

Becoming a New Creation Therapist: The Kingdom of God and Biblical Counseling

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“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col 3:1-5)¹.

“Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Heb 2:8b-9).

Before I try to convince you of the benefits of becoming a new creation therapist, I should probably define what is meant by “new creation therapist.” To get there I must back up a bit.

New creation terminology was coined by Craig Blaising in the book, *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*. In Blaising’s chapter on premillennialism he states:

The *new creation model* of eternal life draws on biblical texts that speak of a future everlasting kingdom, of a new earth and the renewal of life on it, of bodily resurrection (especially of the physical nature of Christ's resurrection body), of social and even political concourse among the redeemed. The new creation model expects that the ontological order and scope of eternal life is essentially continuous with that of present earthly life except for the absence of sin and death.²

The New Creation Model has been greatly expounded on by Michael J. Vlach’s volume, *The New Creation Model: A Paradigm for Discovering God’s Restoration Purposes from Creation to New Creation*. Vlach offers a summation of the New Creation Model by listing the key

¹ All scripture quotations are taken from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

² Craig A. Blaising, “Premillennialism,” *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 162.

elements of biblical teaching regarding what will comprise the new earth, upon which believers will spend eternity. They are: 1) Earth as man's destiny; 2) resurrection of the body; 3) restoration of Earth; 4) nations and ethnicities; 5) Israel; 6) land; 7) governments; 8) society; 9) culture; 10) eating/drinking/celebration; 11) houses and farms; 12) economic and agricultural prosperity; 13) relationships and friendships; 14) animals, birds, fish; 15) natural resources; and 16) time.³

My goal is not to give you a treatise on eschatology. It is not to convince you to be dispensational and premillennial. It is certainly not to make you a 16-point New Creationist. Imagine trying to come up with a flower acronym for that! My goal is much simpler. It is to persuade you that the consideration of the plan of God for eternity and the Bible's teachings regarding the eternal state of believers should influence the counsel given by biblical counselors. To finally reach a definition... a new creation therapist is a biblical counselor that considers God's kingdom program for all things when offering counsel to others.

In what ways should a biblical counselor become a new creation therapist? Consider the following. He/she is under the rule of King Jesus and is headed for the destiny of ruling and reigning with him in his coming kingdom on this earth (2 Tim 2:11-13, Rev 5:10, Rev 20:6). A new creation therapist understands life on the backdrop of the five-fold kingdom program

³ Michael J. Vlach, *The New Creation Model: A Paradigm for Discovering God's Restoration Purposes From Creation to New Creation* (Cary, NC: Theological Studies Press, 2023), 118-119.

of God: Creation, Fall, Promise, Redemption, Restoration.⁴ He/she lives and counsels in the reality of the antinomy of the “already” and the “not yet.” His/her mind rests on things above, not things below. The hope he/she offers is rooted firmly in the certainty of our God “making all things new” (Rev 21:5)—that the day is coming when a loud voice from the throne of God will declare, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:3-4). The new creation therapist does not discount or minimize the suffering of humans as souls united with temporal bodies in the time of Redemption. But the hope offered transcends the earthly hope of improving things to the point they are not as bad as they used to be, or as bad as they could be.

In the kingdom program of God, we are living in the time of Redemption. During this season, the curse of the Fall on humans and creation is still in effect. As Hebrews clearly states, not everything has been restored. That which was ours from Creation to Fall will be ours again at the Restoration, but not until then. The Promise of a coming Messiah was fulfilled in Jesus’s incarnation, though many messianic promises remain unfulfilled until he returns. Redemption has come by Christ’s death and resurrection, and we benefit much by

⁴ I am heavily indebted to Michael Vlach’s excellent books, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* and *The New Creation Model: A Paradigm for Discovering God’s Restoration Purposes From Creation to New Creation*, for many of the thoughts presented throughout this paper.

living in this time of grace. Yet there remains a future redemption for those of us in Christ when we leave these mortal bodies of corruption and put on incorruption (1 Cor 15:53-55). Clearly, we do not yet see everything in subjection to Jesus (Heb 2:8-9). But those of us with faith in him have received the citizenship of heaven (Phil 3:20), even while we remain citizens of this Fall-cursed, broken, groaning creation (Rom 8:18-25) until physical death.

Dual citizenship has its privileges, but it also has a host of challenges. Our earthly allegiance is to a heavenly king. This calls for living according to a higher standard than citizens of the kingdom of this world. It makes us stand out in the same way that Christ stood out, which invites scorn, ridicule, and rejection. It calls for the same kind of response Jesus gave before Pilate: "... 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from this world.... For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth...'” (John 18:36-37). The century we live in has no more taste for the truth than the first century and is every bit as offended when we bear witness of it. Listen to the words of Robert E. Webber.

The full-blown development of this kingdom concept as it relates both to the presence of the kingdom in the here and now and to the ultimate fulfillment and establishment of the eternal kingdom means that there can be no area of life that escapes the rule of the king. His rulership extends over *all* of life. What we do, say, and think must be executed under his rule. Our eating, sleeping, drinking, judging, and loving must all take place under the rule of the king. He is the Lord of life—all of life. Thus the inauguration of the new age is not merely some intrusion into the secular world, or a spiritual component that runs alongside of life. It is the center through which all of life is interpreted. In the ancient world the Fathers of the church

called this the theology of recapitulation and it is this theology which is pertinent to our postmodern world.⁵

The Kingdom of God

Since we are indeed citizens of the kingdom of God, it would do us well to look at a few key concepts before we go any further. This paper can only skim the theological surface of the kingdom of God, but listed below are three important axioms to consider.

1. **The kingdom of God is unending.** There has never been a time when God was not king, nor will there ever be. God is everlasting. He has no beginning and no end. All earthly and spiritual dominions—past, present, and future—exist under the sovereign rule of Jesus (Col 1:16).
2. **The kingdom of God is unrivaled.** Colossians 1:13 says, “He [God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” The Greek word translated “domain” is *exousia*. It means power, authority, control. “Kingdom” in the Greek is the word *basileia*, which means dominion, rule, kingdom. Satan is not a king. He is referred to as a “prince” (Gr. *archon*) “of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” in Ephesians 2:2. Though he sees himself as ruling over the kingdoms of this world, as evidenced in the temptation of Christ (Matt 4:8-9), he is truly nothing more than a wannabe—a rebel refusing to bow the knee to his Maker; an unwitting servant of the God he despises.

⁵ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 55.

3. **The kingdom of God is unfolding.** As stated before, there are five parts or developments of this unfolding: Creation, Fall, Promise, Redemption, Restoration. We live in part 4, the time of Redemption. While we are called to live well in the present, from physical birth to physical death, it is important to consider the past and the future to accomplish that goal. It is all too normal to be so focused on our short seventy-plus years on this earth that we fail to consider where our life fits in God's grand scheme of his kingdom. The tangibility of our earthly citizenship can cause spiritual amnesia, forgetting that we have been "raised... up with him and seated... with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6-7). Counselees often struggle with a myopia that only sees their problem. A biblical counselor would invite them to see God bigger than their problem, and a new creation therapist would also invite them to see their problem in light of the eternal life that they now possess. It is not insignificant that our Lord taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10 KJV).

I had a counselee that I worked with off and on for several years that became very dear to me. One thing I could count on with her was the ever-present question: "But how do I do that?" or the other variant: "So what does that look like?" When struggling saints come off the mountain peaks of theology to the lower altitudes of me-ology, isn't that their go-to question? How do I seek the things that are above when I can't find my cellphone? How do I

set my mind on things above when my boss is telling me to get my head out of the clouds? Try as we may, we can't defy gravity. The earth doesn't let us leave it until our body returns to it. The challenge is to somehow manage life on earth with our thoughts on heaven.

Does this lead to some kind of Gnostic or Platonic dichotomy of mind and body? *Me genoito!* (May it never be!). The body is not evil. Matter is not evil. If we are commanded to honor God in our body (1 Cor 6:20), how could it be inherently evil? Neither are our minds the seat of goodness. Genesis 6:5 is clear that it was not just the actions of the ancients, but their thoughts that grieved the Lord and brought the Great Flood. Body and soul (mind) form a unity. Personhood demands both. A new creation therapist gives counsel for suffering, sinning saints that is both practical for the here-and-now and hopeful for the life to come.

Why is a new creation perspective needful in biblical counseling?

1. **A new creation therapist offers greater hope.** Most counselees are thinking people who have lots of questions. Why did my friend commit suicide? Why are people at school so mean to me? Why do I struggle with anxiety? How do I determine what God's will is for my life? Why is my marriage falling apart? Underneath most of these questions and many others is some form of the following three fundamental questions: Is God good? Does he love me? and Can I trust him? Of course, we know the answer to all three is "yes." A new creation therapist will have the resources to prove it from the past *and* the future. The goodness of God

can be seen so easily in the biblical narrative of past events—especially the cross of Christ. But isn't Christ's return to rule and reign on this earth also demonstrable evidence of God's goodness?

We often hear John 14:1-6 read at funerals; about Jesus telling his disciples he was going to prepare a place for them. The intended application is that Jesus has prepared a room for the deceased, and for each of us, in his Father's house so that we have a place to go when we die. While this is certainly true, I think there is more to what Jesus is saying. In verse 3, he tells his disciples, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." It is a sweet sentiment to think that Jesus comes to us at death, picks up our soul, and takes us to our permanent dwelling in heaven for the rest of eternity. But I think that is an truncation of what Jesus was saying. Though the meaning of this verse is contested, I can't see how a statement like, "I will come again," could be void of eschatological implications. Yes, "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8). But we must also cast our eyes to a farther horizon where Christ returns, we meet him "in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17). Pardon the poetry, but there is more to the story than a mansion in glory. We have a hope that does not disappoint (Rom 5:5) and that hope is in the ultimate restoration of all things.

2. **A new creation therapist offers clearer perspective.** Those of us who were old enough to remember September 11, 2001, have numerous indelible mental

snapshots of the events of the day. I was about to go teach a class at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary when I heard the news. My mind was pondering a phone message from a pastor I had received the day before. One of my music department colleagues had taken issue with a statement he had recently made and had publicly written about said issue. This pastor was offended and decided to call me to vent about it. He was considering some sort of response and wanted to get my feedback. After the World Trade Center became rubble on the ground, that pastor called me up and said, “You know, in light of today’s events, what I was all worked up about really doesn’t matter.” That is perspective.

Can it not be helpful to ask: if I knew for certain that Jesus’s return would be next week, would my counseling issue become less important? Am I more concerned with solving my problem than I am doing the work of the Lord and anticipating his return (Mark 13:33)? Perhaps my concern has become a distraction that has caused me to be in a spiritual slumber, and the stern warning of Mark 13:36— “lest he come suddenly and find you asleep”—should be a literal wake-up call. A new creation therapist encourages (in the right way at the right time) his/her counselees to step back and gain perspective. Robert Webber reminds us, “The consequence of Christ's work is that the powers are now limited and that we are called to live in the expectation of a restored creation. These themes lie at the heart of the Christian

understanding of reality and are relevant to the postmodern search for a unity to all of life and to a way of dealing with the problem of evil.”⁶

3. **A new creation therapist offers richer worship.** Some of my richest moments of worship come when I ponder the benefits of the cross. It is easy to become “lost in wonder, love, and praise”⁷ when pondering the enormity of my Savior’s love for me as he poured out his blood for my sin. Are we not missing out on a huge part of God’s story to exult in when we fail to ponder the future that is most certainly ours?

Consider 1 Corinthians 15:19. “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.” The providence of God for our great salvation did not stop with making things better for us while on this earth. Nor does it stop with some eternal spiritual nirvana sitting on a cloud playing a harp. Contemplate the pericope just a few verses later.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.⁸

Such glorious thoughts should inspire in us the highest heights and deepest depths of praise and worship!

⁶Webber, 49.

⁷ From Charles Wesley’s hymn: *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*.

⁸ 1 Cor 15:22-28.

New Creation Therapy applied

- 1. Eschatological hope is not code for “Suck it up, Buttercup”.** The hope we offer to suffering, sinning saints is that our struggle with the curse of the Fall is temporary. We cannot guarantee that all the promises of God will come true in this temporal life. But we can guarantee that our Messiah will fulfill every remaining promise in his coming kingdom. When properly offered, biblical hope in the new creation will encourage greater acceptance of the fallenness of creation and greater perseverance in the purposes of the kingdom of God.
- 2. Eschatological hope does not dismiss current burdens.** People’s struggles are real and painful. Eschatological hope does not minimize a person’s affliction. When you are sitting across from a father of five whose wife just took the kids and left home, it is time to do what Jesus did—he wept. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:15-16).
- 3. Eschatological hope is to be applied with great wisdom.** I have often told counseling students, “Do not rush towards someone in pain and start quoting Romans 8:28.” A wise counselor once told me, “The truth is never optional—but timing and method are.” There will come a time when Romans 8:28 can be applied. It is great medicine but not to a fresh wound. Remember the words of Isaiah: “a

bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench” (Isa 42:3).

- 4. Eschatological hope is not to be ignored or downplayed.** We live in a day when people think everything matters *except* the Lord’s return. But I assure you, on the day of his return, nothing else will matter. In the meantime, we wait. We wait with great expectation. We look to every cloud in the sky anticipating that moment when “the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God (1 Thess 4:16); when we “see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt 24:30); when “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10-11). “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen” (Rev 22:20-21).