

# Baptism – The Big Change

2 Corinthians 5:17

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**“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).**

Matt and Cindy were married today. They were not married yesterday or the day before or even when they woke up this morning. But today that changed. Matt had dated Cindy for a couple of years. They had spent a lot of time together, becoming almost inseparable. They went out on dates nearly every Friday night. They were dating, but they were not married. As Matt approached his college graduation, he decided that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with Cindy. He bought a ring. One night, during a riverside walk after a nice dinner, Matt got down on one knee and asked Cindy to marry him. Amid the tears and smiles, Cindy happily said yes. Matt and Cindy were engaged, but they were still not married. More steps remained.

They spent the next year planning a wedding. Invitations, dresses, tuxes and decorations became the subject of countless conversations. Eventually, the wedding plans were complete and the reservations were made. Matt and Cindy had a wedding planned, but they did not yet have a marriage.

Finally, Matt and Cindy stood before a preacher and an assembly of witnesses. They gave their vows. They exchanged rings. And finally, the preacher announced them “husband and wife.” They kissed, their friends and family applauded and they smiled like never before as they walked down the aisle hand in hand. Matt and Cindy were now married.

What had changed? Five minutes earlier they had been committed to each other, but they were not married. The change from “single” to “married” involved both a commitment and a ceremony. Now, after the ceremony, their families consider them married. The government considers them married. God considers them married. A simple ceremony, but a big change.

Helen experienced a similar change today. She moved to the United States several years ago, going to school and eventually working in the medical field. She lived and worked with Americans, but she was not an American. She applied for citizenship and passed a test on basic American history. A date was set for her naturalization ceremony. She would soon be an American, but not

yet. One more step remained.

Finally, today she stood with a large group of other immigrants, repeated a pledge of commitment to the United States, listened to several speeches about American responsibility, and was officially declared an American citizen. She smiled, and the crowd cheered because things were different now. When she awoke this morning, she was still an immigrant working in a foreign nation. But now this land is her land. She has inherited all the rights and privileges of an American citizen. A simple ceremony, but a big change.

Change, Christ and Baptism

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul described a change even more monumental than marriage or citizenship. The change he had in mind was one of eternal significance: the change in one's life that comes through Jesus Christ. He said, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."

A new creation! What in the world was Paul talking about? Christians are still people, not new creatures. There is no caterpillar-to-butterfly transformation when we go from "out of Christ" to "in Christ." Or is there? Clearly, Paul was describing a spiritual newness rather than a physical one. He was saying that there is a Grand Canyon-sized gap between the spiritual lives of those who are in Christ and those who are not. The change is so great that Paul could only describe Christians as entirely new creatures. They are spiritually different from the rest of the world.

But how does that change take place? Actually, here we can take a lesson from the wedding and citizenship analogies. After all, the Bible uses those very images when describing the Christian change. When you again Ephesians 5:25-33., observe closely that Paul said the relationship between Christ and the church is like a marriage. If we are members of Christ's church, we have been spiritually "married" to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Look further at **Ephesians 2:19**, where Paul reminded his readers about the change experienced by those who are now in Christ Jesus: "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."

Being "in Christ" means we have entered into a spiritual marriage contract. We have become citizens in His kingdom. And, as we might expect, the change process is very similar. We must first decide we want to be in Christ, a decision that comes from faith in who He is. We then must take the proper steps toward making that decision a reality which starts with a commitment to

living for Him. Finally, we must go through the ceremony at which the change actually occurs.

Baptism, of course, is that special ceremony that changes us from being in the world to being in Christ. Remember again **Romans 6:3**, where Paul wrote

that we are “baptized into Christ Jesus,” and **Galatians 3:27**, where Paul wrote that all who were “baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” If you were to read the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation, only one act is described as putting us into Christ: baptism. Before baptism we are not in a spiritual relationship with Him; we are outside of His kingdom. At baptism we are put “into Christ,” joining Him in a spiritual relationship and becoming a citizen in His kingdom. And that is a big change — a ‘new creation’ change. But exactly what changes when we are in Christ?

## A CHANGE OF STATUS

In marriage, a person’s status changes from “**single**” to “**married**.” In naturalization, a person’s status changes from “**foreign**” to “**American**.” And in baptism into Christ, a person’s status changes from “**sinner**” to “**Christian**.” We take the name of Jesus Christ — after all, it is in His name we are baptized (Acts 2:38). But this change of status is more than just a name designation. **It is a change of our spiritual status before God.**

Again we go to **Ephesians 2**, where verse **12** describes our status before we were in Christ: “ At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

Paul painted a bleak picture. When we are “without Christ,” look at our status. (1) We are excluded from God’s chosen people. (2) We have no part in the promises God gives to His children. (3) We have no hope. (4) We do not have God. It is a sad story to be sure. Our lives are empty. There is no hope for eternity. We are on our own.

But then we are baptized into Christ. What does the Bible say is “in Christ”? Please observe these verses:

- Eternal life is in Christ. **1 John 5:11** – “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.”
- Grace is in Christ. **2 Timothy 2:1** – “. . . Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

- Salvation and eternal glory are in Christ. **2 Timothy 2:10** – “. . . That they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”
- Redemption and forgiveness of sins are in Christ. **Colossians 1:14** – “In Whom [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”
- All spiritual blessings are in Christ. **Ephesians 1:3** – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”

To put it simply, we become saved children of God in Christ. In baptism, our status changes from excluded to chosen, from lost to saved. A simple ceremony, but a big change.

## **A CHANGE OF OUTLOOK**

During a marriage ceremony, we make vows of commitment: For richer or poorer, in sickness or health, we pledge to love and be faithful to our spouse. Life goes from being about me to being about us.

In a U.S. naturalization ceremony, an oath of allegiance is repeated. Immigrants pledge to renounce their allegiance to foreign nations and to support and defend the Constitution against all enemies. Thereafter, the new citizen has a different outlook. The United States becomes his or her highest political allegiance.

When we are baptized into Christ, we are making a similar pledge. In taking His name, we are committing ourselves to live for Christ and work for His goals in this world. Thereafter, we have a new outlook on life. We get a hint of this new outlook in **2 Corinthians 5**, the very chapter where Paul wrote that we are new creatures in Christ. For example, look at what He wrote about Christ’s death in verse **15**: “And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”

Jesus died for us — not only for forgiveness of sins but also to help us gain a new focus in life. Namely, He wants us to stop living for ourselves and start living for Him. Most people are self-centered. They will push anyone and anything out of their way to get what they want. Jesus wants

us to be different. He wants us to love God above all things (Matthew 22:37-38). He wants us to love our neighbors as ourselves (v. 39). Our outlook changes from **selfish** and **worldly** to **faithful** and **loving**. When we are baptized, we pledge ourselves to a new outlook on life. A simple ceremony . . . But a big change.

## **THE GOD OF NEW CREATIONS**

We serve a God who makes things new. He created our amazing world out of nothing. He continues to create new physical things in His world through childbirth and the annual coming of spring. He has promised that He will one day create a new heaven and a new earth for His people.

He also makes new creations out of people like you and me through baptism. We are “born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). And in that new birth, God transforms our lives into something wonderful. We go from lost, selfish, sin-filled people to saved, caring and forgiven Christians. An empty, hollow life becomes purpose-filled and even eternal. Paul knew a big change when he saw it. We are new creatures indeed.

## **God’s Plan for Man’s Salvation**