

Believe It!
How To Live The Christian Life

When I was in college studying for the ministry one of the guys in our junior class transferred to another well-known school to finish his education. That school was larger and offered some areas of study that Florida Bible College wasn't able to provide.

Later on in the middle of the year I had a chance to talk to him to find out how things were going. This is what he said... He said, "It's been really strange. I've ended up with a ministry that I never thought I'd have. About every month or so they get some big name chapel speaker come in and give a message that goes something like this... 'God is a God of holiness. So if you see things in your life that are contradictory to scripture you just think your saved. If you're practicing sin you need to come down to the front, turn from your sins, and really get saved.'"

And then he said this, "My ministry is the dorm and it's to show these guys (who I know have trusted Christ as savior) that the problem of sin in their lives isn't that they need to 'get really saved', it's that they haven't learned how to deal with sin God's way."

How do we deal with sin in our lives? What is God's way of responding to the sin that seems to so easily beset us?

Here at FCC we preach and teach the clarity of the Gospel. We're in a series were calling *Believe It!* And what we're doing is taking a week-by-week journey through our statement of faith.

If you've been here for this series we want you to know that this is where we stand. These are what we see as absolutely key beliefs. These are essentials to us.

Some politicians read the public opinion polls every day so they can tailor their message to what people want to hear. I don't take surveys and do market research to see if people agree with me or not.

For 34 years I've gotten up here every Sunday and basically given out the same message. It's the message of the Bible. The Bible says there's a reason why the world is in the shape it's in today. There's a reason why we struggle with questions like, "Why am I here?" and "What is the meaning of life?"

The Bible tells us where we've come from and where we're going. All things were created by God including each one of us. God created us for many reasons but one is to have a personal, genuine, intimate relation with Him.

The reason we don't have that relationship is because of what the Bible calls sin. And it defines sin as anything (any thought, any word, any action) that doesn't meet God's standard of absolute perfection.

For instance, the Bible says, *As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."* (I Peter 1:15, 16)

Whoever shall keep the whole law (meaning the commandments of God), and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. (James 2:10)

That's why the Bible concludes, *As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one.* (Romans 3:10)

The reason we don't have that relationship with God is because, *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23)

But God, who is rich in mercy, made a way for us to be forgiven and restored to that place of fellowship with Him.

In fulfillment of hundreds of specific Old Testament prophecies, Jesus Christ came to take our judgment. Jesus Christ went to the cross as part of God's plan of redemption.

God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (II Corinthians 5:21)

The perfect Christ took our sins upon Himself so that He might cover us with His righteousness. The Bible says all who believe in Christ are justified before a holy and righteous God.

Faith doesn't make us perfect but faith gives us a new life so we can begin to honor God with our lives.

That's the heartbeat of this church. That's our message. Salvation and eternal life are a gift that we could never earn. We are justified by faith in the person and work of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Now our purpose statement says this: *The purpose of faith community church is to introduce people to Jesus Christ and to equip them to become His devoted followers.*

To introduce people to Jesus Christ happens when we make the message of salvation crystal clear. But then how do we equip people to be fully devoted to the savior?

A crucial part of becoming a devoted follower of Christ is understanding temptation and how to respond to it.

We say this in our statement of faith:

The Christian Life.

A true child of God has two births, one of the flesh, the other of the Spirit, giving man a flesh nature and a Spirit nature. The flesh nature is neither good, nor righteous. The spiritual nature is totally righteous. This results in warfare between the Spirit and the flesh, which continues until physical death or the return of the Lord. The flesh nature does not change in any way with the new birth, but is controlled by yielding to the Spirit.

Let's begin this morning by understanding this truth...

I. We're Born Into The World With A Rebellious Nature

Turn to Ephesians chapter 2 page 1146

Ephesians is actually a letter written by an apostle back to a church he had started in the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor.

The church had some struggles and the apostle is reminding them about the amazing transformation that God did in their lives when they came to faith in Jesus.

Read verse 1

Before God, all of us are both rebels and failures. We willingly cross the line and constantly fall short of God's perfect standards.

It's our nature. We're born this way. We just don't want to admit it. That's why we need to true mirror of God's Word to show us what we're really like. We're separated from God.

I had a first time mother to be ask me, "What's this stuff about babies being born sinners. I'm having a hard time with that."

My answer was, "Just wait. You're going to find out that your baby will want what she wants, when she wants it and she won't care at all that it's 3 AM when she wants it. She won't be the slightest interested in how much sleep you get. We're born totally self-focused."

"Not only that, but you will never have to teach your child to disobey you. It comes naturally. Your job will be to teach her to do what's right and to think of others. That's maturity. We're born selfish sinners."

Now here's where the rub comes in for us. We might not be religious but we don't rob banks or assault little old ladies in the street. We pay our bills, cut our grass, and coach the kid's soccer team.

We have a hard time seeing ourselves the way God sees us.

Here's where we really need something to help us see ourselves from God's vantage point.

God says to us, "If you don't have Jesus as you Savior then you're dead. You're separated from me and you can't do anything to change that.

"From an eternal perspective, nothing you do is eternally good. Nothing you do is going to last beyond this life. Nothing you do is good is because it's just human goodness flowing out of someone who's spiritually dead and isn't motivated by the glory or worship of God."

We evaluate people by all kinds of measures of morality and goodness.

The Bible says, *God looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. Every one of them has turned aside; They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.* (Psalm 53:2, 3)

Read verses 2 & 3

Here's what really drives us. This is how we really operate. We're controlled by 3 things; the world, Satan, and our own desires.

Now there's something that's absolutely crucial to understand here. The Bible's not saying that every person who has not received Christ as savior is as disobedient as he or she could be.

A seemingly moral person may be more obedient to God than an immoral one in certain areas, but every person starts out disobedient at the most important point of all.

Romans 10:16 says, *But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?"*

To obey the gospel means to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what we are without Jesus. Dead, disobedient in the most crucial area of all, and influenced by the philosophy of this world system, Satan, it's ruler, and our own sin nature.

And notice in verse 3 God says we fulfill the desires of the flesh *and the mind*.

Sins like intellectual pride, false ambition, rejection of truth, pride in your heritage or religion. Those don't always show outwardly but they're part of our lives and that's why without Christ, God says we're lost.

We may be down in the gutter or up singing in the church choir but God says without Christ we're by nature children of wrath.

Jesus said, *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again."* (John 3:6, 7)

We need a new birth because we're born of the flesh and the flesh can't produce the spiritual birth that we need from God.

The rebellious nature we're all born with is called by various names in the Bible. It's called the flesh, sin (singular), the old man (which is kind of unique since you apparently inherit from your father, which is why Jesus had to be born of a virgin). It's called the old nature and the natural man.

From a divine standpoint there's nothing good about the old nature. *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells.* (Romans 7:18)

That flesh nature can't be improved, changed, reformed, or enhanced. It will always be in rebellion against God. We inherited it from Adam.

You can clean up the flesh, put perfume on it, shine it up to look religious, but Jesus said it takes a new birth to make things right.

I. We're Born Into The World With A Rebellious Nature

II. When We're Born Again We Receive A New Nature

Turn to Ephesians chapter 4 page 1148

Remember, Ephesians, like the rest of the New Testament letters, was written to believers. These were people who had trusted Jesus Christ for their forgiveness.

Read verses 20-22

Take off (like a suit of clothes) your old evil nature. Put off that corrupt desire to disobey God that was the guiding factor in your life before you became a Christian.

4Remember, some times that old nature shows itself in outright sin and rebellion against God. Sometimes it shows itself in religious self-righteousness or a humanistic morality but it's there in each one of us from birth.

Now we tend to read that and say, "How am I supposed to do that?" How do I

put off this old nature that's had such a grip on my life for so many years? How do I stop living like my old self?"

By the way, this is just one more passage that tells us that Christians don't always automatically start doing what's right. I get so weary of people saying, "If you're really saved you're going to live for God."

A couple of verses after this the Bible tells Christians to stop lying, stop stealing, and stop tearing down each other with hateful words.

You don't judge your salvation by your life. You judge it by the promises of God. The people in Ephesus were just like you and me. They had trusted Christ as savior but they needed to be equipped to become totally devoted followers of Christ.

So how do I put off the old ways? Romans chapter 6 explains that just like Jesus died and rose again, spiritually we die to sin when we put our trust in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. We're raised to a new life.

That's what baptism signifies. That's why baptism is by immersion in the Bible. It shows death, burial, and resurrection.

It's because the old man is dead that I can put him off.

It's like in John 11 when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. He'd been dead for four days. His body had begun to decay. But when Jesus called him out of the tomb the decay was gone. He was alive.

That's why Jesus told the people around him. "Loose him and let him go." Take off his burial clothes. Remove the last vestiges of death. Lazarus no longer belonged to the old dominion of death.

Why would you walk around wearing burial clothes? Take them off.

Now see the argument? You no longer belong to the old corruption of sin. You belong to the new creation in Christ.

But now here's where a lot of Christians fail. In our relationship with God it's true that our old nature is dead. Positionally we are dead, buried and raised

with Christ.

In God's sight all that we were up to the point we were saved is gone. As far as God goes, our life began the day we were born again.

But in every day practice it doesn't seem that way at all.

Because of habit patterns established over the years, practices, lack of knowledge and understanding, ignorance of spiritual power, many of the characteristics of the old man still cling to us, even though we are a new creation in Christ.

So, the Bible says to us, have nothing to do with the old man. Don't go on doing the things that he used to do, because he's dead.

In the language of Roman 6, know that he's dead, consider, or reckon, it to be true in your life personally, and then stop yielding your body to sin's use.

Be what you are in Christ, not what you used to be in Adam.

Read verses 23 & 24

Notice what we're supposed to do. We have to do it. This is discipleship. This is what it means to be a follower of Christ. As believers we're to put on the new man. We've been given a new nature. When we were born again by faith we received the new man.

And catch this because it's the key to living for God. Just as the old nature is corrupt and always does evil, the new nature was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness.

That new man, that new birth, that exists within you as a Christian is a creation of God and is perfectly righteous and holy.

Not only have you died to sin, but you're alive unto God. God's very life exists within you.

Stop thinking like this world system that's blinded and hardened and put on your new clothes.

Romans 13:14 *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*

You say, “Oh, but it’s so hard out there in the world. There’s so many temptations, so many things to pull me down.”

Here’s another biblical promise. Jesus said, *In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.* (John 16:33)

Don’t be shocked that you’re still tempted. You have an old nature. You’ll always be tempted until the day you’re with the Lord. But here’s where God wants us to focus our attention...

Put on the new. Claim the new. Be aware of what you shouldn’t do, but concentrate on what you should do.

This is the bottom line of the argument of Ephesians 4. If we are Christians then Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

To put on the new man is to continually remind ourselves that Jesus Christ lives within us. That we’re indwelt with righteousness and true holiness.

It’s a conscious yielding of our bodies to God for His use as instruments of righteousness. And it’s all done through the power of Jesus Christ who lives in us.

Do you believe in the power of the Bible? Do you believe in the person of the Holy Spirit and his ability to change lives? Do you believe you’ve been given a new nature? This is the key to living a whole different life.

Those guys studying for ministry didn’t need to walk an isle in a chapel service once a month asking God to finally really save them. That’s an insult to the God who gave them the great and precious promises of the Bible.

- I. We’re Born Into The World With A Rebellious Nature*
- II. When We’re Born Again We Receive A New Nature*
- III. The Battle Of The Old VS The New Lasts A Lifetime*

Hear me out. I want to be so careful at this point to make things as clear as possible. I want to be an encouragement not a discouragement. God forbid that someone would leave this service today saying, “If the battle to walk with God never ends, what’s the use of trying.”

Actually, the Bible does just the opposite with this truth. It becomes a motivation for being on the winning side. That’s God’s side, by the way.

Turn to Galatians chapter 5 page 1144

How can we live a godly life in an ungodly world? How can we be people that honor God? Where are we going to get the things that we all long for down inside: love, joy, peace, patience?

Read verse 16

When a person first trusts Christ as Savior we tend to give them as list of do’s and don’ts. If we’re not careful they can think that the key to their relationship with God is keeping a list.

According to this verse, that’s not true. The key to spirituality is to walk in the Spirit.

The true Christian life as God designed it isn’t just keeping a list of rules, even a list of good rules. Even if the list is God’s Law.

But because of that, some Christians go off in the opposite direction and say we need to do away with all lists. All rules are legalism.

That can’t be true because God has rules. The New Testament is filled with admonitions. It covers lots of things we’re supposed to do and lots of things we’re not supposed to do. That’s not legalism.

The real issue is our motive for doing what we do. But, here’s the key,

If we live on the basis of the Holy Spirit and what He teaches and how He directs and empowers, we will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.

Read verse 17

This is where a lot of people get confused.

A person trusts Christ as Savior and they're excited. They see from the Bible that they're forgiven of their sins. They want to live for God and please Him.

Then low and behold, a few days later they sin grievously. It's like out of nowhere sin jumps out and body slams them.

And they wonder, "Where in the world did that come from?"

Here's where it came from. We have two competing natures. There's a war within us. Just because we sin after we receive Christ doesn't mean we must not really be saved. What it means is that the flesh is controlling us instead of the Spirit.

The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. The verb translated "lusts," *epithumeo*, means "to strongly desire." They're battling it out for control.

If there's a battle going on, who do you think's going to win? How about the one we feed and exercise the most?

The victory comes when the Spirit rules the flesh so walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. For (Because, this is the reason walking in the Spirit will override sin in our lives) the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another.

Just remember, don't ever get complacent. Here's the principle, *Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.* (I Corinthians 10:12)

The battle between the old and the new lasts a lifetime.

Now at this point you may be thinking, OK I get it to a point. I can understand the basics of what the Bible is getting across here, the Holy Spirit has to be controlling my life, but how do I really do it? How do I walk in the Spirit? How do I put myself under God's control?

In the end, I believe the spiritual life is a paradox. An apparent contradiction of Christian living is that while my whole life isn't mine, it's Christ's, at the same time I'm living it out.

It's all by the Spirit's power, but it demands all my yieldedness and commitment.

It means:

Being sensitive to the Spirit's direction. Knowing the Word of God so that I can know the will of the Holy Spirit.

Yielding my members as instruments of righteousness, reckoning myself to be alive unto God.

Opening up my will in submission and allowing the Holy Spirit to energize and move me.

Who's leading you through life this morning? Is it your flesh, or is it God's Spirit within you? Have you put on that new man who's created in righteousness and true holiness, or are you running the show?

Believe me, if it's all about you, you're headed for a crash and burn.