

The Two Natures in a Believer

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon explores the mystery of the two natures in a believer, highlighting the struggle between flesh and spirit and the danger of the doctrine of progressive sanctification.

Scripture: Romans 7:15, Romans 8:7, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 5:17, Ephesians 4:22, Philippians 1:6, Colossians 3:9, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 1:15, 1 John 1:8

Topics: "Sanctification", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

J.C. Philpot delves into the profound truth of the two natures in a believer, highlighting the internal conflict between flesh and spirit that every child of God experiences. He criticizes the lack of clarity in many spiritual writers regarding the distinction between flesh and spirit, emphasizing the fear of acknowledging the enmity of the carnal mind against God. Philpot addresses the sensitive nature of believers towards personal sanctification, exposing the misconceptions around the gradual extirpation of sin and the molding of the carnal mind into Christ's image. He contrasts the tormenting doctrine of progressive sanctification with the liberating revelation of the two natures, offering hope and encouragement to sincere believers struggling with the weight of sin and their inability to attain the holiness preached by others.

Transcript

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Among those branches of divine truth which, without special teaching, we cannot enter into, is, that of the two natures in a believer. And yet, though every child of God must in all ages have been experimentally acquainted with the inward conflict between flesh and spirit, nature and grace; and though authors innumerable have written on such subjects as sanctification, the trial of faith, the strength of grace, the power of sin, the deceitfulness of the heart, the commencement and progress, decline and restoration, of the life of God in the soul, yet how few even of these really spiritual and experimental writers have laid out the truth of the case as made known in the Scriptures, and felt in the experience of the saints! How blind have many gracious writers, as, for instance, Dr. Owen, and most of the Puritan authors, been to the distinctness of flesh and spirit! In fact, as it seems to us, many good men have been afraid of the real, actual truth. Our Puritan ancestors especially, living in a day when profanity and ungodliness ran down the streets like water, and holiness, therefore, of heart and life was powerfully urged as the distinctive feature of the children of God, intuitively shrank from anything that seemed in its faintest coloring opposed to their

view of gospel sanctification. They feared to believe, and dreaded to proclaim, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; that it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed could be." They seemed to think, if they once admitted that the flesh, the carnal mind, underwent no spiritual change; in other words, could not be sanctified; it was opening a wide and open door to the worst Antinomianism.

There is a distinction between "the flesh" and "the carnal mind." The flesh is the corrupt principle itself: the carnal mind is the breathing, moving, and acting of the corrupt principle. The flesh is, as it were, the body, the carnal mind the soul of sin; the flesh is the still atmosphere, pregnant with disease and death; the carnal mind is the same air in motion, carrying with it the noisome pestilence; the flesh is a giant, but lying down or asleep; the carnal mind is the giant awake and hurling his weapons of defiance against heaven and earth.

On no one point, it may be remarked, are the minds of men professing some measure of truth so sensitive as upon that of the believer's personal sanctification. You may be three parts an Arminian, and four-fifths of a Pharisee, and men will speak well of you and of your religion; no, many even of God's children will think favorably of you. But be in their eyes one-tenth of an Antinomian, and they will unchristianise you in a moment, if you had the experience of Hart, the gifts of Huntington, the godly life of Romaine, and the blessed death of Toplady. Now, nothing so much exposes a man to the suspicion of secret Antinomianism as his denying the sanctification of the flesh. The cry is at once raised, "You are an enemy to holiness; you turn the grace of God into licentiousness; you allow people to live as they list; you encourage men under a profession of religion to continue in sin."

Who does not know the charges which they ring on this peal of bells against all who assert that the flesh is incurably corrupt, and cannot be molded afresh, or new modeled, or sanctified, or conformed to the image of Christ, but remains to the last what it was at the first, "the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts?" We may oppose to these clamorous reproaches a godly life, a gospel walk, a spiritual mindedness, a heavenly conversation, a filial fear, a tender conscience, a separation from evil, a liberality to the poor and needy, and a deadness to the world of which our opponents profess little and manifest less; but all in vain. The very suspicion that we deny the holiness of the flesh, present or possible, makes us viewed by most of the "very religious" people of our day much as the Protestant heretic is looked upon by the staunch Papist--a kind of horrid being, who may, perhaps, by a death-bed conversion to their views, and a full recantation of his own, escape hell, but who, at present, is in a very awful and dangerous condition.

But leaving these poor ignorant creatures who speak evil of things that they know not, and who are actuated by much the same principle and spirit as those of old who said of the Lord himself, "He has a devil, and is mad; why hear you him?" let us look for a few moments at a very different class of people to whom the mystery of the two natures is but little known. These are the honest and sincere, the tender in conscience and broken in heart of the children of God, who, for want of divine light on this point, are often deeply tried and perplexed, and sometimes almost at their wit's end from what they feel of the inward workings and strength of sin. They are told, and their naturally religious mind, their traditionary creed, and their unenlightened understanding, all fully fall in with what they hear enforced on their conscience, that the sanctification of the soul, without which there is no salvation, is a gradual progress from one degree of holiness to another, until, with the exception of a few insignificant "remains" of sin, which, from some unknown cause, obstinately resist the sanctifying process, the believer becomes thoroughly holy, in body, soul, and spirit. Sin, they are told, may occasionally stir up a bad thought or two, or now and then a carnal desire may most unaccountably start up; but its power is destroyed, the rebellious movement is

immediately subdued, the hasty spark, which straight is cool again, is put out at once without further damage, and the process of sanctification keeps going on as harmoniously and uninterruptedly as before, until the soul is almost as fit for heaven as if it were already there.

Beautiful theory! but as deceptive and as unsubstantial as the mirage of the desert, or the summer evening cloud bathed in the golden glow of the sinking sun. And so those sincere, honest-hearted children of God find and feel when "the motions of sin which are by the law," stirred and roused from their torpid inactivity by its application, work in their members to bring forth fruit unto death.

The doctrine of progressive sanctification, implying, as it does, in the mouth of its strenuous advocates, the gradual extirpation of sin and the molding of the carnal mind into the image of Christ, is to the honest and tender conscience a torturing doctrine, pregnant with guilt, bondage, and despair. To a man who merely plays with religion, all doctrines are pretty much alike. None cause him trouble, and none cause him joy. The holiness of God, the spirituality and curse of the law, the evil of sin, the helplessness of the creature, the sinfulness of the flesh, the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the heart, as long as they are mere doctrines, have no more effect upon the conscience than a narrative of the battle of Alma or an account of the fight at Inkermann. To a professor of religion dead in his unregeneracy, the fall of man is nothing like so stirring as the fall of Sebastopol; and the recovery by Christ does not give him half so much pleasure as the recovery from a bad cold. These are the men to preach progressive sanctification; and none urge it so continually, and press it so forcibly, except, perhaps, those that are living in sin, who are usually the greatest advocates for holiness, either as a mask of their practice, or on the principle of a set off, that, having none of their own, they may get as much as they can of other people's. "In for a penny, in for a pound," is the maxim of a man who runs into debt without meaning to pay.

And so, if a man means to pay God nothing of the obedience and holiness which he urges upon others, he thinks he cannot do better than get into debt as deep as he can. None set the ladder so high as the master who stops at the foot, and urges his man on to the topmost round. None lay such heavy burdens on men's shoulders as those who themselves never touch them with one of their fingers; and none wield so unmercifully the whip as those who have never felt the end of the lash. To all such miserable taskmasters the tried and distressed in soul may well say, "What is play to you is death to us; you are in jest, but we are in earnest; you are at your ease, we are laboring to attain unto what you only talk about. The holiness that you are preaching we are striving to practice. Your flashes of exhortation are but summer lightning, and your denunciations but stage thunder; while we are at the foot of the mount that burned with fire, and where there was blackness and darkness and tempest.

The sanctification of the flesh that you urge may do for you who have learned your lesson at the academy, and preach what you neither know, nor understand, nor feel--blind leaders of the blind, as you and your tutors are. Such a doctrine lies with no more weight on your conscience than the preacher's gown upon your back, or the gold ring upon your little finger; but it is not so with us, who are daily and hourly groaning beneath a body of sin and death. It is the load of sin that so deeply tries us, and our utter inability to bring forth the holiness that you urge upon our sore and bleeding consciences. It is our base backslidings, our sins against love and blood, our barrenness and deadness; the dreadful depravity of our hearts; our getting every day worse instead of getting every day better, that so deeply tries us: and your doctrine rubs salt into our bleeding, gaping wounds."

To such tried and distressed souls as these, who have been harassed almost to death by the doctrine of progressive sanctification, how reviving and encouraging it is when the mystery of the two natures is

opened up to their spiritual understanding, and sealed upon their conscience by the Blessed Spirit!

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