

## **“The Believer’s New Nature”**

**Galatians 2: 17-21**

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**Text: Galatians 2:17-21 (NLT) <sup>17</sup> But suppose we seek to be made right with God through faith in Christ and then we are found guilty because we have abandoned the law. Would that mean Christ has led us into sin? Absolutely not! <sup>8</sup> Rather, I am a sinner if I rebuild the old system of law I already tore down. <sup>19</sup> For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God. <sup>20</sup> My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup> I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die.**

The Apostle Paul said:

**<sup>20</sup> My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

Paul is saying **“I no longer live.”** We have to admit....that’s a curious thing to say. He was still alive among them. They recognized him. What did he mean? He meant that he had a new nature. He was simply not the same person any longer. The old Paul had died! He meant that having gained eternal life thru Jesus Christ, he was not just going to Heaven later when he died physically....but that right now while still living he was no longer the same man. And so for us too. The “new nature” will not start when we die to this life. It starts when we come to Christ. So...what is that new nature to be like? First, let us pray.

I have deliberately used the New Living Translation today because it makes a complex subject a little easier to follow. First, let’s review. A few weeks ago, we talked about the death of a terrorist and the punishment that murder deserves. Then we spoke about Hell itself and then, the next week about Heaven. Then we spoke of the believer’s resurrection. All themes about the afterlife. Now, today, we will back up and review life here and now before resurrection and before Heaven. Once a person has been saved...once a person has been born again and been given the gift of eternal life...once that person is certain of [a] Heaven and [b] resurrection...what will be the “New Nature” of that Christian...while still

here on Earth? You've joined the family of God and you are all set for Heaven because of Jesus. But, you must live *here* until you are called *there*. So, what will be the main trait that other people will see in you? What will be your "New Nature?"

This sermon would be very easy to preach and hear if I simply followed the theme that the title suggests. We could just say "What is the Believer's New Nature Like?" But that would only take about five minutes or less to answer. The Christian's new nature is a changed nature the same as the Christian's new body will be changed. We could just say the Christian's new nature was simply described by Paul as a nature under the Lordship of the Holy Spirit. Namely:

**Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.**

There it is. The perfect description of the Christian growing in sanctification and grace. But when we discussed the believer's resurrection we spoke of how that will come about thru the determination of the Risen Christ. In that same way, I want today to focus on HOW and WHY the believer has a new nature. And here is the KEY. Here is the whole sermon today: ***THE BELIEVER'S NEW NATURE IS A NATURE TRANSFORMED BECAUSE IT IS SAVED BY GRACE AND NOT BY LAW.*** And that is the reality...that grace is at work in the new nature...and that it changes the way the believer lives and acts and thinks. And its transformation is pleasing to God. Put another way, the person bound by their old sinful nature cannot please God. Paul said this:

**Romans 8:5-8 (NIV) <sup>5</sup> Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. <sup>6</sup> The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; <sup>7</sup> the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. <sup>8</sup> Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.**

**"Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."** Recently, we've seen several perfect examples of this truth. Consider this....we've noticed an amazing burst of immorality in our society in these last few weeks. First one prominent European leader and then another were arrested in the U.S. on charges of sexual misconduct. A famous governor is found out for having a mistress and a child that's been hidden away. A former Senator is charged with misusing campaign funds to meet the needs of *his* mistress. Two Congressmen are caught sending lewd and earthy photos over the internet. The most recent one lying about it for ten days and then finally admitting it. But in doing so, he said he would not step down from office because he had not technically broken the law. Quite amazing. Whose law did he not break? Perhaps not the laws of Congress

although he probably did so. But surely the he broke the laws of God. Yet, he shows no shame.

Think about this with me. If you saw the Congressman's confession, he indicated sorrow for his family and sorrow for doing such a foolish thing. But he showed no conviction of sin. One could not help but feel that if he had never been caught, he would never have admitted the truth. And he'd still be doing it. Again... **“Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”**

That news conference sent Bill O'Reilly into a real fit. Now, O'Reilly is a religious man. An active Catholic, he was stunned that the Congressman thought it was enough to finally tell the truth. Let me quote Mr. O'Reilly loosely because he said something interesting. He basically said: “I'm a Catholic. If I go to confession and ask forgiveness I get it...but there has to be some kind of contrition on my part...right?! There must be something that I have to do! I can't just say 'Sorry!' and that's it!”

Now...this event with the Congressman and Mr. O'Reilly's theological ponderings raise an issue. When people are still controlled by their old nature, can they ever really repent of sin or lawbreaking...for the right reason? No. The new nature wants to please God. The old nature may be somewhat sorry for sin but it is more concerned with punishment and pride of self.

Back to O'Reilly for a moment. He makes a thoughtful point. Mr. O'Reilly is on the right track but he has an incomplete understanding real contrition. The Catholic notion of contrition means that the sinner confesses his sin not just because he got caught but because he has offended God. And that is valid. Now, O'Reilly would agree that such behavior offends God. So, I'm not running him down. But “contrition” is literally a word that meant “crushed!” **Here's the BIG POINT: God is far more interested in the sinner being crushed and seeking salvation by grace than in being contrite and trying to work off his sin.**

In Catholic theology, usually contrition is followed by “something” the sinner must do. But why? If I could chat with Mr. O'Reilly, I would ask him why he feels he must *do* something? Usually, the something is an act of “penance” whereby the sinner adds his own “merit” to his confession. So, a Priest might say “You are absolved of your sin. Go and serve in the homeless shelter for a week or give an offering in the name of the poor.” The motives are good. Even going back to the Reformation, some Catholic theologians struggled with this issue. Why? Because they correctly were concerned that the forgiveness of sins based solely on Christ....grace based solely on what Jesus did...would invite spiritual “indolence.” Laziness. But we must be careful to clarify.

A “contrite” person should feel ashamed and crushed. Their contrition would indicate real sorrow for having offended God. But an act of contrition will not and cannot earn forgiveness. Put another way: if I am a forgiven sinner I will

come to despise my sin and I will feel contrite. But any righteous acts I perform will be the evidence of that contrition not the means of forgiveness. There is nothing I can do to get forgiven except confess and ask God's mercies. But I should be changed.

Let me be clear. Repentance and changed behavior is a good thing! Remember the words of John the Baptist. He spoke of repentance leading to righteous living. For example, when he preached to a crowd about the coming Day of Judgment, they replied:

**Luke 3:10-14 (NIV) <sup>10</sup> "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. <sup>11</sup> John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." <sup>12</sup> Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" <sup>13</sup> "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. <sup>14</sup> Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--be content with your pay."**

In other words, if you're really sorry about your sins against God, you will start to live differently! You will start to live in such a way that God is pleased! But then hopefully you will realize that you can't keep all the moral rules of God and you begin to look for the Savior. The person with the new nature knows he cannot live sinlessly and he has received God's grace and he has been set free.

A Professor of mine years ago wrote a book about Romans called "Set Free to Be." In other words once I am set free by grace and I am enjoying my new nature, I can begin to be what I should have been all along. Namely, a man who loves God and his Laws but who is saved by grace. As to the laws of God or the moral rules, he comes to understand St. Augustine who said: "Love God...and do anything you want!" The new nature is a product of grace because Jesus kept the law on its behalf. Peace. But we always tilt back to O'Reilly's comment "There must be something I should do!" Even the Christian often quietly suspects he is saved by grace and kept saved by works.

Believe it or not, this teaching that we are saved by grace and we can rest assured in God's mercies because Christ kept the law...this teaching was the single hardest idea to get across in the early church. Consider: the Holy Spirit revealed that salvation and forgiveness would be issued by grace thru faith to those who confess their sins and ask to be saved! But wait! Wait! If you are a first century Jew living under the law... the MORAL RULES OF God...you are a lot more comfortable with John the Baptist's theology than with that of Paul! You would say to Paul "What about God's rules? They no longer matter? We can just not bother with them?" That was really what Bill O'Reilly was asking. What about some outworking of God's rules? And Paul would say....**HERE IS THE KEY...Contrition and outworking of repentance are good things but...God is not**

*trying to raise up perfect rule-keepers but new creatures who love His rules but are saved by Grace.*

Here is a shocking statement: many Christians saved by grace are still trying to save themselves by keeping the law. They correctly value the Law of God but they mis-apply it to their own lives and usually to others. That is why very legalistic Christians are so hard to be with....they are constantly judging themselves and everyone else. They have been given new natures but they live under the tyranny of their old nature. And often, they are cheerless and nervous Christians. And they make Christianity seem totally unappealing!

The new creature in Christ has a new nature and he is not a rule keeper because he must keep the rules...but because he is a new creature with a new nature *he wants to keep the rules*. You see...O'Reilly is looking at the fear of God and trying to embrace it by bringing known sin to him in confession and then demonstrating his sincerity by acts of contrition. In the end, he is pursuing a Gospel of rule-keeping...a Gospel of works. Because...what if he misses one sin? What if he forgets to confess it? His theological mistake is the while it is good to bring God our sins in confession....what we must do is bring ourselves in confession and asked to be saved forever from the penalty of sin...instead of thinking that God might drop us from Heaven if we fail to confess one or we don't do penance.

We're talking today about LAW VERSUS GRACE. The person with the new nature understands GRACE and lives by grace and gives grace to others. They understand that God's rules are wonderful and worth embracing but that they are saved by Jesus who kept God's rules perfectly. This does not mean ignore God's rules but learn from them and learn to love the Savior Jesus for keeping them on your behalf!

I want to re-use an old illustration that seems to present LAW VERSUS GRACE very clearly. It is baseball season and our Tigers are closing in on first place. But playing baseball in the Major leagues is quite a challenge. Put simply: you may be terrific this year or this month but if you start playing poorly for a few weeks...if you break the law of productivity...you're going to sit on the bench. So, every ballplayer from high school on up learns to live with a sort of tentative salvation; you're on the team but you might get cut!

Here is a great and true story about grace. In the early nineteen fifties Mickey Mantle broke into the majors with the New York Yankees. Just about everyone expected him with his prodigious talent to be one of the greatest players ever. And he was. But not that first summer. You see, they brought him up to the Yankees too soon and the first month he was there, he hardly ever got a hit. He was playing so poorly that he went to his manager and pleaded to be sent down to the minor leagues. "I can't play at this level!" he said. But his manager knew that he would become a great player and he really did not need him to be a star at

that time. So, he told Mantle “You will be my right fielder every single game for the rest of season ... even if you never get a hit! Don’t worry about it. I will not take you out. Just relax and enjoy playing major league baseball.” That assurance made all the difference! With all the pressure off, Mantle then finished the season as a rookie sensation and batted at the top of the league. Why? Because he was secure in his manager’s promises to him and he was no longer worried about earning his playing time. He believed his manager. Question: do you believe God when he says you are saved his by grace?

If you think about it, the young rookie ballplayer was a changed man...changed by grace...the grace of his manager. He took on a “new nature.” The genuine Christian is someone changed by grace and they take on a new nature because Christ did for them what they could not do for themselves. But this is hard to grasp. Grace makes people nervous. And suspicious! So, Paul wrote:

**Galatians 2:17-21 (NLT) <sup>17</sup> But suppose we seek to be made right with God through faith in Christ and then we are found guilty because we have abandoned the law.**

Here is the problem Paul is having with his listeners. The Jews and even the Gentiles all knew that God had standards of behavior. The “Law” meant keeping the many rules of the Old Testament and keeping them so as to possibly earn favor with God. But as valuable as the moral rules were, no one could keep them perfectly. So, Paul said a man can only get right with God thru Christ. But then others criticized him for not worrying about the rules or the law! Others will say “Guilty!” The same is true for us today. Some people even argue that resting in grace by trusting Christ would mean Christ has encouraged lawless sin! But Paul is saying the real sin would be to abandon trust in Christ and go back to the system of laws that you could not keep! He writes:

**Would that mean Christ has led us into sin? Absolutely not! <sup>8</sup> Rather, I am a sinner if I rebuild the old system of law I already tore down.**

Now, he reminds them that law-keeping did not work! All it did was remind him of how condemned he was! He says:

**<sup>19</sup> For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me.**

Then he gave up on law-keeping and placed his trust in Christ! And so, in a sense, he died! In a sense, he was crucified with Christ. Christ bore his sins and died and he somehow died with him and was spiritually raised! From now on Paul is saying, he’s living in that trust relationship with Christ...enjoying his new nature and his freedom from condemnation. The man who tried in vain to get right with God by keeping the law...died. A new man with a new nature set free now lives.

**So I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God. <sup>20</sup> My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup> I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die.**

Here is the great irony. You are more likely to keep the law...to love God's MORAL RULES...you are more likely to honor them with your new nature fully grasping that God loves you and will not let you go... than you would ever keep the law in your own strength.

So...was all of this just a lot of theological wandering? I hope not. Allow me to summarize today's message of the believer's new nature by asking a few questions. Do you secretly feel that God is probably unhappy with you? Do you suspect that He might be sorry you asked for salvation? Do you fret about lots of rules like "Don't miss church!" "Be sure to tithe!" "Don't read a new translation!" "Don't smoke or dance or drink!" "Don't even consider different ways of looking at the Bible!" "A Christian must never do this..or that..."

Too many Christians have been given new natures but they are being suffocated by their old and worried natures. They simply do not understand grace and they just do not believe God when He says that they will stay in His line up forever!

Let us pray.