

Nature Or Natures?

By Gary Shepard

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: 2 Peter 1:4
Preached On:: Sunday, February 12, 2017

Sovereign Grace Baptist Church
2031 Burgaw Highway
Jacksonville, NC

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/allsovgrace

"O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!
Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me!

"O the deep, deep love of Jesus, love of every love the best!
'Tis an ocean full of blessing, 'tis a haven giving rest!

"Underneath me, all around me, is the current of His love
Leading onward, leading homeward to Thy glorious rest above!"

I want you to turn in your Bibles this morning to 2 Peter 1. It is a sad thing, sad thing, that men and women in our day are so gullible, so lazy, so unconcerned for the truth that they just simply believe only what preachers say, what their favorite preacher says, I should say. And sadly many preachers capitalize on this for their own gain and their own glory and their followers become like people in the fairytale, the Emperor's New Clothes, when the wicked men told the king and all the people that they had made for the king a beautiful garment but only certain people could see it, when the truth was they hadn't made for him a garment at all but because of pride and because of such things as that, everybody said how beautiful it was and everyone including the king spoke of how beautiful it was. But there was a little boy in the crowd when the king went by who was just honest like a child and he said, "He's naked. Just plain naked." And that's the way it is oftentimes with people when they are told things, they just believe them; they just believe that they are the way they are and if anybody comes along with the truth, they are locked into a place of pride and self-will and they refuse to admit the reality. It's the hardest thing for people to do, to admit they have been wrong. Somebody said sin is like a prison cell, but pride is the lock on the door.

So oftentimes men tell people how things are and they show them things that cannot be supported from the Bible but, after all, So-and-so said it. So-and-so believed it. So-and-so wrote about it. But you really only believe, I've said this to you before, you only really believe what you know to be true from God's word. You only believe what you have read and seen for yourself from this book. That is faith. Faith not because a preacher said it or because a writer said it, but because God said it and it is plain in black and white.

And it's true with what you believe about the nature of man and especially what you believe about the nature of a believer. Does a believer have a nature or natures? Does he

have what some have called an old nature and a new nature? And I would ask you simply what does the Bible actually say? Not what does Dr. Gill say or even Brother Hawker, or the most respected persons and preachers that we know. The answer is only to be found in what God says and the truth of the matter is, if we have to run to men to see what we believe, we'll always be deceived.

If I've got to go and check with this book or that commentator or that preacher or this preacher to see what I believe, then we are really in trouble because men are fallible. I'm fallible. I'm subject to error and I have seen some things in recent days that I would not have believed if you had told me with the most sincere heart. I've never known anybody until recent days to take what one believes about the nature of man and make it a point of fellowship. Never. I've never known what one believes about the nature of believers to be made a point of orthodoxy, or for anybody ever being accused one way or the other for what they believed about the nature of man as preaching heresy. Not in 40 years of preaching. I've never seen it. And I have never known it.

But I want to say this morning in the very beginning, that I believe that you must be born again. Jesus said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see and he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." You must be born again. There must be a supernatural work of God's Spirit in your heart and if you never receive that, you will never believe, you will never ever lay hold of eternal life. And I know this is what Paul says in Romans, "You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." It is absolutely necessary that the Spirit of God do a work in us. Absolutely. Just like Christ did a work for us, the Holy Spirit must do a work in us.

But Christ also said something else on that occasion when he was speaking about the necessity of the new birth. He said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." That is to say there is an element of mystery in the Spirit's unseen work in an individual. Billy Graham may write a book and tell you how to be born again but Jesus never wrote such a book. He said the work of God's Spirit in us is a mysterious work, an unseen work like the wind. Like the wind.

Now, let me say that I once believed that in regeneration, a person got a new nature. I once believed that because that's what I read that So-and-so said, that's what I heard So-and-so preach, that's what I variously looked and listened to men say, that everybody that is born again has a work of the Spirit, they have a new nature. But one day I began to look at what the Bible said and not man because it seemed to me that what was being said was a whole lot like the black dog/white dog illustration that people usually use naturally to describe what we are. We are like a black dog in one thing, we're like a white dog in another thing. But all I could ever see was the black dog in me, in everybody else, and in the word of God. It's kind of like people used to use the illustration, "Well, I've got an angel sitting on one shoulder and a devil sitting on the other shoulder, each one of them telling me what to do." But I never could see that in anybody and I never could feel that and know that in my own self.

And one of the examples, one of the reasons that people used to speak of this duality of natures is they say, "Well, Christ had two natures: he had a nature and he had a divine nature, so that two natures can be in the same person at one time." But the truth is the nature of Christ and the nature of God is one and the same and it is not a conflicting nature but it is a holy nature, a perfect nature, so that in him it is all the same.

So I began to search the Scriptures and I could not find, nor will you find in your search, one time when I see the phrase "new nature." Not one time. But then you don't find the word "sovereignty" in Scripture either, so I knew that something can be a reality and actually not have the word or terminology that men choose to use. But it made me begin to think because everybody seemed to stress so much importance on this new nature, that I began to look. What I did find in investigating closely, what I did find was that every reference to "nature" or to "natural" had to do with the old Adamic nature except for two. Every time you find the word "nature" in the New Testament or "natural," it says something like this, "The natural man receiveth not the things of God. We were by nature the children of wrath." Everywhere in the Bible except two, and in those two places, one of them it is used in relationship to the nature of angels, "He took not on himself the nature of angels." And in the other verse, it has to do with a reference to God himself. To God himself.

And when I began to examine the so-called proof texts, I found out as I often have, that many of the proof texts are just simply out of context. You'd better beware of proof texts. You'd better read the context that they're in, and oftentimes the proof texts don't prove what a man is saying at all. Often it proves just the opposite.

But turn with me in 2 Corinthians 5 and I want you to look at one of those so-called proof texts. This is one often given here. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." And that is given as a proof text that someone has a new nature, a believer has a new nature. But the truth of the matter is Paul's subject here in 2 Corinthians 5 is not regeneration, it's reconciliation, and he's not talking about what a man is made by Christ, what a man is made in Christ. He's talking about a positional thing that we are in if we are in Christ. What is that? Reconciled to God.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ." That's a wonderful thing. That's a wonderful place to be and that's the place that he is standing here telling us about in relationship to our standing before God, in Christ. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," or as most translations give that, "he is a new creation." But the giveaway is this: the thing that makes us know that he cannot be talking about regeneration is that he says this, "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Is there any believer here in this hour that would dare say that in conversion old things were all passed away? All things pertaining to the nature of sin in us are surely not passed away and they are not all made new. He can't be talking about regeneration here. But in reconciliation, as to what we were in Adam and what we are now in Christ, that surely rings true. We are reconciled to God. All those old things in Adam are gone and everything is new in Christ.

Adam symbolized the old creation and Christ is the new creation and if we are in him, old things are passed away. Every single solitary one of those old things with regard to how we first stood in our federal head, Adam, they are all passed away and we now stand before God reconciled in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, what about those references where we find "old man" and "new man"? They are all given for the same reason as Paul was giving us this passage of Scripture, they are all given to remind us of what we are to depart from and what we are to aspire to because of our position in him.

Now, I want you to look with me in Ephesians 4 and look at verse 22. Here is an admonition by the apostle wherein he says, "That you put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Who is the new man? Who are we to aspire to be? Who are we to find as the reason for all abstaining from sin and all of the things that we ought not to do, all the things that he has been talking about here that characterize what we are in the old man? It is in Christ, the new man. In other words, the apostle is saying to us we are to act, we are to conduct ourselves, we are to strive to be what we already are. We are new men, we are new women in Christ.

Turn over just a few pages to the book of Colossians, chapter 3. Look at verse 8, "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." How do we do that? How do we put on the new man? We put on the new man by looking to the Lord Jesus Christ. We put on the new man by faith. We believe what we are in Christ Jesus, the Lord. We don't believe that we are something new and special in ourselves because of what we have been made, we look to Christ. We are new people in Christ and we are to put off, you might as well say, we are to quit acting like we acted when we were old men and start acting like we are when we are new people in Christ.

But the real thing that tells me that this is not old nature and new nature is found in Romans 6. Romans 6:6. Now, you can go and you can get a concordance or you can get a Greek dictionary or you can get another translation and you can do whatever you want, I think the consensus is this: that when Paul uses "is" in the King James in Romans 6, the better translation is "was." Alright, this is verse 6 of Romans 6, "This knowing, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin may be made useless for our no longer serving the sin." Now, the important thing here is that Paul says that our old man was crucified with him, with Christ.

Now, you can't say, I can't say, that I am crucified. Crucifying is something that men do to other men but Paul says that our old man was crucified with him. How long was it ago that Christ was crucified? Well, now it is over 2,000 years so if we believe, we can't say this is the old man here and a different old man there, the old man was crucified with him

long long ago. He doesn't exist anymore. He is not what we are anymore. We are new men and women in Christ Jesus.

And with those texts, honestly and in their context being interpreted and being defined as they are, where do they say or what is left to suggest that we have a new nature? Well, the one that is most often used is right here in 2 Peter and the fourth verse. Now, I can tell you without a shadow of a doubt, be honest with you, that I have seen a phrase in this verse made up of just a few words quoted, given as proof texts, over and over and over and over again in support of our having a new nature. Here it is,

4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Here it is: partakers of the divine nature. We are partakers of the divine nature. That's given as a quote, a proof text that we have a new nature. I'm sure of one thing, I may not be sure of a lot but I'm sure of this one thing: anybody with a divine nature is divine. That's right. The word "divine" means "of or like God, or a god; deity." I don't know about you but I'm not God. I'm not a little god. I'm not a little Jesus. There has only been one man with a divine nature and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, you mark that down. He had a divine nature. He has right now a divine nature.

Well then, what does that mean when it says or refers to us as partakers of the divine nature? I came to that verse and I used probably the most faithful, the most tried and tested way of trying to find out how a word or what a word means in the Bible. I went and looked at everywhere that word in the Greek was used and I sought to determine from those usages, all of them together, what the word "partakers" means. I went to Strong's Greek dictionary and the word "partakers" is defined as "associate; companion; partner; fellowship." And the way it was used the very most all those places in Scripture, it was used to express things people have in common such as this verse in Acts 2:44, "And all that believed were together, and had all things common." Fellowship. That we might have fellowship with the divine nature.

Turn over and look at 1 John 1 because here in 1 John 1, a word that is close akin, close akin to the word "partakers" as it is translated here, the word is used in 1 John 1 quite a few times. Verse 3, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Now, when Peter writes what he writes, he talks about us being made partakers of the divine nature, but he says something before that, doesn't he? And this alone ought to tell

us something about what he means here. Well, I'll go back and read verse 2, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these," by these what? Exceeding great and precious promises. What is that if it is not the Gospel? If it is not the word of God? In other words, we hear from God as he is, and we hear how he is, and we learn about him, and we commune with him, and we know the way that we can have fellowship with God.

I challenge anybody to have fellowship with God who you can't see without the word, without these exceeding great and precious promises. I can have fellowship with you. I can see you. I can see how you are. I can talk to you. I can listen to what you say. I can see how you act. But I can't do that with God. But more than that, more than that, how can I, how can you, have fellowship with God, be a partaker, a companion, an associate, have fellowship with a thrice holy God? If you know anything about him and if you know anything about yourselves, it is an impossible thing naturally but John said if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another. We have fellowship with God if we walk in the light. And sadly, most people take that to believe if we conduct ourselves in the proper way, or if we don't tell any lies for a week, or if we don't do anything bad for a week, and if we kind of clean ourselves up, we're walking in the light, we can have fellowship with God. It ain't so. It ain't so. The only way we can have fellowship with God and the only way we walk in light is to walk in the light of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. He is the light. We can only have fellowship with God on the basis of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one and the only one that we can both agree on.

Zechariah, he says, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow." God says, "He's my fellow." Do you know what I say? He's my fellow too. In the strictest sense, we can have fellowship with God, we can agree with God, we can be accepted by God in only one way, we can partake of the divine nature in only one way, and that is in Christ. I agree with God on Christ. He agrees with me on Christ and that is that he is all.

I don't claim any new nature. I've only got one nature and it's a bad one. It's amazing to me that some of those who claim a new nature, they sure have a funny way of showing it. I only have a sinful nature. In other words, there is only one nature that's natural to me and that's the natural body, the nature of sin. That's the only thing that's natural to me. Anything I believe about Christ is supernatural. Supernatural. You see, in the light, in the truth by these exceeding great and precious promises that we have in the Gospel that tell of Christ, the tell of his bloodshed, that tell of his righteousness, that tell of everything being in him, I can have fellowship with God.

I sat down this week and I read Psalm 71 that I just read to you a bit earlier and it was just like he was talking to me, and it was just like the Psalmist was saying the things that I wanted to say. All these exceedingly great and precious promises that he says are yea and amen in Christ.

Well, what happens when we are born again? We don't get a new nature. What happens when we are born again? We are indwelt by the Spirit of God. We don't get a new nature, we got a new resident. The third person of the Godhead. The Father is active in saving us, the Son was active in saving us, and the Holy Spirit is active in saving us. He indwells every person that is born of God. God is said to be our God, our Savior, and God, the Holy Spirit, is not an influence, it's not a feeling, it's a person. And that's why I say it's dangerous to attribute a work that is done in us as being the cause of some things when it is actually the Holy Spirit in us.

Listen to this, Romans 8, "But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit," capital letters, "is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." That's Roman 8:9-11. And all that is said there, the two things that are spoken of there, is the flesh and the Holy Spirit.

Well, they say, "What brings about the change? What brings about the fact that we one day don't believe and the next day we do? Or one day we hate God, the next date we love God? All these other things?" I suggest to you it's not a new nature, it's the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit.

Turn over to Galatians 5. Now, if you'll notice in these verses, the only Spirit that is mentioned is in capital letters. Somebody said, "Well, Paul is talking about the conflict between the old nature and the new nature in Romans 7." I don't think so, not if he writes this. Verse 16, "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. 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. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another."

Now, when he's talking about this struggle, he's talking about these two contrary things, there is not a third person in there. He doesn't say that there is a struggle between the old nature, which is here called the flesh, and the new nature and the Spirit. He says there is a struggle between two, the flesh and the Spirit. Capital letters, Holy Spirit. Not three, two. It always boils down to this: what I am by nature, what God has made me by grace. If I chew you out, if I say something bad to you, treat you bad, get angry with you, you don't have to worry about where that's coming from, that's all me. That's my nature. But if I

have to treat you kind, if I happen to quote a verse of Scripture, if I happen to put my arms around you or help you or something, that's God. That's the Spirit of God.

The fruit of the Spirit. Think about that. Fruit grows on a tree. Which tree is it? The Spirit's tree. The fruit of the spirit is love and peace, joy, long-suffering, gentleness, all these things. Not the fruit of the flesh, not the fruit of a new nature. You see, the work of God's Spirit is one of revelation and one of preservation. He keeps us and all that we are enabled to believe, all we are enabled to do that is right, all that we are able to do of good works, whatever it is, it's him working in us. And I do not doubt that if the Holy Spirit did not indwell us, did not continue to save us, we would show ourselves for the nature that we have. Suppose if you say we have a new nature, would you like for the Holy Spirit to just withdraw from you and let your new nature take control? I'm sorry, I wouldn't, and if you've got any sense, you wouldn't.

David cried out and he said, "Lord," he said, "don't take your Holy Spirit from me or I will be a devil. You relax your hand on me enough to let me know just exactly what I'd be. Take not your Holy Spirit from me." No, we have no confidence in the flesh. And what men call a new nature, I believe, you don't have to believe this, I won't break fellowship with you if you don't, I certainly won't call you a heretic and accuse you of preaching heresy, but I believe that rather than a new nature, we have the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit indwelling us, and any good that comes is his work. And besides, the real question is not what we believe about the nature of man, the real question is what think you of Christ?

I hate to preach a message like this so bad because it makes us to delve into things that I'm afraid take our eyes off Christ. Why would somebody make an issue of that? To speak of the glories and the wonders of Christ as my delight? You who hear me weekly, you know I don't dwell on the nature of man except the fact that it is a sinful nature. We dwell on Christ. But that's what I believe and I'll tell you something: if you can show me different from the word of God, I'll stand corrected and I'll believe you, but until then, saying that a believer has a new nature is just like the men that told the king that they had made for him a new garment. It sounds good but it's not true, not true in the word of God. I don't feel threatened if you don't believe it. I don't feel threatened one bit but I'm going to believe it until God shows me different. I want to believe what God says, not what men say. Let God be true and every man a liar, and if I don't say what God says, then let me be counted a liar and leave me alone. Don't hear me.

Our Father, we thank you for your goodness to us, that you'll never leave us, that your Spirit indwells us to keep us, to produce whatever fruit might be produced until such a time as we be glorified. We don't know what that will be; we know it will be better than we are. But we thank you. We pray in our Lord's name. Amen.