

## **The New Life of the New You and Me** (THE BELIEVER'S BIRTHMARKS)

“Behold, all things have become new. I am  
a new creation in Christ Jesus.”

“Our old self was crucified with Him so that we should no longer be *slaves* to sin.”  
“(We) are being transformed into His (Jesus) likeness.”

2 Corinthians 5 / Romans 6:6 /  
2 Corinthians 3:18

Paul, the man who said these words went from being a murderer of Christians to a missionary for Christ. (Acts 9-11) In his own words, he “butchered” the humble people of God, no doubt watching children cry while their mothers and fathers were dragged off to die. (Galatians 1; Acts 7-9)

Rusty Woomer, a boy who grew up in a hate filled home in West Virginia, went on a killing spree with a friend; killing a family for a few dollars, and raping two girls in South Carolina, shooting both and killing one. Charles McAlister, a former presidential speech writer, who grew up in a loving home in South Carolina was won to Christ by visiting a church with his wife. He ministered to prisoners and visited Rusty Woomer on death row. The first time he saw him he had long hair falling over his eyes, his clothes were filthy, and he was surrounded in his cell by human waste, pornographic literature and roaches. Charles told him, “Rusty, Jesus loves you and died for you and He doesn’t want you to live like this.” Three days later the warden called Charles and asked him to visit Rusty again. When he looked in the cell, it was spotless and clean from top to bottom. The literature was gone and the roaches were gone. Rusty’s hair was cut, he was clean shaven, and his clothes were clean and neat. When Charles asked, “What happened Rusty?” he smiled and said; “Jesus cleaned me up on the inside, so I cleaned up the outside.” Rusty went on to find forgiveness from some of the relatives of his victims before he was executed. Charles McAlister was with him every step of the way.

This story is from the book, “The Body”, written by Chuck Colson, the hard hitting, tough nosed politician, imprisoned for his part in “Watergate”. Colson was won to Christ by some Christian men who rallied around him and visited him in his home before he went to jail. He founded a prison ministry and is now one of the most articulate spokesmen for Christianity in the world.

This shows how Christ can change people from every walk of life, using all kinds of methods and people to do it. We must remember that the change is not always that dramatic and evident. Billy Graham’s wife Ruth, the daughter of missionaries, never strayed far from loving and serving Jesus as a child; and her life change wasn’t dramatic. When Methodist pastor Charles Allen told us in a

seminary lecture that he never knew a time when he didn't love Jesus, half the men in the room wanted to get him "born again."

In the 1800's evangelist D.L. Moody went to England for a revival. The devout Pastor, F.B. Meyer, whose experience was like Ruth Grahams, worked with the group that invited him. The two men were suspicious of each other. Meyer was afraid that Moody's Christianity was based too much on emotion and Moody was suspicious of anyone who could not pin point their time of conversion and tell of all the changes in their life. In time the men got to know each other and each, seeing Christ in the other, became life long friends. But even though conversions differ, we should unite in living the new life that comes from the new birth.

This new life:

### **Is Not Necessarily a Personality Change**

God doesn't crank out human beings from a heavenly copy machine. We are all unique and special to Him, and can make unique contributions to this world and after conversion to His kingdom. No one has your personality, your fingerprint, your face, etc. Simon Peter was impulsive when Jesus met him, and was impulsive until the day he died. He gave in to peer pressure at Jesus' trial (Luke 22:54ff) and twenty years later, did it again by refusing to sit with Gentiles in Antioch. (Galatians 2) God doesn't want to fill His churches with clones who look alike, think alike, act alike, and talk alike. I tell young people, "If you liked baseball before you became a Christian, you will probably like it afterwards; but you will be nicer to the umpires."

### **Is Not Temporary**

The change God works is a miracle. It is described as the "work of the Spirit from above" (John 3); being "raised from death" (Romans 6); being "made alive" (Ephesians 2:5); receiving a "new heart- character" (Ezekiel 36:26); becoming "a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5); etc. This is all God's work. We can no more create ourselves; birth ourselves; make ourselves alive; or raise ourselves from death than we can pick ourselves up with our shoe laces. This is the direct work of God upon human character and life, and as such, is a miracle. It is something medicine, counseling or no other work of man can accomplish.

What we do can be undone, but what God does no man can undo. Jesus said, "My sheep listen to My voice, and they will never perish; nothing can take them from My hands." (John 10)

Paul said of himself in 2 Timothy 1:12....

"I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day (*when we reach heaven*).

And he said of others in Philippians 1:6....

"(I am) confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

What an encouragement this is to any of you who are afraid to come to the Savior because you are afraid you cannot hold out. I once had that fear. This is the beauty of salvation - we don't hold out; we don't even hold on. We are HELD! We are in the hands of God for time and eternity and no power can snatch us away. (For more on the subject of our eternal security in Christ order "Once Saved Always Saved", available from the Pastor's Pulpit.)

### **Is Not Perfection**

God leaves our old sin nature in us; what the Bible calls the "flesh" (Romans 7:14ff). In His model prayer Jesus tells us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses" (Matthew 7). In First John Christians who claim not to sin, are called liars (1:5-2:2). The Bible is honest about the faults of its heroes. Abraham, because of fear, put his wife in danger twice (Genesis 12; 20). David committed adultery and murder after years of serving God (2 Samuel 11-12). Peter, the mighty preacher at Pentecost, and the leader of the early church (Acts 1-2) used cursing to deny he knew Jesus; and twenty years later gave in to peer pressure and committed the sin of prejudice by refusing to eat with Gentile Christians (Galatians 2).

God does this to make us stronger as we fight temptations and learn to win the battles for a Christ like character. Even Jesus "learned obedience from the things He suffered in temptations" (Hebrews 5:8). Jesus never failed but we do, and this keeps us humble. When Jimmy Swaggart fell into wrongdoing his old father, when interviewed by a TV reporter said, "Well, maybe now he will stop being so hard on the rest of us."

### **Increased Awareness of Wrongdoing**

Peter had been a Christian for about a year when Jesus called him to full time service, and he answered, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." (Luke 5:8/ Read Isaiah 6). Read the Gospels and you will see that Peter loved Jesus more than any of the Apostles, but he never thought he loved Him enough. (John 21)

The new birth, far from making us proud and self righteous, makes us **more aware of sin than ever before**. When we hear the divine call to a life of love and sacrifice; when we get close to Jesus; and when we associate with strong and humble Christians; we realize how far short we fall.

Early in his Christian life, Paul wrote, "I am the least of all the saints." (Ephesians 3:8) Later he wrote, "I'm not worthy to be called an Apostle." (1 Corinthians 15:9) Toward the end of his life, he wrote, "I am the chief of sinners." (1 Timothy 1:15) In Romans 7:14ff he is so open and so distressed by his sinful nature and sinful acts, that many commentators say he is talking about his pre-Christian life; even though he speaks in the present tense. At the time of the writing, he was perhaps the most dedicated Christian on earth.

This does not mean Paul had a woman on the side and subscribed to "Playboy". It meant that the closer he got to Jesus, the more he saw his failure. This

awareness of sin sometimes causes us to doubt our salvation, when in fact it is evidence of salvation. J.C. Ryle said the growing Christian may feel so bad about his failures that he is not aware that he is growing. Warren Wiersbe says, “A growing Christian sins less and less and confesses more and more.” That is why the Bible says we “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18) The more we know about Jesus, the more grace we know we need. We would as soon try to lie face down on the surface of the sun and live as to try and enter the presence of a Holy God dressed in the rags of our goodness.

### **Increased Warfare with Wrongdoing**

A Christian lady was rude to a clerk, and when she apologized, the clerk said, “You Christians are no different than the rest of us.” The Christian said, “The difference is not that we do not sin. It is that before we came to Christ we ran to sin; and now we run from it.”

There are many birthmarks of the true believer. We have the **desire and power** to live right, coupled with an element of **fear**. Philippians 2:12 says, “Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to do.” There is fear because we know God is a good Father who will make us pay for doing wrong. Hebrews 12:7,10 says, “What son is not disciplined by his father? God disciplines us for our good.”

We **hate our wrongdoing**. Paul said, “I do the thing I hate, who will deliver me?” (Romans 7) Our worst punishment is from our own hands because doing wrong brings **shame and inner sorrows**. Peter denied the Lord and wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:75) David committed murder and adultery. (2 Samuel 11) He said when he kept it secret his “bones wasted away.” He “groaned”, he lost the “joy of salvation” and he felt dirty and ashamed. (Psalm 32:3; 51:12, 7)

All this leads to a life of **continual repentance and faith**. First John was written to Christians (5:12) and in chapter one it tells us what to do when we sin. What it says could be used to tell people how to become Christians. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Sin brings us back to where we started in the Christian life--repentance and faith. Sorry for sins, we want to turn from them, and we turn to Jesus for forgiveness and the power to do better. This means that sins will intrude but they will not continually rule. Romans 6 says, “Our old self was crucified with Him so that we should no longer be *slaves* to sin. / Sin must *no longer rule* over your bodies. (v 6, 12)

### **A Personal Testimony**

I had been a Christian for about a year when I answered the call to preach. In seminary I was a baby Christian among mature Christians; and comparing myself

with them, I seriously doubted my salvation. They witnessed on the street and I didn't have the nerve to witness to my own family and friends. They prayed for an hour, and in five minutes I was ready to quit. I still battled anger, fear, profanity when angry, and a lot of other things. Billy Graham's book "Peace With God" helped me. He said there is a difference between committing **acts** of sin and **living** in sin. Sin **intrudes** but it does not **rule**. He gave a good illustration. If a cat falls in the mud, it jumps right out and licks itself for hours to get the mud off. That is the nature of a cat. If a hog falls in, it is in "hog heaven" and wallows in it. That is the nature of a hog.

Before I became a Christian, I was on a lake, fishing during a storm. A fellow with me said, "Stop taking God's name in vain. It is lightning." I did not even realize I was doing it, because profanity was such an integral part of my nature. It was like breathing. If I get up in the middle of the night to answer the phone; stump my little toe on a chair; and fall into my TV set; I might backslide and say a bad word. But before I go back to bed I will hate what I said; confess it; ask God to forgive me; and ask Him to help me not do it again.

### **God Loves Us Warts and All**

John wrote, "We love Him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19) After our conversion, we somehow believe we have to earn God's love by being good. That would insult us as fathers, and it insults God. Our new birth was motivated by love. God knew how bad we really were, long before He showed it to us. Adrian Rogers says, "God doesn't change us in order to love us. He loves us in order to change us."

A young soldier, returning home from war, called his parents when he reached the United States. He said, "Mom and Dad, I have a friend with me who needs a place to stay for awhile. His face is blown away, and he is blind and has no ears. Is it alright if I bring him home with me for a few months?" The parents hesitated a little, and suggested he might do better in a hospital or special home. The next day, their son was found hanging, dead in his hotel room. His face was blown away, he was blind and he had no ears. God loves us when there is very little in us to love; when He saves us and while He is changing us.

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