

Arguing with Paul: 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-17

I don't want to leave my body or its loves. I wouldn't rather be at home with the Lord; I want to be right here.

by [Michael A. King](#) in the [June 13, 2006](#) issue

When I read the lectionary texts for this week, I was disappointed. Give me texts of David sinning, Amos raging against the “cows” of Bashan or Jesus again in trouble for loving outcasts. These I can run with. But don't give me Paul always confident, walking by faith and not sight, apparently really feeling he'd rather be at home with the Lord than in his body, regarding no one from a human point of view, celebrating that “in Christ there is a new creation, everything old has passed away—see, everything has become new!”

Don't give me texts like that because my life so often clashes with them. I remember my boyhood in my missionary family amid the ceaseless quest of Christians around me to live in the new creation. I haven't forgotten how guilty that boy felt, stuck in his trash-filled old humanity—unsure how to reconcile what seemed to him the ethereality of Christian living with a body that seemed always to run hot when it was supposed to run cold or cool when it was supposed to run warm.

Nor will I forget the day I casually asked my mother how a relative had died, back when I was too young to remember. I expected to hear about cancer or heart trouble. No. He had gone out to the fields with his hunting gun and had shot himself. Some who loved him found out how he died only when they came to view his body. In those days and among those Christians committed to their new beings in Christ, no one knew how to make human space for suicide. They knew only to grow scar tissue around the wound and continue on in new creation.

But as I grew up, I heard my very bones groaning that what would kill me was being other than human. I struggled to believe that anything could be made new. How could any of us trust that “everything has become new” when it was precisely such

faith that helped kill my relative? Depression and faith had fed each other. Awareness of how far short of the new creation he fell had fueled his guilt and misery, even as he interpreted the depressive attacks as failure to live in Christ.

Because Paul is part of God-breathed scripture, I will wrestle with what I can learn from his wish to be away from his body, at home with Christ, made new. But boy does he cut against my grain! How do we give up the human point of view without giving up the truth about ourselves as human beings?

My truth is that I don't want to leave my body or its loves. I wouldn't rather be at home with the Lord; I want to be right here! I love this world. The older I get the more I love elemental things: leaves shimmering in the breeze at sunset; morning coffee with my wife; a daughter's impish smile; cruising in the 1990 Subaru I bought from my dad, with the sunroof open, my dad's spirit still in the car. Why would I want a point of view that didn't cling to such things?

So am I a bad Christian? I have often thought so. Good Christians are like the ones I saw this morning leaving a Bible study at Vernfield Restaurant, walking out with Bibles in hand. I bear them no ill will, but I don't want to spend hours with men helping each other be new creations. I want to be in my Subaru, smiling up through the roof not at Christ but at blue trimmed with clouds.

Then I thought of Angie, a waitress at the restaurant, who greeted me when I arrived: "Well, hello, dear," she said. "Welcome to your office." We both laughed as I went to the table that has indeed become my office—there where I visit with congregants in a down-home setting well suited to probing human truths and new creations.

I thought of Ike, whom I've often met there, and of the time we debated whether he was ready to become a Mennonite. If he had to be perfect like it seemed to him Mennonites are, then no way! "Perfect" wasn't in him. But he'd be glad to start traveling toward Christ and see where it got him. So to the shock of many, particularly himself, he became a Mennonite.

I thought of the next morning, when I planned to meet Ike. Ike would report on his latest struggle to be a Mennonite Christian. Amid laughter, because you can't be with wild Ike without laughing, we'd consider his options. Like the time he reported that his ex had stolen wood from his woodpile. And we pondered what might happen if instead of demanding his wood back he added more to her pile.

Ike is not Paul, and neither am I. Maybe new creation language would sing to us too if we had raged against Christ before our human point of view burned up on the Damascus Road. But both Ike and I have experienced the new creation as a club that can be used, often with the best of intentions, to assault our human truths and cause lies, pain and sometimes even death.

So we don't talk much about being new creations. We look for Christ within our human lives rather than try to leave our human lives to be with Christ. Still, how often do we ask, "What does Jesus teach about this? How is his Spirit nudging there? What would Paul say if writing to us? If we tried that instead of this same-old same-old, what would happen then?"

So maybe in our way we're trying to get where Paul wants to go. And as much as I don't want to leave this body, I do hope that when I'm dragged out—kicking and screaming all the way—at home with the Lord is where I'll be.