

# The New Nature and the Old

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Many Christians experience a good deal of difficulty in daily life as a result of having no clear understanding of this subject. They are conscious of a whole host of desires and emotions of a strangely conflicting nature. The apostle James may ask the question, "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" They, however, seem to have no difficulty in accomplishing something of this sort; for in thought, word and action they find the strangest possible jumble of good and evil until the whole problem becomes most perplexing.

It is a great help to grasp the fact that the believer is possessed of two distinct natures, the new and the old, the one the source of every right desire, the other the source of only evil. A hen would be sorely distracted if set to mother a mixed brood of chickens and ducklings. Their natures are distinct, and hence their desires and behaviour are very opposite, but not more opposite than the two natures of which we speak. And many believers are like that hen!

When the Lord Jesus spoke to Nicodemus He insisted upon the necessity of being "born again" - "born of water and of the Spirit," and He added, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3: 6). Let us carefully consider these important words.

In the first place they plainly indicate the existence of two natures, each characterized by its source. "Flesh" is the name of the one, for it springs from the flesh, "spirit" the name of the other, for it springs from the Holy Spirit of God.

Then it is evident that we rightly speak of "flesh" as the *old* nature, for it belongs to us as coming

into the world of Adam's race by natural generation; "spirit" is the new, and it is ours, if born of the Spirit, in new birth.

Again, these words clearly distinguish between "spirit," by which we mean the new nature, and "the Spirit," that is, the Holy Spirit of God. The former is the direct product of His wonder-working power, and never does He indwell a person in whom He has not previously wrought in new birth, producing the new nature which is "spirit." Still, it would be a great mistake to confound - as some are inclined to do - the new nature with the Holy Spirit who produces it.

When you were born again, then there was implanted in you by the Holy Spirit this new nature, which is spirit, and one of the first results of this was the inevitable clashing of this new nature with the old, which you inherited as a child of Adam. Both strive for the mastery, each pulling in a diametrically opposite direction, and until the secret of deliverance from the power of the flesh within is learned, the painful jumble of right and wrong is bound to continue.

In Romans 7 that painful experience is described for us. Carefully read it, noticing especially verses 14 to the end, and continuing your reading as far as Rom. 8: 4. Do you not see in it a good many features which tally with your experiences?

In that chapter the speaker reaches one very important conclusion. "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing" (v. 18). The flesh, then, is utterly and hopelessly bad, and God allows us to wade through the mire of bitter experiences that we may thoroughly learn this lesson. "The flesh profiteth *nothing*," are the Saviour's own words (John 6: 63). "They that are in the flesh *cannot* please God," are words that corroborate the story (Rom. 8: 8). This being so, out of it nothing but evil will come.

Flesh may be left uncared-for and untrained, it then becomes heathen, savage, and possibly even cannibal flesh. It may be highly refined and educated, it is now curbed, civilized, christianized flesh, but it is *flesh*, for that which is born of the flesh IS flesh, no matter what you do with it. And in it - high-class flesh though it be - *no good dwells*.

What can you do with a nature like that, a nature which is simply the vehicle of sin, in which sin dwells and works? Let us answer that question by asking another. What has God done with it? what is His remedy?

Romans 8: 3 supplies the answer: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh."

The law from the beginning strongly censured the flesh, but it could neither curb it nor control it so that we might be delivered from its power. But what the law could not do God has done. In the cross

of Christ He judicially dealt with it, "condemned sin in the flesh," *i.e.*, He condemned it in the very root and essence of its nature.

Romans 8: 4 gives the practical result of this. The cross being the condemnation of the old nature in the root of its being, we have received the Holy Spirit to be the power of the new nature, so that walking in the Spirit we fulfil all the righteous requirements of the law, though no longer under it as our rule of life.

God then has *condemned*, in the cross of Christ, the flesh - the old nature. But what can we do with it? We can thankfully accept what God has done, and treat it henceforward as a condemned thing ourselves. The apostle Paul indicates this when he says, "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have NO CONFIDENCE in the flesh" (Phil. 3: 3).

When one reads this scripture commencing so positively with the words "We are," one is inclined to ask, "*Are we?*" *Am I* so thoroughly alive to the *true character* of the flesh - no good thing dwelling in it, on the one hand, and *God's condemnation* of it in the cross, on the other - that I have no *confidence* in it, even in its fairest forms? Depend upon it, here lies the crux of the whole matter. That point is not easily reached. Many a painful experience is passed through, many a heart-breaking failure is known, as again and again the flesh, like a Samson refusing to be bound, snaps the seven green withs of pious and prayerful efforts, and the new ropes - so carefully woven - of good resolutions. But when once it really is reached the battle is well-nigh over.

*The shattering of our confidence in the flesh is largely the shattering of the flesh's power over us.* Then at once we look away from ourselves, and our most earnest efforts, for a Deliverer, and find Him in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has taken possession of us by His Spirit. The Spirit is the power; He not only checkmates the activity of the old nature (*see Gal. 5: 16*), but energizes, expands and controls the new (*see Rom. 8: 2, 4, 5, and 10*).

Bear in mind that the new nature has no power *in itself*. Romans 7 shows that. The new nature in itself gives aspirations and desires which are right and beautiful, but for power to fulfil them there must be this practical submission to Christ and His Spirit - this walking in the Spirit, which is largely the result of coming into real and heartfelt agreement with God's condemnation of the old nature in the cross of Christ.

**Some people are good-natured and religious almost from birth. Do such need the new nature of which you speak?**

Most certainly they do. The very man to whom the Lord Jesus uttered those memorable words, "Ye **MUST** be born again," was exactly of that type. Morally, socially, and religiously, everything was

in his favour, yet the Lord met him point-blank, not only with an abstract proposition (John 3: 3), but with the same truth in concrete and pointedly personal form. "Ye must be born again" (v. 7).

That settles it. After all, good-natured and religious flesh is only FLESH, and will not do for God.

**There is a widespread idea that everybody has some spark of good in him, and that it only needs developing by prayer and self-control. Is this scriptural?**

It is very *unscriptural*, indeed *it is anti-scriptural*. Many passages might be cited, but I shall content myself with two.

The *first* shall be *negative* evidence. In Romans 3: 9-19, we have given us a full-length portrait of mankind in its moral features. The details are culled by the apostle Paul from Old Testament Scriptures. First come sweeping general statements (vv. 10-12), then incisive particular ones in hideous detail (vv. 13-18), and not one word is breathed as to this latent spark of good. How unjust, how untruthful, if really, after all, it be there! The God who cannot lie describes His creatures, and does not mention this supposed spark of good. The inference is obvious. It is *not there*.

The positive evidence runs like this: -

"God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth; and that *every* imagination of the thoughts of his heart was *only* EVIL *continually*" (Gen. 6: 5).

The apostle Paul puts the same truth in different words when he says; "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no *good thing*" (Rom. 7: 18) - not even *one* spark of good.

For those who believe the Bible such evidence is quite conclusive. Nothing more remains to be said.

**Does a person get rid of the old at new birth, or are we to understand that a converted person has both the old and the new within him?**

The old nature is not eradicated at new birth, else we should not read: "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1: 8).

Neither is it changed into the new nature. New birth is not like the philosopher's stone, which was fabled to turn every object it touched into fine gold. John 3: 6, already quoted proves this.

Both natures are in the believer just as both natures are in that standard fruit tree in the garden. Indeed, the process of "grafting" not inaptly illustrates the matter in hand, for by it the wild stock into which the choice and cultivated apple shoot is inserted is condemned. The knife is put to it and it is cut hard back for the process to take place. Further, instantly the graft is made the gardener no longer recognizes it as a wild stock, but calls it by the name of the apple variety he has grafted in.

So it is for us; both natures are there, yet God only recognizes the new, and we, having received the Holy Spirit, are "not in the flesh, but in the Spirit" (Rom. 8: 9).

**If the old nature is still there, surely we must do something. How should we treat it?**

We are not, of course, to be insensible to its presence, nor unaffected by its activities in us, but at the same time no amount of human resolution or effort against it will avail us.

Our wisdom is to fall into line with God's thoughts and to treat it as He does. Begin by recognizing that you are now identified with the new nature and entitled to disown the old. "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. 7: 17). The new nature is your true individuality, not the old, just as the cultivated apple is the tree as soon as the graft is effective.

This being so, your treatment of it is simple. The gardener keeps a sharp look-out on his newly grafted tree. If the old wild stock seeks to assert itself, and throws up suckers from the roots, he ruthlessly cuts such suckers down as soon as they appear. So do you bring the cross of Christ to bear like a sharp knife on the old nature and its sinful desires.

"Mortify therefore *your members which are upon the earth*" (Col. 3: 3). The words I have emphasized answer pretty much to the suckers thrown up by the wild stock. What they are the remainder of verse 5 and also verses 8 and 9 of the same chapter specify. Mortify them - put them to death in detail.

For this you want spiritual energy, courage, purpose of heart, which in yourself you do not possess. Your only power is in looking simply to the Lord Jesus, and placing yourself unreservedly in the hands of His Spirit.

"If ye *through the Spirit* do mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live" (Rom. 8: 13).

**Is it by a great act of our own will that we finally obtain the Spirit's power and overcome, or is it by yielding to God?**

Let Scripture itself answer. "*Yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God*" (Rom. 6: 13).

"*Yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness*" (Rom. 6: 19).

"Being made free from sin, and become *servants* to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Rom. 6: 22).

The idea that the necessary power is obtained by an act of our own will looks like a last desperate attempt to obtain a little credit for the flesh somewhere, instead of totally condemning it and giving God the glory.

**Does the new nature in the believer ever reach such perfect growth as to render him quite proof against the desires of the old?**

2 Corinthians 12 shows very clearly that it does not. In that chapter we read that the Apostle Paul, privileged above all other Christians, was caught up into the third heaven - the immediate presence of God. After hearing there things so transporting that no human language could possibly express them, he was left to resume his ordinary life upon earth, and he tells us that God gave him from that point a thorn in the flesh - some special counter-balancing infirmity - *lest he should be exalted above measure*, through the abundance of the revelations.

Now, admittedly, Paul's Christianity was of a most advanced and extraordinary type, yet, even so, and with a temporary sojourn in the third heaven thrown in, he was not in himself proof against that self-exaltation which is inherent in the old nature.

If he was not, neither are we.

**Can you give any hints that will help us to distinguish practically between desires and promptings, which spring from the old nature, and those that spring from the new**

I cannot give you any that will enable you to dispense with God's Word, and relieve you of the necessity of continually going to your knees in prayer with an exercised heart.

The Word of God it is which is "living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword." It alone can discern the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4: 12), and the throne of grace stands ever available that we may find grace for seasonable help (Heb. 4: 16). God's High Priest it is who graces that throne.

The Word of God and prayer, then, are absolutely necessary, if we would distinguish and disentangle the thoughts and desires we find within.

Recognizing this, however, it may help us if we remember that just as the mariner's compass is true to the north, so the new nature is true to God, and the old nature true to self. All that which has Christ for its object is of the one, that which has self for its object of the other.

This being so, a thousand perplexing questions would be solved by asking, "What is the secret motive which actuates me in this? Christ-glorification or self-glorification? Which?"