

The Old Man and the New

by Charles Finney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between the old man, characterized by selfishness, and the new man, characterized by a commitment to pleasing God.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:22

Topics: "Spiritual Renewal", "Transformation"

Description

Charles Finney's sermon 'The Old Man and the New' emphasizes the stark contrast between the old man, characterized by selfishness and corruption, and the new man, defined by a commitment to please God and live in righteousness. He explains that true transformation involves putting off the old man through regeneration and embracing the new man, which is born of the Spirit and seeks to glorify God in all actions. Finney warns against common misconceptions, such as attempting to reform the old man or mistaking external behaviors for genuine spiritual change. Ultimately, he calls for a deep self-examination to discern the motives behind our actions, urging believers to live out their faith authentically and wholly devoted to God.

Transcript

"That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Ephesians 4:22-24

It will be my object in speaking upon this text to show,

I. WHAT CONSTITUTES THE OLD MAN.

II. WHAT CONSTITUTES THE NEW MAN.

III. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN PUTTING OFF THE ONE AND PUTTING ON THE OTHER.

IV. SUNDRY MISTAKES OFTEN MADE ON THIS SUBJECT.

I. What constitutes the old man.

1. There are two sources from which all human activity, or in other words, all mental life flows. I use the term, life, now, just as we do when we apply it to the body. In the latter case we mean by it the activity, or

rather the active state of the various organs. This is life; its opposite, death, is the cessation of activity, and a passing out of that state in which action is the law of our existence into another in which absolute inaction is the law.

Applying the term life now to the mind, we mean to denote its active state; and our remark is that there are two and only two ultimate causes or springs of all this activity; one, fallen human nature; the other, the Spirit of God.

Mental activity is first developed through our connection with a physical body. The new-born infant has constitutional wants; its appetites demand gratification; and its mind is thus first aroused to exercise. Here human nature begins to develop mental activity. We would not be understood to imply that this first action of the infant is sinful; it manifestly is not unless the intelligence is so far developed as to take cognizance of right and wrong;--the Bible every where assuming that some knowledge of obligation must be present, or sin cannot be. All that we can say now on this point is that our earliest mental activity is prompted by our connection with the body; and that the constitutional demands of the body lead to indulgence which, though not sinful before any knowledge of duty exists, yet becomes the main-spring of foul selfishness when this knowledge is developed and in the very face of it we prefer to please ourselves rather than God.

Another source of mental activity is the Spirit of God. We do not mean by this that the Spirit is a necessary cause of mental action, in such a sense that the mind under the Spirit's influence acts of necessity and not freely; we only mean that the Spirit excites to action, and is the occasion of such action as would not take place without the Spirit. Thus the Bible represents God as working in us to will and to do, and Christians as walking with the Spirit, or after the Spirit and not after the flesh. The Spirit begets a peculiar kind of action, the very opposite of that produced by the workings of selfishness.

2. The old or first man, is the carnal mind, or principle of selfishness. It begins with caring for the flesh even before its action can have any moral character, and continues to care for the flesh ever after. Hence it is called a carnal mind, or a minding of the flesh. Its characteristic feature is that its own gratification is its supreme end.

3. It is called a "man" because it is the hidden source and cause of outward activity. It would seem as if the Bible language contemplated a hidden agent, working underneath the visible exterior of each individual, in the one class of character producing selfish action and in the other class, the opposite. These inward-working agents--the old man and the new--correspond to the ultimate intention of the will, and control all our proximate volitions in the same way that we see it done by the ultimate intention. Indeed, they are but other names for the same thing. The ultimate intention of course always governs all our voluntary conduct. We never can act without intending something; and all our lesser subordinate volitions are only the necessary result of our ultimate purpose, this ultimate purpose being always either to please ourselves or to please God.

4. My last remarks substantially include my text; viz., that the "man" in the sense of our text is the reigning disposition. It is that which the mind is disposed, or rather which the mind voluntarily disposes and sets itself to do. The mind deliberately chooses its great end of existence--chooses the kind of good it will seek, and then of course sets itself to secure this kind of good by every means in its power. Hence arises a disposition of the mind: the mind shaping its efforts--all its mental activity to secure the good of its own ultimate end.

5. This is also an ultimate and efficient intention. In the form of the old man it is a deep and hearty committal of the soul to self-gratification. It controls all the activity of all unregenerate men. You do not see the old man with the external eye, but by its ceaseless development we learn its character and omnipresent agency.

II. What constitutes the new man.

1. It is a spiritual mind, or a disposition to please God instead of self. It is right over against the carnal selfish state. The mind is fully committed to pleasing God, so that this becomes the chief end for which the individual lives and acts. The new man is thoroughly committed to do the will of God just as the old man is to do the bidding of his carnal impulses. The former lives for God; the latter for himself.

Besides these two ultimate ends, no other can be conceived. All voluntary agents will seek to please either God or themselves. All action, therefore, results from one or the other of these ultimate intentions. And this is true not only of all men but of all other intelligent beings--of angels and of devils.

2. These two dispositions divide all mankind into two classes. Hence there are, as we often say, two sorts of men; and so the Bible says. The Bible represents all men as either saints or sinners; holy or unholy; spiritual or carnal; children of God or children of the devil. It makes them either old men or new men; born of the flesh, or born of the Spirit. The old state is first in order, and all pass into the channel of self-gratification which leads directly to it, unless some may be enlightened and converted by the Spirit from the womb. With this exception all others begin a course of self-gratification from their birth, which becomes sinful as soon as they know that God forbids their making this the supreme end of their existence and yet refuse to obey God.

The new man is born of the Spirit--born from above; the Spirit of God continually begets his moral activity, leading him thoroughly to renounce self, and commit his whole being to do the pleasure of God.

3. The old man is corrupt according to and in compliance with the deceitful lusts. So says our text. By lust is meant in the scriptures all forms of sensual desire. It includes the entire circle of our physical propensities.--All these the old man commits himself to obey. He lives for their gratification. They are called deceitful for the obvious reason that the pleasure they promise in their gratification is always delusive. They flatter only to destroy.

4. The new man is sometimes spoken of as being the Lord from heaven, or Christ formed in the soul. So it is, not however in the sense of a physical creation, but in this sense; Christ by his Spirit begets, produces, a state of mind in which we voluntarily commit our whole being to God. Then we become like Christ, and it is therefore as if Christ himself were formed within us, his very Spirit and temper now reigning in our hearts, so that it seems as if Christ himself were there, and indeed he is there by his spiritual and most efficient presence.

III. We are to enquire what is implied in putting off the one and putting on the other.

1. Regeneration. This putting off the old man and putting on the new is precisely what the Bible means by regeneration. This is the change of heart of which the Bible speaks.

2. Perseverance is also implied. We are to continue in this state. Paul is writing to Christians and urges them to put off the old man with his deeds and put on the new man. Of course he must mean that they should continue to do what they began to do at their conversion, and maintain in constant vigor that

activity which then commenced.

3. It implies the death of the old man. This does not mean the annihilation of the appetites and the physical constitution: no, the former body still exists, and you must eat and drink for its support no less than before. It only means that all these appetites and propensities are held under the control of God's revealed will, to be indulged only in accordance with that will. They are no longer our masters; we have no master but God.

Some on this point have run into great confusion; some have stumbled into grievous error. Holding the doctrine of physical depravity, they make the Apostle say--"Put away your constitutional appetites, annihilate the flesh; literally crucify its constitutional propensities." But the Apostle means only this:--Let them not control your moral activity. Hold them evermore subordinate to the will of God.

It should be observed that these physical appetites are not necessarily the source of our activity. We may act from love and obedience to God, these appetites still existing within us; for we may indulge them only because we rightly conclude that this will please God, and only so far as this seems to be the case.

4. Putting off the old, and putting on the new man, implies entire consecration to God. It is equivalent to putting away all selfishness, and acting only and alone from real benevolence; renouncing the dominion of the flesh, and submitting to the dominion of the Spirit. This, of course, is entire consecration to God. There is no middle or third state. He who puts off the old man must put on the new man; for the mind will have some spring of action, some ultimate end to gain, some prime source of its activity. It must therefore turn from one of these to the other. In fact the mind never puts off the old man except that it may put on the new. We never really renounce self except when the Spirit draws us to choose God as our supreme portion.

5. Heavenly mindedness is implied. God and heavenly things are now its chosen objects of supreme affection, so that the mind now runs towards its chief love, as it did when this chief love was earthly good. There is now a heavenly state of mind by the same law which before produced a carnal and earthly state, namely, "Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also."

6. Consequently the conversation will be of heavenly things. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

7. So will the thoughts also be of heaven. The mind turns toward God with delight. O, how does it dwell on the great things of God in the night watches, reposing sweetly on his universal providence, on his revealed promises, on the bosom of his ineffable love.

8. The treasure is in heaven. No longer does the soul seek its chief good here. Its portion is above. A pilgrim and a stranger here, the new man seeks a better country, even a heavenly. Content to forego earth for the sake of heaven, he lets off his eager pursuit of things temporal; pursues them for a totally different end, so far as it seems his duty to pursue them at all; and really has no other God but Jehovah. His God is in heaven.

9. Selfishness is put away and Christ put on in all things. This is the very essence of the Apostle's meaning. The new man put on, is the yoke of Christ taken, the Spirit of Christ imbibed and acted out; the law of love, supreme to God, and impartial to man, becomes supreme; a spirit of self sacrifice ensues, and the individual no longer asks what will gratify me, but what will please God. Now he puts on Christ, and grows up into Him in all things, studying continually to conform every thought and act to the great law of

his being--imitation of Christ and obedience to his will.

IV. We are to notice several mistakes into which persons are wont to fall.

1. They try to reform the old man, not considering that he admits of no reform to any purpose. Just consider what the old man is--namely, a supreme intention to please self; and you will see at once that this intention can admit of no reform for the better. You may change its direction from one form of selfish indulgence to another, but such reform as this, though very common, is yet perfectly useless, for it leaves the heart as completely enslaved to sin as before. Thus, often men change the form of their selfishness without in the least changing its moral quality. A man removing from a community where one form of selfish indulgence is popular, to another where it is unpopular, will probably adapt himself to his new circumstances, and pursue the most productive form of selfish gratification. Why not? Selfish happiness is his object; why shall he not make the most he can of it, and pursue it in the most hopeful way? This change may seem to him perhaps to be conversion, especially if he substitutes a more refined for a grosser form of selfishness; a form on which moral and christian society frown, for one on which they smile. Yet in this very change he may be more thoroughly selfish than ever before; with this additional mischief, that he is now deceiving himself, and blinding his eyes for the fatal plunge into perdition. All he has done, is just an attempt to reform the old man. It is no real reformation. He may put on a new face--it is only a mask; a new coat, a Sunday suit, but this changes not the hidden man of the heart.

2. The old and the new man in many things conduct externally alike. Both eat and drink; both use the necessaries of life, but with this broad, fundamental distinction; the one has no higher, and no other end than self gratification; while the other both eats and drinks for the glory of God. The one aims only to please himself; the other only to please God. Both may eat when hunger prompts; both may find pleasure in the gratification of the demands of nature; but while the one has no higher end than the gratification, the other finds a double relish in the gratitude of his heart to God, the giver; eats, that thereby he may have strength to live for God; and takes no more and no other food than he supposes God would have him. This makes the broadest possible distinction between the old and new man.

Again, the old man and the new man both equally may marry, and be given in marriage; yet, observe, with this broad difference in the ultimate end had in view; the old man does it to please himself, and the new man to please God. The old man, remaining old, can do this from no other end than to please himself; the new man, "acting in the spirit of a new creature," can possibly have no other end than to please God.

Again, both attend apparently in the same way to the common business of life. Both may be behind the same counter, selling off the same lot of goods, at the same prices; yet one is there doing his own will, and the other doing God's will; the one pleasing his own self--the other pleasing his Master. Or, both the old man and the new may be following the plow, each to raise the same crop, yet each with a perfectly opposite ultimate end in view; the one to gratify self, the other to gratify God. Their motives and ultimate end are just as really different now as they will be when one of them shall be in heaven and the other in hell. Then, as now, the real difference will be only this; the one is supremely selfish; the other is supremely benevolent; the one caring only to please himself, and the other only to please God.

There are two students, pursuing the same studies, in the same class, attending the same recitation; they study equally well, and may appear externally in all points alike; yet one is the old man and the other the new; the former, striving to mount up over the heads of all his class-mates, panting for fame, seeking great things for himself; but the other has bowed his whole heart to God's will, studies only because God would

have him, and seeks only to please God by doing all his will.

Or take still another view. There are two young men, both preaching the gospel; both pray apparently much alike; both have the external air of piety; yet the Omniscient Eye sees one of them supremely selfish, selfish in seeking heaven, selfish in preaching the gospel, selfish and supremely so in his prayers, for in all, his eye looks never beyond his own good. The other has crucified himself, lives now for God and for the good of his race, preaches and prays out of love to souls and love to Christ; this is a new man and the other is the old man.

3. Hence, the external developments being so similar, it is a common mistake not to distinguish between them. It is often impossible to know the hearts of others from mere external manifestations. For instance, you all come into this house of God to worship, apparently alike; how can I tell who of you come in the spirit of the old man and who in the spirit of the new?

Persons often fail to make this discrimination in their own case. They might know their own hearts if they would honestly and deeply search themselves, and take cognizance of their motives and of all the deep springs of their action; but often, very often they do not, and hence deceive themselves. They never go to the bottom of their own hearts.

4. For want of making this discrimination, hypocrites are prone to flatter themselves while yet in their own deep corruption. They put on a decent exterior and are often comparing their life with the life of real, and spiritual Christians, inferring hence that themselves are real Christians. Indeed they often take pride in making their own external conduct quite unexceptionable, and hope to get a double reward for this good life, the gratification of their pride here and heaven hereafter.

No mistake in religion is more common or more fatal than the one of which I am speaking. Whole masses of professors go after the world in seasons of declension, that is, as soon as they can do so without disturbing their hope of salvation. They want to be as good as most others, and this they seem to suppose will bring them up into heaven with the mass. This being secured, the more they get of this world the better. How purely selfish! In a revival they wake themselves up, often tardily, yet when they must, they yield to the general influence and come along; bustle perhaps full enough for their credit and seem to reform, but this is only an attempt to reform the old man and his deeds--nothing else.

5. You may see the mistake often made by sinners in condemning the conduct of Christians. They condemn Christians for doing the same things as they themselves are doing. They say, "You, professedly holy men, eat and drink, buy and sell, plow and study, just as we do; wherein are you better than we?" The mistake is, that the wicked do not consider that while the external course is the same, the motive and the moral character of the course may be in the one case right, and in the other utterly wrong. The wicked man has no right to assume that the Christian acts from the same motives as himself, merely because he pursues the same business. This may be, and often is arrant censoriousness.

6. Many mistake the apathy of the old man for the peace of the new man. The old man sometimes becomes apathetic, vastly calm and indifferent to passing events, and this seems to him like that deep calm which the Christian feels because his own Father is at the helm. Nothing can be a greater mistake. The sinner's soul is a perfect stranger to the Christian's deep heavenly, peace-begetting trust in God.

7. Many mistake the zeal and legal bustle of the old man for the holy fervor of the new man. Legalists are wont to become very zealous; they strive hard to do some great thing, and often make a splendid bustle,

and you would think that verily they were about to convert the world in a twelve-month; now they look back upon these developments, and comparing themselves with active Christians they judge themselves to have the holy fervor and divine love of apostles and martyrs. Yet in fact their motives and spirit are just as unlike the real Christians as hell is unlike heaven. They are the Jehus of the Church; "come, say they, come, see my zeal for the Lord of hosts." Perhaps they really think that they outstrip most real Christians.

8. Often men mistake the impatience of the old man for the holy jealousy of the new man. The old man frets at sinners because they sin, feels indignant at such horrible wrong-doing; but point out to him his own sins, and press his conscience to repent and confess, and O! he does not think that wrong under his circumstances; he has nothing particular to confess. His heart is not quite so indignant against sin in himself as against sin in others. In his own case he sees various extenuating circumstances which more than alter, which quite reverse the case. Thus he reveals himself.

Yet he often takes credit to himself for holy indignation against sin. The real Christian feels a holy indignation; Christ felt it and often could not repress it; yet it was a holy jealousy for the honor of God, and not a fitful irritation against wrong doing because it might injure some of his own interests, or because it offended against his virtuous principles.

9. Often men fail to distinguish between the selfish sorrow of the old man and the godly sorrow of the new.

The new man remembers his former sins with great sorrow; his soul is weighed down within him and often his tears gush out in the very streets as he is reminded of his past deeds of shame and guilt; but not so the old man. He has a sort of sorrow for his old sins, especially if they have affected his reputation. But you do not see him loathing himself in his own sight for all his secret abominations. Yet he counts his own tears for sin, and thinks he has the sorrows of the real penitent.

10. Many mistake the selfish joys of the old man for the spiritual joys of the new man. The former however begin and end in selfishness; the man is pleased when good comes to himself, that is all. The latter rejoices in God, yea in God, his exceeding joy. He is happy when others get good, though himself has none.

11. Often people mistake the hope of the old man, for the hope of the new man. Each have their hopes. The sinner hopes to be happy in heaven--by what means is a thing of small care or thought to him. The Christian's hope is beautifully sketched by the apostle, "We know," he says, "that when Christ shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see Him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure." The hope of the new man rests on being holy, not merely nor directly on being happy. No. his glorious hope is that he shall be perfectly, universally, eternally holy. Give him this, and you gratify the ruling passion of his soul.

12. A mistake is often made of the turbulence and fanaticism of the old man for the holy firmness and faithfulness of the new. See that man finding fault--how censorious, how turbulent; he can denounce every thing in most unmeasured terms, yet under the self-soothing pretense of being faithful to his fellow men.--He means to clear his skirts of the blood of souls, so he traduces his brethren and measures off denunciations in a most terrible manner. Yet ask him why he does this, and he will refer you to Christ and to the prophets of old who had the word of the Lord shut up in their bones; and he says, did not Christ denounce? Little is this man like Christ that is trying to cast out devils through Beelzebub. With the very spirit of Satan, he would fain drive Satan out of his brethren!

Not so the new man. He is firm and faithful, but his spirit breathes gentleness and love. I do not say that every Christian is always bold and firm, nor that all who have been converted continue through life to act out the new man and him only; happy if it were so. But while they do act the new man, they are firm without malevolence; faithful without bitter denunciation.

13. The effervescence of the old man is mistaken for the unction of the new man. Yet the difference between the two is most radical. In each there is excitement, yet while the one is the boiling up of a selfish heart, the other is a holy unction from heaven.

14. The presumption of the old man is mistaken for the faith of the new. The former often talks of his great faith, assumes to have more than his brethren, but it is all presumption; he pursues such a life and has such a spirit that he has no right to trust God for anything but damnation.

15. Many mistake the self-will of the old man for the conscientiousness of the new man. They are obstinate, unyielding; yet it is only self-will--a committal of the will, and not the demand of an enlightened conscience.

16. The constitutional tendencies of the old man are mistaken for the spiritual developments of the new man. The natural humanity and kindness, for instance, of the old man are mistaken for gospel benevolence; conscientiousness of natural character, for that conscientiousness which is created, trained and expanded in the school of Christ.

REMARKS.

1. None but a spiritual mind will really make the distinctions which I have been pointing out. No others care to make them; and moreover, the qualities of the new man can never be clearly apprehended without experience. Yet it is a vastly desirable attainment to be able to distinguish between what originates with self, and what originates with the Spirit of God. How rarely made! From my acquaintance with Christians, I think this point is but feebly developed. They don't distinguish between pleasing self and pleasing God. Yet no two things can be more opposite to each other, and none should be more carefully distinguished. In eating, in all labor, in study, we should be careful to know whether we are doing all to please God, or to please ourselves.

Some years since, my mind was greatly exercised on this point. Almost every waking moment the question would press upon me--Why am I doing this and why that? This led me to settle in my mind a thousand points of difficulty, and thus became of great service to my soul. How can we labor together with the Spirit of God in our own sanctification, unless we get hold of the real distinctions between holy consecration, and refined selfishness?

2. On this subject sinners constantly deceive and flatter themselves. They take credit for much that they do as good which is purely selfish. Thus they build themselves up on self-righteousness, but on a foundation which the last flood will sweep away and great will be the fall of it.

3. We see how and why sinners constantly misjudge Christians. They see Christians doing some of the same things externally which themselves are doing, and then they falsely judge that the Christian acts from the same motive as himself. Thus they take a flattering unction to themselves, and wrong both their Christian neighbors and their own souls.

4. The old man is constantly corrupt. There is nothing good in him. Paul might well say of the old man, 'I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.' No good originates there. You can say no good thing of the old man. He is wholly evil. You can place no confidence in him for anything really good. He is wholly selfish, and will do anything to carry his selfish ends.

5. No evil can be said of the new man. Understanding by this term the new, regenerate heart, it does nothing wrong. The converted person may sin, but if he does, it is because the old man is not dead, but rises up and rules, gaining a temporary ascendancy.

6. The old man is exceedingly tenacious of life. It seems as if you might kill him a thousand times and yet he lives. You gain the victory over him; you crush him down and he seems breathless; you flatter yourself he is dead and buried, but ere long up he comes--the old disgusting carcass, breathing out its fouled stench; your spiritual strength becomes weakness, and perhaps under this baleful influence, you return like the dog to his vomit. Ah! that old man, how he will live and keep coming up; and so there will be a tendency to this more or less while we are in the flesh; we must watch, and often have to fight, and often kill our old man over and over again. Yet through Christ we may come off more than conquerors.

This leads me to say that a spiritual man is exceedingly jealous of the old man. He will always be watching his old enemy, and will never trust him at all. Yet, alas, even the spiritual are sometimes deceived by the old man and are lured into a selfish state before they are fully aware of it. But when they come to see it, O, how they loath the abomination! I have known persons so deeply disgusted with themselves for their own selfishness as actually to vomit. O, how horrid and how loathsome! That young man goes out to preach. He has prepared his sermon. But when he was studying it out and making it up, something whispered--"Now get in some choice and splendid paragraphs--this very classical and elegant expression, that fine philosophical illustration--show the people that you are a scholar and a genius." Well, he has made up his sermon and goes to the pulpit--spouts it off--takes good care to make a good impression for himself; at length returns to his home and his closet; there the truth flashes upon him--serving myself--serving myself--none else but self--not Christ, but my own great self! O! how he loathes this abomination! He is disgusted, and turns away from himself as if he had met the very devil! He is ready to vomit or even spit in his own face! O, young man, that is a bad business--such letting up of self--such a resurrection of the old man in your heart. Beware!

The converted man falls into selfishness, but let him see it, and how he loathes it! Horrible! Detestable! He would fain spue his very self out of his own soul!

Here you may see who is really the new man. No better test of the new life can be had than this.

Beloved, how is this with you? Does the religion you possess make you new creatures in Christ Jesus, or does it leave your old selfishness still reigning, only somewhat dressed over perhaps, and fitted out sometimes in a Sunday suit; how is this? O, there is nothing that so perils the souls of men in this Christian land and in this passing age, as a refining the manners, and polishing the exterior of the old man, till he shall pass for that new man which is truly born of God, and molded into his divine image!

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