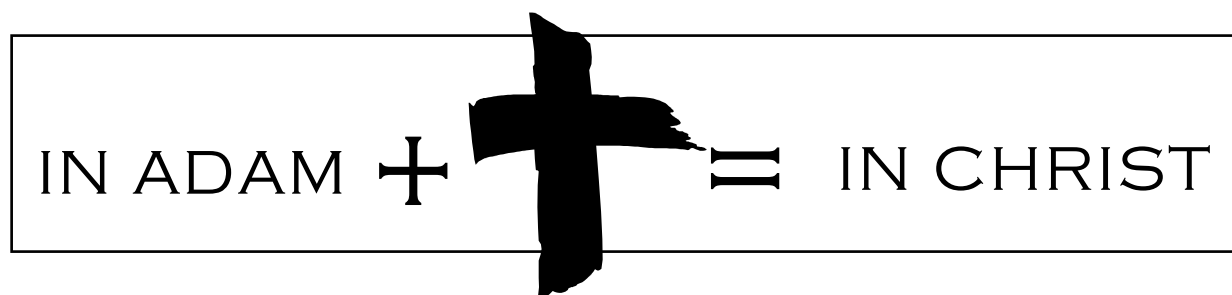


# Chapter 4

Prepared by Patrick J. Griffiths

## Reigning Grace and Our Identity in Adam

<sup>1</sup> “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:1-4)



### INTRODUCTION

We have already noted how God had to deal graciously with us based on the person and work of Jesus Christ or all would be lost. It is because Jesus Christ is God that His work could satisfy the Father's wrath and remove our shame, fear, and guilt. This work of

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God in our behalf is called “salvation.” Salvation is the single greatest act that we will ever experience. It far surpasses anything we have done or ever hope to do. This chapter explores the implications of His work in behalf of His people. These are foundational truths that every believer needs to know. Here we will address our old identity **in Adam** versus our new identity **in Christ**. We will answer the question as to why it is important to study *what we once were* and *what we now are*.

Although our *Story* speaks to Adam and Eve’s refusal to obey God, their sin became our sin. How is such possible? Two ideas are fused together at this juncture in the *Story*. First, Adam and Eve are race progenitor. All of humanity was in the loins of Adam and Eve. We carry within us their DNA. Their sin is intrinsic to our very makeup. Who he is becomes who we are. This is *original sin*. Second, Adam is race representative. Because of his position of headship, he represents each part (Rom. 5:12-21). Thus the Scripture speaks of humanity as **in Adam**. This is *imputation*. Who he is forms our identity before God.

The whole world was imputed with Adam’s sin and condemned to die. Paul argues this in Romans 5 by demonstrating that people died from “Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come” (v. 14, ESV). They died, even though they lived before the law was given, and even though “sin is not counted where there is no law” (v. 13, ESV). In other words, they were condemned and died on the basis of one sin

committed by one human being, Adam. Understanding the imputation of Adam's sin is particularly helpful when one realizes that Paul compares it with the imputation of Christ's "one act of righteousness" (v. 18), in order to advance the argument that "as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men" (v. 18). The imputation of Adam's sin is distinct from original sin, the doctrine that humans are born *with a sinful nature* as a result of Adam's sin.<sup>1</sup>

Collectively, in Adam, all of humanity is guilty of transgression. Yet individually we all like sheep have gone astray (Isa. 53:6). We are in the *Story* through Adam and by choice.

Jerry Bridges correctly understood this when he penned the following comment.

We can never rightly understand God's grace until we understand our plight as those who need His grace.<sup>2</sup>

The reason this news is so vast and wonderful is that the bad news is so huge and horrible. The gospel is big because our sin is big.<sup>3</sup>

**It is the human condition that necessitates God's action of grace.** The Scripture describes the unbelieving as being "dead in their trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1-3). Because they are neither good nor righteous (Rom. 3:10-12) they are "by nature children of [divine] wrath" (Eph. 2:3). Their present condition is so atrocious that the wrath of God is even now abiding on them (John 3:36).

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Fortunately, *what we once were, we no longer are.* The Bible describes for us the condition of the lost. The picture painted is anything but flattering. We will attempt to answer three questions: **first**, what were we in Adam; **second**, why is salvation by grace and not works; **finally**, what happened to our old self, in Adam, at the cross. We will begin with the first question.



## WHAT WERE WE IN ADAM?

It is important for us to understand *what we once were* **in Adam**. This is *what we once were* **before** believing. As we trace God's *Story* in six acts, it is indispensable to note **our rejection of God** before we can understand **the redemption provided by God**. The Bible speaks to our fallen state through various means. One of those approaches is found in Romans 3:9-18. Here the Apostle Paul gives us a perspective about our condition that is foreign to modern thinking. He approaches the topic from two angles. First, verses 9-12 treat our depravity from a universal perspective. This is what everyone is. Then verses 13-18 look at it from an anatomical perspective. He identifies just how hopeless and helpless we are in ourselves.

To summarize and emphasize the condemnation of both Jew and Gentile, Paul draws together a series of quotations, primarily from the Psalms, **all of which substantiate his contention that no man can win God's approval by means of his own righteousness.** Verses 10-12 give a general overview of man's depravity, stressing the universality of God's

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condemnation of men. Verses 13-18 move from the general to the specific, describing the depravity of man as it is evidenced by the various members of his anatomy. From head to toe, from the inside out, man is characterized by sin.<sup>4</sup>

Paul F. M. Zahl correctly notes how Romans 3 is Paul “quintessential teaching about grace-justification. There Paul establishes the impossibility of human beings changing their world. Paul draws on several dark verses from the Psalms and the prophets to describe a Malthusian chaos of aggression and spirit. [Here he establishes how] . . . there is absolutely no hope for us to change the world on the basis of our own strength.”<sup>5</sup> There is no part of man that is exempt from sin’s corruption. Following is a listing of those terms used by Paul to describe our sinful nature.

I. Romans 3:10, “There is none righteous, not even one.”

This verse tells us no one is just or virtuous. No one keeps the commands of God. No one is innocent, faultless or without guilt. No one stands approved of or accepted before God. We are unfit and full of fault, thus **we are unacceptable before God and incapable of approaching God.**

This is our condition prior to the cross. There is not one person in the world good or right before God. We think we are good people and comparatively speaking we are. Yet our standard is not man but God, and before God we are neither good nor right.

II. Romans 3:11, “There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God.”

The word “understands” means “to set or bring together, to set or join together in the mind.” Apart from a work of grace, the Bible stands as a foreign work incapable of being deciphered. The *Story* sits as a closed book and an unknown truth.

The word “seeks after” means “to investigate.” No one will seek to understand God’s *Story* apart from a divine work of grace. Our response to the fall was to hide from God, not flee to God. Not only do we not understand His ways, but we could actually care less! If God did not do a work, we would never lift a finger to come. God is going in one direction and we are going in the other direction. Although the image of God guarantees the need within man for God, the meeting of the need in God will only be sought if God does the work.

III. Romans 3:12, “All have turned aside.” (See also Proverbs 12:15; 14:12; 16:25)

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel” (Prov. 12:15).

“There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12).

“There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death” (Prov. 16:25).

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The ways of God are not the ways of man. If left to ourselves, we would consistently choose wrong. It is the same idea noted in Romans 3:11.

IV. Romans 3:12, “Together they have become useless.”

The word “unprofitable” means “to make useless, render unserviceable.” It is only used here in the New Testament. Notice how a sister word “unprofitable servant” is used in Matthew 25:30 and Luke 17:10.

“Throw out the **worthless** slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 25:30)

“So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are **unworthy** slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done’” (Luke 17:10).

Sin is what devaluates the object.

V. Romans 3:12, “There is none who does good, there is not even one.”

All of our righteous acts are as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). The verse does not teach we are incapable of any benevolent acts, but that none of our good works can merit favor with God or remove sin before God.

Verse 13 begins describing man's depravity anatomically.

VI. Romans 3:13, "Their **throat** is an open grave."

VII. Romans 3:13, "With their **tongues** they keep deceiving."

VIII. Romans 3:13 "The poison of asps is under their **lips**."

IX. Romans 3:14, "Whose **mouth** is full of cursing and bitterness."

X. Romans 3:15, "Their **feet** are swift to shed blood."

XI. Romans 3:16, "Destruction and misery are in their **paths**."

XII. Romans 3:17, "The **path** of peace they have not known."

XIII. Romans 3:18, "There is no fear of God before their **eyes**."

Paul summarizes the situation in verse 23.

XIV. Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

The word "short" means "to come late or be too tardily; to be left behind in the race and so fail to reach the goal, to fall short of the

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end, to be inferior in power, to suffer want, to be devoid of, to lack (be inferior) in excellence, worth.” It is used sixteen times in the New Testament. Cited are some of the more graphic occurrences.

#### “COMING UP SHORT”

- Mark 10:21 Rich Young Ruler “One thing you lack”
- Luke 15:14 Prodigal Son “He began to be impoverished”
- Heb. 4:1 Receiving a Promise “To have come short of it”
- Heb. 11:37 Martyrs for the faith “Being destitute”

In life we are always falling short. In fact, we are unable to reach the mark. Our failure is notable because we have attempted every imaginable means to cover our shame, fear, and guilt. All we have done is made it worse. “St. Paul’s description of original sin in Romans 3 is vivid, complete, and defeating.”<sup>6</sup> Understandably, we read Paul’s description and immediately say, “This is not me.” Yet, **the Scripture excludes no one and includes everyone.**

**The doctrine of depravity has to do, not with man's estimation of man, but rather with God's estimation of man.** When we measure men by man, we can always find someone who is lower than we are on the moral or ethical scale, and the comparison gives us a feeling of self-satisfaction. But the Scriptures do not measure men by man; they measure men by God who has created them. The creature is measured by the Creator and is found to be wanting. The doctrine of depravity has to do not so much with man's conduct as with man's state.<sup>7</sup>

We have been deceived by sin. The fourteen thoughts noted in Romans 3 are simply reflections of our old, fallen, sinful nature, of our identity **in Adam**. The listing is not exhaustive only suggestive. In our old Adam nature, we are deceived thus far worse than we could imagine.

This passage contributes to the doctrine of the depravity concerning the entire human race and that no person has escaped the grip of sin. **Further, no amount of good works, done in accordance with the highest ethical norms, can result in our being declared righteous.** The situation is hopeless *as far as we are concerned*. Our entire heart, mind, and will are enslaved to the power of sin and we stand under the just wrath of God.<sup>8</sup>

As it relates to the old self, there are four concluding remarks related to the unbelieving who are still **in Adam**.

- First, an unbeliever lives in the lusts of his flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and is by nature a child of wrath (Eph. 2:3).
- Second, an unbeliever is governed by an “old self” (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9).
- Third, an unbeliever is under the dominion of sin and a slave to it (Rom. 6:12, 14, and 17). They can do nothing but sin.
- Finally, even their righteous acts/good works are filthy rags (Isa. 64:6; Titus 3:5).

Why the stress on what we were in Adam? The purpose of the study is to show us our inability. We cannot live our lives in a way that is pleasing to God independent of Him. To study our **fallen nature** is to receive a healthy dose of reality. Because all this is true, we need to consider what we are as believers. This is what makes our justification or salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone **so exceptional and essential**. What we could not do, He did. This leads us to consider the second question and the answer in Ephesians 2:1-10.



#### WHY IS SALVATION BY GRACE AND NOT WORKS?

Ephesians 2:1-10 will provide for us a context to look at His grace holistically. “In chapter one Paul wrote of the great purposes and plan of God, culminating in the universal headship of Christ.”<sup>9</sup> This purpose finds its inception in the salvation of man. The entire passage accents God’s greatness and man’s debasement.

Ephesians 2:1-10 contains three main segments: (1) Verses 1-3; (2) Verses 4-6; and (3) Verses 7-10. Verses 1-3 focus on fallen man, and his hopeless condition (dead) as a result of his sin. Verses 4-6 focus on God, and on His mercy and grace in making a provision for man’s salvation in Christ. Verses 7-10 focus on the purpose of salvation, to the praise of the glory of His grace. All together, they spell out the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

## I. The Believer's Past Sin (Eph. 2:1-3).

What we have already noted in Romans 3:9-18 Paul revisits in Ephesians 2:1-3.

### A. We were dead in trespasses and sins.

This speaks of our essence - this is what we were (v. 1). This is the consequence of our rebellion against God. We rejected Him and we died. We are dead in trespasses and sins. We have nothing to offer, no merit, and no ability. The divine sentence is such that "none are pronounced good, none are righteous, no one seeks Him and no one understands Him" (Rom. 3:10-12). Such is the unending condition of all mankind. We have no hope before a holy God of ever measuring up to His righteous standard.

### B. We walked according to the devil.

This speaks of our action - this is what we did (v. 2). This walking speaks of deliberate progress in a particular direction. The idea of walking speaks of a course of life, a manner or conduct of living.

### C. We were sons of disobedience.

The word "disobedience" speaks of one who is in opposition to the divine will. In other words, the spirit that characterizes lost

humanity is the same spirit that characterized us before salvation. Like Adam and Eve **we have chosen our wills over God's will.** It is neither more complex nor far reaching than that simple statement.

D. We were defiled in our bodies.

This speaks of our attitude – this is what we desired (v. 3).

E. We were under divine wrath.

We chose to do what pleased us (v. 3). We were the embodiment of Psalm 1. To walk away from the divine record still believing in our own innate goodness is to be blinded by the one who will snatch from us the life giving seed of God (2 Cor. 4:3, 4; Mark 4:15).

<sup>3</sup>“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,  
<sup>4</sup> in whose case the god of this world **has blinded the minds** of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:3, 4).

“These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately **Satan comes and takes away the word** which has been sown in them” (Mark 4:15).

God could have chosen to leave Adam and Eve in their sin. When we read the narrative as found in Genesis 3 it is disturbing how there is no statement concerning Adam and Eve's confession and

repentance. Nowhere does it say they repented of their rebellion. In fact the text says, “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them” (v. 21). Again, by implication God had to save them for they could not save themselves. Salvation is always from the LORD; humanity cannot save itself. If the record stopped here, we would be consumed by our own despair, yet the record continues.

## II. The believer’s present standing (Eph. 2:4-10).

“The atonement of Christ is the mechanism of grace. Without the atonement, the grace of God is a beautiful dream.”<sup>11</sup> The fullness of grace can only be seen when laid against the backdrop of man’s despair. This is the message of hope echoing through the corridors of holy writ, “But God.” Such a contrast brings hope to those consumed by despair. Such words are the relief we seek from our helplessness. Oh thank Him sinner and saint alike that He has not left us to ourselves. Praise His holy name - “But God.”

This paragraph provides the reason as to why Paul believes it is possible for us not to follow the ways of the world, to follow the ruler of this world, or to gratify the cravings of the sinful nature by following its desires and thoughts. It is because Christ has made us alive. It is because through Spirit baptism we have now been crucified, buried, raised and are now seated with Him. We are now in a “one flesh” relationship with Jesus Christ. Such a truth

provides for us the power to live apart from the living dead. This is explained in three ideas.

A. The Mercy of God (vv. 4-6 [His Provision])

God's resources are rooted in His very character and thus are infinite and limitless. He draws from Himself. It is on account of His love that He loved us. Would any other platform or motive do? God is rich in mercy. His mercy is abundant. It is excessive. It is greater than the need. This is what is spoken of in Titus 3:5, 6.

“He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, **but according to His mercy**, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5-7).

The mercy of God is His action of restraint. His motive for extending to us mercy is His love. Notice how the text states it, “He loves us even when we were dead in sins.” Even, to this degree. How do we see mercy, how do we see love? Notice the union.

1. He quickened us (v. 5).
2. He raised us up (v. 6).
3. He made us sit (v. 6).

These last two expressions reflect the believer's new position of being in Christ (cf. Col. 3:1–3; Phil. 3:20).

<sup>1</sup> “Therefore if **you have been raised up with Christ**, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> **For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God**” (Col. 3:1–3).

“For **our citizenship is in heaven**, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; (Phil. 3:20).

Because of the same language employed in 1:20–23, we understand this to refer to our co-regent role with our Lord. We will reign with Him over all of the created order.

<sup>20</sup> “which He brought about in Christ, **when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places**, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:20–23).

**In mercy,  
He withheld wrath.  
In love,  
He looks upon us  
favorably.  
In grace,  
He gives us His life.**

Colossians tells us “[our lives are] hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). And Christ “who is [our lives]” guarantees our future glorification (Col. 3:4; Rom. 8:29, 30). This is

grace! Our identification with Christ is all an expression of grace. It is all of grace so that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus (v. 7).

B. The Motive of God (v. 7 [His Purpose]) "He might show the exceeding riches of HIS grace."

- The duration / "that in the ages to come"
- The disclosure / "that He might show us as trophies of His grace"

The salvation of sinners and the adoption of sons is an expression of His overflowing grace. God's *Story* celebrates the richness of God. Paul uses the statement, "Exceeding riches of His grace." The idea is that of surpassing, of being above measure. It is incapable of being sounded out. That is why Paul says "that in the ages to come," heaven will be an unfolding of His glorious grace. Jesus Christ is everything. He is mercy. He is love. He is grace. He is goodness. To have Him is to have all things. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God's love (John 3:16). Jesus Christ is the embodiment of grace and truth (John 1:17). To have seen Christ is to have seen the incarnation of the Father's essence (John 14:9).

- The display / "for by grace . . ."

“God manifests ‘common grace’ toward all men because they are His creatures (Ps. 145:9, 15; Matt. 5:45), but the overriding exercise of His grace lies in the provision of salvation in Christ.”<sup>12</sup> The only possible way for fallen humanity to stand right before God is for God to condescend, to stoop and do for humanity what humanity could never do for its self.

C. The Method of God (vv. 8-10 [His Plan])

1. Salvation is a gift from God (v. 8)

a. The reason for this display - grace (Rom. 3:24)

“being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;” (Rom. 3:24).

Why did God save us? There can be no earthly basis for the giving of the gift or it is no longer a gift, but rather a wage or earning (Rom. 9:11; 11:6).

“But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Rom. 11:6).

It is the gift nature of salvation that is contrasted with sin’s wages (Rom. 6:23).

“For the wages of sin is death, **but** the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

Paul makes it emphatically clear that whatever might be our attainment or acquisition, it is definitely not of our selves. “No human effort can contribute to our salvation; it is the gift of God.”<sup>13</sup> Grace is God’s response to man’s need.

b. The result of this display – salvation

Salvation is the result of God’s gracious dealings with us. Notice the wording of Romans 11:5 (the choice of grace) and 6.

<sup>5</sup> “In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice. <sup>6</sup> **But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace**” (Rom. 11:5, 6).

We often speak of being “saved.” What exactly does this entail? Romans 8:28–30 provides an excellent description of salvation’s progressive nature.

<sup>28</sup> “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup> and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified” (Rom. 8:28–30).

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Inside of this short passage two words are notable. We will add the third element for thoroughness.

- First is the word is justification. Justification speaks of our past. Justification deals with our righteous standing before God in Christ. **God saves us from the penalty of sin** (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9).
- The second word is glorification. Glorification speaks of our future. Glorification deals with our righteous standing before God in Christ fully seen in my body with the absence of the old nature (1 John 3:2, 3). **God saves us from the presence of sin.**
- The one word absent from Romans 8:28–30 is sanctification. There is an aspect of salvation that is progressive and deals with the manifesting of justification through the body. Sanctification speaks of our present condition. It deals with our righteous standing before God in Christ progressively manifested in my body of flesh (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 2:14, 15; 3:18; 4:7–11). **God saves us from the power of sin.**

Salvation is the provision of God for His people. The means through which the provision is secured by His people is one of **faith.**

c. The route of this display – faith

The only action we contribute is the exercising of faith. And, I believe even the faith I exercise is a gift from God (Phil. 1:29; Acts 11:18; 13:48).

“For to you **it has been granted** for Christ's sake, **not only to believe in Him**, but also to suffer for His sake,” (Phil. 1:29).

“When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, **God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life**” (Acts 11:18).

“When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; **and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed**” (Acts 13:48).

Because all this is true, there is no room for personal or individual boasting.

2. Salvation leaves no room for boasting (v. 9)

No one can boast. On what basis could we boast? On what ground could we stand to make such an appeal? We are the objects of His workmanship; He is a Master craftsman. He is working a masterpiece. “One cannot earn salvation by ‘observing the law’. Such a legalistic approach to salvation (or sanctification) is

consistently condemned in Scripture. No one can take credit for his or her salvation.”<sup>14</sup>

3. Salvation produces in us and through us the ordained goal of good works/fruit-bearing (v. 10)

Verse ten is not introducing a new thought of obedience but rather continuing the thought begun in verse 5. Good works/obedience is being introduced, but this obedience is viewed as simply part of a continuation of our salvation experience. Our obedience is simply a part of salvation from its inception to its glorification (Rom. 8:28–30). The work He has begun and He alone is doing is a work of grace. How are we to understand our past state in Adam with our present standing in Christ? What happened at the cross and how are we now to live? This leads us to discuss what happened to our old self at the cross.



### WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR OLD SELF AT THE CROSS?

Understanding who we were prior to the cross gives us the ability to wrestle intelligently with a temporal but persistent enemy . . . our old self. The New Testament uses three ideas to describe the same thing: the flesh, the old nature, and the old self. The flesh can refer to something other than our fallen nature, such as our body of flesh that is morally neutral. Our Lord Jesus was born according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 2:14; 5:7; 2 John 7). In such a

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statement, the moral neutrality of the flesh is established. The flesh as the housing for our immaterial aspect is without independent moral attributes (Rom. 4:1; 9:3). Our body of flesh can sin, but it is simply the vehicle of expression for our fallen nature (Rom. 7:5). However, there is reference made to the flesh that is spiritually fallen. What exactly is this fallen flesh? There are seven aspects of this idea I would like to consider.

- I. What we had in Adam we still have, though now we are in Christ.

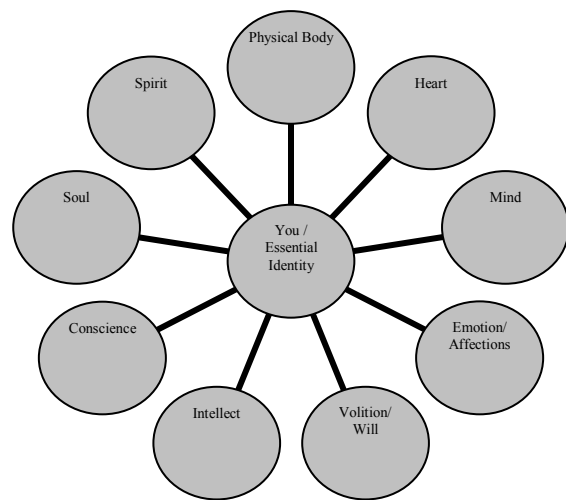
We are making an intentional distinction between what we had and who we are. We have an old self, but our identity is who we are in Christ. As L.E. Maxwell points out, “I am no Adam-Christ believer.”<sup>15</sup>

Some will argue that our old self died with Christ and thus no longer exists. We are only fighting against its “residue.” Thus, we war against the engrained habits or patterns, but not against any “tangible” or “real” opponent. I would differ. I believe our co-crucifixion with Christ was a “judicial” action whereby we are declared dead, though our old self is still very much alive. Its full or complete death will come at the Bema Seat where what is real judicially will be real experientially. This leads us to our second aspect concerning our old self.

II. “For [we] know that nothing good dwells in [us], that is, in [our] flesh [present active indicative]” (Rom. 7:18).

The flesh is non-redeemable (“born of the flesh is flesh” John 3:6). It is corrupted and cannot, nor will not, be salvaged. Since in the flesh dwells no good thing, it is useless in the perfecting of the individual (Gal. 3:3). It is truly “dead” (Col. 2:13). Ephesians 2:1 says that we were once dead, but now God has made us alive. Whereas once there was a point in time when the fallen nature identified and controlled the individual, this is no longer true for the believer.

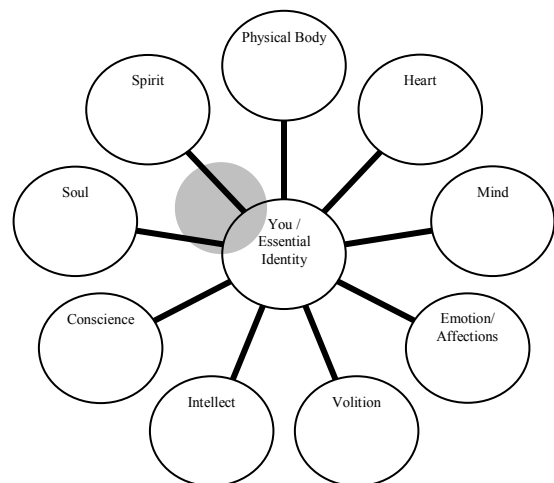
There is still, however, a part of us called “flesh.” It is fallen and totally alienated from God. Its presence guarantees the complete and total corruption of each part. In regeneration, God “rescues” who we are (Col. 1:13). After our re-birth, the addition of the life given by God overthrows the permeation and domination of the old self over the individual. The believing individual is one person, but with two distinct natures. The governing nature is his new self. However, the believing individual is still “housing” the old self. The old self has no right or authority, but what the individual gives it.



Though we still have what we were in Adam, its authority has been broken and it no longer has rights or claims over us. “Our flesh is sold into bondage to sin” (Rom. 7:14). We once were under obligation to the flesh (Rom. 8:12). This bondage to sin, however, has been broken and abolished. Consider the following imagery to assist us in understanding the relationship of our old self, our new self, and the “us.”

● Our old self in Adam influences every aspect of our existence. Prior to our faith in Christ this is what controlled our identity. This is what we were. When by faith we received the work of Jesus Christ at the cross in our behalf our old self was crucified and was *judicially* killed. The authority of sin over us has been forever broken. Although our old self is judicially dead and is rendered powerless it still exists and can express itself. **But what it is and what it does is no longer controlling how God views us and how He deals with us. Our relationship with God is sourced in and maintained by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.**

○ Our new self in Christ influences every aspect of our existence. Our old self still exists but is no longer in a place of authority. Our new self was received when by faith when we



received the work of Jesus Christ at the cross in our behalf. Jesus Christ received our old self and we received His righteousness which becomes for us our new self or identity. **There is nothing we can do to undo what He has done.** Although the old self still exists, its ability to control us and make us something we no longer are has been forever broken.

The Father no longer knows us after the old self. His relationship with us is firmly and forever rooted in who Christ is, what He has done, and who we now are in Him. Even when the old self is expressed through our immaterial or material self, we are no longer identified by it. Does God see our old self? Yes, but the actions of the old self are never counted against us. An ongoing struggle believers have is two-fold: either they define themselves by their personal behavior and thus are driven by a performance based acceptance before their Father, or they separate too sharply their position before the Father and their practice/condition before people. The two are inseparably linked. The one is a reflection of the other. This leads us to our third aspect concerning our old self.

### III. All boasting in the flesh is of the flesh.

As basic and perhaps mundane as these truths sound, without them we will live in defeat and continue in a consistent state of mental decline, entrapment, and bondage.

Legalism is a spiritual disease that has afflicted the church since its inception. I cannot recall having met a legalistic Christian who is characterized by deep joy. This is because legalists attempt to achieve, through their own efforts, an externally imposed standard of performance in the hope that this will somehow earn them merit in the sight of God. This produces insecurity, frustration, denial, and failure.<sup>16</sup>

The pattern we are seeking to establish is one of “mind renewal.” Romans 12:2 and Ephesians 4:23 teach this truth.

“And do not be conformed to this world, **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

“and that you **be renewed in the spirit of your mind**” (Eph. 4:23).

We must come to understand how all hope, healing, and wholeness are the birthrights of every believer. The path before us leads to Him, and it is in Him that perpetual light exists (1 John 1:5). We are to place no confidence in our flesh (Phil. 3:3). “Self can never cast out self.”<sup>17</sup> What we have in Adam is still helpless to deliver us. Its constant pull is toward self-sufficiency and independence.

“Because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so” (Rom. 8:7). The unsaved individual stands in a position of complete and utter rebellion against God. He is not a passive spectator but an active participant in a wholesale uprising against the rule of God.

**We were helpless prior to the cross, and we still are.** There is nothing we can do to merit divine favor. We could not do it before and we cannot do it now. When the songwriter wrote, “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling,”<sup>18</sup> his words ring true regardless as to where we are standing in relation to the cross. This leads us to our fourth aspect concerning our old self.

#### IV. Our old self was crucified with Him at Calvary (Rom. 6:6).

A believer has his old self crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6). The purpose of this co-crucifixion was “in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.” Our co-crucifixion is a historical fact. There was a point in time when our old self was crucified with Christ. At the cross, Jesus Christ did something to our old self.

In Galatians 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ,” we have an event that happened at a point in time but its consequences continue to this day. Again, like Romans 6:6, we are the recipient of the action. “I was and continue to be crucified with Christ.”

In Colossians 2:20, “You are dead with Christ,” also speaks of a completed and finished action. Thus, there is an element within us that had died and is dead in Christ.

It is because of our identification with Christ that the flesh has been “crucified with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24). Such truth becomes apparent when reading Galatians 2:20 and Colossians 3:1-4 and 1 John 4:17.

As noted earlier, I believe our co-crucifixion with Christ was a “judicial” action whereby I am declared dead, though my old self is still very much alive. Its full or complete death will come at the Bema Seat where what is **real judicially** will be **actual experientially**. Although we have perhaps made much of real versus actual, John Murray brings out this idea in the following statement.

The freedom from the dominion of sin of which Paul speaks is the *actual* possession of every one who is united to Christ. It is not merely *positional* victory which every believer has secured (cf. pp. 84ff.). When Paul says in Romans 6:14, ‘Sin shall not have dominion over you’, he is making an affirmation of certainty with respect to every person who is under the reigning power of grace and therefore with respect to every one who is united to Christ. This victory is received by faith in Christ and in effectual calling. It is not achieved by process or by prolonged effort directed to that end. It is the once-for-all gift of God’s grace in uniting us to Christ in the virtue of his death and resurrection. **But it is not simply positional; far less is it potential; it is actual.** And because it is actual it is experimental. To speak of freedom from the dominion of sin in terms other than the actual as, if we will, experimental is to indulge in an abstraction which has no relevance to the question at issue. It is true that there are differing

degrees in which the implications of this freedom from the dominion of sin are realized in experience. In other words, there are differing degrees in which the ‘reckoning’ to which Paul exhorts in Romans 6 is applied and brought to expression in the life and experience of believers. But the victory over sin is not secured by the ‘reckoning’; it is secured by virtue of union with Christ in that initial faith comprised in effectual calling and is therefore the possession of every believer, however tardy may be his advance in the path of progressive sanctification.<sup>19</sup>

The full reality of His finished work will not be “felt” experientially until our death or His coming/our resurrection (1 John 3:2).

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. **We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is**” (1 John 3:2).

The Bema Seat is a confirmation of God’s faithfulness in keeping His Word to complete that which He began (1 Thess. 5:24; Phil. 1:6).

<sup>23</sup> “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> Faithful is He who calls you, and **He also will bring it to pass**” (1 Thess. 5:23, 24).

“For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began a good work in you will perfect it** until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).

The Bema Seat is a time of tremendous celebration. There will be

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no regret or inward man-centered focus. All attention will be on Him in that blessed and glorious day. This leads us to our fifth aspect concerning our old self.

V. Our flesh cannot understand God or His Word (1 Cor. 2:14; 3:1)

“But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor. 2:14).

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1).

Though we are “housing” our old self, he is not an ally but an enemy. Any desire on our part to make “him” better is a misdirection of energy.

There really is something neurotic about Christians who spend most of their time trying desperately to please a God who is already very pleased. I’m getting better by not trying so hard to be better.<sup>20</sup>

Christ came, not to help religious people get better, but to help sinners realize that forgiveness and salvation is outside themselves: in Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup>

Christ came, not to help religious people get better, but to help sinners realize that forgiveness and salvation is outside themselves: in Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup>

As believers in Christ, we are no longer walking according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4, 9). The two natures are diametrically opposed to each other. No co-existing is possible. They will always be incompatible entities (Gal. 5:16ff). To live according to the flesh is spiritual death; to live according to the Holy Spirit is spiritual life.

The mindset of the flesh is death (Rom. 8:6) because it is hostile toward God (Rom. 8:7). The two are in opposition to each other (Gal. 5:17). The context would force us to conclude that it is either one or the other, but not both. “No one who is in the flesh can please God” (Rom. 8:8). The flesh is in complete opposition to the Spirit and thus the things of God (Eph. 2:3; 2 Pet. 2:10; 1 John 2:16). This leads us to our sixth aspect concerning our old self.

VI. Though crucified we are still called upon to lay aside the old self (Eph. 4:22).

“That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, **which is being corrupted** in accordance with the lusts of deceit” (Eph. 4:22).

Though the old self is crucified and has been laid aside (Col. 3:9), it is still in a process of perpetual corruption (Eph. 4:22), thus the necessity to lay it aside.

“Do not lie to one another, **since you laid aside the old self** with its evil practices” (Col. 3:9).

We can understand the verse (Eph. 4:22) in the larger context of truth that would allow us to say, “Put off the old man, because you have put off the old man,” or as we are prone to say, “Practice your position.” It is the same idea as found in 1 Corinthians 5:7, “Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, **just as you are in fact unleavened.**”

The laying aside of the old self by the believer is an “already / not-yet” truth. Although it has been crucified (and is dead), and has thus been laid aside (Col. 3:9) it is still being corrupted (Eph. 4:22). In Colossians 3:9, the language suggests the action of dying is **judicial** meaning the sentence against it has been pronounced or declared. The judicial pronouncement is real. It is now a matter of executing the sentence against it. Pastor John Piper refers to this as “decisive and irrevocable, Yes! But final and perfect, No!”<sup>23</sup> This leads us to our seventh aspect concerning our old self.

VII. Our body of flesh is a vehicle of expression for our fallen nature. Thus we must control what our body of flesh does in the expression of our innate depravity (Rom. 6:19) by yielding to what we know is true.

The fleshly body is a garment (2 Cor. 5:1-7; Jude 23). It is for this reason we are not to yield to our sinful nature, but rather to present our bodies to God and to mortify the members of our body (Rom. 6:19; 12:2; Col. 3:5). It is in and through the power of the Holy Spirit that we are to be putting to death the deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13). We are to make no provisions for the flesh in the expression of its rebellion through our physical body (Rom. 13:14).

For the believer, sin is still present in them. It reveals itself as “we present the members of our body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness” (Rom. 6:13).

- It is for this reason the believer is exhorted to present their bodies as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1) and in so doing they yield their members as instruments of righteousness to God (Rom. 6:13).

In Romans 12:1, “To present your bodies,” is an aorist active infinitive. Here (similar to Ephesians 4:22) it carries a commanding force. The same word, “Present/Yield,” is found in Romans 6 and 12. In the action of offering ourselves up as a living sacrifice, the believer is yielding the members of their body as instruments of righteousness to God.

- It is for this reason the believer is to “consider the members of their earthly body as dead” (Col. 3:5).

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The strength of Colossians 3:5 (an aorist active imperative) is built on the foundation of 3:1-4. Whatever we once were, we no longer are. The most natural action for those who have died with Christ (2:20) and have been raised with Christ (3:1) and whose lives are hidden with Christ in God (3:3) is to consider the members of their bodies as being dead to sin (3:5).

- It is for this reason the believer is “not to provide for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom. 13:14).

There is an accumulation of imperatives throughout chapters 12 and 13 with 13:14 giving a summation of the whole process, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh.” Verse 14 parallels verse 12. The language can change but the meaning is the same.



## CHAPTER SUMMARY

The believer must live with the tension that exists in possessing two natures continually in opposition to each other (Rom. 7:14-24). Sanctification is the process by which God renews the mind of the believer to live in light of his new nature rather than his old nature (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:15; Col. 3:1-14; Titus 3:11-12; Eph. 5:8). It is not a process where God cleans up the old nature in order to make it good. The old nature is non-redeemable (Eph. 4:22). The new nature is non-corruptible (Rom 6:9). Choices made, experiences

interpreted, truths believed can either be made within the framework of our old nature or according to His Spirit living within us. As our choices are made according to His life within us, our new nature shines forth more brilliantly (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:10-11). From the human perspective it appears as though God is removing the old and replacing it with the new, but from God's perspective it is not a change of essence but rather an issue of which nature is being displayed more fully in this battle for control. The good news is Christ is always victorious and therefore His life within us is always victorious (Rom. 6:5-7; 1 Cor. 15:57; 1 Thess. 5:24; 2 Thess. 3:3-5).

When a believer dies, his old non-redeemable nature is left behind with all that is corruptible. The indestructible life of Christ lives on forever (Rom. 6:9) and since the believer is inseparably linked with Him, it is the believer's new nature that lives on for all eternity (Rom. 6:5-7; 1 Cor. 15:49). For the unbeliever, all he has is his old corruptible nature and he will find himself unredeemed and condemned forever (2 Thess. 2:12).

So as we "strive" to be more like Him, we need to remember we already possess all that He is (1 John 4:17). We are living vicariously through Him. He is the One striving to renew our minds to live as if we really believe that "Christ in you" is our hope of glory (Col. 1:27). I can't think of a more sure foundation to rest upon.

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- <sup>1</sup> [http://www.theopedia.com/Imputation\\_of\\_Adams\\_sin](http://www.theopedia.com/Imputation_of_Adams_sin)
- <sup>2</sup> Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 32.
- <sup>3</sup> Tullian Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything* (Crossway, 2011), 78.
- <sup>4</sup> <http://bible.org/seriespage/some-bad-news-and-good-news-romans-3>
- <sup>5</sup> Paul F. M. Zahl, *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 47.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.
- <sup>7</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), 10.
- <sup>8</sup> <http://bible.org/seriespage/study-and-exposition-romans-39-20>  
[emphasis added] “Study and Exposition of Romans 3:9-20,” Greg Herrick.
- <sup>9</sup> *NIV Study Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).
- <sup>10</sup> <http://bible.org/seriespage/guilt-men-and-grace-god-part-1-ephesians-21-10>
- <sup>11</sup> Zahl, *Grace in Practice*, 114.
- <sup>12</sup> W.A. Criswell, *Criswell Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1981).
- <sup>13</sup> *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).
- <sup>14</sup> *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).
- <sup>15</sup> L.E. Maxwell, *Born Crucified* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1945), 26.
- <sup>16</sup> [http://www.kenboa.org/text\\_resources/teaching\\_letters/kens\\_teaching\\_letter/2156](http://www.kenboa.org/text_resources/teaching_letters/kens_teaching_letter/2156)
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.
- <sup>18</sup> “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me,” Text: Augustus M. Toplady, 1740-1778, Music: Thomas Hastings, 1784-1872.
- <sup>19</sup> “Studies in Theology, Reviews,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 4:284.
- <sup>20</sup> Steve Brown, *A Scandalous Freedom* (Howard Pub. Co., 2004), 71.
- <sup>21</sup> Chuck Collins, “My Biggest Regret.”  
<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tullian/2011/06/27/my-biggest-regret/>
- <sup>22</sup> Chuck Collins, “My Biggest Regret,” <http://holymtrinitysa.org/Anglican-Churches-San-Antonio/my-biggest-regret/>
- <sup>23</sup> John Piper, “Already: Decisively and Irrevocably Free; Not Yet: Finally and Perfectly Free” (Bethlehem Baptist Church, August 28, 2001).  
<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/already-decisively-and-irrevocably-free-not-yet-finally-and-perfectly-free>

