

CHAPTER 4 – Sinner to Saint

(by John Henry Alan, edited by Bob Clarkson)

When God began to teach me about my identity in Christ, the truth about the death of my old nature was the most difficult thing for me to understand. The Scripture clearly states that the old nature was crucified with Christ, yet it felt like my old nature was very much alive. But the truth is that the old Bob—the person I was before I was saved—is dead with respect to my relationship to sin. (I am dead to the penalty of sin since it was paid by Christ on the Cross.) I enjoyed a close friendship with sin. I reveled in lust for many things. I greatly desired to be indulged with pleasure, applause and to be in control of people and happenings. But I was conflicted when I finished the act of sin, I felt miserable about it. Yet I continued to go there. And I was constantly apologizing to God and feeling guilty, shameful and afraid to be near God. I just could not understand why I was such a miserable Christian when the Holy Spirit was in me. Maybe you know that same feeling.

When the Lord revealed the death of my old nature to me, I was initially confused. But it soon became abundantly clear that what you believe about your nature may be the single greatest factor in determining the level of spiritual understanding and victory over sin you experience.

What Is Your Nature?

Webster's dictionary defines nature as "the essential character of something; inborn character or disposition."

What is the essential, inborn character of the Christian? At the core of your life, at the spirit level, you have a disposition that hungers to glorify God. This is the Holy Spirit who came to live within you at the moment you were born again. It was the birth of God's Spirit in you. Now you have a Spirit in you which wants to please God alone. Yet **you** are still alive which is evidence that your old spirit (human nature) is still in you as well. (Incidentally, in case you were not aware of this I'll tell you, when your human spirit leaves your body, your body goes limp; dead.) Life is in the breath. When God breathed life into you, you became a living soul. When He takes that breath away, you die.

My son had come to talk about his early years with God. After he came home from prison he told me, "I trusted Christ and was born again while I was in elementary school. But, I have often continued to lust and wander around as though I wasn't a Christian. I'm still struggling at times with the temptation to do drugs and chase women." He explained how he wondered when God would resolve the conflict of actions which did not match the righteousness of Jesus, his Savior. But I was shocked to hear him say this.

When I go out drinking with my buddies on Friday nights, I pray this prayer aloud before we go in to the bar. "Lord, I'm going to get drunk and sleep with a girl tonight. I am going to keep on doing this until Your Holy Spirit transforms my life and takes it away." Some time later he said that God released him completely from this lifestyle. Later still, those drinking buddies, although they were mad at him every time he prayed that prayer going into the bar, both come to faith in Jesus

themselves, in part because they saw God do this miracle in my son's life.

My son felt miserable while sinning, but somehow he knew that it is only the Holy Spirit who overcomes the nature of humanity. It is only God that can tame the wildness in us. The pleasure of sinning doesn't disappear when a person trusts Christ. But after the short-lived pleasure is gone, sin leaves a Christian feeling empty and unfulfilled. Have you found that to be true when you sin? It isn't your nature (in union with God's Spirit) now to live a lifestyle of sin. If this weren't true, you wouldn't experience inner conflict when you sin. If your **only** nature were your natural, human, sin nature, it wouldn't bother you to sin. It would be as comfortable for you as barking is for a dog. However, you're not comfortable with sin, because your nature is not what it used to be. You have a spirit that tries to satisfy your selfishness. And you have a Spirit that desires to satisfy God selflessly. You might think of it as how a person desires to please their most significant other even if they must give up some personal pleasure.

The *new* you has a deeply personal relationship to Jesus which compels you **not** to sin. Sin might best be defined as 'to live backward.'

L I V E spelled backward is E V I L.

In Christ we have the power to live as we were created to live. Additionally, God put His Holy Spirit, our most significant other, within us. We are in an inextricable bond with Him. And the best news is that you don't have to struggle. You don't have to try not to sin. Just relax in the new relationship and let Him lead in every dance.

The old you is dead to sin. That is, you died to that old relationship with sin. Before you were saved, you had one nature. It was the sin nature, sometimes called an unregenerate nature, the Adamic nature, the natural man, or your old self. The essence of your existence at that point is that you lived in Adam. You were totally dead to God. You had no relationship to God and no affection for Him, so you had no impetus to please or serve Him. Since you trusted Christ, you still have your original sin (selfish) nature. But you also have a new one. This new nature is the Spirit of Christ (the Holy Spirit) and His nature is the disposition to please God the Father in all things! In 2 Peter 1:4, we read that we have become “partakers of the divine nature.” The new creating in Christ gives you a desire that was not there at your birth. Being a new creation, does not imply or infer that the old nature is gone. But you may have heard the saying, “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts,” so it is for the Christian. The union of two creates one, a unity similar to marriage or other significant human relationship.

God had planned from before the creation of the universe that humans would become joined with His Holy Spirit. His plan was to give birth to the Spirit of God in any person who desired to be in relationship with Him. And like our human relationships, from acquaintance, to friendship, to marriage, there is always a two person choice in the matter. And, to be sure, there are plenty of conflicts in relationships. But conflicts do not have to be relationship breakers. And the best chance to heal a broken relationship is for one to never stop loving the other, even if they are abandoned by the other. Sounds like Jesus, doesn't it? And the most magnificent of all relationships is achieved when a human becomes

so passionately intimate with God that all they desire is, like Jesus, to please God! Every conflict is ultimately resolved by both choosing to please the other no matter what.

The new creature, you, with both your own spirit and the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Himself in you, **are** the glory of God. Imagine this! God is able to transform a human being into an incredible soul mate. It's like a radical makeover. And the only thing you have to give to God that pleases Him is all of you, Heart, Soul, Mind and Body! Together the union of your spirit with God's is the glory of the Father!

We have already discovered that God created a new person when we trusted Christ as our Savior. So what happened to the old man?

Crucified with Christ

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith **of** the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

When Paul said that he had “been crucified with Christ,” he meant that death had occurred. But the death was not me, the person, it was death to my relationship to sin. As it were, Christ and I died to the penalty of sin together on the Cross *in spirit*. Paul went on to say, “It is no longer I who live.” There is an unavoidable truth in this verse. God had to put to death sin (that is our relationship to sin) so that we could be joined with Jesus

Christ. And the energy of life in my body is now the very living Christ who was raised from the dead.

Our relationship with sin was terminated in death. We have been given a new nature, that of Jesus Christ. The life we now possess is nothing less than the very life of Jesus Christ!

We Died to Sin!

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 Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ... Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him (Romans 6:2-3, 6-8).

Look at the number of times these verses say that we died with Christ. What part of us died? It was not a part of **us** that died. It was the relationship to sin and the consequences of sin that died. Jesus Paid It All! He paid the penalty for every sin you ever have or will commit. So you can live in freedom from guilt, shame and fear.

My problem for many years was that I failed to understand that God is not concerned about my sin. He is only concerned about my love affair with Him. He wants to be my most significant other in all the universe, now and in Eternity. Since His love for me never stops, and is never based on any conditions of motive or expression, His love compels me to thank Him instantly

for the forgiveness already applied and get right back in His Presence!

Now I 'live loved' unconditionally and never fear God's disappointment with me.

"God is never disillusioned with me because He never had any illusions about me in the first place. He knows that I am weak and foolish and have a history of messing up! – Graham Cooke

Another terrific thing the Holy Spirit revealed to me is this. God CANNOT forgive sins in the usual sense of that word. God declared that ALL vengeance is His and He WILL repay. If God just dismissed the punishment for my crime against your child, then justice would be violated in that the victims would not receive justice. Rather, God paid the penalty of every sin ever committed, with His Only Begotten Son's death on the Cross.

Consider the motor cyclists' camaraderie. When one biker sees another biker who has run out of gas, he goes to the nearest gas station, buys a bottle of water, dumps out the water, fills it with gas and returns to the stranded biker. As he pitches the bottle of gas to his fellow, he shouts, "Pay it forward!" This means, you do the same thing for the next biker you see in the same situation. God lets us "pay it forward" to Jesus. That is, we pay the penalty of our sins forward to Jesus who suffers the just penalty of our wrong doing! When I first realized this, I wept with joy and felt even deeper love for God than ever before.

What you and I are called upon to do is to cease to live as if we were still in Adam, fully locked into relationship to selfish indulgences, seeking applause and recognition, and trying to force our opinions on others (sin). Understand that the “old man” is no longer alone in me. The only way to stop living as if he were still alone is to realize that the Spirit which is the sum and substance of Eternal Life **is** there. The trouble with us according to the New Testament, is that we do not realize what it means to be ‘new’. We go on thinking we **are** the old man, and continue trying to do things to our old man trying to prevent him from acting badly.

The old man was crucified with Christ. He is no longer alone but still powerless to live righteously. If you are a Christian, the man that you were in Adam has been transformed by the union with Christ. You are in Christ. Christ is in you. You and Christ are in God. And God is in you and in Christ. You have been fused with God in every possible way. This **is** the ‘new’ creation in Christ Jesus. Just relax in the relationship and let His Spirit guide you.

When we sin we are acting in a way that is unnatural for the ‘new’ us. Our conduct contradicts our ‘new’ character when we sin. That’s why Paul says, “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:2-3, emphasis mine). The old you is no longer the same. It has been renewed. The new you, is bonded to Christ Jesus! The ‘new’ combination of spirits within you, when fully embraced, will love like Jesus loves!

It's tough to act on facts when feelings are screaming something that contradicts the truth or at least makes the truth *feel* like it is false. Yet we face that kind of situation many times in our Christian experience. You may be facing that kind of situation right now with this truth about your old nature. If you don't *feel* as if you have died to sin, you may be tempted to reject this truth. While it may go against your feelings, the truth is that a Christian has two spirits, yours and God's. Simply resist your spirit when it desires something contrary to God's Spirit in every moment of choosing. Relationship is all about how you will express yourself. Stop blurting out before the Holy Spirit expresses His love. His expressions, not yours will compel others to follow Him!

Consider this vision of the new creation in Christ.

You are a master weaver of cloth. But you only have black thread. When you finish weaving you have a tapestry of black. You also have a thread maker who sells you thread. What He sells you now is a spindle of multiple colors. You weave these new colors into the existing black tapestry. Now you have something that is distinctly different and 'new.' The black thread represents you and your selfish pursuits. The tapestry, once laced with the colorful thread of Jesus, is something altogether different and affects everyone differently. It is still a tapestry. It is only one. Yet it is both. You are transformed from darkness into light (brightness).

Since you have a new spouse (marital bonding) whose nature is NOT TO sin, you are miserable after

committing sin. You are sorrowful that you hurt your spouse's heart just to satisfy your lust. (In human terms, infidelity against your spouse does not equate to *not* loving your spouse. It hurts your spouse deeply. You may be deeply sorry. But in that moment of self indulgence you loved yourself more than you love your spouse.) Your misery is in the conflict between the natural desires of your spirit and the Holy Spirit's desires for you. Your nature will always be selfish. It will only stop lusting when it is fully satisfied by the nature of God in the Holy Spirit with whom you are forever bonded. Only the Holy Spirit within a man can be consistently selfless.

God's Word says that you have died to sin. This in no way means that you will live a life of sinless perfection. It does mean that it is not your nature to live a life of habitual sin anymore. The conflict between flesh (your spirit) and Spirit (God's Spirit) will exist as long as you are in this world. However, saints have the freedom to choose *to* sin or *not to* sin. You might say that you now have a 'license NOT to sin.' By the life joined to the Spirit of Christ the *new* you has the desire to resist sin and the power to live without it.

Steve McVey's words helped me enormously in my journey to intimacy with God. Quoting from *Grace Walk* Chapter 4:

Within days after that night of absolute surrender in my office, God began to reveal the truths of my identity in Christ. I understood that when I was saved, He had given me a new nature. For the first time I knew that my old man really was dead. But the time came when the

process moved from the theological and academic realm into practical experience. Head knowledge alone wasn't enough to experience victory. Just like a man who understands the gospel intellectually and then finally receives Christ, so I came to the place where learned truths became living truths to me. It became apparent that God didn't want to change my life as I had asked—He wanted to exchange it.

Steve's belief that his natural spirit died leaving only one Spirit within the Christian (Christ-in) helped me surrender completely, abandoning all self-efforts and yielding every decision to the Holy Spirit of Christ.

Because of the words in Romans 8:16, I believe a more accurate understanding is that my 'natural' selfish spirit remains within me, but in union with Christ's Spirit I have the option in every situation to yield control to the Holy Spirit rather than blundering on and selfishly controlling things without Him. Romans 8:16 states, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." Further, the Holy Spirit of God CANNOT commit sin. Only my nature, the spirit of human life CAN. I am 'dead' to sin's penalty as that was paid by Jesus Christ on the Cross. And the exchanged life that Steve refers to is essentially letting go of the *self* control and letting the *Holy Spirit* control instead. Absolute surrender to the Holy Spirit must occur in order for the Holy Spirit to live your life for you. The exchange is absolute abandon of self in the perpetual

sequence of events in which I leave control to God (the Holy Spirit). The more I yield, the greater my love, joy, peace and rest.

I now desire completely to live with and in relationship to God and a passionately intimate relationship at that. I am free to live the Christian (Christ-In) life. Jesus' word to His disciples and all others who would be His disciples, "Follow Me!" Jesus was the best leader because He was the ultimate follower!