A New Creation - 2 Corinthians 5:17

(By Iver Larsen, Updated October 2026)

Craig Blomberg has explained the reasons for the change in NIV2011 in 2 Cor. 5:17. It can possibly be read here. (No access in EU in October 2026)

I was very surprised by the arguments Craig brought forward to support the new rendering which is similar to and inspired by NRSV and HCSB. The change is from: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (NIV84) to "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come." (NIV11).

It is an interesting change, because it tells me how the endeavour to avoid gender exclusive language in English can unfortunately lead well-meaning translators astray. I am in favour of getting rid of gender exclusiveness where it is not in the Greek text at all as is the case in this verse. Translations need to accommodate to a significant change in the English language that has taken place gradually in the last 50-100 years.

The main problem behind the NRSV, NIV11 etc in this verse as I see it is that the translators have ignored the context, and the translations are in my view inaccurate in terms of the meaning of the Greek text. The text is: ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινά. A literal translation could be: As a result of that (or: consequently), if/when anyone is in Christ, (that person is) a new creation. The old (things) have passed away, look, new (things) have come into being.

I have another article about "in Christ." It can be read here. If anyone is "in Christ," it means that this person has been united with Christ through what Christ did and through believing in what Christ did. In this verse it is basically the same as being a believer in Christ or having come to believe in Christ. NLT04 is clearer and more accurate when it says: "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ…"

Translators should not be so absorbed in a single verse that they forget to take the previous verses into consideration. In the NIV11 v. 16 reads: "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer." The Greek text says: Ὥστε ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν οὐδένα οἴδαμεν κατὰ σάρκα· εἰ καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν κατὰ σάρκα Χριστόν, ἀλλὰ νῦν οὐκέτι γινώσκομεν. A literal translation is: "Consequently, we (Christians) from now on know/look at no one according to flesh. Even though we did know Christ according to flesh, now we no longer know (him in this way)." It is clear that Paul is talking about the fundamental change a person has gone through by becoming a believer in Christ. The "flesh" in Paul's language refers to the non-Christian attitude and life without enlightenment from the Holy Spirit. There is a complete change in the outlook of a Christian, and Christians obviously look at Christ and know him in a very different way from how they looked at him before they became Christians. In fact, they have a completely new outlook on life. Since v. 16 starts with the same connecting word Ὥστε which is a result connector, we really need to go back one more verse to get more of the context.

NIV11 has this translation of v. 15: "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." Here I don't need to quote the Greek

text, since the NIV adequately covers the meaning. Again, we see the fundamental change in a person from living for themselves to living for Christ. It is a completely new life after one has become a Christian.

The NLT04 has done very well for v. 17: “This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” It has successfully avoided any gender exclusiveness. It has expressed the basic meaning of the non-English phrase “in Christ” in good English. It avoids the strange “creation” and says correctly “person.” It clarifies that the things that have passed away is the old life as a non-Christian, and the new things that have come into being is the new life as a Christian.

Craig says in his comment: “Paul regularly looks forward not just to individuals becoming new creatures but to the arrival of a new creation (see esp. Rom. 8:19-23).” Yes, Paul does look forward to a new world at the end of times, but that does not fit the context of 2 Cor 5:17. In 2 Cor 5:15-17 he is not looking forward to the arrival of a new creation/world. He is looking back to what happens when a person has become a new “creature/creation”. Furthermore, the expression “new creation” does not occur in Rom 8:19-23, but it does occur in Gal 6:15 with the same meaning as here in 2 Cor 5:17. Craig continues: “It is more likely that he is getting his readers’ attention by a staccato-like construction that makes them realize that he is talking about more than just the expected results of conversion—personal transformation—but about the arrival, even if only in part, of a whole new creation.” But this is not a staccato-like construction in Greek as it would be in English. It is a common Greek ellipsis where the verb “to be” is very often to be understood, and the subject is carried over from the previous clause. The text is not talking about a future “creation,” but about what has already taken place in Paul himself and in others who have become believers. NIV11 has added the words “the…has come” where the Greek only has “new creation.” This is problematic, partly because the Greek text has no definite article here, but mainly because one is not allowed to add “has come” to the text when there is nothing like it in the Greek. It is permissible to add a form of “to be,” because that is how Greek ellipsis works. NIV11 has in my view destroyed a very important and well-known verse in the Bible.

Craig had a comment on Phil 2:6 – also rather poorly translated in the NIV11 – which I found interesting. He admits that he likes the NLT translation of this verse, but then adds: “But it probably starts to move one just a little bit closer in the direction of functional equivalence than would be appropriate for a translation like the updated NIV.” It is nice to hear one of the NIV translators say that the NIV is not a functional equivalent translation nor is it intended to be so. That is OK with me, but it is not OK with me to misconstrue a verse like 2 Cor 5:17 (and Phil 2:6) in the way they have done.