

Principle #3

The New You *our identity as believers*



Principles of Discipleship

Last week, we explored four metaphors that describe the wonders of salvation. The Bible has one other metaphor which deserves special attention. Like the other four, it has great implications, not only for our past lives, but for our present lives as well. The Bible is very clear that when Christ died, so did we. And when He was resurrected, we were too. Did you ever wonder why a Christian was supposed to be "different"? How many people get a chance to attend their own funeral?

Romans 6

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- ⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace

Main Passage: Romans 6

Wherever Paul went, people accused him of preaching "too much" grace. In fact, wherever the gospel is clearly taught, people have that reaction. Think of how the Pharisees disliked Jesus because he wasn't "religious" enough! You can almost hear Paul's accusers saying, "Paul, you keep saying that God's grace is a gift we can't earn, that we simply need to receive it. But that's too easy! That doesn't require enough from us. We should have to work for it! According to you, Paul, we might as well keep sinning all we can so that it will make God's grace that much more obvious!" Can you hear that accusation behind the words of verse 1?

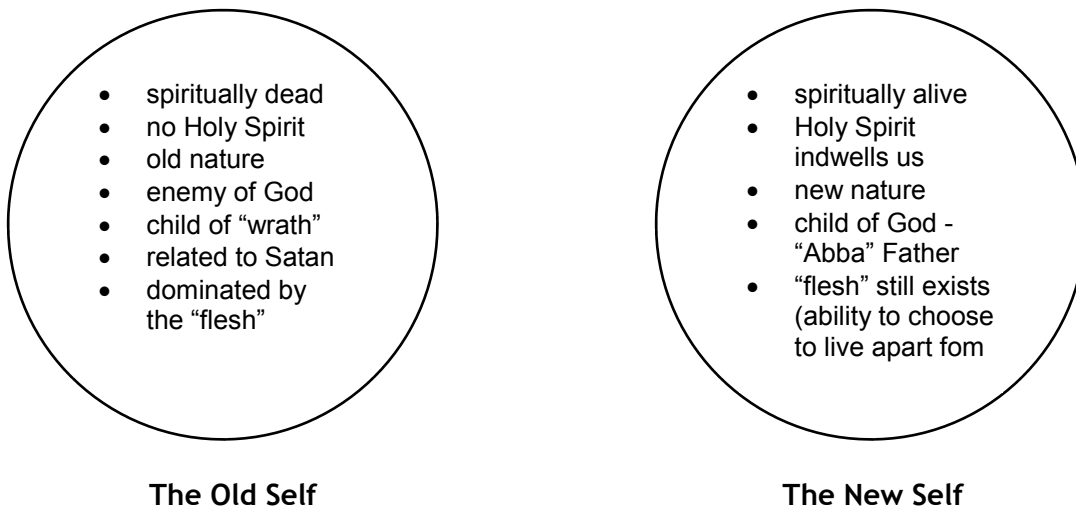


Note that this chapter consists of one basic question, worded in 2 slightly different ways (verses 1 and 15), and two answers. Paraphrase Paul's argument in these two sections: how does he answer those questions?

- **Romans 6:1-14**

- **Romans 6:15-23**

In essence Paul declares that we died when we became Christians (*“For we know that our old self was crucified with him...”* Rom 6:6). The “old” me is gone, and a “new” me was born that day. This radical truth must be grasped for us to make any real headway in the Christian life. If we believe that we are simply our “old” selves with a few cosmetic improvements, we’ll easily be defeated. If we believe we are “two selves”, as some wrongly teach, then we will tend to believe that the “old” self will always win. Perhaps the diagram below will help in our thinking:



2 More Major Passages:

In these next two passages, Paul uses two contrasts to describe the nature of a Christian. Colossians 3 compares heaven and earth; Ephesians 4 compares light and darkness. Each of these reveals something about the Christian's new self, and his old self as well. Both passages use the metaphor of "changing clothes" to describe the Christian life.

After observing the following two passages, answer these questions:

1. what “clothing” is a Christian to take off and put on?
2. why should a believer be good?
3. why does Paul make it sound like it's as simple as choosing to do right? Is it?
4. besides disobeying God, what does a Christian do when he sins (in relationship to himself)?

- **Colossians 3:1-17**

Break the passage into its parts.

Are there any resources here to help the Christian behave?

- **Ephesians 4:17-5:21**

Outline the passage. Note the structure of verses 25-32.

Does 5:5-6 mean that you can lose your salvation?

Are there any resources mentioned here to help the Christian live life differently?

Old and New Man

Chapter Three from *A Christian Looks at Himself*, by Anthony Hoekema



But, someone may still say, what about our “sinful nature”? What about our “depravity”? Does not the Bible teach that even after we have been born again, even after we have become believers, we continue to have a sinful nature and therefore to keep on sinning? And does this not imply that the Bible teaches us to continue to have a negative image of ourselves even after we have been converted?

In fact, such a person might go on to say, even when I accept the fact that in Christ all my past sins have been forgiven and all my past guilt has been removed, if I am as bad a sinner as the Bible describes me to be, don’t I keep on increasing my sins and piling up my guilt every day? Though, to be sure, I confess these new sins daily and receive forgiveness for them, doesn’t all this add up to a pretty negative self-image? Mustn’t I continue to see myself as a person perpetually dogged by failure, constantly trying to do the right things but just as constantly failing to do them? If the very holiest of men, as one Christian creed puts it, have “only a small beginning of this obedience,” how can any believer avoid having a negative image of himself?

This is the problem with which we must now deal. In trying to find a solution to it, let us first of all consider what the Scriptures teach about the concepts “old man” and “new man.” A better understanding of these concepts than is sometimes held will, I believe, help us to answer the question posed above.

It has been rather commonly held by Christians that in the believer there is a continual struggle between two aspects of his being, the “old man” which he is by nature and the “new man” which he puts on at the time of regeneration and conversion. According to this view, the old man and the new man are distinguishable “parts” of the believer. Before conversion he is only an old man; at the time of conversion he is said to put on the new man without, however, totally losing the old man. The converted person, or believer, is understood to be partly new man and partly old man. At times the old man is in control, whereas at other times the new man is in the saddle; the struggle of life, therefore, is the struggle between these two aspects or parts of his being (also sometimes called the “new nature” and the “old nature”).

This understanding of the old and the new man can easily lead to a negative self-image. One may, of course, think of himself as primarily new man, and only secondarily old man, but even in such a case his self-image will be of a person who is partly new and partly old – partly obedient to God and partly in rebellion against God. One might, however, also think of himself much more pessimistically, as primarily old man and only occasionally and rarely new man – in which case his self-image would be negative indeed.

It is to be seriously questioned, however, whether the view of “old man” and “new man” described above is the right one. In his *Principles of Conduct*, John Murray has rejected the idea that the believer is both old man and new man. It is just as wrong to call the believer both a new man and an old man, he argues, as it is to say that he is both regenerate and regenerate (p. 218). Murray contends that since

according to New Testament teaching the believer has put off the old man and put on the new, we must think of him as a new man though a new man not yet made perfect, and still the subject of progressive renewal. This renewal, however, is not to be conceived of as the progressive putting off of the old man and putting on of the new (pp. 218-19).

In his study of Paul, Hennis Ridderbos offers an interpretation similar to Murray’s. When Paul speaks about the old man and the new man, writes Ridderbos, he is not concerned primarily with the change which takes place in the life of an individual Christian after conversion, but with what took place once and for all in Christ (pp. 63-64). Christ, as the second Adam, died on the cross and arose from the grave for His people. Since Christ’s people are one with Him in corporate unity, what happened to Christ has therefore also happened to His people. By His death on the cross Christ dealt a death-blow to sin as the power which had been enslaving His people; by His resurrection He opened up a new way of living for His people: the way of living associated with God’s new creation.

The “old man” and the “new man” Ridderbos claims, ought to be understood in this salvation – history setting. They designate the great transition from spiritual death to spiritual life which came into existence through the death and resurrection of Christ, and which is now to be appropriated by faith. In other words, we may think of these concepts in both an objective and a subjective way. Objectively, “old” and “new” man mean that in Christ’s death and resurrection the old, sinful way of living has once for all been done away with, having lost its power over Christ’s people, whereas the new way of living associated with God’s new creation his once for all been inaugurated. Subjectively, “old” and “new” man mean that believers enter into this new way of living as they appropriate by faith – not only initially but continually – what happened in the death and resurrection of Christ. Another way of putting this is to say that “old” man refers to the old age in which man as incorporated in Adam is a slave to sin, whereas “new” man designates the new age in which man as a member of the body of Christ is now liberated from the slavery of sin and is free to live to the praise of God.

I believe that what Murray and Ridderbos are saying is of great significance for our subject. The old and the new man, it seems to me, ought not to be seen as aspects or sides or parts of the believer which are both still somehow present in him. How, then, should we understand these concepts? Murray can help us here. He says,

“‘Old man’ is a designation of the person in his unity as dominated by the flesh and sin” (p. 218). If this is so, it is obvious that the regenerated person is no longer an “old man.” Paul says in Romans 6:6, “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin” (ASV). This crucifixion of the old man happened in salvation history. When Christ died on the cross, our old man – that is, our total person as enslaved by flesh and sin –

was put to death with Him. This means that we who have been united with Christ through faith are no longer “old men.” Our old man or old self has been put to death with Christ.

What happened when Christ was crucified, however, has also been subjectively appropriated by us. This is taught by Paul in the two other passages where the terms “old man” and “new man” occur: Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:9-10. To quote just the latter passage, Paul there writes, “Lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (ASV). After the analogy of what has just been said about the old man, we conclude that the new man must mean the person in his unity ruled by the Holy Spirit. In this passage, therefore, Paul appeals to his readers not to lie to each other because they have once and for all put off the old man or old self and have once and for all put on the new man or the new self.

Our self-image as Christians, therefore, must be of ourselves as those who have decisively rejected the old self or old man (the total person enslaved by sin), and have just as decisively appropriated the new self or the new man (the total person ruled by the Spirit). Because of what Christ has done for us, and because we, enabled by His Spirit, have grasped all His benefits by faith, we are now to look upon ourselves as no longer identified with the old self or old man, but as identified with the new self or the new man. We are to see ourselves, therefore, not as partly old selves and partly new selves, but as new persons in Christ.

Does this mean that for the believer the struggle against sin is over? No! The New Testament is **full** of the language of struggle: the Christian life is called a battle, a race, and a wrestling against evil spirits; we are told to be *good* Christian soldiers, to fight the good fight of the faith, to resist the devil, to take heed lest we fall, and to put on the whole armor of God. Moreover, in this struggle we do not always win, we do not resist every temptation. On the contrary, we hear New Testament saints confessing that they are far from perfection, that they have not yet attained, that in many things they all stumble. We hear John saying in his first epistle, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1:8). The point is, however, that when we do fall into sin, we are momentarily living according to the old man, or the old self, which we have actually repudiated. We are then living contrary to what we really are *in Christ*. Though we are regenerate: we are then living contrary to our regenerate life. Though we have put on the new man, we are then living contrary to the new man, as if we were still the old man.

But the fact that this does happen – and may, indeed, happen frequently – does not mean that we must therefore revise our self-image as having to include both *old man and new man*. For – and this is a most important point – when we slip into an old man way of living, we are living contrary to our true selves; we are denying our true self image. Paul does not say in Romans 6: 11, “Consider yourselves to be mostly alive to God and mostly dead to sin.”

What he *says is*, “Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God.” This, then, must be our Christian self-image. We must consider ourselves to be new persons in Christ, who have once and for all turned our backs upon the old self, and who therefore refuse to be identified with it any longer.

The old man or old self reveals itself in an old lifestyle, that of enslavement to sin. The new man or new self should reveal itself in a new life-style, that of joyful obedience to God. But it does not always do so. There are times when even the believer, who is a new person in Christ, lives in accordance with the old life-style. When he does so, however, he is being inconsistent with the person he truly is. Therefore Paul calls on believers to make their life-styles consistent with the new selves they have put on.

It might be well at this point to say something about the use of the word “depraved” as a term with which to describe believers. If it is true that the believer is to look upon himself as a new man in Christ, is it then proper to refer to such a person as still “depraved” or even as still “totally depraved”?

Perhaps a bit of historical background would be in order here. The concept of “total depravity” was developed by theologians in the Reformed or Calvinistic tradition to designate the condition of man as a fallen creature, apart from the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. The term was intended to convey two thoughts: (1) that in man as he is “by nature” the corruption or pollution of sin extends to every part of his being: to his mind as well as his appetites and impulses, to his aesthetic appreciation as well as his capacity to choose, and so on, and (2) that man in his natural state cannot do what is fundamentally pleasing to God, and cannot in his own strength change his basic preference for sin to love for God.

But now the question arises, is “depravity” or “total depravity” a proper expression to use in describing a regenerate man – a person to whom the Holy Spirit has given new spiritual life? We have just noted that the term was introduced to describe man apart from the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit. That being the case, it should be obvious that the term ought not to be used to describe a person in whom the Spirit has begun the process of renewal and sanctification.

One might conceivably counter: But is it not true that even a regenerated person must still struggle against sin in every area of his life, in his thoughts as well as in his feelings, in his mind as well as in his appetites? Must not the believer still contend with the flesh, put to death the deeds of the body, and fight against indwelling sin? Indeed he must. But since the believer is now *in Christ*, indwelt by *the Holy Spirit*, he has been endowed with power to resist temptation and to overcome sin – a power which the unregenerate man does not have.

For these reasons I conclude that one ought not to say that a regenerate person is still “totally depraved.” Though the believer *is still inclined* to all kinds of sin, the indwelling Spirit now enables him more and more to say no to sin. We ought therefore to see him, think of him, and describe him as a person who is a new creature in Christ, who is being progressively renewed in the image of God.

SCRIPTURE

Which verses significantly impacted you and why?



ARTICLE

What did you personally glean from this article?



PRINCIPLE

Summarize the truth you've learned in a concise statement:



LIFE APPLICATION

- 1. According to this study, are you a “new man”, “old man”, or both?*
- 2. What role have past failures and / or successes, parental messages and feelings played into establishing your spiritual identity?*
- 3. According to God’s Word, even though we are still able to live life in our own strength (i.e., “the flesh”), how should we choose to see ourselves?*

