

This passage in Ephesians was born years earlier. I like how Frederick Beuchner tells the story ([Peculiar Treasures: A Biblical Who's Who](#), page 129).

"It was about noon when he was knocked flat by a blaze of light that made the sun look like a forty-watt bulb, and out of the light came a voice that called him by his Hebrew name twice. "Saul," it said, and then again, "Saul, why are you out to get me?" and when he pulled himself together enough to ask who it was he had the honor of addressing, what he heard to his horror was, "I'm Jesus of Nazareth, the one you're out to get." We're not told how long he lay there in the dust, but it must have seemed like at least six months. If Jesus of Nazareth had what it took to burst out of the grave like a guided missile, he thought, then he could polish off one bowlegged Christian-baiter without even noticing it, and Paul waited for the axe to fall. Only it wasn't an axe that fell. "Those boys in Damascus," Jesus said. "Don't fight them, join them. I want you on my side," and Paul never in his life forgot the sheer lunatic joy and astonishment of that moment. He was blind as a bat for three days afterwards, but he made it to Damascus anyway and was baptized on the spot. He was never the same again, and neither, in a way, was the world."

Paul knew what it was like to have his life changed by Jesus the Christ. When he says, "Anyone who is in Christ, is a new creation, the old has past, behold the new has come, he speaks from experience. No one can say, "He doesn't know what he is talking about!" The staunch, conservative Hebrew scholar, who had been there when Stephen was stoned and who, thereafter, became the Sanhedrin's hatchet man to the point that he was on his way to Damascus with a warrant to put in chains and bring back to Jerusalem for trial and stoning, any who were followers of Jesus. Instead, he met Jesus. He found himself loved and wanted by the very one he was out to destroy. What he had been thinking and doing wasn't held against him. He was given a new life.

When Christ gives us the new life there is freedom and joy. We are freed from our past. Our sins are forgiven. We are, if we allow it to happen, freed from our guilt or shame. The new life holds joy because we know we are loved unconditionally. We are loved by God and by our Christ. He is our savior but also our friend and companion who will never desert us or give up on us but always walk beside us and be there for us. Jesus did this for many folks: The shunned woman of Samaria at the well. She must have run all the

way back to town, sharing such a joy that she brought the whole town came to meet Jesus --- The woman caught in adultery, about to be stoned. Jesus forgave her. Her tears turned from fear and sadness to joy and thanksgiving --- Zacchaeus the crafty tax collector. When Jesus came to Zacchaeus' house for dinner, so did salvation. With a smile on his face and a heart filled with joy, he was found the next morning out in the neighborhood repaying all his victims fourfold.

New life in Christ means that what has been our life changes. No longer do we live for ourselves but for our Savior. Often it means that what we found so important loses its importance as one group of nuns declared in their confession: "In Christ, what was very, very large becomes very small and what was small becomes very, very large. If nothing changes, there is nothing new. One person imaged it this way. "If I had a car with an engine that was ready for the grave, I'd have a new engine put in it. I'd take it to a mechanic who would install the new engine. If when I got it back, it ran just as poorly, I'd begin to wonder if the old reality had really been changed or just cleaned up." (Christian Personal Ethics, C.F.H. Henry, 1957). I saw that once in a young man. I was asked to visit him in Charity Hospital in New Orleans. He was dying and was to be given a bone marrow transplant, which was just beginning to be performed at that time. It would save his life. We talked multiple times. He spoke about how great this was and how he was going to change his life, turn it around, live differently for himself and his worried wife. He had been wild, drank too much and got in fights. He had the surgery. It was successful and several months later he left the hospital with a new life. But he didn't change. A year later he was killed in a drunken bar fight. Paul affirms and insists that the new life must be different from what was. This is true for those who have lived a "good life" just as much as those who have taken a low road.

The new life has to be lived for Jesus and for others not centered around one's own self. It was not to be the normal life of the culture around us. The new life is not about being first or winning by having the most money, toys, or fame. It is about what the Lord did and would do and wants us to do -Did Jesus put himself first? Did he stand upon his own rights and demand freedom to do whatever he wanted? Did Jesus put down and hurt or did he not he act in love for every person he met? Did he get at all costs and hoard, or did he share? Did Jesus hold on to anger and make sure he got even, or did he forgive and seek to reconcile with a brother or sister before the day had ended, even before his very last breath? Was Jesus bitter at the hand life gave him? Was he filled with wrath, and did he slander others or gossip about his disciples? Was there any malice in him? What he was, was humble and lowly

of heart, tenderhearted and forgiving. The new life is the life we see in Jesus. He is our model; he is our mentor.

Not everything changes in this new life. Priorities and behaviors change but, in some ways, Christians are still the same even in the new life. Saul though he was now Paul and had a new direction and goals was still a Hebrew, a scholar who could debate with the best of them. He still was a person of great passion, just passion in a different direction. He still saw things as right or wrong and was adamant at times. Paul was still driven. He was just driven to share the Good News of Jesus, he was driven to help people find new life through Christ, he was driven to spread the gospel throughout the whole world because his Lord was to go to return and establish the kingdom of God. I like what Frederick Beuchner put into the mouth of Jesus during the conversion of Paul. "I want you on my side." We are called into new life where God may surprise us. God working through us can accomplish far more than we can ask or imagine. We may discover brand new things about ourselves that shock us and everyone around us. But no question, God will use what we bring to the table and which we already possess. We are chosen because He wants us on his team, and he will use who we are and the gifts we have. Simon who became Peter the Apostle and Saul who became Paul the great missionary to the Gentiles would probably not have been first round draft choices. But Jesus saw their potential, the gifts that were already in them and called out their name. So, it is with us. We need to change but Christ also sees in us the makings of one of his people., one of his saints. Part of the good news of the new life is that Christ can melt us, mold us, fill us and WILL use us.