



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

### Lesson 12.4 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

#### The Struggle between the Old Man and the New Man

The Bible clearly teaches that conversion is altogether a work of God, and that a person cannot contribute anything at all to their own conversion because they are, by nature, dead in their sins. But after the Holy Spirit has brought a person to faith in Jesus Christ, that person has two forces working within him: the new man and the old man. The new man is the creation of the Holy Spirit. The new man is in total agreement with the Holy Spirit in every way and cooperates with the Holy Spirit. The old man is the sinful flesh inherited from Adam and is often called “the old Adam”. The old man resists the work of the Holy Spirit at every turn and is in total agreement with Satan and the unbelieving world.

The psalmist David referred to the creation of this new man in Psalm 110, which is a psalm that foretells the days of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Speaking of the Messiah, David says: **“Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power”** (Psalm 110:3). Thus, there is this new man in the believer that wants to do God’s will and that is happy to serve the Lord. As Paul says, **“I delight in the law of God according to the inward man”** (Romans 7:22).

Jesus said that He Himself abides in His disciples, and that His disciples abide in Him (John 15:4-5). As long as this connection remains, Jesus’ disciples will bring forth fruit, that is, they will do those things in their lives that are pleasing to God and glorify His name. In order to help His disciples in bringing forth fruit, Jesus assured them: **“I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you”** (John 14:16-17). A bit later Jesus said to them: **“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. ... But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”** (John 14:23, 26).

Thus, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all work within the believer. The new man in the Christian is God’s creation, and this new man in the Christian cooperates with the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification – in the bringing forth of good fruit. Confessional Lutherans declare: *“The reborn ... cooperates in all the works of the Holy Spirit that He accomplishes through us”* (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 561, ¶88). God and the new man are not equal partners in sanctification, however, since God is the Creator and sustaining power of the new man.

After his conversion, the apostle Paul saw himself as a worker cooperating with God. He wrote to the Corinthians: **“We are God’s fellow workers”** (1 Corinthians 3:9), and Paul called himself and his associates **“workers together with Him”** (2 Corinthians 6:1). But at the same time Paul admitted: **“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God”** (2 Corinthians 3:5). He also said: **“We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us”** (2 Corinthians 4:7).

The new man in the Christian is a creation of God. The apostle Paul wrote that the **“new man ... was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness”** (Ephesians 4:24). He said that the **“new man ... is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him”** (Colossians 3:10).

Thus, the new man is the restoration of the image of God, which was lost in Adam's fall into sin. The apostle John was certainly speaking of the new man when he wrote: "**Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God**" (1 John 3:9). If a Christian sins, it is not the work of the new man that God has created in the Christian, but it is the work of the "**old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts**" (Ephesians 4:22).

Jesus said: "**That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit**" (John 3:6). The new man in the Christian is called "**spirit**" – something new created by the Holy Spirit. This new man is also sometimes called "**the inward man**" that "**is being renewed day by day**" (2 Corinthians 4:16), in contrast to "**the outward man**" that "**is perishing**" (2 Corinthians 4:16). Paul wrote: "**If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new**" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Because the Holy Spirit has created this new man in the Christian at his conversion, and yet the Christian still retains his sinful flesh, the life of the Christian involves a continuing struggle between the new man in him and the old man in him. The apostle Paul presented this struggle in detail in chapter 7 of his letter to the Romans, using his own life as an example. In verses 1-6 he describes his former life as an unbeliever as being "**in the flesh**", and at that time his "**sinful passions ... were at work ... to bear fruit to death**" (Romans 7:5). He speaks of his conversion as a deliverance that now enables him to "**serve in the newness of the Spirit**" (Romans 7:6).

In Romans 7:7-13 Paul described his struggles with God's law prior to his conversion when he began to realize that he was a doomed sinner. He used the past tense in that description. But in verses 14-25 Paul uses the present tense to describe the struggle within himself after his conversion. This was a struggle that was continuing within him as he was writing this letter. We need to take a close look at his words in order to understand this struggle between the new man and the old man that every Christian experiences.

The new man is the defining influence in Christian's life. Paul says: "**What I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me**" (Romans 7:15-20). The real Paul, controlled by the new man, wants to do the good things that God wants him to do. But he finds himself doing things that the new man hates – things that the real Paul hates. Why is this? It is because of the sin that dwells in him. It is because of the sinful flesh that remains in him. There is nothing good in his flesh.

Paul is unable to carry out in his life all the good things that he wants to do, according to his new man, because of the continuing presence of the old man. This is what Paul says in Romans 7:21-25: "**I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.**"

There is no Christian that does not have the same struggle that Paul had. There are these two forces that Paul calls by different names. In his conclusion he uses the terms "**mind**" and "**flesh**". His true mind is the new man that controls him, but the flesh always remains as an obstacle. Thus, sanctification remains a gradual process, a striving to do the right thing according to God's will, but always failing to be perfectly successful. But notice that in his wretchedness the apostle Paul turns to Christ as his Deliverer. The Christian in his struggle against the flesh repents of his sins daily and turns to Christ daily

for forgiveness. He also prays that the Holy Spirit will continue to work together with his new man to wage continual war against his sinful flesh.

There are other references to the struggle between the old man and the new man in Paul's letters. To the Galatians he wrote: "**Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish**" (Galatians 5:16-17). He then lists "**the works of the flesh**" (Galatians 5:19-21) and "**the fruit of the Spirit**" Galatians 5:22-23).

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul stresses the importance of continuing the struggle. A Christian who no longer struggles against his flesh will lose not only the battle but also the war. "**For this you know,**" he says, "**that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience**" (Ephesians 5:5-6).

For this reason the apostle Paul in all his letters calls on Christians to "**put off ... the old man**" and "**put on the new man**" as he does in the long section from Ephesians 4:20 to 6:20, which he begins with these words: "**But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness**" (Ephesians 4:20-24).

What needs to be put off? Lying, stealing, hurtful words, bitterness, anger, fornication, filthiness, idolatry, drunkenness, and other sins that are listed in Ephesians 4:20 to 6:20. What needs to be put on? Speaking the truth, hard work, generosity, kind words, love, thanksgiving, avoidance of evil, use of the Word of God, carrying out one's duties as wife, husband, child, parent, master, servant, and continuing in prayer.

A similar section is found in Paul's letter to the Colossians, chapters 3:5 to 4:6. It is because of Paul's presentations of the struggle between flesh and spirit in the Christian that Martin Luther liked to use the Latin phrase: *simul justus et peccator*, which means "righteous and sinner at the same time". We are just and righteous through the imputed forgiveness of sins, but we are still sinners because of our sinful flesh and only beginners in living the Christian life.

Because of the new man created by the Holy Spirit, the Christian is able to exercise power over the old man. When we were baptized or when we were first brought to faith in Christ, "**our old man was crucified with Him (Christ), that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin**" (Romans 6:6). Why, then, should the Christian allow the old man to be in control? Paul asks: "**How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life**" (Romans 6:2-4). Therefore Paul writes to the Christians in Rome: "**Do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ... Sin shall not have dominion over you**" (Romans 6:12-14).

The sinful flesh in us cannot be converted or reeducated. It must be put to death, crucified, buried, or drowned, as Martin Luther wrote in his *Small Catechism*. The old man is constantly seeking to regain control of the Christian. Therefore he must be put to death daily. Paul says: "**If you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live**" (Romans 8:13). Paul himself had to kill his own sinful flesh daily, for he says: "**I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified**" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Continuing in the struggle against our sinful flesh is difficult but altogether necessary. A refusal to fight against the flesh is a rejection of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote: **“God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit”** (1 Thessalonians 4:7-8). **“For this is the will of God, your sanctification”** (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

This struggle requires seriousness and perseverance, for the devil is on the side of our flesh: **“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world”** (1 Peter 5:8-9). We should also expect persecution to threaten us, for, as Paul says: **“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”** (2 Timothy 3:12). Throughout the world Christians are generally a persecuted minority, for Jesus said: **“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”** (John 15:19).

The struggle of the Christian against all the forces of evil is described by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:10-18. In the strength of the Lord, using the spiritual weapons He has provided for us, we are **“able to stand against the wiles of the devil”** (Ephesians 6:11), **“to withstand in the evil day”** (Ephesians 6:13), and **“to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one”** (Ephesians 6:16).

### **Questions**

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1. To what extent does the Christian cooperate in his own sanctification?
2. What are the names the Bible gives to the two forces in the Christian?
3. What are the major differences between these two forces?
4. What are some of the works of the flesh?
5. What are some of the fruits of the Spirit?
6. What is meant by the phrase *simul justus et peccator*?
7. What must every Christian expect to face in his or her life?
8. Why is it so important that we persevere in this struggle?
9. What tools has God given us for this struggle (see Ephesians 6)?