

Choosing The New Man (Part Two)

by Charles Whitaker

Forerunner, March-April 2003

The apostle Paul informs us in Romans 6:6 that, when we were submerged in the waters of baptism, "our old man was crucified with [Christ], that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." Once this has occurred, "just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (verse 4).

Every Christian, then, is a *new* man, no longer living the old life of sin and slavish obedience to human nature. Paul says later in the chapter that, "having been set free from sin, [we] became slaves of righteousness" (verse 18). Because the new man is a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17), he is to be renewed in mind (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23; Colossians 3:10) and conduct (Titus 3:5, 8; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:10, 12). Ring out the old, ring in the new, and the new man begins his walk toward perfection (Hebrews 6:1).

Reconciled to God and Man

The four passages discussed below share two important characteristics. Each mentions the new man (or new creation) and touches on the theme of reconciliation, either between God and man or between man and man. We will see that renewal and reconciliation go together like hand and glove. In fact, without renewal real reconciliation cannot take place.

Galatians 6:12-16

Some had taught the Galatian Christians that "Gentile" Christians should become physically circumcised. Paul disagrees. He makes it plain that the real motive of those teaching this doctrine is to "make a good showing of the flesh . . . that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ" (Galatians 6:12; see 5:11; I Corinthians 7:19; Romans 2:28-29). In verse 15, he asserts that "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but the new creation." Paul reiterates what he says in Galatians 5:6: What is important is a walk of "faith working through love." Upon those who so walk, the apostle concludes, will be "peace and mercy" (verse 16).

Physical descent—whether one is a Gentile or an Israelite—matters nothing. What matters is whether a person is nurturing the new man, once established by God, through a renewal process which involves walking in His law.

Ephesians 2:10-18

In verse 15, Paul says that God "create[s] in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace." The apostle defines what these "two" are in verse 11: "Therefore, remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands. . . ." The two, Gentiles and Israelites, share one Spirit in Christ, "who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us" (verse 14). Whether physically Gentile or Israelite, those who have "put on the new man" have one Spirit, God's Holy Spirit.

Colossians 3:9-11

Where there is the new man, Paul says, "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all." The new man can be physically a Gentile or an Israelite. To God, it really does not matter, nor should it matter among real Christians.

II Corinthians 5:17-20

In verse 18, Paul explains that he, and by implication other Christians, have a "ministry of reconciliation" to serve as "ambassadors for Christ" (verse 20). It is, the apostle continues in verse 20, as if God is "pleading through us" to "be reconciled to God." Jesus Christ brings this reconciliation about, and the new man is the result: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ" (verses 17-18).

The Circumcised Man

There is an interesting similarity among the first three passages mentioned above. In Galatians 6:12-16; Ephesians 2:10-18; and Colossians 3:9-11, Paul broaches the subject of *circumcision*. He often connects the new man with circumcision because he understands the symbolism behind circumcision, and so should we.

When practiced according to God's law, the ritual of circumcision pertains to men, that is, males, taking place on the eighth day after parturition. Eight is the number of "new beginnings," the idea being that seven is the number of perfection, and seven plus one—eight—restarts the cycle. Thus, the eighth day of the week is Sunday, in reality the beginning of the new week. The Last Great Day, which occurs eight days after the Feast of Tabernacles begins, looks forward to the day when God will make all things new. This is the important symbolic message behind physical circumcision: The boy—the man—circumcised on the eighth day is a "new man."

However, the new man of whom Paul speaks is not new because of physical circumcision. He is new because he has obeyed God's command to "circumcise the foreskin of [his] heart, and be stiff-necked no longer" (Deuteronomy 10:16, see Jeremiah 4:4). Paul, understanding this, claims that "circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit." "Heart," of course, refers to mind. The new man is new because he is "renewed in the spirit of [his] mind" (Ephesians 4:23). By definition, the new man is *spiritually* circumcised—circumcised in his mind.

The New Covenant Man

The new man, with his renewed, circumcised heart (mind) is the individual of whom God speaks through the prophet Ezekiel:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezekiel 36:26)

Ezekiel's prophecy is of the institution of the New Covenant (see Jeremiah 31:33). The new man is the New Covenant man! What is it, exactly, that makes the new man new? Two things: his new heart and the new spirit within him, God's Holy Spirit, which enables him to walk in God's ways. Ezekiel's reference to "a new heart" parallels Paul's command for a renewed mind in Ephesians 4:24. Moreover, both Ezekiel and Paul (in Ephesians 5) make use of the *walking* metaphor. Did Paul have Ezekiel 36 in mind when he wrote his letter to the Ephesian church? Probably! The similarities are remarkable.

A Matter of Choice

Notice another interesting similarity in terminology whenever Paul speaks of the new man. Quite consistently, he uses the verb "to put on." The Greek verb is *enduo*, which means, literally, "to sink into." By extension, it means "to enter into," "to get into," or "to put on" (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*). New Testament writers often use it when referring to putting on clothes (see Matthew 6:25; 27:31; Mark 1:6; I Thessalonians 5:8; Revelation 1:13; 15:6; etc.).

Paul repeatedly uses the metaphor of putting *on* clothes when he commands us to adopt the Christian way of life. With the same predictability, he speaks of taking clothes *off* to describe the abandonment of this world's lifestyle. We see it again in Colossians 3:9-10, where he speaks of our "put[ting] off the old man with his deeds" and our "put[ting] on the new man." He uses the same figure of speech in Ephesians 4:22-24. In Ephesians 6:11-17, the apostle goes a step further when he tells us how to *dress* the new man: "Put on the whole armor of God."

God's consistent use of the analogy of donning clothes to describe our adoption of the new man tells us a lot about the choices we must make daily. The logical conclusion of the metaphor is as inescapable as it is meaningful: The clothing we wear is largely a matter of our choice. Unless an adult is in very special circumstances, as in prison or the military, he has wide discretion in the matter of clothing. His is the choice of what to wear and when to wear it. He determines when to take clothes off and when to put them on. More than this, it is a choice he makes *daily*—sometimes many times a day—as he determines what to wear in different social contexts.

So it is with the Christian walk, the way of life of the new man. Daily, repeatedly each day, we must choose to "put on" the Christian way of life.

That is what Paul is telling us through his splendid clothing analogy: Christianity is a way of life. We must choose to put on that way of life—and to keep it on. Just as we do with a well-worn garment, we must come to feel so at home with the new man—so comfortable with his way of life—that we absolutely refuse to take it off for any reason at all.

In addition, God's consistent use of the clothing analogy argues against the Protestants' false doctrine of *eternal security*. "Once saved, always saved" is the cry of some Protestants. Others put it in a slightly different way: "It was all done at the cross."

What is wrong with this? "Born-again" Protestants, so-called Christians who claim the new man was born complete and finished in them when they "accepted" Christ, have in fact abdicated virtually all personal responsibility for their salvation! Take their thought to its logical conclusion: When we were *physically* born, from *our* viewpoint, it just happened—we had no say about it at all! It was out of our

control. So, such a "Christian" believes that he "accepts Christ," and, presto, he is saved, to exist forever as a spirit being, a new man. Thus, now, in this life, he has no further responsibility. Christ did it all "at the cross" and must, upon his confession of faith, irrevocably save him.

This false doctrine permits its adherents to evade all responsibility to choose daily to follow Christ. True Christians know, because of the clothing analogy, that they have that ongoing responsibility to "put on the new man."

In Paul's description of the new man, the birth or conception analogy is conspicuous by its absence. However, by its repeated presence, the clothing analogy is equally conspicuous.

A Collaboration

One point is becoming increasingly clear: the partnership that exists between God and us as we develop the new man.

We have seen that God creates the new man and then compels us to choose whether we will adopt him. We demonstrate that we have adopted the new man through our conduct, that is, through what we *do*. The new man grows, matures, as we walk the Christian way of life.

To put it differently, *God **and** man, working cooperatively, create the new man over the span of a Christian's life.* In reality, the installation of the new man is not the unilateral creation of God, but the result of a collaborative effort by God and man.

The Old Testament bears this out through its teachings of circumcision and of the new spirit. First, we will look at circumcision.

Two are necessary to circumcise the foreskin of our heart. In Deuteronomy 10:16, God tells *us* to "circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer." Here, He commands *us* to do the circumcising. Compare this to Deuteronomy 30:6, where God says *He* will perform the circumcision: "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart." These two passages do not contradict. God cannot create perfect, righteous character—that is the character of the new man—unilaterally. We build that character as we *labor with* God, cooperatively working with Him over, generally, an extended period of time. That is what the Latinate word *collaborate* means, to "labor with."

Two are needed to make a new heart. We saw earlier that the new man is the New Covenant man. He is the man to whom God has given a new heart and in whom He has placed a new spirit (Ezekiel 36: 26). Here, God takes the initiative; it is His doing.

Yet, notice the change in terminology in Ezekiel 18:31, the responsibility becomes *ours*! "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves [*make you*, KJV] a new heart and a new spirit." In this passage, it is man, not God, who creates the new heart and the new spirit. Ezekiel 18 and Ezekiel 36 do not contradict; by Himself, God cannot create the new man in us. *He needs our cooperation.*

The Hebrew word translated "make" in Ezekiel 18:31 (KJV) is *asah*. God uses it some 2625 times in the Old Testament. The translators render it a number of ways.

» To **make** in the sense of fabricate or build: "God *made* the firmament" (Genesis 1:7); "And you shall *make* holy garments for Aaron" (Exodus 28:2); "I did not *make* an end of them [the children of Israel] in the wilderness" (Ezekiel 20:17). *Asah* does not imply creation out of nothing—the Hebrew word *bara*, used only 60 times in the Old Testament, carries that meaning: "In the beginning God *created*" (Genesis 1:1). God is always the subject of *bara*, but as we can see from the examples, He is not always the subject of *asah*.

» To **execute** in the sense of "to do": "[Y]ou have established equity, You have *executed* justice and righteousness in Jacob" (Psalms 99:4). "Remove violence and plundering, *execute* justice and righteousness" (Ezekiel 45:9).

» To **keep** : "Remember the Sabbath day, to *keep* it holy" (Exodus 20:8); "Because you . . . have not walked in My statutes, nor *kept* My judgments, . . . I . . . am against you" (Ezekiel 5:7,8).

» To **prepare** , especially a sacrifice: "And when you *prepare* a young bull as a burnt offering, or as a sacrifice to fulfill a vow . . ." (Numbers 15:8; see also verses 5, 6, 12). "For since the beginning of the world, men have not heard, . . . what He ha[s] *prepared* for him that wait[s] for [H]im" (Isaiah 64:4, KJV).

» To **work** : "He has filled them with skill to do [KJV work] all manner of *work* of the engraver" (Exodus 35:35); "Then Jonathan said, . . . '[I]t may be that the Lord will *work* for us" (I Samuel 14:6); "So we built the wall; . . . for the people had a mind to *work*" (Nehemiah 4:6).

» To **commit** : "But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has *committed*, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die" (Ezekiel 18:21).

» To **do** : "And I gave them My statutes, and showed them My judgments, which, if a man *does*, he shall live by them" (Ezekiel 20:11). "I am the Lord your God: walk in My statutes, and keep My judgments, and *do* them" (Ezekiel 20:19).

The conclusion is inescapable: *asah*, translated "make" in Ezekiel 18:31 (KJV), is synonymous with *keep*, *do*, *work*, and similar verbs. We "*make [ourselves] a new heart*" by what we *do*! Specifically, the action God requires of us is *keeping* His law, *doing* His commandments. This is a Christian's *work*.

By its meaning of "prepare," *asah* describes both sides of the covenant agreement. It describes what God does for us and what we must do for ourselves if we are to receive the promises of the New Covenant.

God, for His part, has *prepared* unimaginable glory for us, as Isaiah 64:4 makes plain in the KJV (see I Corinthians 2:9). We are to prepare ourselves just as an Israelite prepared an animal sacrifice (see Numbers 15). It is up to us, as "living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1), to *prepare* ourselves for the marriage of the Lamb by putting on clean clothes—the new man (compare Revelation 19:7-9 with Colossians 3:9-10).

Paul certainly understood the two-sided arrangement: God collaborating with man in the most important endeavor anyone can undertake—the creation and nurturing of the new man. He tells us to "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). But, as it were in the same breath, he reminds us, "It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (verse 13).