

DOES THE BELIEVER HAVE TWO NATURES?

GRACE NOTEBOOK

Does the Believer Have Two Natures?

By John Woodward

Question:

Do you have something within your website dealing with the two natures of a Christian? I will mention two authors: Joel T. Andrus, his booklet "The Believer's Two Natures," and E.C. Hadley, his booklet, "The Believer's Two Natures"...I would like to know where you stand on this subject. Thank you very much for your cooperation...

N.L.

Answer:

Thank you for asking about the believer's two natures and what is taught at the GFI conferences and via Grace Notes. An author has objected to some of our literature using the charge of "one naturism." Hopefully, the following observations will replace some of that heat with light.

Does the believer have two natures? Without trying to be vague, my short answer is yes ... and no. Let's consider the following Scriptural observations and definitions.

The believer who appropriates his identification with Christ (Gal. 2:20), and is filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph.5:18) can walk in freedom and experience abundant life, yet there is still an internal, corrupt, sinful pull. Traditionally this has been called the "old nature" (but this is a descriptive, not a Scriptural term).

Let's define some key terms:

Old Man and New Man (Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22,24; Colossians 3:9,10). Specific: Old man refers to unregenerate human spirit consisting of Adamic life prior to salvation. New man refers to regenerate human spirit, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Generally: Old man is all that the Christian was before salvation. New man is all that the Christian is after salvation.

Flesh (Self-Life; Romans 8:5-8; Galatians 5:16-21). Flesh is the interface of the mortal body and human soul that consists of the beliefs, values, identity messages, coping mechanisms etc. acquired through living independently of God. It is sin-stained (by depravity from Adam) and sin-trained (from each person's life experiences and choices - Romans 7:18). "In the flesh," refers only to the position of unsaved people (Romans 8:8,9; Ephesians 2:1-3). "After" or "according to the flesh," refers to a way of living which may be evident for either the unsaved or the saved (Romans 8:4, 5,13). This is a condition or way of living out of one's own resources and strength as if one is independent of God. It is learned before salvation (in Adam) and continually taught by the world. "Carnal" (Latin root) is another word for "fleshly" (Romans 8:6,7, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

Sin and Sins (Romans 3:23, 6:14-23; 7:7-25). Sin is an unholy force or power within but is not a part of the Christian. Sins are the actions which violate the expressed character and will of God.

Nature (Sinful Nature). There are two definitions of the word "nature" that apply. One deals with the spirit, while the other deals with the soul. The word "nature" when used of the spirit is the basic attributes or

characteristics that determine that a human being is a human being distinct from the rest of the creation (Ephesians 2:1-3; 2 Peter 1:3-4). The term "sinful nature" is usually used of a combination of flesh and the power of sin together, but if so used, it may not include the "old man." (From the Web site's "Definitions" page)

The "old nature" or "sinful nature" can be Scripturally identified as the Sin principle, sometimes referred to as "indwelling Sin." Acts of sin are the evidence of this evil principle. Here are some references to this:

Rom. 7:17: "But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me."

Rom. 7:20: "Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me."

Rom. 7:23: "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."

Rom. 7:25: "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."

Rom. 8:2: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." (Cf. Rom. 6:2,7,11,12,13,14,16,17,18,20,22;7:8,11)

One way to describe this Sin principle is to consider it as the world/flesh/devil dynamic.

The aspect of this Sin principle that is IN the believer is the "flesh" (used in its ethical sense). Rom. 7:18: "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." (Cf. Rom. 8:4,5)

This "flesh" is a continuing problem for everyone this side of heaven: Gal. 5:17: "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."

So what about the "old nature"? We recommend not using this term, although it has been commonly used and used in some modern Bible translations. The reason for this is that we have observed over the years with counselees that the term has veiled some of the vital aspects of the Christian's sanctification process. The term "old nature" implies that the believer has two ESSENTIAL natures that are co-equal. It also gives the impression that the Sin principle may refer to the condition of the believer's spirit.

We believe man is spirit, soul, and body (trichotomy: 1 Thess. 5:23,24; Heb. 4:12), though most of the conference and GFI literature would be acceptable to the dichotomist if he adjusts some terminology.

We believe that the believer's spirit is the locus of his new man/new nature.(2 Cor. 5:17). Rom. 7:22: "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man." In other words, the born-again believer's essential, spiritual nature is new. 2 Peter 1:4 describes us as partakers of the Divine nature. The struggle in Romans ch. 7, then, is more accurately seen as a struggle between the Spirit/spirit and the flesh, not between the new man and the old man, nor between two equal "natures."(Cf. Gal. 5:16,17). David Needham develops this theme more fully in his book, Birthright.

I hope you will consider these points and see that we are not teaching sinless perfection nor the absence

of the Sin principle and the flesh.

Respected Christian authors have used the term "old nature" in reference to the Christian's struggle; Hebert Lockyer's booklet also comes to mind. I'm not rejecting all they've written on this subject. If some of their terminology is clarified, I assume we'd be in agreement with most of their teaching. Books such as Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification (Sinclair Ferguson / Inter-varsity Press) and Five Views of Sanctification (Melvin Dieter / Zondervan) indicate that sincere, informed, committed evangelicals can have different views on some of these points. However, we should agree on the importance of fellowship, an attitude of unity, and the wisdom of emphasizing the truths common to each biblical sanctification perspective.

Related issues are further explored at Grace Notebook:

No inner dualism: "Jekyll or Hyde?"

<http://gracenotebook.com/pub/243>

David Needham on the terms "Old Man" and "flesh": <http://gracenotebook.com/pub/363>

"The Believer's New Heart": <http://gracenotebook.com/pub/340>

Tricotomy (Theological Papers): <http://gracenotebook.com/pg/14>

-JBW

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The purpose of Grace Notes is to highlight the dynamics of abundant living as summarized in Galatians 2:20: "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 in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (NKJV). Hundreds of articles are available online to freely use for personal ministry, newsletters, etc. To find an article by topic, author, or key word, click "Grace Notes"/search at [www.GraceNotebook.com](http://www.GraceNotebook.com). Please pray for God's blessing on this internet ministry.

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