

The Old and the New Man in Believers

THOMAS BOSTON

Born into relative obscurity in 1676 in Duns, Berwickshire, Thomas Boston died in 1732 in the small parish of Ettrick in the Scottish Borders. But his 56 years of life, 45 of them spent in conscious Christian discipleship, lend credibility to the spiritual principle that it is not *where* a Christian serves, but *what quality* of service he renders, that really counts.

It is as a loving, faithful, rigorously self-disciplined Christian pastor, and one deeply committed to the grace of God, that Boston is best remembered. Leaving his first charge at Simprin (where he served 1699-1707), he settled in Ettrick for a 25-year ministry that saw the number of communicants rise from 60 (in 1710) to 777 (in 1731). Constantly taught them in season and out of season, in pulpit and in home.

A Sermon preached, on a sacramental occasion, at Maxton, in the year 1729.

Rom. vi. 6, Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

THE sanctification of sinners is no less a mystery than their justification: the former springing out of the cross of Christ unto them, through the intervention of faith knitting the sinner to a crucified Christ, as well as the latter. Hence the apostle — having asserted the insurance of the sanctification of believers, that they shall certainly walk in “newness of life,” ver. 4; in “the likeness of Christ’s resurrection,” ver. 5, *i.e.* as Christ, during the forty days after his resurrection, lived in the world after a new manner, very different from his manner of life in it before his death — brings the ground of it from the cross of Christ, in the words of the text. In which we have,

1. The ground insuring holiness of life in believers united to Christ, “Our old man is crucified with him.” This secures their holiness of life, in such manner as the drying up of the fountain doth the drying up of the streams.

(1.) The state the fountain of sin is in believers, “Our old man is crucified with him.” This supposeth that Christ was crucified; that in believers there is a twofold man, a new man, and an old; for while he saith, “our old man,” he intimates that the old man is not the whole man, as in the unregenerate. The new man is the new creature of grace in the believer, or he as renewed. The old man is the corruption of nature, or he as unrenewed. This old man is the fountain of sin in his heart and life.

Now, the state it is in is a state of crucifixion; it is nailed to the cross, which is a state of death. And us crucifixion is a con-crucifixion with Christ, Gal. ii. 20. "I am crucified with Christ." In so far as the believer is by faith united to Christ, his old man is nailed to the cross of Christ, to fare here as Christ fared: and that was heavy fare.

(2.) The issue of this state of the fountain of sin in believers. It is twofold.

1st, The final issue, "That the body of sin might be destroyed."

The old man is the body of sin, being a complication of the several sinful lusts opposite to the holy law, as the body is of members competent to the human frame. Now, the final issue of this state of the old man, the body of sin, is its destruction and utter ruin. Crucifixion is not present death indeed, but it is sure and certain death. Pilate would have "chastised Christ, and released him," Luke xxiii. 16. but the Jews would have him crucified, for that would carry him quite away from among them: even so the old man' is not to be corrected and amended, but destroyed quite and clean.

2dly, The intermediate issue, "That henceforth we should not serve sin;" that from the moment of our union with Christ we should not serve sin any more, voluntarily living in it, and giving up ourselves to it as its servants, to live and act for satisfying it, as we did before. The old man may live long on the cross before he be destroyed: but then his hands and feet cannot serve him as they did before, there are nails driven through them; he may move them indeed, but then it is with pain and difficulty. So was it with Christ; he behoved to recommend his mother to the care of his beloved disciple John, for that his own hands and feet were not at liberty to act and go for her as formerly.

2. The certainty concerning this ground, "Knowing this." It is not a matter of uncertain hope, but known for truth. It could not be known by sense; no bodily eye could discern our old man on the cross with Christ: nor yet by rational deduction from natural principles; for the whole mystery of Christ is supernatural. Therefore it is known by faith upon divine testimony; it is a conclusion of faith to be laid down for invigorating us in all our endeavours after holiness of life, and to be firmly held and stuck by in all our struggles with the old man, as ever we would desire to make head against him.

That I may touch the several purposes of this text, I shall offer them in several doctrines to be briefly handled.

DOCTRINE I. "There is in believers united to Christ a new man, a holy principle; and an old man, a fountain of sin.

I. Why the holy principle and the corrupt nature in believers are called the *new* and *old man*?

1. They are called *men*, because each of them possesseth the whole man, though not wholly. There are by their means two I's in every believer, Rom. vii. 15. "For that which I

do, I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate that do I.” There is not one part of the man that is in Christ, but grace has a part of it, and corruption has a part of it: as in the twilight there is light over all, and darkness over all too, the darkness being mixed in every part with the light. So my renewed part is I, a man having an understanding enlightened, a will renewed, affections spiritualized, using my body conformably: but my unrenewed part is I too, having an understanding darkened, a will rebellious, affections corrupted, and using my body accordingly.

2. They are called the *new* and *old man*, for two reasons.

(1.) Because the *new* nature is brought in upon the corrupt principle, which was the first possessor. The corrupt nature is of the same standing with ourselves from the conception and birth, and possessed us alone till our union with Christ by faith. And then only came in the *new* nature, and that made the former *old*.

(2.) Because of their different originals; the one being in us from the corrupt first Adam, the other from the holy second Adam. So the believer, looking on the corruption of his nature, may call fallen Adam father; and on the new creature in him, he may call Christ father. The second Adam coming after the first, made the first old: so the produce of them in us is the old and new man accordingly.

II. How the believer comes to be thus split in two, two men. This is done by virtue of his union with Christ, from whence ariseth a communication of grace to him from Christ, 1 Cor. i. 30. “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” Concerning which two things are to be noted.

1. That in the moment of one’s union with Christ by faith, there is communicated to him, out of the fulness of grace in the man Christ, a measure of every grace in him, as the wax impressed receives every point in the seal, John i. 16. “And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” Eph. iv. 13. “Till we all come — unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” And thus is the new creature formed, being a new man perfect in parts, entire or having all its members, no grace totally wanting.

Hence it is that the new man is formed immediately after Christ’s image, so that it is the very picture of the man Christ, as Eve was of Adam. Therefore the forming of it is said to be the forming of Christ in the believer, Gal. iv. 19.

2. That yet there is not then, nor during this life, communicated to the believer a full measure of any grace, 1 Cor. xiii. 9. “For we know in part.” So all the graces being imperfect, though they remove sin as far as they go, they cannot fill up the room in any part, mind, will, or affections. And thus is there an old man left in the believer still, Rom. vii. 14. which is the image of the first Adam, from whom the corruption composing it is derived.

USE 1. Hence see, that the believer's life while here cannot miss to be a struggling life, Gal. v. 17. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." The believer is like Rebekah in another case, the two men struggle in him; and like the two armies in the Shulamite.

2. See here the rise of the peace and easy life of it most men have. The flesh in them has no competitor. In the state of glory, grace has all, so there is a perfect peace: in the state of nature, corruption has all; so there is peace too; except what is marred by the struggle between the flesh in one part lusting, and the flesh in another part fearing, as in Balaam, 2 Pet. ii. 15. "who loved the wages of unrighteousness." Compared with Numb. xxii. 18. "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more." Whereas the struggle in the believer is betwixt the flesh and Spirit in the same part willing, and willing the same thing of their proper motion, Rom. vii. 15, 16. forecited.

DOCT. II. The old man in believers is a body of sin, an entire body, lacking none of its members, Rom. vii. 24. "O wretched man that I am I who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" This appears from the account of it already given. As we derive every grace from the second Adam in our regeneration, so every corruption from the first Adam in our natural generation.

USE 1. This may serve to humble believers, when they are at their best. There is an entire body of sin in them while they are here. Do they excel in any grace? yet there is in them a member of the old man opposite to it, as passion in meek Moses. Have they every grace in them? They have every corruption too, though every one does not appear, more than every grace. Therefore they have need to watch against all sill whatsoever; for there is never a snare in the ill world but there is a member of the old man ready to fall in with it, Col. iii. 5. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness," &c.

2. No wonder the believer groans being burdened, having a whole body of sin carrying about with him. And they that groan not under it are certainly all flesh; no new man in them. If ye belong to Christ ye cannot want an errand to him for sanctification. Ye have a body of sin to lay before him, which he alone can destroy.

DOCT. III. The old man in believers is crucified with Christ. This bears two things.

I. Christ was crucified. He not only died for us, but died for us the cursed, painful, shameful, lingering death on the tree of the cross; which we are met to commemorate. Christ was put to this death for us, rather than another kind of death.

1st, That the first sin that let in all sin into the world might be the more clearly read in the punishment. When ye consider the awful and tremendous dispensation of the Son of

God, the second Adam, hanging naked on a tree, and dying there at great leisure in exquisite pain, can ye miss to see the fiery wrath of God against the sin of that naked pair in paradise, pleasuring themselves in the fruit of the forbidden tree, and in an instant defacing the image of God in them?

2dly, That the whole world might see what a low and hard state Christ took on him, putting himself in our room. We were bond-men under the curse, and Christ took on him our state of servitude, and that under the curse becoming a bond-man for us under the curse, Philip. ii. 7. "He took upon him the form of a servant." Hereof the death on the cross was tile sign and badge, being the punishment of slaves, and accursed in the law. And to make way for this circumstance, the Jews were subjected to the Romans.

USE 1. Remember a crucified Christ, enter this night deep into the thought of the Son of God hanging, groaning, dying on a cross for us. Admire the matchless love in it. Behold the severity of divine justice against sin in it. Prize the salvation so dearly bought, and receive it with thankfulness.

2. Think not strange, if ye have a crucified life in the world. If ye are Christians, followers of Jesus, why should ye think strange of it, to be thus conformed to your head?

II. The old man in believers is crucified together with him. Here we are to inquire how it is crucified with him; which take in the following particulars.

1 Christ hung on the cross as a public person, a representative of his spiritual seed. For he was the second Adam suffering, as the other the first Adam sinning. So that as they sinned in Adam, they suffered in Christ; the law having them all on the cross in Christ their representative, Gal. ii. 20. "I am crucified with Christ."

2. Christ hanging on the cross had the body of all their sins upon him, your old man, and my old man. They were on him by the imputation of the guilt of them, though not inherent in him, 2 Cor. v. 21. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Therefore our old man is said to be crucified, not *in* him, but *with* him.

3. While he was hanging on the cross, he was meritoriously doing away the guilt of them, and consequently the power, pollution, and very being thereof; inasmuch as the guilt being removed, these must cease of course. For the strength of sin is the law, whereby it stakes down the sinner under the curse, 1 Cor. xv. 56.

4. The sinner being united to Christ by faith, the merit and virtue, of Christ's suffering on the cross is actually applied to him. So that, his guilt being removed, there is a reigning principle of grace planted in him, going through the whole man, whereby the dominion of sin is broken, Rom. vi. 14 and the pollution removed so far as that new man goes, Tit. iii. 5. So that the believer is an image of Christ on the cross, full of grace in him, and of sin on him; but the former working off the latter.

USE 1. See then, O communicants, that the crucifying of the old man, the body of sin in you, depends entirely on your uniting with Christ by faith. The sacrament is appointed to seal and strengthen that union. Therefore your great business at the table should be, closely to knit with a crucified Christ. The more of that, the more will the death of sin be hastened on. And they that aim not at the destruction of sin in their communicating, while they pretend to remember a crucified Saviour, forget the end of his crucifixion, viz, that the body of sin, being crucified with him, might be destroyed.

2. The old man in believers is in a state of death, though not dead outright. It is crucified with Christ. It may move and stir in them, and vehement struggles it may make, as a dying man struggling with the mortal disease: but whatever efforts it make, it is on the cross, whence it shall not come down till it breathe out its last.

3. The practice of religion is painful work; and Christians must not think it strange, that oft-times they are pained to the heart in it. The saints in glory have no pain in their work; for the old man is destroyed in them: but the saints here have an unrenewed part; and that is on the cross, and cannot but pain them. There are right eyes in them to be plucked out; the man has a painful struggle in denying himself, crossing his own inclinations, wrestling against his own flesh and blood. Providence thrusts a spear into the old man's side, by piercing trials and troubles; it breaks his legs by cutting disappointments from many airths, to forward his death. This cannot be bat painful.

4. The old man is long a-dying out; for crucifying is a lingering death. There must be an exercise of patience in the Christian course; for there may be many a battle ere the complete victory be got. Many a wound the old man will take ere he fall; and after he is worsted again and again, he will get up and renew the battle, till he get the final stroke from the Lord's immediate hand.

It is a grave question, Why doth the Lord suffer the old man of sin to dwell in his people after their conversion? Why is not sin quite expelled at the first entry of grace? Our text affords one weighty reason for it, viz, that the members may be conformed to the head. Christ did not put off the body of our sins, that by imputation lay on him, at his very first encounter with it: nay, he had a grievous struggle with it for the space of three hours on the cross, till he himself got the first fall, dying by its hand on the cross. Nay, if we reckon rightly, it lay heavy on him the space of thirty-three years; only upon the cross was the heat of the battle, which ended in his death and burial, whereby he put it off quite and clean. So, since imputed sin was on Christ the head all his life, inherent sin is left in believers, the members, all their life. The old man is crucified with him.

DOCTRINE IV. By virtue of the cross of Christ, the old, man in believers shall certainly be destroyed quite and clean at length. Here we may inquire,

I. What destruction is that that is certainly abiding the old man in believers? It is an utter destruction of it, with all effects of it, all marks and vestiges of it, all belonging with it to the old Adam.

1. The old man himself shall be destroyed, utterly destroyed, out of all that are Christ's; so that though he has many a time trode them like a field of battle, there shall not be in them the least print of his feet to be discerned, Heb. xii. 23. "The spirits of just men made perfect." The day will come, when there shall not be the least guilt of it on them, to draw a frown from their Father's face against them, (Is. xxxiii. ult. "The people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity"); when it shall have no power to prevail over them' in the least: nay, when it shall no more have an indwelling in them, Heb. xii. 23. forecited; but shall be utterly cast forth as an abominable branch. So the new man shall possess all alone, without a competitor for ever.

2. The sinful vile body derived from old Adam, which brought him down from Adam to us, Psal. li. 5. and continues to the end the best friend he has in believers, shall be destroyed for his sake. The soul shall leave the sinful flesh to be carried into the grave, where it shall rot and consume, till it return to the dust again, so as not the least lineament of old Adam's image or likeness shall be discerned on it. And Christ will take the same dust thus purified, and form it anew after his own likeness as second Adam, Phil. iii. 21.

3. The visible heavens that covered him, and this earth that bore him, and furnished fuel to his lusts, shall for his sake be set on flames, and reduced to ashes, 2 Pet. iii. 10. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up." Compare Gen. iii. 17. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake." So that it shall no more for ever be to be said, There is the earth where the old man some time lived, and there the' heavens that gave him light and air. But Christ will make new heavens and a new earth for the new man, 2 Pet. iii. 13. "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

4. *Lastly*, All that shall remain of him shall be buried in hell, Rev. xx. 14. "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire." Old Adam brought in the old man into the world, and he spread his poisonous efficacy over all: so that look where ye will, ye shall not see in all this world that in which there is not sin, or some effect of sin. But then all shall be gathered from off believers, and from off the now groaning creatures, and cast into the lake of fire; so that there shall not be the least sin, nor effect of sin, without the boundaries of hell.

II. When will the old man be thus destroyed? You will easily conceive, from what is said, that destruction will have two periods.

1. At the death of the believer, and not till then. Till then the child of God must wrestle on with it; for so did Christ with it as imputed to him, till death set him, free. It is a grave question, how come believers to die being freed from the curse of the covenant of works? ANSWER. They die in conformity to Christ their head; that as death came in by sin, sin may go off by death. It is not dying that does it indeed; for sin goes through death in them that are out of Christ, not moved from off them for all that death can do.

But at death, Christ gives the redding stroke betwixt the new and old man, kills the old man outright, as 2 Sam. i. 10. And he does it, by letting in a full measure of every grace from himself into the believer, which takes up the whole man wholly; and so the old man is' gone in a moment, as the darkness upon the sun's displaying his beams over all.

2. At the end of the world. Then comes the utter abolition of all vestiges of it out of hell.

III. The certainty of it. It is even as sure as the death of Christ could merit its destruction, and as the end of his death cannot be frustrated, and as he rose again from the dead free from the imputed guilt of it, and sits in heaven to-day without sin so much as imputed to him.

USE. Let the saints then take courage, and renew the battle vigorously with the old man; for the victory will undoubtedly fall to their side. And as for you that are still for keeping the old man's head and heart hale; as ye do interpretatively desire none of Christ's cross, it is an argument ye have as little saving interest in it.

DOCTRINE V. In the meantime, till the old man be destroyed quite and clean by virtue of the cross of Christ, by virtue of the same cross the believer shall not be a servant to the old man more. That is the present piece of freedom from it the believer has.

1. The believer has heartily given up with him for a master. Some time he said, as Exod. xxi. 5. "I love my master, — I will not go out free." But now he hates him mortally, and would fain be altogether free at any rate, Rom. vii. 24. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The very being in the house with the old man is a burden.

2. He will get no work, but forced work, off his hand more, Rom. vii. 15. "For that which I do, I allow not," &c. He will not yield his members to the old man voluntarily, as before, chap. vi. 13. "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin." He will never get work with whole good will at his hand more, but half will at most.

USE. This writes death to such as have given their hand to Christ at his table, and are ready to go back into the service of their lusts. If from henceforth ye enter not into a struggling life against sin, ye have not felt the virtue of Christ's cross.

DOCTRINE VI. ult. Believers should go out against the old man in acts of holiness, in the faith that he is a crucified man; *i.e.* Believe your old: man is crucified with Christ, and in this belief bestir yourself against him in the use of appointed means. If you believe it not, how can your hands be strong, having all to do yourself alone? But believe it firmly, and it will make you as a giant refreshed with wine.

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