

The Cross and the Two Natures

by L.E. Maxwell

The sermon explores the internal conflict between the old and new natures in believers, emphasizing the transformative power of the Cross and the necessity of living by the Spirit.

Scripture: Romans 7:24

Topics: "New Creation in Christ", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

L.E. Maxwell explores the internal conflict between the old and new natures within believers, illustrating how the flesh, corrupted by sin, is in constant enmity with the Spirit. He emphasizes that upon salvation, individuals become new creations in Christ, yet they still grapple with the remnants of their old selves. Maxwell warns against a defeatist attitude that allows the old man to take responsibility for sin, asserting that believers must actively choose to put off the old and embrace the new. He highlights the necessity of recognizing our union with Christ's death to overcome the flesh and live in the Spirit. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a conscious decision to engage in the spiritual battle, choosing to live according to the Spirit for true victory.

Transcript

A WILD MAN, if imprisoned in a cage," says D. M. Panton, "so long as he is alone, is gentle, tractable, quiet, and appears quite civilized and reasonable; alone in the cage, he follows his own will, and has his own way, and is at peace. But unlock the door and push a civilized man into the cage; and watch. The wild man's countenance changes; an angry scowl darkens his face; and in another moment he hurls himself on the intruder, and the two are locked in deadly conflict." A close fellow worker once said: "I didn't know I had a temper until after I was saved." Until then her house had not been divided against itself. Self was in complete control. She chose her own path; she went her own way; she followed her own will. When, however, she became "a new creature" in Christ, she began to discover the poisonous principle of selfishness which was lodged in us at the Fall. The Saviour said plainly to religious Nicodemus: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh"--it can never enter the realm of spirit. It is unconvertible, incurable, incorrigible. Only "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." There is, therefore, in each believer the old man and the new. When Scripture speaks of the "first man," the "natural man," and "the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," it refers to what we are "in Adam," and from him by nature. On the other hand, those who have been born again have become new creatures "in Christ"; they have put on the new man."

As a believer I am shocked when I first discover that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing." The mind of the flesh is death. "It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). It is unmitigated antagonism against the things of the Spirit. It is not merely an enemy, in which case it might be reconciled. But it is "enmity against God." Paul says: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5:17). But the most startling and distressing shock to me personally is to find that I am both: "I am carnal, sold under sin," and "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Most every sincere Christian will therefore at some time or another cry out, consciously or unconsciously, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

This war, according to Scripture and experience, is of all wars the very worst--a civil war. It is a war, not with an external foe, but with an internal "fifth column" within the very citadel of Mansoul. And it is wrong to suppose that this relentless and undying antagonism can settle down to a deadlock, a kind of stalemate where neither side wins. We also fear that many Christians, having adopted what might be termed a defeatist position, attempt to make "the old man" responsible for their daily misdeeds. They have doubtless been encouraged in this extreme on account of certain teachers who give the impression that "the regenerate man is made up of two persons, two individuals, the old man and the new man, constituting two separate and independent beings, an angel and a devil linked together,--the old man unchangeably evil, the new perfect and impeccable" (H. Bonar). On the contrary, I am a single individual. As such I am responsible to "put off the old" and to "put on the new." The old man and the new man are not separate and distinct persons, but simply two aspects of one single responsible individual. Bishop Moule says: "And the body is no separate and, as it were, minor personality. If the man's body 'machinates' it is the man who is the sinner."

In an earlier chapter we dwelt upon the fact that Emperor William once refused request for an audience prepared by a German-American. The ground on which the audience was refused was this: Germans born in Germany but naturalized in America became Americans-"I know Americans, I know Germans, but German-Americans I do not know." As an individual I was once "in Adam." That same individual is now "in Christ." Make no mistake about it, I can-not at the same time be "in Adam" and "in Christ." When I was in Adam, I was "in the flesh," lost and cursed and in no sense a Christian. But I was cut off from Adam and joined to Christ in vital life-union at the Cross. "I have been crucified together with Christ" crucified because otherwise incurable. Through my union with Christ, I am "not in the flesh, but in the Spirit." We emphasize it again, therefore, that those who have been born again are not Adam-Christ believers. Such an approach will permit me no audience with my King. The Old Testament criminal who, in order to escape the law, "fled unto the tabernacle of the Lord, and caught hold on the horns of the altar," had meted out to him his just deserts:--"thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die" (Exod. 21:14). Even so, all flesh is under the curse.

Our old man was crucified with Him. We fear that many believers are holding the truth of the two natures in such a way that forbids audience with the King. On what grounds do we seek access to the throne? There is no mercy for the flesh. It dare not approach the holy place, lest God say, "Take him from mine altar that he may die." We must go in as crucified or not go at all. The Cross has fixed an eternal separation between us and the old man. Be this my lifelong attitude! Only thus can I go in "by the blood of Jesus."

But to illustrate. It has often been true of a Jewish or Hindu convert to Christianity that the relatives, in order to express how completely they cast him out, actually celebrate his funeral. Henceforth they treat him after this contemptible display of death as though he no longer exists. We once heard a Jewish

Christian thus describe his own "burial." Just after that funeral had been celebrated, the father made as though he would kiss the son goodbye. But the mother stepped between the two and said to the father, "Would you kiss that dead dog?" When Christ came into my humanity, He fastened me to Himself and took me to the cursed tree and down into the tomb that He might "once-for-all" terminate my relationship to my 'old man." Having been buried, I am "married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead." Has it ever dawned upon me what an ethical and moral contradiction I am to the Bridegroom of my soul when I step back to "kiss that dead dog"? Let me, then, solemnly sign my death sentence, and for-ever celebrate the funeral!

Not long ago we were preaching along this line when a perfect "dandy" commented after the message, "I don't know what he was talking about-I am not as bad as all that." A friend said: "Do you mean that you are never bothered with envy or vanity or pride?" (Such things were all too manifest.) "Oh yes, of course," he replied. "Well, what do you do about those things?" Glibly he replied, "Oh, the Blood takes care of all that." To this poor, self-sufficient young Christian, sin has not yet "become exceeding sinful." In the meantime the Lord Jesus is indeed a convenient fire escape out of hell, and His blood a handy rinse, absolving this superficial Christian of all responsibility.

Note again the close connection between the justification of Romans 5 and the sanctification of Romans 6, the one laying the basis for and leading immediately into the other. Concerning the former Paul says, "Where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly." Concerning the latter he asks, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein?" (Rom. 5:20; 6:1, 2, A.S.V.). The apostle then proceeds to explain that, when we were justified in Christ, we were so united with Him, "baptized into his death," that our whole former connection with Adam and with sin was for-ever terminated. In His death Christ placed between my old man and the new "the immeasurable depths of Calvary's annihilations. In view of my life-union with Christ crucified, I am vitally involved in that death. It is my judicial standing. From it issues the life I live--a life of death unto sin and oneness with God" (Huegel). This is my position the moment I become a Christian.

While there is no scriptural reason why the justified believer should not, immediately upon conversion, reckon himself "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord," the fact remains that most of us wander, as did the apostle Paul, in the wilderness of a divided affection (Romans 7) until we learn that "in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing." But once we cry out in utter hopelessness and despair, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death," then we enter into the blessed land of fruitful obedience-and conflict. Alas, the conflict remains in Romans 8, but oh, how different! In Romans 7 Paul experienced a conflict which issued in the most tragic defeat. That chapter is full of "I" and "Me." In Romans 8 the conflict continues, but with Paul on the winning side. "The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" has made him free.

But note that Paul stands in Romans 8 at the fork of two roads. To the left is the path "after the flesh"; to the right "after the Spirit." These two paths continually face the most victorious Christian. It is ours to choose. In Romans 8 the believer has liberty to choose to walk "after the Spirit." But it is not liberty that is automatic. We must still choose.

Thank God "we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh." That is glorious encouragement. The old debtorship has been cancelled. Then Paul couples warning with encouragement in Romans 8:13: "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die." The phrase "ye shall die" has been variously rendered, "about to die," "on the way to die," and "doomed to die." Is this what James means when he warns those drawn away by

their own lust that "sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death"? Most good expositors see here a frightful warning to those

who continue to walk "after the flesh." Reliable Matthew Henry says: "In a word, we are put upon this dilemma, either to displease the body or destroy the soul." Jamieson, Faucett and Brown say in that most excellent commentary, "If ye do not kill sin, it will kill you." Instead, therefore, of likening this undying conflict to a kind of deadlock or stalemate, the apostle rather likens it to a duel where each is out to take the life of the other.

After the children of Israel had gone through Jordan's floods (a figure of our death and resurrection with Christ), and had entered into the land of fruit and fight, they were indeed put upon the dilemma, "If ye do not kill the Canaanites, they will kill you." In this analogy is set forth the warfare between the flesh and the Spirit. While not ignoring the dark side of these warnings, we would rather thank God for the bright alternative that, "If ye through the Spirit do mortify [make to die, or put to death] the deeds of the body [the cursed Canaanitish flesh], ye shall live."

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