Creation and New Creation

DOUGLAS J. MOO
WHEATON COLLEGE

The phrase “new creation,” used twice in the letters of Paul (Gal 6:15, 2 Cor 5:17), appears abruptly in both contexts and has therefore been subject to several different interpretations. This article argues that the phrase is best understood as a broad description of the “new state of affairs” inaugurated through Christ’s first coming and to be consummated at his second coming. This interpretation fits with the usual meaning of the phrase in Jewish literature and makes best sense in both contexts where it occurs. Though the phrase cannot, then, be limited to cosmic renewal, it includes this element and therefore provides some basis for environmental stewardship by Christians today.

Key Words: creation, new creation, Galatians, eschatology, ecology, κτίζω

On Earth Day in the Spring of 2008, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi cited Scripture in support of the importance of environmental protection. She said, “The Bible tells us in the Old Testament, ‘To minister to the needs of God’s creation is an act of worship. To ignore those needs is to dishonor the God who made us.’ On this Earth Day, and every day, let us honor the earth and our future generations with a commitment to fight climate change.” Of course, the words Speaker Pelosi quoted do not appear in the OT, as the media gleefully pointed out. Internet wags suggested that Speaker Pelosi may have been quoting the “Book of Hezekiah,” or the “Greenpeace Bible,” or a Hallmark card. But the source of Speaker Pelosi’s words and whether she thought she was quoting a specific text or summarizing OT teaching are not my concern. My interest, rather, lies in a

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1. In her remarks, Speaker Pelosi apparently stated specifically, “the Bible tells us in the Old Testament.” However, the version of the speech on the official Speaker of the House web site has a slightly different wording: “The Bible tells us that to minister to the needs of God’s creation is an act of worship, and that to ignore those needs is to dishonor the God who made us. On this Earth Day, and every day, let us pledge to our children, and our children’s children, that they will have clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and the opportunity to experience the wonders of nature” (Online: http://speaker.gov/issues?id=0060 [accessed November 24, 2009]).

2. There is some question about whether Speaker Pelosi thought she was quoting an actual text or intended to summarize in her own words what she thinks the OT teaches. However, in an earlier speech, quoting the same language, she referred specifically to Isaiah; this suggests
bigger issue that the incident and the debates that occurred in its wake highlight: how the Bible may be used to address modern issues, such as climate change, to which the Scriptures do not explicitly speak. This question has particular importance to members of this society who are committed both to the integrity of Scripture and to its relevance for our current context. Surrendering the former, of course, makes it easy to be relevant. This tactic is common in our postmodern hermeneutical climate, exemplified in the case of environmental issues by the Earth Bible Project. Arguing that the “voice of the earth” has been suppressed in past interpretation, the spokespersons of this project elevate concern for the earth to the central value through which the Scriptures are to be read, interpreted, and applied. The voice of the earth is to be privileged above all else. Anything in the Bible that suppresses that voice must be reinterpreted or shoved to the side. Thus, for instance, the Gen 1 teaching about humans being uniquely made in the image of God must be suppressed in the interests of concern for the earth.3 The Earth Bible Project has produced innovative and sometimes useful interpretations. But its tendency to subordinate the voice of Scripture to the voice of the earth is a serious problem. Faced with approaches of this sort that in practice abandon an authoritative voice for Scripture, evangelicals sometimes respond by retreating to a kind of rigid historical exegesis that deliberately brackets out the concerns of our own world. But this would be a mistake in the opposite direction, in its extreme form creating an unbridgeable ditch between the Bible and the issues that press upon us so insistently. Climate change, along with a host of related environmental concerns, is one of the biggest of those issues, and it is quite appropriate, even necessary, to allow them to set our agenda for careful biblical-theological study. I am reminded of the reaction of so many of us to Roe versus Wade, as this landmark Supreme Court decision sent us back to Scripture in a search for resources that might give the Bible a voice on the side of the unborn. Of course, putting the matter this way raises urgently the concern of subjectivity. Concern to address our ecological crisis can exercise a powerful bias in our interpretation.4 The problem is a real one—but it must be recognized that the bias can come from more than one direction. While the problem has that she thought she was quoting a specific text (Online: http://www.pbs.org/kcet/tavissmiley/archive/200710/20071022_pelosi.html [accessed November 24, 2009]).

3. The agenda of the “Earth Bible Team” can be found on their web site: www.webofcreation.org/Earthbible/earthbible.html (accessed November 24, 2009). See, more recently, the introduction (by Norman Habel) to Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics (ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 1–8.

been exaggerated, it is undeniable that generations of biblical interpreters have understated the place of the material world in the Bible because of the powerful current of dualism in the Western intellectual tradition. And who can doubt that the tendency to reject environmentalism, root and branch, among Western Christians is affected by our concern to protect our affluent lifestyle?

We have come to understand that neutrality in our interpretation of Scripture is not possible, or even, perhaps, desirable. Like a scientist who sets up an experiment in an effort to confirm a hypothesis, I, as a biblical theologian, turn to Scripture seeking to confirm my suspicion that the Scriptures provide valuable resources to believers as we address the ecological crisis of our time. Am I, then, foredoomed to come out where I started? Does my work in the end differ from the Earth Bible folks’ only in my attempt to cloak it in the pious garb of biblical authority? I hope not; and I think not. For, at the end of the day, I seek be constrained by what I actually find in the Bible. Despite my “biased” starting point, I hope and believe that my results are ultimately shaped by what is actually in Scripture.

If, then, we are unhappy about Speaker Pelosi’s way of using the Bible to speak to environmental issues, it is our job, as custodians of God’s word, to chart a better course. Proof-texting will not do. What is needed is a sustained and creative engagement with the teaching of the Scriptures about the created world. This engagement will frankly acknowledge its starting point in the ecological crisis of our time. But its ending point will, by God’s grace, bring biblical truth to bear on that crisis.

As a small contribution to this project, I offer this paper on one small piece of the NT cosmological puzzle: the phrase “new creation.” Despite the fact that this phrase occurs only twice in the Bible, in Gal 6:15 and 2 Cor 5:17, the language of new creation is very common in contemporary discussions of the biblical teaching about the natural world, where it is usually used to describe the re-created world that will follow our present creation. NT scholars, as we will see, use the phrase in a variety of ways,


8. Among many examples I could cite, see John Polkinghorne, The God of Hope and the End of the World (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), who has a chapter entitled “New Creation” that focuses on the relationship between this creation and the new world to come.
but they, too, often use it broadly to designate the new era or situation that Christ’s death and resurrection have introduced into salvation history. In his recent popular-level survey of biblical eschatology, *Surprised by Hope*, for instance, Tom Wright refers very often to “new creation” in this sense. But, as far as I can see, Wright never mentions the two biblical texts in which the phrase appears. I do not intend this as a criticism of the way Wright and others are using new creation language. It is a quite-appropriate way of designating a concept that is taught in Scripture by means of a variety of words and images. But the point, of course, is that this general use of the phrase cannot claim any particular warrant in Paul’s use of this language unless we build an exegetical-theological bridge from these texts to the wider concept. It is this bridge building that I propose to do in this paper.

Interpretations of the phrase “new creation” in Paul take three general directions: that “new creation” refers to the transformed Christian, to the transformed community of Christ, or to the transformed universe. I argue for a broad view that includes all three. Specifically, I will argue for the following proposals:

1. “New creation” alludes to a concept of “universal” restoration found in the OT (and especially the latter part of Isaiah) and certain Jewish apocalyptic texts.
2. Interpreted within the framework of Paul’s inaugurated eschatology, “new creation” finds its initial fulfillment in the salvation of individual human beings and the creation of a new humanity and its ultimate consummation in a renewed universe.
3. Because “creation” is part of “new creation,” the phrase carries important implications for Christians’ stewardship of the created world.

I will move from the basic lexical data, to background, to the two key texts and finally to some implications for our topic.

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11. J. Louis Martyn warns that “new creation” is “the kind of expression that easily trails off into the nebulous realm of pious rhetoric” (“Apocalyptic Antinomies in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians,” *NTS* 31 [1985]: 413).

The lexical data are clear and relatively uncontroversial. Paul uses three Greek words regularly translated with “creation” language in English: the verb κτίζω and two substantives derived from it, κτίσμα and κτίσις. The word κτίζω appears more than 60 times in the LXX, almost always with God as the subject. Nevertheless, the word is not the most common way to denote God’s creative activity. The two substantives are even more rare. All three words cluster in the latter books of the LXX. Almost half of the occurrences of the verb and all the occurrences of the two substantives come in books with no extant Hebrew original. Paul uses the verb κτίζω 10 times, the noun κτίσμα once, and the noun κτίσις 11 times. This last word is the one that Paul uses in his “new creation” references. As its ending suggests, κτίσις can refer to the act of creation, and Paul uses the word with this meaning in Rom 1:20. But his 10 other uses of the word refer to the result of God’s creative act: either an individual “created thing” (or “creature”) or the “creation” in general. The distribution across these two meanings is debated and is one of the issues we hope to resolve in this paper. But I argue that 8 of 10 refer to creation in a general sense. Almost all interpreters agree that the 4 occurrences in Rom 8:19–22 have this meaning, whether the reference is to all of creation or, as I think more likely, to nonhuman creation. BDAG take κτίσις in Col 1:15 to refer to an individual creature, but here the consensus of the English translations should be followed: Paul claims that Christ is the “firstborn over all creation” (TNIV). Colossians 1:23 is more difficult, but here also I think Paul probably has in view the proclamation of the gospel in “all creation” rather than to “every creature.”

Before we leave the lexical area, it will be useful to note the relationship of this creation language to other relevant terms in Paul. Negatively, Paul never uses the merism “heaven and earth” to denote the entirety of creation, although he uses both words together in several contexts where the effect is similar (1 Cor 8:5; Eph 1:10, 3:15; Col 1:16, 20; negative in


14. The word κτίσις is a textual alternative for κτῆσις (“possession”) in Ps 103:24[104:24]. Another substantive, κτίστης, “creator,” which is used in 1 Pet 4:19, follows a similar pattern, with seven of its eight occurrences found in books with no Hebrew original.

15. See my Epistle to the Romans (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 513–15. As Adams points out, the sense of “non-human creation” for κτίσις has a precedent in Wisdom (Constructing the World, 79).

16. So ESV, NASB, NET, in contrast to NIRV, NAB, TNIV. See my Epistle to the Colossians (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 146–47.
Col 3:2, 5; see Eph 4:9). Paul never uses φῦσις in our typical modern sense of the word “nature,” “the created world apart from humans.” Rather, φῦσις refers to the “way things are”—implicitly as a result of God’s act of creation. Especially significant for our topic is the comparison between “creation” and “world” (κόσμος). As Edward Adams has shown, “world” and “creation” are not polar opposites in Paul.17 While “world” sometimes functions within Paul’s apocalyptically colored worldview to denote the spatio-temporal realm of sin, death, and evil, it more often describes, neutrally, the world of human beings or the comos in an all-encompassing sense. As a human-defined and human-defiled construct, the “form of this world” is “passing away” (1 Cor 7:31). But, as the object of God’s good creative activity (Rom 1:20), the world is what Abraham, and his children, will inherit (Rom 4:13). The language of “creation” shares none of this duality, functioning always positively in Paul. In one sense, then, “world” and “creation,” while never used by Paul in parallel, at least overlap significantly. In another sense, the two are contrasted; at least Paul implicitly contrasts “this world” and the “new creation” (Gal 6:14–15). Of course, the very hope for a “new” creation suggests that the original creation, though not bad, is nevertheless in some sense either incomplete or in need of renewal.

**BACKGROUND**

The OT and Jewish roots of the phrase have been thoroughly analyzed in an important article by Peter Stuhlmacher and in the books of Ulrich Mell, Edward Adams, and Moyer Hubbard.18 I have neither the time nor the competence to repeat or significantly critique their presentation of the data. I will content myself with a brief summary and one or two salient points. The phrase “new creation” never occurs in the OT. It does occur infrequently in Jewish literature, the exact number being difficult to determine because of textual and translational issues. But five texts deserve serious consideration: Jub. 1:29, and 4:26, 1 En. 72:1, 1QS 4:25, and 2 Bar. 44:12.19 All five passages share three features: (1) “new creation” language is introduced without explanation or elaboration, suggesting an allusion to a well-known concept; (2) the phrase refers to the final state of affairs after God’s climactic intervention on behalf of his people;20 and (3) new

17. He summarizes this major point of his monograph, Constructing the World, in his conclusion (pp. 239–47).


19. Some other texts that are sometimes mentioned are 4 Ezra 7:75, 2 Bar. 32:6.

20. Some scholars think that language elsewhere in the DSS might suggest that the community viewed its present circumstances as a “new creation.” See esp. 1QH 11:20b–22a: “And
creation refers to a wide-ranging set of circumstances, probably encompassing the cosmos.

Of course, we must consider more than this handful of linguistic parallels when considering the possible background to Paul’s “new creation.” Our attention is drawn particularly to Isaiah, whose prophecy, especially in chaps. 40–55, is remarkable for the ubiquity of creation language. The prophet seeks to stimulate hope among exilic Israel by reminding them of the creative power of God. Isaiah’s point is that the new deliverance that God will accomplish for Israel is so much greater, so decisive, and so far-reaching that it will be as though they have been created anew. Isaiah 43:15–19 is a good representative text, especially because Paul alludes to it in one of his “new covenant” passages:

“I am the L ord, your Holy One, Israel’s Creator, your King.” This is what the L ord says—he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”

God, who “created” Israel initially by delivering his people from Egypt, will “create” Israel again by bringing the nation back from their exile. This Isaianic theme might suggest that Paul uses “new creation” to refer to the Christian community as the place in which the “return from exile” prophecies find their ultimate fulfillment. There is some truth to this, as we will see. But this view fails to do justice to the overall theme of “new creation” in Isaiah. For, in his familiar prophecies about a “new heavens and new earth,” Isaiah envisages an ultimate salvation that extends beyond the people of Israel or even the land of Israel to include the entire cosmos: a “new heavens and new earth” (Isa 65:17–22; cf. 66:22–24). It is quite unlikely, given the usual meaning of “creation” in Paul, that he would use

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“new creation” to allude to this Isaianic expectation without some reference to the cosmos.

The expectation that God’s final salvation would embrace the whole cosmos is widespread in Second Temple Jewish literature, especially in apocalyptic. In some passages, a destruction of the present world and recreation is envisaged (e.g., 2 En. 70:9–10; Apoc. Zeph. 12:5–8; Sib. Or. 3.92, 4.186, 7.118–49; As. Mos. 10:1–10; cf. 4 Ezra 6:25); others envision a renewal of the present earth (e.g., 1 En. 45:4–5; 2 Bar. 32:6, 49:3, 57:2; 4 Ezra 6:13–16, 7:75–80; Apoc. Ab. 17:14; Sib. Or. 3.670–760, 5.271–74). In light of this evidence, most interpreters have concluded, in the words of Adams (who is summarizing Mell’s thorough study): “the expression ‘new creation’ was an established, technical term in Jewish apocalypticism, referring to the new or transformed creation expected to follow the destruction or renewal of the world.”

The evidence justifies this conclusion about the concept of new creation, and it has led most contemporary scholars to conclude that Paul must have something like this in view. However, this conclusion is premature. While acknowledging the cosmological sense of the phrase that we have outlined, Hubbard also draws attention to the use of creation language in the OT and Judaism to designate human transformation. Jeremiah and Ezekiel, for instance, predict that God will overcome Israel’s failure to follow God’s laws by giving his people a new heart. Joseph and Aseneth uses creation language to describe conversion from paganism to Judaism—although, in contrast to the impression sometimes given, rather sparingly. Older interpreters regularly shed light on Paul’s new creation language by citing the rabbis’ application of “new creation” language to inner renewal and forgiveness. Hubbard draws attention to these metaphorical applications of creation language in his attempt to resurrect the older anthropologically focused interpretation of new creation in the face of the current dominant cosmological view.

In these battles over background, it is helpful methodologically to distinguish between concept and language. The phrase “new creation” appears to be confined, in literature predating Paul, to the concept of cosmic


renewal. Creation language, on the other hand is applied metaphorically to a variety of concepts—among them, Israel’s return from exile (Isa 40–55), inner human renewal (Jeremiah and Ezekiel), and conversion to Judaism (Joseph and Aseneth). “New creation,” then, may be a fair description of these ideas—although it may be significant that, apart from later rabbinic texts, as far as I can determine, the actual language “new creation” is not applied to these concepts. At the risk of oversimplifying, then, we might say that the question we face in defining “new creation” in Paul is this: is he referring to the relatively well-developed concept of cosmic renewal? Or is he using the language “new creation” as a metaphor to denote some other concept—return from exile or internal transformation? With the issue before us in these terms, we can now turn to the Pauline evidence.

**Galatians 6:15**

I begin with Galatians because, adopting the South Galatian view of the letter’s destination and an early date, I think it was written some years before 2 Corinthians. Paul refers to “new creation” in the closing verses of his letter to the Galatians: “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation” (6:15, TNIV). The TNIV rendering masks the slightly abrupt syntax of the original: “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but—new creation” (οὔτε γὰρ περιτομή τί ἐστιν οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ καινὴ κτίσις). Paul’s reference to circumcision touches on the central concern of the letter: to convince the newly converted Gentile Christians in Galatia to renounce a heterodox gospel being propagated by people he calls “agitators” (5:12). These agitators were supplementing the gospel that Paul had proclaimed to the Galatians by insisting that Gentiles could belong to God’s people only if they placed themselves under the law of Moses (2:16, 4:21, 5:4)—a condition marked above all by undergoing the rite of circumcision (5:3, 6:12). Paul counters this false teaching by stressing the epochal significance of the death and resurrection of Christ. He sounds this note at the very beginning of the letter. In an addition unparalleled in Paul’s prescripts, he refers to God the Father as the one who “raised [Jesus Christ] from the dead” (1:2). Similarly, in 1:4, he expands his typical “grace and peace” wish by describing Christ as the one “who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age” (1:4). Resurrection is not explicitly mentioned again in Galatians, while the death of Christ and its significance are highlighted again and again. The cross occupied center stage in Paul’s original preaching in Galatia: “Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified” (3:1). Through Christ’s death

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27. Hoegen-Rohls curiously restricts the possible background for Paul’s new creation to Greek equivalents, which leads to the conclusion that Paul has coined the phrase (Christina Hoegen-Rohls, “Wie klingt es, wenn Paulus von neuer Schöpfung spricht? Stilanalytische Beobachtungen zu 2 Kor 5,17 und Gal 6,15,” in “. . . Was ihr auf dem Weg verhandelt habt” [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001], 145–53).

28. Adams (Constructing the World, 226–27) puts the issue in somewhat similar terms.
God “redeems” people from their condemned status under the curse of the law (3:13; cf. 4:5). And, as Christ’s death effects the transfer from “old age” to new, so, as believers identify with Christ, they find themselves transferred from the old age to the new. Referring to his own experience as representative of other believers, Paul claims that he has “been crucified with Christ” and so lives a totally new life (2:20). Similarly, he claims that he will boast only about the cross of Christ, because it is through Christ that “the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (6:14).

This last text, which immediately precedes the verse we are interested in, is particularly significant. Paul describes a dramatic and thoroughgoing shift in his value system. The language of the “world” here takes its meaning from Paul’s foundational spatio-temporal framework of salvation history. The “world” is the fallen and sinful world, with particular focus on the value system of that world. It functions as a close equivalent to “old age” in 1:4. “New creation” in v. 15 is the counterpart to that world and its values. In a move typical of Paul’s polemics in Galatians, he dares to associate God’s old covenant requirement of circumcision with this worldly system of values that has now been judged by Christ’s death and resurrection. Significantly, it is not only circumcision that has no value in this new “world” but uncircumcision as well. This pair of terms draws our attention to two other passages in Galatians. Sharing both the basic structure of 6:15 along with the terminology of 6:15a is Gal 5:6: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” And sharing the Christological focus of 5:6 as well as the contrasting structure of both 5:6a and 6:15a is Gal 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ” (3:28). These texts together assert that the coming of Christ introduces a whole new state of affairs in the world. No longer do distinctions of ethnicity, social class, and gender that are determinative for this world matter. All “simply human” factors become meaningless in the face of God’s world-transforming work in his Son Jesus Christ. The old state of affairs is ended. What matters now is faith, which has both anthropological and sociological significance in Galatians. Because God’s work in Christ is an act of grace, all humans, Jew and Gentile alike, must respond in faith. And because God’s work in Christ is for all people without distinction, faith and not law and circumcision is the appropriate response. Paul argues both: “because grace, therefore faith,” and “because it is for all, therefore faith.” But faith, however prominent in 5:6 and throughout the letter, must not be seen in isolation, as the immediate context makes clear. It is both “by faith” and

30. J. Louis Martyn has drawn particular attention to the strong dualities in Galatians, labeling them “apocalyptic antinomies” (“Apocalyptic Antinomies”); he works these out in detail in his commentary on Galatians (Galatians: An Introduction with Translation and Commentary [AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997]).
“by the Spirit” that believers await God’s ultimate righteous verdict (v. 5); and faith is continuously active in love (v. 6b). Galatians 5:5–6 is a key hinge in the argument of Galatians, bringing together faith, which has been the constant touchstone in the earlier part of the letter, and the Spirit and love, which dominate the last part.

The importance of this triad in the letter for our interpretation of “new creation” lies not only in the parallelism between 5:6 and 6:15 but also in the place of “new creation” in its own paragraph. Interpreters agree that Gal 6:12–18 functions as a concluding summary of the key ideas of the letter.31 Paul once more attacks the agitators for their insistence on circumcision, flesh, and the law. He again highlights the cross as the epochal turning point in all of history. He succinctly summarizes, in the language “Israel of God,” his insistence that the people of God is no longer restricted to one ethnic group but is open to all without distinction.32 Missing, however, in this passage is any reference to faith, the Spirit, or love. We should expect, then, that “new creation” will include reference to these three determinative “powers” of the new age. This expectation is reinforced by the connection between vv. 15 and 16. In the latter verse, Paul pronounces a benediction on all “who follow this rule.” Many identify this “rule” (κανών) as the principle of v. 15.33 But the summarizing nature of this text suggests that we should expand the reference to include not only faith but also the Spirit and the love produced by faith—especially since Paul has used the same verb found here just a few verses earlier to refer to “walking by the Spirit” (5:25).34 The “rule” of v. 16, then, I suggest, is tied to “new creation” in v. 15. The “old age” (1:4) or the “world” (6:14), the spatio-temporal state of affairs condemned at the cross, has its own set of values—flesh, the law, death. In stark contrast are the set of values bound up with the new creation: the Spirit, faith, love.

The underdefined status of the phrase “new creation” means that interpretation of the phrase will depend considerably on one’s estimation

31. “It contains the interpretive clues to the understanding of Paul’s major concerns in the letter as a whole and should be employed as the hermeneutical key to the intentions of the Apostle” (Hans Dieter Betz, Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 313; see also Jeffrey A. D. Weima, “Galatians 6:11–18: A Hermeneutical Key to the Galatian Letter,” Calvin Theological Journal 28 [1993]: 93–94).

32. There is, of course, no agreement on the referent of “Israel of God” in v. 16. The argument of the letter, however, strongly suggests that it refers to all those—Jew and Gentile alike—who “walk by this rule” (the καὶ before ἐν τοῖς Ἰσραήλ, therefore, being epegeetical). See, e.g., Richard N. Longenecker, Galatians (WBC 41; Dallas: Word, 1990), 297–98; Gregory K. Beale, “Peace and Mercy upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6,16b,” Bib 80 (1999): 204–23.

33. E.g., Longenecker, Galatians, 296–97; Richard B. Hays, “The Letter to the Galatians,” in The New Interpreter’s Bible (vol. 11; Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 345 (vv. 14–15); cf. also Stuhlmacher, “Erwägungen,” 7—he refers specifically to the grace of the creator that has been manifested in the apostolic preaching.

34. Yon-Gyung Kwon, Eschatology in Galatians: Rethinking Paul’s Response to the Crisis in Galatia (WUNT 183; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 173, speaks accordingly of the “moral use” of the concept.
of the general thrust of the letter. As the summary I have just given suggests, I am convinced that Paul’s argument for the “truth of the gospel” in Galatians is fundamentally an argument about the radical newness of the state of affairs introduced by Christ’s death on the cross. Within this construal of the letter, “new creation” most naturally functions, in contrast to the “old age” and the “world,” as a designation of the new state of affairs that the cross signifies and inaugurates. Central to this new state of affairs, of course, is the new community that Jews and Gentiles enter on the same terms. This being the case, “new creation” in Galatians undoubtedly has some reference to the Christian community as a place where the usual worldly barriers between people are broken down (see Gal 3:28 and the argument of Eph 2:11–22).35 The wording of Gal 3:28, to which we referred before, suggests this relationship between the new community and new creation. For it is puzzling at first glance why, granted the letter’s argument, Paul does not content himself with referring to how Christ brings together Jew and Gentile. Why add the apparently extraneous pairs “slave and free” and “male and female”? Paul may simply be indebted to the tradition that he probably cites here (note the parallels in 1 Cor 12:13 and Col 3:10–11). But neither of these texts includes the pair “male and female,” and, further, we have good reason to believe that Paul does not simply take over tradition unless it suits his purposes. A better explanation is that Paul is deliberately setting the oneness between Jew and Gentile in the broader context of God’s general reconciling work in Christ. Moreover, Paul draws attention to the new creation theme by echoing the language of the original creation, when God made human beings “male” and “female.”36 Colossians 3:10–11 confirms this line of interpretation: in this text, the “new man,” in effect the Christian community in solidarity with Christ, the new man, is said to be in the process of being renewed “with a view to acquiring the knowledge that is according to the image of the one who has created it” (my own translation). Reflecting this same creational, and therefore cosmic, focus by way of contrast is the way that Paul associates the agitators and the law they espouse with “the world” (6:14) and “the elements of the world”—the fundamental building blocks of the material universe (4:3; cf. v. 9).37

35. Silvia Keesmaat argues that new creation is related to Paul’s inheritance language (see 3:18, 29; 4:1–7, 28–30) as part of a new exodus motif (Silvia C. Keesmaat, “Paul and His Story: Exodus and Tradition in Galatians,” HBT 18 [1996]: 306–9).

36. The Greek terms, ἄρσην (“male”) and θῆλυς (“female”), are used in the creation account in Genesis 1 and tend to be confined to “creation” texts in the NT (Matt 19:4, Mark 10:6, Rom 1:26–27).

37. The phrase “the elements of the world” (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου), used in Gal 4:3 (see v. 9) and Col 2:8, 20 (see also στοιχεῖα in Heb 5:12; 2 Pet 3:10, 12), is one of the most debated in Paul’s letters. Many interpreters think it refers to astral spirits (TNIV), while others take it as a reference to “elementary principles” (see ESV). The view I espouse here is admittedly a minority view but one that reflects the overwhelming usage of Paul’s day. See esp. Martyn, Galatians, 393–406.
The state of affairs denoted by “new creation” therefore has an important ecclesiological element. Does it also have an anthropological element? To some extent, of course, yes: the new community is, after all, populated by renewed human beings. But “new creation” is not primarily here an anthropological concept. Hubbard, again, provides the longest and best defense of this interpretation. He argues that a contrast between externals—circumcision in the flesh—and internals—faith and the Spirit—is central in the letter, exemplified in Paul’s own “conversion” from reliance on the law and Jewish privilege to reliance on God’s grace in Christ, received by faith. In line with the focus on the renewal of the heart in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and similar to *Joseph and Aseneth*, Paul uses “new creation” in association with his fundamental “death to life” conception of human transformation. Evaluation of this line of argument is quite subjective, bound up as it is with an overall conception of the nature and thrust of Galatians. I can only say that I find the element of internal transformation that Hubbard accentuates to be a very minor theme in the letter. His claim that “it is less accurate to speak of the believer entering the new age than it is to speak of the new age entering the believer” seems to me to reverse the actual conceptualization that Paul uses in this letter and elsewhere. For instance, the problem with the law in Galatians is not that it is incapable of transforming the heart; the problem with the law is that it belongs to an outdated period of salvation history.

In the terms we have used earlier, then, Paul does not use “new creation” in Gal 6:15 as a metaphor referring to the renewed person or the renewed community. He uses it to denote a concept: the radically new state of affairs that Christ’s death has inaugurated. The introduction of the phrase without explanation, along with the apocalyptic-oriented argument of Galatians, makes it particularly likely that Paul has drawn the phrase from apocalyptic Judaism—where, as we have seen, the only pre-Christian occurrences of the phrase are found. We will discuss later whether “new creation” here maintains the cosmological associations that the phrase has in these Jewish texts. We first turn, however, to the other occurrence of “new creation” in the Pauline letters.

2 Corinthians 5:17

My perspective on this verse is to this day colored by the form in which I memorized it over 35 years ago: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” This is the RSV translation. It is taken over verbatim in the ESV and is substantially similar to KJV, NASB, NIV, NET, and NLT. Of course, these translations are filling in a lot of blanks left for us in the Greek text, which is even more elliptical than Gal 6:15: “If anyone is in Christ, new creation!” (εἰς τις ἐν

Χριστῷ, καινή κτίσις). Carrying over the subject of the protasis (τις) into the
apodosis and accordingly taking “new creation” to refer to the individual
person (“anyone”) is certainly an initially plausible reading. But the syntax
also allows for translations such as is found in the TNIV: “if anyone is in
Christ, the new creation has come” (see also NJB, HCSB). Paul can change
both subject and verb from protasis to apodosis. Nevertheless, there is
something to the argument that, logically, the apodosis depends for its
truth on the protasis. Clearly, the existence of the new creation does not
depend on any one person’s being “in Christ.” A better alternative transla-
tion to the usual anthropological rendering, then, would be “If anyone is
in Christ, the new creation has come to that person”; or, more simply, “if
anyone is in Christ, that person belongs to the new creation.” Still, I admit
that the kind of interpretation represented by the RSV has much to be said
for it; and this syntactical point is decisive for a number of interpreters
who think that “new creation” here denotes the renewed believer. What
factors lead me to argue for the alternative?

First, since Paul uses the phrase “new creation” only twice in his let-
ters, we would expect it to have the same meaning in each case—and, as I
have argued, “new creation” in Gal 6:15 refers generally to the new state of
affairs brought about by Christ’s death and resurrection. I am well aware
of the potential circularity of this argument. Indeed, a suspicious person
might wonder just what motivates me to move from Galatians (which is
more amenable to a cosmological interpretation) to 2 Corinthians while
Hubbard moves from 2 Corinthians (more amenable to an anthropologi-
cal interpretation) to Galatians. Nevertheless, in contrast to Hubbard, I
think that Galatians provides more contextual data for interpreting “new
creation,” so starting with Galatians makes good sense not only chrono-
logically but also methodologically. And it will be for this reason also that
I spend considerably less time on 2 Corinthians than on Galatians.

However, I am not simply reading the meaning of new creation in
Gal 6:15 into 2 Cor 5:17 arbitrarily. There are good contextual reasons for
thinking that “new creation” has the same meaning in both texts. Both

40. Some interpreters insist that the subject and verb of the protasis—“if anyone is in
Christ”—must be carried over to the apodosis—“that person is a new creation.” But there is
nothing in the syntax of the verse that requires this. See, for an example of a significant shift
in subject and verb from protasis to apodosis, 1 Cor 10:27: “If one of the unbelievers invites you
ever and you want to go, [you] eat everything that is set before you, without raising ques-
tions of conscience.” And, as an example of an elliptical construction similar to 2 Cor 5:17, see
1 Cor 9:11, which, translated literally, reads: “If we have sown spiritual seed among you, great
thing” (εἰ ἡμεῖς ὑμῖν τὰ πνευματικά ἐσπείραμεν, μέγα; the following conditional clause does not
affect this basic syntactical point).

41. Barnett translates “there is a new creation” (Paul Barnett, The Second Epistle to the
Corinthians [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 296).

42. E.g., Murray J. Harris, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the
Greek Text (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 432–33; Jan Lambrcht, Second Corinthi-
ans (SP 8; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 96.
deploy new creation language for similar purposes.\textsuperscript{43} In Galatians, Paul uses “new creation” to remind the readers of the new set of values that should guide them in evaluating false teaching. In contrast to the “agitators,” who focus on the flesh (concretized in circumcision) and are oriented toward the world, true believers should focus on the “new creation.” Paul is engaged in a similar attempt to reorient values in 2 Corinthians. The Corinthians, probably under the influence of some rival teachers (10:10–12; 11:4–5, 12–15, 19–23; 12:11), have questioned Paul’s ministry credentials and procedures. Central to this dispute are the criteria by which Paul is to be evaluated. Paul makes specific reference to these rivals in our context: “We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart” (5:12). What are the criteria of evaluation? In vv. 14–15, Paul cites the death of Christ as the great turning point in human history—just as he does in Galatians. Christ’s death, in which all participate, means that people, and Christians in particular, should live by a new standard: no longer “for themselves” but “for him who died for them and was raised again.” Then, in v. 16, Paul draws out the consequences of this new perspective for the way in which he, and other Christians, view others, and especially Christ: “From now on we regard no one from a worldly [or “fleshly”; σάρξ in Greek] point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.”\textsuperscript{44} The temporal “from now on” (emphasized in the contrast in the second part of the verse between “once” and “no longer”) alludes to Paul’s typical contrast between the two ages of salvation history. The “old age,” ruled by Adam, sin, and death, has been replaced by a “new age,” ruled by Christ, righteousness, and life. Paul’s point in v. 16, then, is that when people enter into the new age of redemption, their standards of evaluation necessarily change. The claim about “new creation” in v. 17 relates to both vv. 14–15 and v. 16.\textsuperscript{45} Christ’s death and resurrection, because they are the turning point in history, means that one who is “in Christ” belongs to the new creation Christ has inaugurated and has therefore left behind the “worldly” standard of evaluation typical of the old creation. As Victor Paul Furnish puts it, to be in Christ means a “total re-orienting of one’s values and priorities away from the world (self) and toward the cross (Christ, others).”\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{43} Robert C. Tannehill, Dying and Rising with Christ: A Study in Pauline Theology (BZNW 32; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1967), 68.

\textsuperscript{44} I take it that contemporary interpretation has pretty much put to rest the (in)famous attempt of Bultmann to attach κατὰ σάρκα to Christ and thereby to argue that Paul is denying interest in the earthly Jesus.

\textsuperscript{45} Many interpreters argue that v. 17 is parallel to v. 16, both verses (introduced with ὥστε, “therefore”) depending on vv. 14–15 (e.g., E.-B. Allo, Seconde Épître aux Corinthiens [2nd ed.; EB; Paris: Gabalda, 1956], 167–68). While this is generally accurate, it is probable that v. 17 also takes up the specific application in v. 16 of the principle of vv. 14–15 (Rudolf Bultmann, Der zweite Brief an die Korinther [KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976], 158; Victor Paul Furnish, II Corinthians [AB 32A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984], 332).

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 322.
The contextual evidence, of course, can be read in different ways. Hubbard, as he does in Galatians, but with better textual support, focuses on the internal/external contrasts in the context: the “letter” versus the “Spirit” who writes on the heart (3:1–6); the outer person, “wasting away” versus the inner person, who is being renewed (4:16); “faith” versus “sight” (5:7); “what is seen” versus “what is in the heart” (5:12). The new life that overcomes death is another key motif in the context. Together, these themes suggest to Hubbard that “new creation” is Paul’s way of referring to the radical newness of the believer, transformed within by God’s Spirit and brought from death to life. These themes are, of course, important in this part of 2 Corinthians. But undergirding these motifs and therefore fundamental to both of them is Paul’s typical “turn of the ages” conception. We have noted that the “from now on” in v. 16 probably alludes to this notion. Similarly, in 6:2, Paul climaxes his appeal to the Corinthians by claiming that “now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” It is the movement from old covenant to new (chap. 3) and from the present time, when believers continue to live in mortal and decaying “homes,” to the future, when we inherit our resurrection bodies, that dominates the context. Martyn’s comment on 2 Cor 2:14–6:10 is on target: “Paul defends his apostleship by various arguments, all of which refer to the turn of the ages.” The typical apocalyptic associations of “new creation” fit this pattern exceptionally well.

A further factor to consider is the influence of Isaiah on this part of 2 Corinthians. The reference to the “day of salvation” in 6:2 comes from the quotation of Isa 49:8 earlier in the verse. Of more immediate significance is the second half of 5:17, which alludes to Isaiah’s exhortation to Israel in 43:18–19 not to dwell on the “former things” (LXX τά ἀρχαία) but to look with eagerness to the “new things” (LXX καινά; the Heb. נָשִׁים is singular) that God will accomplish when he delivers his people from exile. The pervasiveness of creation language in Isa 40–55 is probably one of the reasons that Paul chooses to use creation language to describe the “new things” that God is doing among his new covenant people. Those who belong to Christ experience the climactic return from exile, the “new creation” that God promised his people. This “new creation” situation


brings with it the transformation of individuals, renewed by God’s Spirit and given new life. But the Isaianic background, which does not focus on this point, suggests that this individual renewal is part of a larger picture. “New creation” is the state of affairs brought about by the ministry of the new covenant. It is this new situation that should govern the Corinthians’ attitude toward Paul. “New creation” in 2 Cor 5:17 indicates, as in Galatians, the new age, the new state of affairs that Christ has inaugurated, as the crucial context for a Christian system of values. As Herman Ridderbos puts it, “When he [Paul] speaks here of ‘new creation,’ this is not meant merely in an individual sense (a ‘new creature’), but one is to think of the new world of re-creation that God has made to dawn in Christ, and in which everyone who is in Christ is included.”

**Cosmology?**

If “new creation” does, indeed, signify in Paul the “new world of re-creation,” does it therefore include cosmic renovation? This question is often answered with a “no,” because Paul applies the concept in both texts where it appears to the present stage of salvation history—a time in which we do not see and are not told to expect evidence of cosmic renovation. Paul’s use of “new creation” would then fall into a familiar hermeneutical pattern, according to which physical things—land of Israel, temple, return from exile—are applied to new covenant spiritual realities—church, Christ’s spiritual presence, salvation. Without denying this pattern, which is, indeed, central to the NT interpretation of the old, I want to argue that new creation does not fit this pattern and that the concept does, indeed, include reference to cosmic renovation.

The argument in favor of this interpretation is a simple one: “new creation” in the sources from which Paul probably takes the language—Isaiah, apocalyptic Judaism—includes cosmic renovation. Paul’s eschatology likewise includes cosmic renovation. Therefore, Paul’s new creation concept also likely refers to cosmic renovation. I have argued the major premise—the background meaning of the phrase—at some length. Here I will briefly establish the minor premise—the cosmic element in Paul’s eschatology—and explain why I think the syllogism, while not perfect, is nevertheless convincing.

Two passages in Paul show that his eschatological expectation includes cosmic renovation: Rom 8:19–22 and Col 1:20. Romans 8:19–22 is the clearest and most important. I do not need to spend much time on it, because there is general agreement about the meaning of the text, and other scholars, such as Harry Hahne in his recent monograph, have quite

adequately argued the points we need to make. Hahne shows that these verses adopt a widespread motif from apocalyptic Judaism about the ultimate transformation of the earth. The created world—probably the non-human created world—has, because of human sin, been subject to decay and frustration. But the revelation of God’s children in glory will bring liberation to creation’s degraded state. The attempt of a number of interpreters to downplay the significance of this text by arguing that it is a kind of “apocalyptic hangover” that Paul uses to make his real point about the destiny of Christians ignores the degree to which apocalyptic categories are central to Paul’s thought. Indeed, the way Paul introduces the idea, without explanation or defense, suggests that he may assume that his readers are already familiar with a standard early Christian eschatology that includes cosmic renovation. In any case, the key point is this: granted Paul’s dependence here on an apocalyptic Jewish tradition about the ultimate renovation of the earth, is it not likely that his use of “new creation,” drawn to some extent from this same tradition, would also have reference to cosmic renovation?

Colossians 1:20 climaxes what was probably an early hymn about Christ with the claim that God has “reconciled to himself all things.” This reconciliation, while applied in the context to Christians (vv. 21–23), cannot be limited to human beings. The “all things” reconciled by God on the cross explicitly include “things on earth or things in heaven” and must have the same universal referent that the word all does throughout 1:15–20. Reconciliation is elaborated with the language of “making peace,” revealing dependence on the OT notion that God’s eschatological intervention would establish universal shalom. Isaiah’s prophecies may again be particularly in view. Paul uses the language of Isa 52:6 to describe the preaching of the gospel (Rom 10:15), and Isaiah in this context refers to “proclaiming peace” (see also esp. Eph 2:17 [and also vv. 14, 15], 6:15). Both ancient and modern interpreters have often tried to prove too much from Col 1:20, as if the text were teaching universal salvation. This is clearly not the case, as is indicated, among other things, by the fate of “powers” mentioned in this verse later in the letter (2:15). But the text does affirm that the “headship” of Christ over all creation (2:10) will manifest itself universally as every part of creation is brought within the scope of God’s reclamation work in Christ. Renovation of the cosmos as a whole is again an important component of Paul’s eschatological expectation.

Further, it is just as possible that the theology we find here in Colossians has a toehold in the 2 Corinthians new creation passage. 2 Corinthians

52. Contra, e.g., Vögtle, who denies that “new creation” has any idea of cosmic renovation (A. Vögtle, Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos [Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970], 174–83).
4–5 has several intriguing parallels with the Colossians context: the use of creation language (2 Cor 4:4, 6; Col 1:15–17), reference to Christ as the “image of God,” and reference to reconciliation, with allusion to Isaiah. Moreover, both 2 Corinthians and Colossians refer to two stages in God’s reconciling work: the establishment of reconciliation through the cross (Col 1:20 and 2 Cor 5:19) and the application of reconciliation to believers (Col 1:21–23, 2 Cor 5:18). It is tempting, on the basis of these parallels, to take a step further and view the reconciling of the world in 2 Cor 5:19a as a parallel to the reconciling of all things in Col 1:20. Verse 19a would then affirm that “God was reconciling the universe to himself through Christ.”

A few interpreters have indeed taken this step, but its cogency appears to be bound up with the assumption that Paul quotes a traditional piece in v. 19a. However, while v. 19 presents some undoubted syntactical and contextual difficulties, it is unlikely that Paul is quoting tradition here. Still, v. 19a is probably, as Seyoon Kim argues, a “pauline parenthesis,” and this leads one to wonder whether Paul is dependent on the same tradition about universal reconciliation that he refers to in Col 1:20. At the end of the day, however, the third-person pronouns in v. 19b probably require that “world” in v. 19a refers to the human world. But the parallels between 2 Cor 4–5 and Col 1:15–23 still suggest that these texts are moving in the same general conceptual world, a world in which God’s work in Christ involves the material universe.

Careful listeners will have noticed that the syllogistic argument in which I couched my case for a cosmological element in “new creation” is, in fact, flawed. It suffers from the problem of the “undistributed middle.” The syllogism would be logically compelling only if I were able to claim that all Paul’s eschatological language includes reference to cosmic renovation and that, therefore, new creation, since it is Pauline eschatological language, must include cosmic renovation. However, while my argument is not logically foolproof, I would still argue that it is a strong one. Paul’s decision to use the phrase “new creation,” otherwise unattested in early Christian eschatology, requires explanation. Because this phrase refers to cosmic renovation in Paul’s Jewish world, and because he clearly

54. The translation of this verse is debated, the Greek also allowing a rendering that focuses on the incarnation—“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (AV/KJV). But almost all modern translations and commentators rightly (in view of the context) support the interpretation reflected in the text cited above.


includes cosmic renovation in his eschatology, it is surely probable, if not logically certain, that Paul intends his “new creation” language to include cosmic renovation.58

But what can we say about the problem of Paul’s application of the phrase to the current stage of salvation history? John Reumann, commenting on 2 Cor 5:17, expresses the problem clearly: “there is no talk here of an apocalyptically renovated cosmos (the grass is not any greener, the sunsets no more colorful than in pagan days).”59 This objection, however, ignores the possibility that “new creation” shares in the typical NT inaugurated eschatological framework. Paul undoubtedly applies “new creation” to the situation of believers in his day. But this in no way prevents “new creation” from referring to the totality of the “already/not yet” eschatological work of God in Christ. Richard Hays claims that “Paul’s image of ‘new creation’ stands . . . as a shorthand signifier for the dialectical eschatology that runs throughout the New Testament.”60 By means of his resurrection and the transformed body he thereby possesses (1 Cor 15:45–49), Christ is, in the words of Rev 3:14, the “beginning of God’s creation.”61 “Beginning” implies a process or further point of consummation. This consummation comes when God makes “all things new” and establishes “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:5, 1). “God’s creation”—which appears to be John’s equivalent to Paul’s “new creation”—arrives in two stages. And, as the new creation is inaugurated by resurrection, so it is consummated with resurrection, when all who belong to Christ are conformed in their own resurrection to his resurrection body.62 In Rom 8, the revelation of believers, to which the transformation of creation is tied, is defined in terms of the “redemption of the body” (v. 23). Resurrection, as Tom Wright has massively shown, is the central expression of biblical hope.63 And the materiality of our resurrection bodies entails a material environment in which

58. See also J. G. Gibbs, Creation and Redemption: A Study in Pauline Theology (NovTSup 26; Leiden: Brill, 1971), 143.
62. As Brown puts it, commenting on Rom 8, “Creation’s anticipated freedom from ‘its bondage to decay’ (v. 21) is prefigured by the church, the body of Christ, through whom the redemptive power of God to establish new creation and community has already broken into the present” (William P. Brown, The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 397).
we live forever—that is, a “new creation.” We cannot eliminate “creation” from “new creation.”

Following the trajectory initiated by Isaiah and continued in apocalyptic Judaism, Paul uses “new creation” to describe the totally new state of affairs that marks the culmination of God’s plan. Conceptually parallel to “new age,” “new creation” semantically focuses on the universal extent of the new realm that God inaugurates in Christ. “New creation” is manifested in the present through transformed Christians who live in transformed relationships with God, with one another, with all people, and with the world of nature. “New creation” will be consummated when these relationships are perfected by God himself and when he brings his created world to its final state of glory. Far from being a problem for the contexts in which Paul uses the phrase, the expansive significance of “new creation” is required to provide the rhetorical force that Paul clearly intends. The values and distinctions that play so important a role in this creation no longer apply—a “new creation” is here! The transformation of the universe that Isaiah and apocalyptic Judaism expected in the last day, Paul announces in dramatic style, is already here—with all its revolutionary implications. The ethical implications that, I have pointed out, Paul explicitly refers to in Gal 6:15–16, are as wide and as varied as the new creation itself. But it is appropriate, granted the focus of this paper, to draw out briefly some of those implications for the topic we started with—the current ecological crisis.

I have argued that Paul proclaims the arrival of the “new creation” in order to remind believers of the new set of values by which they are to live and look at all of reality. Central to these values, as the context of Gal 5–6 makes clear, is love for others. Belonging to the new creation means fundamentally a reorientation of our focus from self to others.64 We Christians in the West—and I emphatically include myself in this “we”—have failed to grapple with the entailments of this “other” focus for our lifestyle. An orientation to self continues to plague us. We use up scarce and dwindling resources at an alarming rate, depriving others, both born and unborn, of the resources they need. We ignore or even try to dismiss truth about the state of our world, thoroughly established by scientific consensus, because the truth might be “inconvenient” for our lifestyle. The transforming power of the new creation must be allowed to renew our minds so that we express our love for others in the way we use the resources of this creation.65

The present state of new creation, then, enables us to become the faithful, self-sacrificing stewards of creation toward which our creation in the

64. Living on the basis of the new creation requires, as Victor Paul Furnish puts it, a “total re-orienting of one’s values and priorities away from the world (self) and toward the cross (Christ, others)” (Furnish, II Corinthians, 332).

image of God was directed. And the prospect of the future consummation of the new creation should incite us to work hard as God’s stewards. Of course, the promise of God to establish a “new creation” has often fostered an attitude of indifference toward this creation. But this reaction is fundamentally flawed. Paul does not see “new creation” as a simple replacement of this creation. The transition from this creation to the next will be discontinuous to some extent, but Paul’s language of “liberation” and “reconciliation” requires a basic continuity as well. The creation in which we now live is, in some important way, continuous with the creation that is to come. The cosmic aspect of new creation is not a “creation out of nothing” (creatio ex nihilo) but a “creation out of the old” (creatio ex vetere). And the efforts we expend in stewarding this creation now will be honored by God as he takes up those efforts into his work of re-creation. Biblical hope is not intended to foster passivity among God’s people but, rather, renewed effort in awed recognition that God, in his grace, is using our efforts to accomplish his own purposes.


