

The Old man.' 'The New Man,' 'I'

by John Nelson Darby

The speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing individuality and taking responsibility for our actions, while also acknowledging the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit.

Scripture: Romans 6:6, Romans 7:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:22

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Responsibility in Sin"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the distinction between the old man and the new man in Christ, asserting that while the old man represents our sinful nature, we are responsible for our actions through the power of Christ. He critiques the notion that one can excuse sinful behavior by attributing it solely to the old man, insisting that we must recognize our personal responsibility in the presence of sin. Darby argues that the flesh, which opposes the Spirit, is a current reality that must be acknowledged, and that true freedom in Christ involves actively mortifying the deeds of the body. He clarifies that while the old man is considered past in a theological sense, the struggle with the flesh remains a present challenge for believers. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of our identity in Christ and the ongoing battle against sin.

Transcript

p439 J. B. Stoney, [to Ed. of 'Food for the Flock' Vol. 2, p.284.] I entirely acquiesce in the general purpose of - The I of individuality needs no proof; it is in the consciousness of everybody. I cannot use the word without declaring it. So that I have not accepted the famous dictum of Des Cartes: 'I think, therefore, I am.' The moment I say "I," all is said and proved, and better known than if attempted to be proved.

The thought of excusing oneself because it is the old man who acts is utterly false and evil. I am responsible and ought through the power of Christ who has set me free, to have kept the old man, or the flesh, if we are so to speak, down; not merely reckoning it dead, "but bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body." But it seems to me this paper* is defective in not adequately recognising the existence of flesh - of what lusts against the Spirit.

{*"The Old Man." "The New Man," "I". ("Food for the Flock." Vol 2:1.)}

I do not think there is any difficulty in scriptural statements where difficulties have not been made by those who wished to obscure the truth. When I say, "Not I, but Christ liveth in me," the soul taught of God knows that the I which does not live - is not owned - is the old Adam I. And when it says, "Not I, but sin that dwelleth in me," it gets the comfort of knowing, though not yet delivered, that the new life is a distinct thing.

To the heart that walks experimentally, and is taught of God, all this is light, not obscurity. It is only so when false teachers seek to puzzle the soul.

'As in Adam he has died' (p. 13) is an unhappy phrase (though I understand it) because in scripture it is used in the exactly opposite sense, and all have died in Adam. "By man came death," but that was by, not to, sin, which is what the writer means here.

Next, I do 'attribute all evil found within to the old man.' Negatives are always dangerous things. 'As though' qualifies it, I admit, but very inadequately, because the evil is in and from the old man, or at least the flesh. The object of the sentence is right, but the form regrettable. So again: 'Strictly speaking, the old man has no present existence.' Now what is the meaning of this? Has the flesh no present existence? and am I not to distinguish it? I admit my responsibility fully to keep the flesh down, and I am to blame if I do not. But, though the old man may be used to signify my Adam existence without Christ, yet it is so used here as that the distinct existence of what lusts against the Spirit is ignored. We are told: 'If he find sin there, he must not plead for it in excuse that it is his old man [so far very well, only I should leave out 'for it,' and say 'in excuse' - meaning plead for himself in excuse, not for it], but must honestly confess that it is himself.' I admit his fault, his responsibility fully. Through the Spirit he should have mortified the deeds of the body, and been full of Christ in the new man. But to say that it is himself, with the rejection of its being the old man, destroys, it seems to me, the force of the apostle's words: "Not I, but sin that dwelleth in me."

I admit the personal I. I admit the responsibility, and no excuse because the sin is there; but there is an ignoring the flesh, the two things contrary the one to the other, because scripture teaches, which it does, that the old man is put off. We are told the old man is of the past. In one passage the fact is admitted that the flesh lusts against the Spirit, but then how is what people really and experimentally mean by the old man, a part which has no present existence? If the paper adequately recognised the fact that the flesh is a present thing, I should not object at all to saying that the old man is a past thing; but this is not the case. I have put it off and put on the new; I am not in the flesh; and this is important, very important, to make clear. But the old man being habitually used for the flesh, even if incorrectly, and this being said to have no present existence, while the flesh is practically ignored - I fear that defectiveness as to this latter point may mislead, as well as the error the paper justly combats.

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