrote, *“For all of us must appear before Christ, to be judged by him. We will each receive what we deserve, according to everything we have done, good or bad, in our bodily life.”* Those words are an expression of works righteousness, which was espoused by the Jewish Legalists – the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law.

Stan Mast of Calvin Seminary recognizes Paul’s contradiction and writes, “It sounds as if Paul is taking away the very confidence he has just professed. How can he be sure that he will be with the Lord, if he will have to give an account to the Lord for all the good or bad he has ever done. How can he be sure that he’s done enough good?” Mast points out, “Well, of course, the answer is that we cannot lose our salvation at this judgment. **‘Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ....’ (Romans 8:1).**” Mast concludes, “Salvation is not by works, but by grace through faith. Judgment is on the basis of works, but God’s grace received by faith cancels the guilty verdict we deserve. So, Paul’s strong desire to please the Lord is not based on his terror of punishment, but on his deep reverence for the Lord who has already saved him. Because he is so confident that he will be with the Lord, he wants to please the Lord who has saved him.”

Unfortunately, Stan Mast put Paul’s message in that way, instead of the Apostle Paul doing it. **Further, the popular understanding of the Christian Faith and Life is more informed by Paul’s slips back to the philosophy of the Pharisees, instead of on the actual message Jesus declared and lived.** That is extremely ironic because Jesus was frequently engaged in conflict with the Pharisees, yet, through the common misinterpretation of Paul’s letters, most people understand the legalistic ways of the Pharisees to be Jesus’ message, even though what our Savior actually said or did went against the ways of the Pharisees! Further, because Paul wrote most of his letters before the New Testament Gospels were written, his momentary sliding back to the ways of the Pharisees influenced how the gospel authors of Matthew, Mark, and Luke framed their reports of Jesus’ disagreements with the Pharisees and their allies. It is no surprise then, how many readers of Scripture tend to want to merely switch places with the Pharisees – to become the New Pharisees – as the disciples frequently sided with the Pharisees against Jesus’ teachings during his public ministry.

Fortunately, the Apostle Paul finally got around to lifting up what is really important in Jesus’ message. **In verses 14 – 17, Paul wrote, “We are ruled by the Love of Christ, now that we recognize that one man died for everyone, which means that they all share in his death. He died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but only for him who died and was raised to life for their sake. No longer, then, do we judge anyone**

by human standards. Even if at one time we judged Christ according to human standards, we no longer do so. Anyone who is joined to Christ is a New Being; the old is gone, the new has come.”

Let’s take a few moments to examine those verses very closely. **Verse 14 begins with crucial information, “We are ruled by the Love of Christ”.** As people who belong to Jesus Christ, we are not ruled by the Laws of the Jews but by the Love of Christ! Jesus’ Love is that agape self-giving and sacrificial love, which he taught about, showed by the way he interacted with the ones the Pharisees called “sinners” – for he ate with them and healed them, and by the way he lived all the way up to and including his death on the cross.

You and I are enabled to be motivated to belong to Jesus and to live his agape love because, as Paul wrote, **“we recognize that one man died for everyone, which means that they all share in his death. He died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but only for him who died and was raised to life for their sake.”** Some emphasize Jesus had to die – to supposedly fulfill the requirements of the Jewish Laws. However, what Paul really described was Jesus’ agape love, which was exemplified in his self-giving death, was for the welfare of – not just the righteous but also for those the Pharisees labeled “sinners” – for all people! Note how I underlined the words “everyone” or “all” and that they occur three times in those two sentences. Frankly, that goes well with **Jesus’ own message in the Gospel of John 6:37, “I will never turn away anyone who comes to me” which has been lifted up through the United Church of Christ’s God Is Still Speaking Campaign with the slogan, “Jesus never turned away anyone and neither do we!”** Jesus’ welcoming of all people and dying for everyone is especially Good News to the multitude of folks, who aren’t part of a local church – who believe churches are full of Pharisees – hypocrites. Those God Is Still Speaking type of messages are what we could proclaim through a Digital Church Sign to reveal Christ’s invitation and Good News to the non-churched, if we raise the funds to buy and install it.

Although from time to time the Apostle Paul certainly came across judgmental, he, nevertheless, recognized those who belong to Jesus are to forsake the ways of being judgmental. Indeed, Paul wrote, **“No longer, then, do we judge anyone by human standards. Even if at one time we judged Christ according to human standards, we no longer do so.”** It was the Pharisees and their legalistic allies who claimed the authority to set the standards for judging “the sinners”. On the other hand, Jesus welcomed those supposed “sinners”. **As a New Being in Jesus Christ, we forsake human prejudice and judging others.**

In verse 17, the Apostle Paul summed up how those who belong to Jesus are changed people, saying, “Anyone who is joined to Christ is a New Being; the old is gone, the new has come.” Are you and I a New Being? Do we live out agape self-giving and sacrificial love? Do we follow Jesus’ example of welcoming everyone, even those society, like the Pharisees, would judge as sinners?

Just prior to the beginning of today’s Scripture, the Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians and us of the trustworthiness, power, and faithfulness of our Divine Parent. **In 5:5 Paul reminded us that God prepared us for our transformation into a New Being, “God is the One Who has prepared us for this change, and He gave us His Spirit as the guarantee of all that He has in store for us.”** The Holy Spirit is a great gift – to empower and guide us in living as a “New Being”. So, Paul calls for us to have courage and faith as we live as a “New Being”!

The Apostle reveals in verses 7-9, “For our life is a matter of faith, not of sight. We are full of courage and would much prefer to leave our home in the body and be at home with the Lord. More than anything else, however, we want to please Him, whether in our home here or there.” Because we are convinced – have faith in God’s Self-Giving and Suffering Agape Love shown in Jesus Christ, we are united to God’s Son and are made New Beings. As New Beings, we follow the example and teachings of Jesus for we want to please our God and our Savior!

With such great opportunity, God’s Spirit, and this New Life in Christ, we are to live out being a New Being! Doing so means we live agape love toward God, one another, and with everyone – all people. Sharing or declaring this New Life and Good News to everyone is especially important. I urge each of us to look for opportunities to share the word about our being a New Being. **Let us show in our daily lives – through living agape self-giving and sacrificial love that we are New Beings in Christ!** Amen.