

A Christian's New Nature

A Hindu said to a native missionary, "I am sure if I lead a good life and do what is right, giving up my bad habits, God will be pleased with me and receive me into heaven."

"That is the way most people reason today," replied the missionary. "You know the babul tree (a tree with long, sharp thorns). Now, suppose you break off from its branches a hundred or more of the nasty thorns, then will the tree cease to be a babul tree?"

"Certainly not."

"Suppose you should apparently stop one or another or even many of your evil ways and habits, you would still remain the same like the babul tree. You must have an entirely new nature, must become a new man, in order to please God. Only in Christ can you receive a new heart." The missionary's reply was sound and scriptural. The message of Christ, His first and only message to sinful man, is his need of repentance. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10).

Devotions

"Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts" (Jer. 15:16). A young lady, when asked to explain "devotional reading of the Bible," answered, "Yesterday morning I received a letter from one to whom I have given my heart and devoted my life. I freely confess to you that I have read that letter five times, not because I did not understand it at the first reading, nor because I expected to commend myself to the author by frequent reading of his epistle. It was not with me a question of duty, but simply one of pleasure. I read it because I am devoted to him who wrote it. To read the Bible with that motive is to read it devotionally, and to one who reads it in that spirit, it is indeed a love letter." (From Illustrations for Pulpit and Platform, by Aquila Webb, p. 51) Let us read and study the Bible devotionally because we love the One who gave it to us.

Give Thanks

Two old friends bumped into one another on the street one day. One of them looked forlorn, almost on the verge of tears. His friend asked, "What has the world done to you, my old friend?"

The sad fellow said, "Let me tell you. Three weeks ago, an uncle died and left me forty thousand dollars."

"That's a lot of money."

"But you see, two weeks ago, a cousin I never even knew died, and left me eighty-five thousand free and clear."

"Sounds like you've been blessed...."

"You don't understand!" he interrupted. "Last week my great-aunt passed away. I inherited almost a quarter of a million."

Now he was really confused. "Then, why do you look so glum?"

"This week... nothing!"

That's the trouble with receiving something on a regular basis. Even if it is a gift, we eventually come to expect it. To test someone's character, give him or her \$5 a day for a month. Then stop, and see what their reaction is. The natural tendency is that if we receive a gift long enough, we come to view it as an entitlement. We feel hurt, even angry, if we don't receive it any longer.

We treat similarly the blessings God gives us every day. I don't deserve the comfortable home I live in, the beautiful hills around me, the clean water I drink. But after receiving these gifts and a multitude of others for years, I sometimes fail to be grateful. I've come to expect these good things. And when one of them is removed for a short while, I become upset.

Make an effort today to recognize the blessings you've come to take for granted. Focus on what you have rather than on what you don't have, and see if it doesn't improve your attitude. "Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" (Psalm 107:8).

God Isn't Deaf

Two young boys were spending the night at their grandparents. At bedtime, the two boys knelt beside their beds to say their prayers when the youngest one began praying at the top of his lungs. "I PRAY FOR A NEW BICYCLE... I PRAY FOR A NEW SMART PHONE... I PRAY FOR A NEW BLUE RAY PLAYER..." His older brother leaned over and nudged the younger brother and said, "Why are you shouting your prayers? God isn't deaf."

To which the little brother replied, "No, but Grandma is!"

There is the temptation to pray to people rather than to God. We've all heard public prayers that were worded in such a way so as to "preach" to the congregation rather than to approach the throne of God. That's why Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matt. 6:5-6).

Jesus was not forbidding public prayer. Jesus offered many public prayers Himself. However, He was warning us about the tendency to pray our prayers for the express purpose of being heard by other people.

Peaceful Coexistence

The story is told of a Russian named Ivanovich who visited the Moscow zoo for the first time. To his amazement, he found a little lamb sharing the cage with a big fierce bear. Ivanovich expressed surprise to his guide. The guide smiled and said, "That is peaceful coexistence."

When Ivanovich shook his head in a doubtful way, the guide explained, "Of course, we have to put in a new lamb every morning."

As much as we should strive for peace, there are some things which simply cannot coexist peacefully -- truth and error, righteousness and ungodliness, morality and immorality.

If we try to combine two such things in our lives, they will coexist "peacefully" only if one gobbles up the other. That's why James was so forceful in his warning: "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." (James 4:4, NASB).

A Moments Wisdom

--Fear is the glue that keeps you stuck. Faith is the solvent that sets you free.

--Pray, and then let God worry.

--There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'All right, then, have it your way.'

--When the solution is simple, God is answering.

--A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word, 'darkness' on the walls of his cell.

--God creates out of nothing. Wonderful you say. Yes, to be sure, but he does what is still more wonderful: he makes saints out of sinners.