

A New Creation Is Everything
By Dane Perry
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Until Christians and people of other faiths or persons with no faith, stop dividing the world between the good and the evil, the insiders and the outsiders, the saved and the unsaved, those destined for heaven and those destined for hell, those who have the truth and those who do not, God and His peaceable kingdom continues to wait patiently for us.

Yet two thousand years ago Paul gave us the remedy. Paul concluded his letter by taking the pen from his scribe and forcefully scrawling in his large script, “For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but a new creation is everything.”

For Paul, the cross brought about a change of cosmic proportions. The law had divided the world into the circumcised and uncircumcised. All of life was lived by these reference points. But the cross signaled the coming of “a new creation,” one in which the old boundaries had been obliterated.

If we do not let go of our tribalistic, dualistic way of thinking and acting that sees the “outsider” as someone less than a child of God, as someone who needs to change and become like us, we will not see or experience anything of the power and love that Paul calls “the new creation.” We are all—Christians, non-Christians, people of faith, people of no faith—we are all children of God.

Western Christianity has been dominated by the dualistic way of thinking for most of its history. And it certainly hasn’t made us more loving or kind or hospitable towards people different from us. Indeed, we are all capable of evil and yet, we also have the potential to overcome evil with good. Like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, good and evil run through every heart.

Theologian Paul Tillich echoes Paul the Apostle’s understanding:

“If I were asked to sum up the Christian message for our time in two words, I would say with Paul: It is the message of a ‘New Creation.’ ...Christianity is the message of the *New Creation*, the *New Being*, the *New Reality* which has appeared with the appearance of Jesus who ... brings the new state of things.

“For Paul and for the readers of this letter, [verse 15] meant something very definite. It meant that neither to be a Jew nor to be a pagan is ultimately important; only one thing counts, namely, the union with Him in whom the New Reality is present....Circumcision is a religious rite, observed by the Jews; sacrifices are religious rites, observed by the pagans; baptism is a religious rite, observed by the Christians. All these rites do not matter - only a New Creation....Christianity is more than a religion; it is the message of a New Creation. Christianity as a religion is not important - it is like circumcision or like uncircumcision; no more, no less.”

For the disciples and Paul, their experience of the living Christ confirmed that God was at work in the person of Jesus. God sustained and strengthened Jesus, not with coercive power, but with persuasive power, enabling Jesus to bear the hatred, cruelty and animosity of worldly powers, without reacting in kind by returning evil for evil.

Ultimately, what did God do in and through Jesus? God forgave those worldly powers. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Such is the power of God's all-encompassing love.

But His love is not passive, weak resignation; it is the extraordinary potency of the new creation.

On Sunday morning Cantor Michael Weisser and his wife Julie were unpacking boxes in their new home in Nebraska, when the phone rang. The voice said, "You will be sorry you ever moved here, Jew boy," then hung up. Two days later, the Weissers received a packet in the mail. The note read: "The KKK is watching you, Scum." Inside were pictures of Adolf Hitler, caricatures of Jews and graphic depictions of dead blacks and Jews. The note read: "The Holohoax was nothing compared to what's going to happen to you."

The Weissers called the police, who said that it looked like the work of Larry Trapp, the state leader or "grand dragon" of the Ku Klux Klan. Though Trapp was confined to a wheelchair because of late stage diabetes he was a suspect in the firebombings of several African American homes the burning of the Indochinese Refugee Assistance Center.

Trapp lived alone in a drab efficiency apartment. On one wall he kept a giant Nazi flag and a picture of Hitler. Next to these hung his white klan robe. His guns were within instant reach.

Michael Weisser became indignant when Trapp launched a white supremacist TV series on a local public-access cable channel, featuring men and women saluting a burning swastika and firing automatic weapons. He called Trapp's KKK hotline and left a message: "Larry, do you know that the very first laws that Hitler's Nazis passed were against people like yourself who had no legs or who had physical deformities or physical handicaps? Do you realize that you would have been the first to die under Hitler? Why do you love the Nazis so much?" And then he hung up.

Weisser continued the calls to the machine. Then one day Trapp picked up, "What the ____ do you want?" he shouted. Weisser said, "I just want to talk to you." Trapp, said, "Stop harassing me," and wanted to know why Weisser was calling. Weisser remembered a suggestion from his wife: "Well, I was thinking you might need a hand with something, and I wondered if I could help. I know you are in a wheel chair and I thought maybe I could take you to the grocery store or something."

Trapp was too stunned to speak. Then he cleared his throat. “That’s okay,” he said. “That’s nice of you, but I’ve got that covered. Thanks anyway. But don’t call this number anymore.”

“I’ll be in touch,” Weisser replied. During a later call, Trapp admitted he was rethinking a few things.” But then went back on the radio spewing the same old hatreds. Furious, Weisser picked up the phone. “It’s clear you’re not rethinking anything at all!” After calling Trapp a liar and a hypocrite, Weisser demanded an explanation.

In a surprisingly shaky voice, Trapp said, “I’m sorry I did that. I’ve been talking like that all of my life . . . I can’t help it . . . I’ll apologize.” That evening Weisser led his congregation in prayers for the grand dragon.

The next evening the phone rang at the Weisser’s home. It was Trapp. He said, “I want to get out, but I don’t know how.” The Weissers offered to go over to Trapp’s place that night. Trapp hesitated, then agreed. When the Weissers entered his apartment, Trapp burst into tears.

Trapp resigned from his racist organizations and wrote apologies to the many people he had threatened or abused. A few months later, when Trapp learned that he had less than a year to live, the Weissers invited him into their two-bedroom/three-children home. When his condition deteriorated, Julie quit her job as a nurse to care for him, sometimes all night. Six months later he converted to Judaism, and three months later he died.

That is the power is the power of transforming love. *That* is the new creation. And one doesn’t even have to be a Christian to express or experience it. Trapp once said in an interview: “[The Weissers] showed me such love that I couldn’t help but love them back. It’s just an experience I’ve never had before.”

Nonviolence and forgiveness make reconciliation possible. They make the new creation possible. It is how we become just and good and kind and compassionate and persistent in love. The way of the cross leads to resurrection; the way of non-violence and forgiveness leads to new life.

In Jesus’ resurrection God affirmed that the unconditional love revealed in the life of Jesus will prevail. God is patient. No matter how long it takes, we believe that *love will have the final word*. The power of forgiveness and restorative love that redeems evil is available to all of us. But first, we must acknowledge it and then seek to live it, no matter how difficult or distant it may seem.