

THE OLD MAN CRUCIFIED

NO. 882

A SERMON
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him.”
Romans 6:6

EVERY new man is two men. Every believer in Christ is what he was and not what he was. The old nature and the new nature exist at the same time in each regenerate individual. That old nature the apostle calls a man, because it is a complete manhood after the image of fallen Adam. It has the desires, the judgment, the mind, the thoughts, the language, and the action of man as he is in his rebellious estate.

He calls it the “old man,” because it is as old as Eden’s first transgression. It is as old as we are. It is the nature born with us, the natural depravity, the fleshly mind which we inherited from our parents. It is tainted by the old serpent and bears within it a dread propensity to his old sin. When Adam first plucked the forbidden fruit, sin polluted our race, and the original stain abides in all mankind.

It is manifest in the most ancient history and continues to reveal itself all along the pages of the story of this blighted world. The old nature, then, is what the apostle means. The lusts of the flesh, the carnal desires, the affections of our estranged hearts, these he calls the old man.

I am much mistaken if every Christian does not find this old man still troubling him. He has a new nature which was implanted in him, as through the Spirit’s sacred working he was led to hate sin, and believe in Jesus to his soul’s salvation. It is the heavenly offspring of the new birth, the pure and holy result of regeneration.

That new nature cannot sin—it is as pure as the God from whom it came, and like the spark which seeks the sun, it aspires always after the holy God from whom it came. Its longings and its tendencies are always towards holiness, and God, and it utterly hates and loathes that which is evil. So that finding itself brought into contact with the old nature, it sighs and cries as the apostle tells us, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

Hence a warfare is set up within the believer’s bosom—the new life struggles against the old death—as the house of David against the house of Saul, or as Israel against the accursed Canaanites. The enmity is irreconcilable and lifelong. As the Lord has sworn to have war with Amalek throughout all generations, so does the holy seed within the saint wage war with inbred sin so long as it remains.

Neither nature can make peace with the other. Either the earthy water must quench the heavenly fire, or the divine fire, like that which Elijah saw, must lick up and utterly remove all the water in the trenches of the heart. It is war to the knife—exterminating war.

In the text the apostle says that the old nature is in every believer crucified with Christ. I take the liberty also to refer you to two or three words which occur in the verse before the text, where he speaks of baptized believers as having taken upon themselves the likeness of Christ’s death. And then he speaks of the old man being *crucified*, which was Christ’s death, and therefore without straining the text, we may gather from it that the old man in us dies in the same way as Christ died—that the death of Christ on the cross is the picture of the way in which our old corruptions are to be put to death.

That shall make our first point, *the old nature crucified*. The second point shall be, that if ever the old nature be put to death at all, it must be *with* Christ—we are crucified with Him. The old man is crucified with Him. And then, in the third place, we shall have *some practical and solemn applications to make*.

I. Now, first, THE OLD MAN IS TO DIE, BUT IT IS TO DIE IN THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST'S DEATH BY CRUCIFIXION.

1. What kind of death was that? First, our Lord died *a true and real death*. There were certain heretics who disturbed the early Christian church, who said that our Lord did not really and actually die. But we know that He died, for His heart was pierced by the spear, and the flowing of the blood and water proved that He was in very deed most truly dead.

Moreover, the Roman officer would not have sanctioned that the body be given up if he had not made sure that He were dead already, and even made doubly sure by piercing our Lord's most blessed side. Christ really and truly died, there was no sham or make-believe. It was no phantom which bled, and the atoning death was no syncope or long swoon.

Even thus it must be with our old propensities—they must not pretend to die, but actually die. They must not be restrained by holy customs. They must not be mewed up by temporary austerities, or laid in a trance by fleeting reveries, or ostentatiously buried alive by religious resolves and professions. They must actually die, and die a real and true death before the Lord and within our souls.

Sometimes persons who are really alive appear as dead, because death reigns over a part of their bodies. The heart beats exceedingly indistinctly, the pulse is but faintly felt, the lungs are languidly heaving—they lie in a state of coma, their hands are powerless as those of a corpse, and their eyes are closed, and every member palsied—yet they are not dead, because they are, in some measure, and really and truly, as to their vital organs, still in the land of the living.

So have I known some that have given up a part of their sins. They have been persuaded to renounce the most gross vices, or the more abominable lusts, but yet they have never made a clean renunciation of all their sins. They have never actually within their hearts, in all integrity of purpose, given up every false way. They still indulge some one or other sin secretly. Or if they have not carried their desires into practice, they have, at least, a secret goodwill towards evil—a love towards some sweet sin in the core of their heart of hearts.

O my brethren, this must, with those who are renewed in the spirit of their minds—the old nature must—so far as our will is concerned, endure a real crucifixion. No man shall enter heaven while one propensity to sin lies in him, for heaven admits nothing that pollutes. And further, no man should expect to enter the abode of bliss while he cherishes and desires to keep alive a solitary sin within him.

I do not say that no one is a saved soul who is not perfect here. God forbid I should thus belie the hopes of the faithful and the Word of God. But I do say that you must desire perfection, will it, and seek it, or grace is not in you. I do not say that any man lives perfectly and absolutely free from sin in this life, but I do say that no man is a Christian who does not wish it to be so with him.

There must be in our soul a wish—deep, hearty, thorough, real, for the death of every sin of every sort, or we are not in union with Christ. Our prayer must be—

*“Return, O holy Dove! return,
Sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
And drove Thee from my breast.*

*“The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.”*

I beseech you be careful on this point, for let mere creed-lovers prate as they will, “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” Sin must be slain. You must utterly hate evil. Sin must be to you as a condemned, detestable thing, to be hunted down and put to death, or else the life of God is not in you. No mere professions or shams will suffice. Sin must really and truly be crucified.

2. The death of our Lord, in the next place, was a *voluntary death*. He said, “I lay down my life for the sheep...no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself.” Jesus need not have died. He could have come down from the cross and saved Himself, but He willingly gave Himself up as a sacrifice for our sins.

Brethren, such must essentially be the death of sin within us—it must be on our parts, as we put it to death, perfectly voluntary. Oh, what a sieve is this in which to sift the chaff from the wheat! Some men part with their sins with the intention of coming again to them if they can, as the dog returns to its vomit, and the sow to her wallowing in the mire.

Or they part with them as of old the oxen parted with their calves at Bethshemesh, lowing as they went because of the calves they had left behind. Like Lot’s wife they set out to leave Sodom, but their eyes show where their hearts would be. How many a drunkard has given up his cups because he would otherwise have lost his employment or been laid by with illness!

How many a foul liver has renounced a vice because he felt that it was too great a strain upon his constitution or brought too much shame upon him! They drop their sins as the dog does the meat when it is too hot to hold, but they love it none the less. They will be back when it cools. Such sinners leave sin as Orpah did Moab, but they soon find opportunity to return. They fight sin as stage-players fight on the stage—it is mimic conflict, they do not hate sin in reality.

Ah! but friends, we must have our whole hearts burning with an intensity of desire to get rid of our sins. And such intensity we shall be sure to feel if there be a work of grace in our soul wrought by the Holy Ghost. To will is present with us. Nay, we are not merely willing—that is a poor cold term, we are vehemently desirous, insomuch that we would be content to give up our eyes and live in lifelong blindness if we could but be wholly delivered from our sins.

There is no martyrdom to which any saint would be reluctant to subject himself if he could thereby escape from the tenfold plague of his daily corruptions and temptations. I would make any bargain with God if He would leave me free from sin. It should be left to Him whether I should shiver amid northern ice, or stagnate in a poorhouse, or lie in prison till the moss grew on my eyelids, or quiver in perpetual fever—if I might henceforth never again in this world fall into a single sin. The execution of sin, then, must be undertaken by us with a willing mind and a vehement determination.

3. At the same time, mark you, in the third place, our Lord’s death was a *violent death*. He was no suicide. He willed to die in obedience to the highest law of His being, which was not self-preservation (which makes it necessary for us to do all we can to live), but consecration to the will of God, and to human welfare, which highest law rendered it necessary for Him to die.

He died, I have said, voluntarily, but yet by wicked men He was taken, by violent hands, and by force put to death. So the crucifixion of sin is voluntary as to the person who crucifies sin—but it is both violent and involuntary as to the sin itself.

Believe me, my dear brethren, sin struggles awfully in the best of men—especially besetting sins and constitutional sins. Outward iniquities are in most cases soon conquered, but inward constitutional sins are hard to overcome. One man is proud, and oh, what prayers and tears it costs him to bring the neck of old pride to the block!

Another man is naturally grasping, his tendency is to covetousness, and how he has to humble himself before God, and to cry out and lament because his gold will stick to his fingers, and will rust and corrode within his soul! Some are of a murmuring spirit, and so rebel against God, and to conquer a spirit of contention and murmuring is no easy task.

Envy too, that horrible monster, so obnoxious in a Christian. Why, I think I have known God’s ministers indulge in it and it has not always been easy to kill it. To let another star eclipse you in the firmament, or allow another servant of God to do more for Him and to have greater success than yourself, is too often a bitter trial when it should be a theme for joy. Yet, brethren, cost us what it may, these sins must die. Violent may be the death, and stern the struggle, but we must nail that right hand, ay, and drive home the nail.

We must pierce the left hand too, and fasten the foot, yes, and nail that other foot, and hammer fast the nail. And while the struggling victim seeks to live, we must take care that no nail starts, but run to the Master, if it must be so, and pray Him to drive the nails yet closer home, that the monster of the old man may not in any one of its members regain its liberty. It will be a violent death, indeed, if my inward experience be any sample of what we are to expect.

4. In the fourth place, crucifixion was a *painful death*. The suffering of crucifixion was extreme. All men have put that into their general belief—their language creed, for we say of great pain it is excruciating, that is to say, it is like crucifixion. So the death of sin is painful in all and in some terribly so.

Oh, it has cost some men nights, days, weeks, and months of misery and anguish to overcome their deep-seated sins. Read John Bunyan's, "Grace Abounding," and see how year after year that wonderful mind of his had red hot harrows dragged across all its fields. The inmost vitals of his spirit were pierced as with barbed shafts. His soul was as a great battlefield, covered with armies who trampled it down, tore it up in all directions, and made it tremble with their furious shocks of combat.

The new man was struggling against the old death that was within him. Believe me, none of us would wish to go over the same ground again, for the scars remain upon us to this hour. There was a plucking out of right eyes and a tearing off of right arms—and this hacking and maiming could not be done without poignant suffering.

And meanwhile, in the case of some of us, there was such a horror of darkness cast over us concerning our guilt cast over us, that our soul chose strangling rather than life, and it was of the Lord's mercies that our griefs did not utterly consume us.

Some, I grant you, are brought unto salvation much more easily, but even they find that the death of sin is painful, at least to this degree—they have a humbling sense of the guilt of sin, they feel bitter regret that ever they should have fallen into it, and they are depressed with great fear and horror lest they should fall into it again.

Along the valley of deathshade most, if not all, pilgrims to heaven occasionally wend their way. Sin dies hard. Such a hundred-headed hydra has many lives. It will not die without much pain and the violence of the pain proved the natural vitality of that which is put to death.

5. Brethren, let us remind you of yet another point. The death of our Lord Jesus Christ was an *ignominious death*. It was the death which the Roman law accorded only to felons, serfs, and Jews. Few were condemned to it but slaves. It was not a freeman's death—a nobler execution was allotted to citizens.

So our sins must be put to death with every circumstance of shame and self-humiliation. I must confess I am shocked with some people whom I know, who glibly rehearse their past lives up to the time of their supposed conversion and talk of their sins—which they hope have been forgiven them, with a sort of smack of the lips, as if there was something fine in having been so atrocious an offender.

I hate to hear a man speak of his experience in sin as a Greenwich pensioner might talk of Trafalgar and the Nile. The best thing to do with our past sin, if it be indeed forgiven, is to bury it. Yes, and let us bury it as they used to bury suicides—let us drive a stake through it in horror and contempt, and never set up a monument to its memory.

If you ever do tell anybody about your youthful wrongdoing, let it be with blushes and tears, with shame and confusion of face. And always speak of it to the honor of the infinite mercy which forgave you. Never let the devil stand behind you and pat you on the back and say, "You did me a good turn in those days."

Oh, it is a shameful thing to have sinned, a degrading thing to have lived in sin, and it is not to be wrapped up into a telling story and told out as an exploit as some do. "The old man is crucified with him," who boasts of being related to the crucified felon? If any member of your family had been hanged, you would tremble to hear anyone mention the gallows.

You would not run about crying, “Do you know that a brother of mine was hanged at Newgate?” Your old man of sin is hanged—do not talk about him, but thank God it is so. And as He blots out the remembrance of it, do you the same, except so far as it may make you humble and grateful.

6. Crucifixion was *a lingering death*. Our old nature has not been put to the death of the sword, or stoning, or burning. It has been crucified. This will bring on a sure death in due time, but it is slow. A man crucified often lived for hours and days, and I have read even for a week. Our old man will linger on his cross as long as we are alive on earth.

Each one of our sins has a horrible vitality about it. “As many lives as a cat,” John Bunyan said unbelief had, and the like may be said of every sin within us. It is crucified, but it is not wholly dead. Expect to have to fight with sin till you sheathe your sword and put on your crown.

I speak with great respect to my dear friends who wear the honorable insignia of old age, but they may let one who is a child compared to them remind them that old age does not bring with it such a weakening in the man to sin as to permit them to cease from watchfulness. When passions cannot be indulged, they often rage the more furiously. And if one sin be driven out by change of life, another will often labor to possess the soul in its place.

Alas! alas! alas! that men should ever begin to trust to their experience or their acquired prudence—for then they are the most likely persons to fall into sin. Your lusts are crucified, but they live, and there is vitality enough in them to make you rue the day if the nails of grace do not hold them fast, and keep the demons to their tree of doom.

The last remark is that our Lord *died a visible death*. It could be discovered that He was dead. So we must put our sins to a visible death. Do not tell me, you men-servants, and maid-servants who profess godliness, that you have crucified your sins, when you are such lazy and dishonest servants that your masters and mistresses would be right glad to do without you.

Do not tell me, you masters and mistresses, that you have crucified your sins, when you fall into such ugly tempers, and tyrannize your servants, and treat them like dogs. Do not tell me, you men of business, that your sins are banished, when you help to get up bubble companies, falsify your weights and measures, defraud your creditors by villainous bankruptcies, or grind the faces of the poor.

Do not sneak into this Tabernacle—or rather, if you come at all, do sneak in, for you ought to wear a hang-dog look if you answer to this description. Do not come into prayer meeting and pray with the saints if you are behaving as unregenerate sinners do. If there is no visible difference between you and the world, depend upon it, there is no invisible difference. I have generally found that a man is not much better than he looks, and if a man’s outward life is not right, I shall not feel bound to believe that his inward life is acceptable to God.

“Ah, sir,” said one in Rowland Hill’s time, “he is not exactly what I should like, but he has a good heart at the bottom.” The shrewd old preacher replied, “When you go to market and buy fruit, and there are none but rotten apples on the top of the basket, you say to the market woman, ‘These are a very bad lot.’ Now, if the woman replied, ‘Yes, they are rather gone at top, sir, but they are better as you go down,’ you would not be so silly as to believe her, but would say, ‘No, no, the lower we go, the worse they will be, for the best are always put on the top.’”

And so it is with men’s characters. If they cannot be decent, sober, and truthful in their daily life, their inner parts are more abominable still. The deeper you pry into their secrets the worse will be the report. O dear hearers, do be sincere in renouncing outward sin. You sinful men, put away your drunkenness, your swearing, your lying, your fornication, and uncleanness. These must be nailed up before God’s sun in open day. Let all men know by your outward conduct that you are dead to sin and cannot live any longer therein.

II. There was much room in this first point to have enlarged, but I must not, for time flies so swiftly. This crucifixion of the old nature is, let us remember, WITH CHRIST.

The old man was crucified with Christ *representatively*. Christ represented the church. When He died, He died for the church and the church died in Him. All His people died when He died

representatively. Christ's dead body represents to us in its death the death of our old man, and virtually and before God, the body of this death died for each of us when Jesus died. We have not the time, however, to go into that doctrine, but the experience is what I would say a word upon.

Depend upon it, my dear brethren, if ever our sins are to die, it must be with Christ. You will find you cannot kill the smallest viper in the nest of your heart if you get away from the cross. There is no death for sin except in the death of Christ.

Stand and look up to His dear wounds, trust in the merit of His blood. Love Him, love Him with a perfect heart and sin-killing will not be difficult. You will hear the Savior say, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines," and you will note His words, take *us*, not take them, but take *us*. Come with me, says the spouse, we will go together and we two will do it.

Your killing of your sin is not in your power, but if Jesus goes with you, it will be done. I have known some people struggle against a horrible temper, and they never quite overcame it until they grew into closer communion with Christ.

Some dispute the doctrine before us, and assert that contemplations of death are the most effectual helps in overcoming sin—very likely. Others have thought that the study of the beauties of holiness might do it—it may be so. But in my experience the mightiest gun to blow down the Sebastopol of sin within me is to flee to the cross of Christ. I am persuaded that nothing but the blood of Jesus will kill sin.

If you go to the commandments of God, or to the fear and dread of hell, you will find such motives as they suggest to be as powerless in you for real action, as they have proven themselves to be on the general world.

But if you remember gratefully that the first death of sin in you was by the blood of Jesus, you will firmly believe that all the way through you will have to overcome by the same weapon.

*"Tears, though flowing like a river,
Never can one sin efface;
Jesus' tears would not avail thee—
Blood alone can meet thy case;
Fly to Jesus!
Life is found in His embrace."*

See you yonder blood-washed host, as without spot or wrinkle they stand before the throne of God. Ask them whether they had to fight with sin and they will tell you that they were men of like passions with us. Ask them how they overcame sin—you glorious ones, out of what armory did you take your weapons, and who girded you for the sacred conflict?

*"I ask them whence their victory came?
They, with united breath,
Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
Their triumph to His death."*

*"They marked the footsteps that He trod,
His zeal inspired their breast,
And following their incarnate God,
Possess the promised rest."*

You must get to Christ, nearer to Christ, and you will overcome sin.

III. I must now conclude with these two observations. First, Christian, here is your practical lesson tonight—*Fight with your sins*. Hack them in pieces as Samuel did Agag. Let not one of them escape. Take them as Elijah took the prophets of Baal—hew them in pieces before the Lord. Revenge the death of Christ upon your sins, but keep to Christ's cross for power to do it.

Think more of Jesus' cross. Spend more time in contemplation of His blessed person, of His death, and of His rising again. Drink in more of His life and live more upon Him. I pray you do this. The words may sound in your ears as very common, and such as you have heard ten thousand times before, but the sense is weighty and all-important.

If I had but one sentence that I might utter to believers, I think I should make it this—*live nearer to Christ*. All virtues flourish in the atmosphere of the cross, all vices die beneath the shade of the cross—but get away from your Master and you will be undone.

The other word is to the unconverted. You say you do not care much about death unto sin. Well, then, there is nothing for it but you shall have your choice—if you will not have *death unto sin*, you shall have *sin unto death*. There is no alternative, if you do not die to sin, you shall die for sin. And if you do not slay sin, sin will slay you.

As surely as you live, my unsaved hearers, you cannot harbor any sin and go to heaven. Let no man deceive you. I try to preach a very free and open Gospel, and these lips have spoken ten thousand invitations to the very chief of sinners. In fact, I never seem to have a more suitable theme for myself than when I am opening mercy's gate very wide, so as to admit the vilest of the vile.

Still I am bound to tell you—wide as God's mercy is to those who are willing to give up their sins, there is not a grain of mercy in the heart of God towards that man who goes on in his iniquities. "God is angry with the wicked every day."

Bunyan tells us he was one day playing the game of "cat" on Sunday, when a voice seemed to sound in his ears, "Will you have your sins and go to hell, or leave your sins and go to heaven?" You have dropped into this Tabernacle, and this is the question I have to put to you—"Will you leave your sins and go to heaven, or will you have your sins and go to hell!"

I know what you would prefer. You would like to have your sins and heaven too, but it is utterly impossible. Not only because God forbids, but because nature forbids. You are sitting in a room with a fire tonight and the windows are closed, and you say, "I would like to be cool." Put out the fire, then. "No, but I would like to be cool and yet keep the fire." It cannot be done—nature forbids.

And so a lover of sin cannot be a saved soul—not because of any enmity on God's part—but because it is contrary to nature. Sin is a poison, you cannot drink it and yet live the life of grace. If a man loves sin, sin is its own punishment. To be an enemy of God is hell. Even if the flames of Gehenna could be quenched and the pit of Tophet could be closed, yet as long as a man was out of accord with God, there must be a hell.

For sin is misery, and only let it develop itself, and evil is sorrow, be it in what breast it may. You have heard of the Spartan youth who concealed a stolen fox under his garment, and although it was eating into his bowels, he would not show it, and therefore died through the creature's bites. You are of that sort, sinner. You are carrying sin in your bosom and it is eating out your heart.

God knows what it is and you know what it is. You cannot keep it there, and be unbitten, be undestroyed. Why keep it there? O cry to God with a vehement cry, God save me from my sin! O bring me, even me, to the foot of Your Son's cross and forgive me, and then crucify my sin, for I see clearly now that sin must perish or I must.

God give you grace, dear hearer, not to go to bed tonight till you have had your sins nailed up to Christ's cross. The Lord grant it for His mercies' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ROMANS 6

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.