



# Truth

## On Tough Texts

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### *What Does “New Creature” Mean?*

#### II Corinthians 5:17

**O**UR “TOUGH TEXT” THIS MONTH IS DIFFICULT only because of those who miss its critical application: **Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.**

The pivotal nature of this verse simply cannot be overstated. What does it mean to be a Christian? It means to be a **new creature**. The word **new** is the Greek *kainos*. While another word for **new** (*neos*) refers to something new in *time*, something that recently has come into existence, *kainos* refers to something new in *quality*, as it would be distinguished from something that is old and worn out, something that has never existed before.

**Creature**, then, is *ktisis*. In Classical Greek it meant the act of creation, the created thing, or the result of the act. It (and the verb *ktizō*) was often used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) to translate the Hebrew *bara* “to create from nothing.”

So what does it mean to be a **new creature**? It means that the Christian is not new in the sense of *time* (*neos*)—as in the date he received Christ as Savior—rather new in *quality* (*kainos*), a creature that has never existed before, a creature with a new character. When Christ comes into a life, *that life changes*. God’s Word everywhere declares, in fact, that a change is automatic when someone truly believes.

The issue of “Lordship Salvation” (an unfortunate term that has been used to criticize some teachers who are desperately fighting against today’s continued diluting of the gospel) has been a subject of much debate. If I may interject, I find it to be one of the most distressing

debates I’ve witnessed in my 35 years of ministry. It is a sad state of affairs when many today actually teach that there is a difference between “accepting Jesus” as *Savior* and then at some later date making Him *Lord*, when there is absolutely no such dichotomy or distinction in Scripture. While their motive is inarguably pure—namely, they wish to avoid any appearance of salvation by works—their conclusion is tragically faulty.

Taken to its logical conclusion, in fact, such a teaching—which is actually an American invention and not a historical position of the church—results in a new form of Universalism, which teaches that ultimately everyone will be saved. The teaching is that all one must do is “believe in Jesus” (whatever that means) to be saved. No repentance is necessary, no change of life is expected, and no responsibility is demanded. What is this if not a form of Universalism? How many people do you know whom you could in some way persuade to say, “Oh, yes, I believe in Jesus.” That’s easy. Why? Because He was a historical figure, just as real and easy to believe in as Abraham Lincoln. He lived, He taught, and He had a “religion.” You might even get a Buddhist to say, “Sure, I believe in Jesus,” and it’s certainly easy to get a Roman Catholic or a Mormon to say it. But does that mean they are saved? Further, one could even believe in Jesus’ teachings and accept His resurrection as authentic, but does that mean he or she is a true Believer?

After all, we should also add, “the devils also believe, and tremble” (Jas. 2:19). They believe in the facts concerning Christ, and that is exactly what many today view salvation to be. How many people are relying on some

vague “profession,” “commitment,” or some prayer they recited in Bible School when they were seven years old?

Our text, therefore, cuts to the very heart of this issue. All so-called “Lordship Salvation” means is that *true salvation results in an automatic change in the person who believes*. Is it not silly to talk about a “conversion” that doesn’t change anything? The word “convert” is from the Latin *convertere*, “to turn around, transform.” True salvation is, indeed, a conversion. This verse (and its context) says the believer (obviously from the moment of salvation on) *is* a new creature, not *will* be a new creature.

The story is told of a missionary who asked a Chinese merchant, “Have you ever heard the Gospel?” The merchant replied, “No, but I have seen it. I know a man who was a terror in this region. He was as fierce as an animal. He was an opium addict. But when he accepted the Jesus religion, he changed completely. Now his wickedness is gone. He is quiet and gentle.”<sup>1</sup> Countless illustrations like that one demonstrate the automatic change that comes in the true believer.

It is the height of contradiction to say that a person can believe in Jesus as Savior but reject Him as Lord simply because *a change of life automatically results in a change of lordship*. Before salvation, *we* were lord, but after salvation, *Christ* is Lord, not because *we* make Him Lord by some subsequent “decision,” but because *He is* Lord. That is what the Scripture says. If there hasn’t been a change of lordship, there has been no change at all.

One of the most vivid examples of this principle appears in Acts 19:8–10, where we read that Paul encountered many “hardened” (*sklērunō*, to make hard or stiff) hearts while preaching the Gospel in the synagogue for three months. But there were also those in Ephesus who believed. As verses 18–20 recount, the Gospel turned Ephesus on its ear; it changed that society. Those who were involved in occult practices burned their books on spells, sorcery, and other such things. Their life change was dramatically demonstrated by the value of those books. Five thousand pieces of silver today would be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. (We’re reminded here of how even some Christians today ignorantly dabble in such things as horoscopes and Ouija boards, things that ought to be burned.)

Verses 23–29 go on to say that believers no longer invested money in pagan practices or paraphernalia, which was a devastating blow to local commerce. Silversmiths were being driven out of business because people no longer bought silver shrines of Diana, which were household idols. Paul’s statement that these were “no gods” at all and the stir churned up by the silversmiths combined to trigger a riot. So serious was the situation that there was the danger of Diana worship being destroyed altogether.

*That* is what the Gospel does. It changes lives. If one chooses to call this “Lordship Salvation,” so be it, but the fact is: true *conversion* means real *change*. Christianity is not a creed, code, or a system of ethics. Christianity is a *life*, a new reality that comes when we trust Christ as Savior *and* Lord.

Another point that many overlook is that justification and sanctification are inseparably linked together, for they occur at the same time. We are not justified at conversion and then sanctified at a later date by some other “decision” or “experience.” While sanctification is in a sense *progressive* as we grow in grace and knowledge of Christ (II Pet. 3:18), it is first and foremost *positional*. When we come to Christ and are, therefore, justified in Him, we are at the same moment made holy, “set apart,” as we receive the righteousness of Christ (Rom 3:22; 4:11; 5:18; II Cor. 5:21). There is then an outworking of this holiness in everyday living: “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Rom. 6:22). After all, what does it mean to “be saved”? It means being saved *from* sin and *unto* holiness.

So, contrary to the “easy believism” that is prevalent today, there is no such thing as being *justified* without being *sanctified*. There is no such thing as spiritual *life* without spiritual *living*. Some immediately object by saying, “But you are adding to the Gospel; all one must do is believe.” On the contrary, we are not *adding* to the Gospel, that *is* the Gospel. Yes, all one must do is “believe,” but such *belief always results in obedience* (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; I Pet. 1:2). Faith and obedience are, in fact, so inseparable that we often find them used synonymously. Hebrews 5:9, for example, declares: “And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (cf. 11:8). What’s more, as we will detail later, the Greek behind “faith,” contrary to modern teaching, clearly and irrefutably implies obedience. Good works never *save* (Eph. 2:8–9; Tit. 3:5), but good works are always a *result*, an *evidence* of salvation (Eph. 2:10; Jas. 2:14–26).

It is, therefore, totally incongruous to say that we can believe in Christ but have absolutely no intention of following Him, obeying Him, or surrendering to Him. Certainly there is growth and an ever deeper understanding of what discipleship is, but to say that we can believe in Christ without becoming disciples is not only illogical, it borders on the heretical. While there are some disciples of Christ who are not true believers (Matt. 7:21–22; 8:21–22; Jn. 6:66), there is no true believer who is not a disciple, a follower, an imitator, an obedient servant of Jesus Christ. An acid-test of true salvation is a desire to obey Christ. If that desire is not present, something is seriously wrong.

Still there are those who want to divorce Christ’s Saviorhood from His Lordship, but the Apostles cer-

tainly didn't do so. Paul echoes our Lord's words when he writes of salvation in Romans 10:9–11:

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Verse 9 clearly emphasizes that salvation involves two actions: confessing (*homologeō*, “declare the same thing”) Jesus as Lord, and believing in the resurrection of Christ. But is this principle unique to the New Testament? No. It is rooted in Old Testament thought. To emphasize Lordship even more, Paul adds in verse 13, “For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved,” which is actually a quotation of Joel 2:32. In the Old Testament, the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord” was specially identified with worship of the true God. It spoke of worship, adoration and praise and drew attention to God's holiness, power, and majesty.

Please read and consider how it is used in the following verses: Psalm 79:5–6; 105:1; 116:4–5. Those verses emphasize that calling on the name of the Lord is to recognize who God is and to submit to His power, authority, and holiness. To say, as many do today, “Just call on Jesus to be saved,” betrays an ignorance of what that phrase means. It means to call on Him as *God*, as *Sovereign*, and as *Lord*.

Still there are those who insist, “All you have to do is believe in Jesus,” but this again shows a total ignorance of the meaning of the words they're using. I have read several Bible teachers who say such things as, “Faith does not mean obey,” or “Obedience has no part in believing something.” This, however, is patently false and demonstrates the increasing lack of study of the original languages by Bible teachers today. It is no wonder that there is so much false teaching on so many issues.

“Believe” and “faith” translate the Greek verb *pisteuō*. Its basic meaning is “to have faith in, trust; particularly, to be firmly persuaded as to something.”<sup>2</sup> But as one Greek authority points out, *pisteuō* also implicitly and indisputably carries the idea “to obey”:

The fact that “to obey,” as in the OT, is particularly emphasized in Heb. 11. Here the *pisteuein* [faith] of OT characters has in some instances the more or less explicit sense of obedience. . . . Paul in particular stresses the element of obedience in faith. For him *pistis* [faith] is indeed *hupakon* [obey] as comparison of Rom. 1:5, 8; I Thes. 1:8 with Rom. 15:18; 16:19, or II Cor. 10:5 with 10:15 shows. Faith is for Paul to *hupakouein tō euangeliō* [literally, “obedient to the good news”], Rom. 10:16. To refuse to believe is not to obey the righteousness

which the Gospel offers by faith, Rom. 10:3. . . . He coins the combination *hupakon pisteuō* [literally, “obedience of faith”], Rom. 1:5.<sup>3</sup>

It is, therefore, an incontrovertible fact that the word “believe” immediately and fundamentally demands lordship, because it has the underlying foundation of obedience, commitment, and submission.

It should be clear from such language that *this issue should not be an issue at all*. It is truly puzzling why some evangelicals argue otherwise. It should deeply grieve all of us, for it most certainly grieves our Lord. It is ludicrous, if not even blasphemous to the very character of Christ, to teach a distinction between His Saviorhood and His Lordship. To “believe” fundamentally demands Lordship because it includes the desire to submit and obey.

We can put this in the form of an axiom: *when someone believes something, regardless of what it is, that belief somehow changes them and results in some action or behavior that is characteristic of the belief*. In other words, true belief results in actions that reflect that belief.

How can one read Hebrew 11 and miss this truth? Every one of those characters had “faith,” but that faith *always*, without exception, resulted in an outward action. Noah did not say, “Well, if God said it's going to rain, then I believe it's going to rain, but that doesn't really affect me or demand anything from me.” No, Noah built an ark as a result of believing what God said. Was Noah and his family saved because he built a boat? Absolutely not, because God could have destroyed the boat like everything else. Noah was saved because He believed what God said, and that belief resulted in obedience. Works do not *save* us, but when we believe our works *prove* it. That is what the book of James is all about: faith without the evidence of works is a dead faith.

Columbus, for example, believed the earth was round and that he could sail to the New World, so he acted upon it and left Spain. To make it even more practical, all of us believe in gravity, and we act upon it by not jumping off tall buildings. We can put the matter another way: *truly believing something, being fully persuaded of it, and trusting in it automatically demands behavior that conforms to the belief*. To deny this, if I may be brutally frank, is just plain foolishness.

Applying this to salvation, to “believe in Jesus” means three things. *First*, it means to believe in Who He is, that He is God incarnate, Savior, and Sovereign Lord. *Second*, it means to believe in what He *did*, that He died for your sins and rose again from the grave. *Third*, it means to believe in what He *says*, to trust Him and His Word implicitly and desire to obey Him in all respects. To obey Him means we acknowledge His lordship and submit to His authority.

Before going on, let me make something clear. Lordship teachers are *not* saying “belief plus works equals salvation,” as some teachers blatantly accuse us of saying. We are *not* saying that to be saved you must not only believe but also obey. Such an idea is unscriptural because it says that salvation is not all of grace. This was, in fact, the issue in Galatia, as the Judaizers were teaching that not only did one have to believe to be saved but also had to obey the Law.

Rather, what the Lordship view is saying is that believing *results* in obedience and an intention to obey. If you are truly born again, if you truly believe, then there will be evidence of this in your life. Obedience does not *cause* your salvation, rather it *proves* your salvation.

How clear the Apostle John was when he wrote:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. (I Jn. 2:3).

And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us. (I Jn. 3:24)

There is one sure way to know if someone is a true believer, a true disciple of Jesus Christ: whether or not he (or she) obeys the Word of God. There are countless people walking around today who claim to be “Christian,” but they no more obey the Word of God than a thief obeys laws about burglary. Certainly, there are many who don’t know the Word of God (often because preachers aren’t telling them), but the numbers are increasing of those who, when they hear the Word, do not obey. Such willful and continuous disobedience, a lack of any intention or desire to obey God’s Word, indicates a lost condition.

Turning to our Lord Himself, He constantly emphasized that before someone believes, they must “count the cost” and then follow Him *unconditionally* (Lk. 14:26–33; see also Matt. 7, in which the whole context is a progression concerning salvation; 10:34–39; Lk. 6:46–49; etc.). People are being told today to, “Just believe in Jesus,” but Jesus said, in effect, “Stop and count the cost before you believe; following Me will cost you something.”

Our Lord also made it clear that just saying you are a Christian doesn’t make it so. In Matthew 7:21–23 He makes this sobering and frightening statement:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; *but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.* Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

What a terrifying passage! This is why Paul writes elsewhere that we need to “examine [ourselves], whether [we] be in the faith; prove [our] own selves” (II Cor. 13:5), and why Peter wrote that we should “give diligence to make [our] calling and election sure” (II Pet. 1:10) and lists the evidences of that in the context (vs. 5–9). It’s not enough to *call* yourself a Christian or even *say* Jesus is Lord. What *proves* you are a Christian? *Doing “the will of My Father in heaven.”* As the old expression goes, “Words are cheap,” and they seem to get cheaper every day as the Gospel is redefined in increasingly broad terms. But our Lord is in no way ambiguous—the *proof of salvation is obedience.*

Earlier in Matthew (7:14) our Lord says that few go through the narrow gate that leads to life. He also adds that there are many wolves that *look* like sheep (v. 15) but are not, and that we can identify them by their fruits (vs. 16–20).

Indeed, the two greatest evidences of true conversion are obedience to God’s Word (Jn. 14:15, 23; I Jn. 2:1–5; 3:21–24) and holiness of life (Eph. 4:24; I Thes. 4:3–4, 7; etc.). Those who do neither one are simply not true believers. If one chooses to call this “Lordship Salvation,” so be it, but the fact remains.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones well says:

We must emphasize that you cannot separate the Lord and Jesus. The person is one and indivisible. He is always the Lord. There is no such thing as “coming to Jesus.” In one sense, a man cannot even come to Christ. He can only come to the Lord Jesus. . . . A man cannot accept Him as Saviour only, and then perhaps later decide to accept Him as Lord, for He is always the Lord. . . . We do not “come to Jesus,” and we do not believe in Jesus: we come to the Lord Jesus, we believe in Him as He is.<sup>4</sup>

The New Testament nowhere separates Jesus as *Savior* from Jesus as *Lord*. He is either both, or He is neither. We say again in closing, the so-called “Lordship Salvation” controversy shouldn’t even be a controversy. The true believer knows Christ not only as Savior but also as Lord. The true Christian is a **new creature**.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Roy L. Laurin, *Life Matures! Devotional Exposition of the Book of First Corinthians* (Stationers Corporation, 1941), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Spiros Zodhiates *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (AMG Publishers, 1992), p. 1160.

<sup>3</sup> Gerhard Kittel (Editor). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1964; reprinted 2006), Vol. VI, p. 205.

<sup>4</sup> *God’s Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1* (Baker Book House, 1983), p. 321.

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