

New Creation in Christ: How Jesus changed us and our marriages (Fr. Josiah Trenham)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



“If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold new things have come.”[\[1\]](#) We come to the Holy Gospel at last and to the Christian way of life! The fullness of time has come and God has sent forth His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. How everything has changed! No aspect of human life remains as it was before Christ came. Everything has died with Him, and everything has been raised and transfigured in Him. All for us has been redeemed, transformed, deified, elevated, and, in a word, made Christian.

When Jesus came to earth He found us with lame limbs, weak and failing, and He perfected our bodies and restored them to a healthy condition, just as He corrected, molded, improved, and fulfilled the Old Law. St. Ephrem the Syrian describes some of the healing effects of the Incarnation on human nature in his *Hymn 37 On Virginity*,

“His body was newly mixed with our bodies, and His pure blood has been poured out into our veins, and His voice into our ears, and His brightness into our eyes. All

of Him has been mixed into all of us by His compassion, and since He loves his church very much, he did not give her the manna of her rival. He had living bread for her to eat. Wheat, the olive and grapes, created for our use- the three of them serve You symbolically in three ways. With three medicines You healed our disease. Humankind had become weak and sorrowful and was failing. You strengthened her with Your blessed bread, and You consoled her with Your sober wine, and You made her joyful with Your holy chrism.”[\[2\]](#)

God has become man, the chasm bridged, the mediation effected, righteousness perfected and modeled on the earth, death slain, the devil defeated, sin atoned for, the curse annulled, Hades destroyed, Christ resurrected, the God-man ascended, Paradise opened, human flesh enthroned in heaven, the throne of David occupied, the Kingdom established, the demons trampled, and man dignified. God is with us! Understand all ye nations and submit yourselves![\[3\]](#)



The Resurrection of Virginity and Marriage

The newness of Christian man expresses itself clearly in his marriage and sexual life. With the redemption and elevation of human nature has come the redemption and elevation of everything associated with it, including marriage. With the resurrection of Jesus Christ has come the resurrection of holy virginity, lost at the Fall. All of the outrageous and unspeakably glorious Gospel realities enumerated above have provoked an immense sea change in our way of life.

From Earth to Heaven

In the Gospel, the focus is no longer on the earth as it was in the Law, but on heaven. Until death had been destroyed by Jesus, and His Kingdom established on the earth, the promise of *heavenly* reward was an obscure dream and ineffective as a motivating factor for the people of God, which is why in the Law the Lord motivated His people by the promise of *earthly* blessing and security. Read Deuteronomy chapters 27-29 or Leviticus chapter 26. There you will find both the blessings and the curses of the Old Covenant. Covenant-keepers reaped tremendous earthly rewards: long-life, immunity from bodily diseases, seasonable weather, fruitful harvests, urban security, civil peace, protection from wild animals, fruitful child-bearing, and victory in war. You get the picture. Covenant-breakers, on the other hand, reaped painful earthly curses: sudden terror, consumption and fever, barren fields, empty harvests, defeat in war, death of livestock and children, and all this as “vengeance for the covenant.”[\[4\]](#) Do you see the emphases? Earthly things.

Jesus did not teach this way. Instead of a constant appeal to earthly blessings and curses, He appealed to the realities of heaven and hell, and to the highest motivation of all, love. The Lord promised the Kingdom, and great rewards and “a good defense” at His dread judgment seat. In fact, no one spoke more often and in more ways of the reality of eternal rewards, of heaven and hell, than the Lord of love Himself. Why would Jesus speak so much about hell? *Because He does not want anyone to go there.* He called upon His disciples to “seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness,”[\[5\]](#) and not to worry about earthly things at all. By His example and teaching He taught us to despise earthly rewards and punishments, as grown-ups no longer value children’s toys. We are not to fear those who can kill the body, but rather to fear Him who can destroy both the body and the soul in hell. [\[6\]](#) Christians are to have their eyes keenly fixed upon the rewards of the Kingdom, and upon the terrors of hell-fire.

Unlike Jews, Christians were not promised that their bodies, children, and livestock would be perfectly healthy and fruitful. Christians have not spent their lives looking

to possess of an earthly promised land, or full barns, or prosperous fields, or protection from disease, or fruitful physical reproduction, though these things remain blessings from God. Christians are promised and are to be ready at all times for just the opposite in this life. Our lot is persecution, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”[\[7\]](#) Our lot is suffering, “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”[\[8\]](#) Our lot is holy martyrdom, “If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel’s shall save it.”[\[9\]](#) We do not wear crosses around our necks for nothing! We are preparing to die for Christ. No longer is death feared; rather it is now scorned and despised, as has been demonstrated by the innumerable martyrs that have adorned the Church with their blood for the last two thousand years.

Martyrs, and faithful Christians who are willing to be martyrs, show that they are not seeking earthly rewards, but rewards as much better than those offered Old Testament believers as heaven is better than earth. We have been blessed, according to the Holy Apostle, with “every *spiritual blessing* in the heavenly places in Christ.”[\[10\]](#) Because Jesus is in heaven, heaven is where our heart is, where our mind is, and where our hope is. “Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”[\[11\]](#) We are not pining after children and earthly prosperity, but for Paradise itself. We are not seeking the increase of money, but the increase of the Holy Spirit.[\[12\]](#) We are not focused on visible and temporal things, but invisible and eternal things.[\[13\]](#) The hope of the people of God is no longer a *long life* on earth, but *eternal life* in the Kingdom of God.[\[14\]](#)

From Child to Adult

These new heavenly aspirations of Christians are firmly rooted and supported in a *new Gospel ethic* established by Jesus Himself. New Testament Law, the “Law of Christ,”[\[15\]](#) is a more demanding moral code than the Old Testament. Christ’s Law brings the Old Testament Law to fulfillment,[\[16\]](#) and applies it with a deeper, more internal and searching application for Christians.[\[17\]](#) Religious laws in the New Covenant are thus *much stricter* than are those in the Old Covenant.[\[18\]](#) Unlike the epoch of the Old Covenant, we New Covenant believers have climbed to a “loftier peak, we strip ourselves for a more rigorous athletic contest. For what else is commanded of us but that we live like those intellectual and incorporeal powers?”[\[19\]](#) Now, in the age of the Church, we are in a race with the angelic powers, and this has tremendous implications for marriage, virginity, and sexuality.

From Jew to Christian

This new and higher goal of life in the Christian Church is propagated by Jesus because man is now new and higher himself.[\[20\]](#) Not only has Jesus’ Incarnation, perfect earthly life, death, plundering of Hades, Resurrection, Ascension, Session at God’s right hand, and sending forth of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh on the Day of Pentecost, fundamentally redeemed and elevated human nature, but the grace of God which has been poured out upon mankind has greatly increased. The divine assistance given to man in the New Covenant is immense, for we have become partakers of the divine nature itself.[\[21\]](#) We have been mystically united in an intimate communion with the Holy Trinity. God in us, and we in God: this is the Christian life.[\[22\]](#) This union of God and man is effected, maintained, and deepened by the Holy Mysteries instituted by Christ Himself and administered in His Body, the Church, by the stewards of these mysteries, the Holy Apostles and their successors.[\[23\]](#) No longer are we living in the *shadows* and with the *types* of the Holy Mysteries as the righteous of the Old Covenant were. They had a type of baptism when they were baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea, but we have the real thing. They had a type of the eucharist when they ate the manna in the wilderness and drank from the rock, which followed them, but we have the real thing.[\[24\]](#) These types, being merely shadows of and pointers to the glorious Mysteries to come, did not bring radical regeneration to the people, however. They still were ensnared by sexual immorality, for which the Lord caused 23,000 of them to fall in a single day.[\[25\]](#)

“Our body, before Christ’s coming, was an easy prey to the assaults of sin. For after death a great swarm of passions entered also. And for this cause it was not lightsome for running the race of virtue. For there was no Spirit present to assist, nor any baptism to mortify. But as some horse that answereth not the rein, it ran

indeed, but made frequent slips, the Law meanwhile announcing what was to be done and what not, yet not conveying into those in the race anything over and above exhortation by means of words.”[\[26\]](#)

Now the end of the ages has come upon us. We have been baptized into Jesus Christ, and in this baptism have been mystically united to Christ, have received complete remission of sins, and have been born again of water and the Spirit. We have died to the old man who was enslaved to lusts, and have been united to Jesus’ Resurrection in our baptisms so that we might walk in newness of life.[\[27\]](#) We have been sealed by God’s Holy Spirit of promise in chrismation, our own personal Pentecost.[\[28\]](#) By eating Jesus’ body and drinking Jesus’ blood in the holy eucharist, we abide in Him and have eternal life.[\[29\]](#)

Thus, man has been ennobled and received more divine aid, yet at the same time the ethical bar has been greatly elevated. This is how we are to understand His command that we *surpass* the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. With the coming of more grace have also come more and greater trials.[\[30\]](#) Christ has transformed human capacity, giving man wings without changing fundamental human nature. It is like iron coming into contact with fire: the iron becomes fire, but retains its own nature. With the coming of the Holy Spirit, the flesh of man has become lighter, “wholly spiritual,” “crucified in all parts,” and “flying with the same wings as the soul.” This transformation has rendered self-denial possible and turned hunger, stripes, and prisons into painless undertakings.[\[31\]](#) Old Covenant ways of living, including the areas of marriage and sexuality, are beneath New Covenant Man. St. John Chrysostom says,

“Since we have been vouchsafed a larger and more perfect teaching, God having no longer spoken by the prophets, but ‘having in these last days spoken to us by His Son,’ let us show forth a conversation far higher than theirs, and suitable to the honor bestowed on us. Strange would it be that He should have so far lowered Himself, as to choose to speak to us no longer by His servants, but by His own mouth, and yet we should show forth nothing more than those of old. They had Moses for their teacher, we, Moses’ Lord. Let us then exhibit a heavenly wisdom worthy of this honor, and let us have nothing to do with the earth.”[\[32\]](#)

Let us have nothing to do with the earth. We will see now how Christians expressed their new life in the elevation of marriage, and the embrace of holy virginity.

[\[1\]](#) 2 Corinthians 5:17.

[2] McVey (1989), p. 425.

[3] These powerful words from Isaiah (LXX) 8:10b, 9a, and again 10b, are chanted as a troparion during the Service of Great Compline. Cf. Essey (1989) *The Liturgikon*, Engelwood, NJ: Antakya Press, pp. 76-77.

[4] Leviticus 26:25.

[5] St. Matthew 6:33.

[6] St. Matthew 10:28.

[7] 2 St. Timothy 3:12.

[8] Philippians 1:29.

[9] St. Mark 8:34-35.

[10] Ephesians 1:3.

[11] Philippians 3:20.

[12] St. Luke 11:13.

[13] 2 Corinthians 4:18.

[14] St. John 17:3.

[15] St. James 1:25.

[16] St. Matthew 5:17-20.

[17] St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 16 on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, Vol. 10, pp. 103-115. This entire homily is devoted to explaining just how Christ did not abolish the Law, but fulfilled it. At the same time Chrysostom would agree with Tertullian who wrote, "The New Testament is compendiously short, and freed from the minute and perplexing burdens of the Law." *Against Marcion*, ANF, Vol. 3, p. 349.

[18] St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 19 on the Statues*, NPNF, Vol. 9, p. 469. As an example of this St. John writes, "If under the law it is necessary for a thief to give four-fold, how much more under grace?" *Homily 52 on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, NPNF, Vol. 10, p. 326. And another example, "If, where the getting of wealth was allowed, and the enjoyment of it, and the care of it, there was such provision made for the [sic] succoring the poor, how much more in that Dispensation, where we are commanded to surrender all we have?" St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 on Ephesians*, NPNF, p. 69.

[19] St. John Chrysostom, *Against those co-habiting with women*; Shore (1983), p. 202.

[20] St. John Chrysostom, *Homily XI in Romans*, NPNF, Vol. 11, p. 411.

[21] 2 Peter 1:4.

[22] St. John 14:23.

[23] 1 Corinthians 4:1.

[24] 1 Corinthians 10:1-4.

[25] 1 Corinthians 10:8-9.

[26] *Homily XI in Romans*, NPNF, Vol. 11, p. 411.

[27] Romans 6:3-4.

[\[28\]](#) 2 Corinthians 1:21-22.

[\[29\]](#) St. John 6:50-58.

[\[30\]](#) St. John Chrysostom, *Interpretation of the Prophecy of Isaiah, Prologue*, p. 36.

[\[31\]](#) St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 13 on Romans*, NPNF, Vol. 11, p. 435.

[\[32\]](#) St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 15 on the Gospel of St. John*, NPNF, Vol.14, p. 53.

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