

BECOMING

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New Eyes

Christianity is not simply a list of things we believe, or behaviors we approve. Christianity is a new way of looking at things — whether God or life, relationships, motives, obligations, joys, sorrows, goals, fulfillment, hardships, satisfaction. Everything is seen through new lenses. Everything feels familiar, yet unknown. Everything smells like adventure!

Some of you have been finishing the Gospel of Matthew this past week, and will begin reading the “Gospel of Paul” (his Letter to the Romans) this week. Others have just completed reading Romans. In this letter, Paul lays out as clearly as he can this Good News about Jesus. It is so new (even though it fulfills ancient promises from God) that it requires careful explanation so that the readers don’t remain stuck in old concepts or old behavior patterns.

This is a brand new way of looking at things for his readers (and for us), even though its roots are ancient. So John also wrote:

MSG 1 John 2:7 *My dear friends, I’m not writing anything new here. This is the oldest commandment in the book, and you’ve known it from day one. It’s always been implicit in the Message you’ve heard.⁸ On the other hand, perhaps it is **new, freshly minted** as it is in both Christ and you—the darkness on its way out and the True Light already blazing!*

So, that’s how it works: from an old root springs a new branch — me or you — every ancient truth becomes new again and our eyes begin to see things in a new way.

Abraham’s Trust

MSG Romans 4:1 *So how do we fit what we know of Abraham, our first father in the faith, into this new way of looking at things?² If Abraham, by what he did for God, got God to approve him, he could certainly have taken credit for it. But the story we’re given is **a God-story, not an Abraham-story.**³ What we read in Scripture is, “Abraham entered into **what God was doing for him**, and that was the turning point. He trusted God to set him right instead of trying to be right on his own.”*

*⁴ If you’re a hard worker and do a good job, you deserve your pay; we don’t call your wages a gift.⁵ But if you see that the job is too big for you, that it’s something only God can do, and you trust him to do it—you could never do it for yourself no matter how hard and long you worked—well, that **trusting-him-to-do-it is what gets you set right** with God, by God. Sheer gift.*

⁶ David confirms this way of looking at it, saying that the one who trusts God to do the putting-everything-right without insisting on having a say in it is one fortunate man:

⁷ “Fortunate those whose crimes are carted off, whose sins are wiped clean from the slate.

⁸ Fortunate the person against whom the Lord does not keep score.”

Paul made the Way of Salvation so plain:

MSG Romans 4:9 *It was by embracing what God did for him that Abraham was declared fit before God.*

And he was declared fit before he was circumcised as the sign of his covenant.

Life-Change

In the same way, I was declared fit, set-right-with-God, before I joined a church or had read the Bible. It all began late one evening, when I realized I had been dodging God instead of pursuing Him. I said I was a seeker of truth, but when I got close to the truth about Jesus Christ, I wanted to argue or change the subject. The only explanation I can give for that behavior is that I was uncomfortable thinking that Someone else could tell me what to do with my life. I wanted to come to the knowledge of truth on my own terms and in my own time. I wasn't willing yet to surrender my right to be the master of my life.

When I realized I was just being argumentative instead of genuinely pursuing the truth (whatever it might look like), I also realized that I could not progress any farther on my own — I knew what I approved and preferred, but I had no real grasp of the truth.

I liked picking and choosing my way along — holding on to what suited me and leaving behind what seemed uncomfortable. I was my own yardstick, and by my measurement, I was doing all right.

Then I was confronted with Jesus. At first, I thought of Him as another establishment-rebel like myself, also picking His way along. But then I heard something else: Jesus wasn't doing His own thing; He only did what His Heavenly Father was doing. And He said He did it all for me (and for you). His will was surrendered and His aim was loving and sacrificial.

I couldn't say the same. My will was my own and my aim was what suited me. I thought God and others were lucky to have me. I considered my good deeds as noble generosity on my part.

I know, it sounds bad. And it was. That night I realized it. That night, I repented and I prayed. I said, "Jesus, I don't even know if You exist. But if You do exist, I want You to come into my life and give me the truth that You have to give me."

To make a long (37-year) story brief, He did just that. And He changed my life. He's been doing that for thousands of years in hundreds of millions of peoples' lives.

MSG Romans 4:14 *If those who get what God gives them only get it by doing everything they are told to do and filling out all the right forms properly signed, that eliminates personal trust completely and turns the promise into an iron-clad contract! That's not a holy promise; that's a business deal.*

MSG Romans 4:16 *This is why the fulfillment of God's promise depends entirely on **trusting God and his way**, and then **simply embracing him and what he does**.*

Trusting God

"Trusting God and His way..."

How many of you here have ever wondered if God could really be trusted? I don't mean to suggest that you ever abandoned Him... but that you had pause to wonder (and before you give your answer, know this: He already knows what the truth is and what your answer *should* be).

Doesn't God do some things, which if He were a man, you would think He hated you or didn't care for you even a little bit? And it gives us pause...

Yet, we are learning to trust God and His way, although His ways are not the same as ours.

NLT Isaiah 55:8 *“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord. And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. ⁹ For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.*

We call it “faith,” if we believe that Jesus is real, yet work real hard to please Him and do the things we think He expects of us. This is head-faith. But Abraham had heart-faith. He didn’t just “believe *in*” God; Abraham actually *trusted* God. He trusted God’s motives. He trusted God’s aims. He trusted God’s methods. He trusted God’s timing. He trusted God’s power to perform what He had promised.

Embracing Him

“Simply embracing Him and what He does.”

I see a young girl climbing onto the back of a motorcycle as her dad revs the engine. She wraps her arms around him and squeezes him tight as the bike leaps forward and the wind whips her hair behind her. She is not afraid. Her look is one of sheer pleasure as she embraces her dad tightly and goes where he goes.

You can ride with Jesus that way. Holding tight and enjoying the ride. You don’t have to steer and you don’t have to care about which direction to follow — He’ll do all that. You just embrace Him and hang on for the ride.

First Things First

MSG Romans 4:17 *We call Abraham “father” not because he got God’s attention by living like a saint, but because God made something out of Abraham when he was a nobody. Isn’t that what we’ve always read in Scripture, God saying to Abraham, “I set you up as father of many peoples”? **Abraham was first named “father” and then became a father** because he dared to trust God to do what only God could do: raise the dead to life, with a word make something out of nothing. ¹⁸ When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he couldn’t do but on what God said he would do.*

“Abraham was first named ‘father’ and then became a father.”

God made somebody out of a nobody. And how did He do it?

First, God *called* him “somebody.” Then, Abraham *became* somebody.

First, He called you a “child of God,” when you scarcely knew Him. Then, leaning on Him, you actually became one.

NIV John 1:12 *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave **the right to become children of God.***

“The right to become...” When you received Jesus Christ as your Forgiver and Leader, He gave you “the right to become.” And become God’s child you did, not on the basis of your behavior, but of your faith in Jesus.

First, God called you “holy” (a saint), when you had hardly changed at all. Then, you began to actually become holy. You began to love things you once hated, and began to hate things you once loved!

First, God called you “whole,” when as yet you wrestled with all kinds of hangups and deficits. Then, you actually began to be free and to heal. Soon, you had something to give to others in the way of compassionate care.

NKJV Romans 4:17 *God... calls those things which do not exist as though they did.*

NASB Romans 4:17 *God... calls into being that which does not exist.*

Re-Creating Us

It is the power of the Great Creator all over again! He speaks and it becomes so! Only now He is at work on the inside.

He is calling those things which do not yet exist in your life into being. He speaks of them as though they already existed! For in His mind and heart and will, they do.

Here are several things He has said about you:

You are a friend of God.

You are the light of the world.

Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

You are a citizen of Heaven.

You are a minister of reconciliation.

You are God’s workmanship.

You are a member of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people specially belonging to God.

At times, you may be focused on all the ways you are *not yet* those things. But you are becoming. And as you follow Jesus Christ, He will make sure that you become everything He has said you would be. Not by force of will, nor strength of mind, but by the Spirit of the Lord (Zechariah 4:6).

Philippians 2:13 *For **God is working** in you, giving you the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases Him.*