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**THE
OLD MAN
AND
FLESH**

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CHRISTIANS AND THE TERMS
"OLD MAN" AND "FLESH"

In his book Birthright,¹ David C. Needham makes the case that "old man" and "flesh" are two different terms. He provides ample Scriptural support against the position that the terms old man and the flesh are synonyms. His case that the "crucifixion of the old man" is neither positional or judicial but actual is based on simple logic and is easy to follow. Needham presents an alternative view concerning the old man and the flesh and refutes it as double talk and lacking Scriptural support.

First Argument

The first argument presented is that of the alternative view which takes the position that the "old man," "flesh," and "sin nature" are synonyms. The alternative view centers around the interpretation that all descendants of Adam possess his Adamic nature and his inherited desire to sin. The authors of these positions elect to use several different words and several different Scriptures to make a weak case for their beliefs. They claim that any reference to human nature including soul, spirit and body is synonyms with sin nature, Adamic nature, the flesh, the old man, and any other term. The Scriptures which they cite are Rom 5.21; 6.6; 13.14; 1 John 1.8; 1 Cor 5.5; 2 Cor 7.1; 10.2-3; Gal 5.16-24; 6.8; Eph 2.3; 4.22; Col 3.9-10. The need to attach the above Scripture references to any particular word such as "old man" or "flesh" is unnecessary. If the words are synonyms then the Scripture references in all their context (historical, literary, textual, ad infinitum) are also synonyms.

Another position which supports synonyms of "old man," "carnal," and "flesh" is that the man one discusses is themselves. Man is full of evil because of man's old nature. This is followed by a similar position, that basic temperament inherited from parents to satisfy wants, are also called "the natural man," "the flesh," "the old man," and "corruptible flesh." This list for the proponents of this position is not exhaustive, but in their opinion is just to name a few.

The refutation of the inclusive nature of synonyms can be accomplished by simple but concise definitions of each of the words. By the very definition of the words considered by some to be synonyms one can see in fact that they are not synonyms. The method of inclusion demonstrated above is weak when compared to definitions which clearly separate and differentiate "old man," and "the flesh."

The first definition of "old man" is "the man I used to be in Adam....It is the man I once was, but which I am no longer." The second definition is that of "the flesh." "The flesh is the body of sin, the body in which sin tends to tyrannize still, the body in which sin yet remains."

¹David C. Needham, Birthright (Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1979), 239-63.

The below comparisons of what the words "old man," and "the flesh" represent and do not represent, may provide a clearer definition.

OLD MAN

<u>Is not</u>	<u>Is</u>
Carnal nature	A man who was in Adam
Moral being	Non-Christian prior to rebirth
Flesh/lusts	Who a Christian was at one time
Old/former	The person Christian is no longer
Corrupt	Crucified and buried with Christ

The "old man" is the old man of the Adamic Nature which a Christian once was but is no longer.

THE FLESH

<u>Is not</u>	<u>Is</u>
The old man	Body of sin
Corrupt nature	Sin tyrannized

The "flesh" is the body of sin which sin tyrannizes and in which sin remains.

The terms "old man," and "flesh" are not synonyms because the "old man" is a person and flesh and sin are a thing. The Apostle Paul separates the two terms (See Rom 7.14; 20; 25). Paul separates the old man and the body of sin. For Paul the "old man" was the old self or unregenerate sons of Adam. Paul identified flesh as sinful nature (See Rom 6.6). Simply put "the flesh is flesh." An "old man" is an old man. Flesh can be any kind of flesh, but an "old man" is an old man. Flesh and sin are not synonyms of old man.

Second Argument

The crucifixion of the old man as found in Romans six has been stated by some to be positional and judicial rather than actual. This is an important concept to consider. The question surrounding the death to the old man, is does death (total and actual annihilation) really occurred or is it that death to the old man was not really death as most people know it? The issue is as simple as, is dead, dead? Several questions are raised when one questions the meaning of death. Does the death of the old man, mean no longer alive? Can one be dead and yet be alive? If the old man did not die, does the new man live?

Positional proponents have several premises. One is that experimentally, the old man is still active after death but controlled by God's power. Another is that the old man is still active within the Christian and is only overcome victoriously through the indwelling Spirit. Needham disagrees with these suppositions. He also disagrees with the judicial suppositions which follow.

Judicial proponents believe that the crucifixion of the old man occurred at the crucifixion of Christ not at salvation. Another judicial point of view is that the old man as a former master is still alive in the Christian but that Christ makes Christians deaf to sin's appeals. A third judicial idea is that Christians must consent to Christ to fulfill the crucifixion of the old man. Another thought is that Christians must cooperate with the Holy Spirit to keep crucifying the old man to death.

The support for the above dual positions of crucified but not dead is described as Christians possessing two natures. One nature is the old sinful Adamic nature and the other a new Christ-like nature. The more the judicial position is examined the more ludicrous the position becomes. One position holds that because Satan and sin were judged does not mean that Satan and sin are no longer present in the life of Christians. Supposed support for that statement is that Christians are to live as though they are dead. It should be noted that the use of Romans 6.10,11 here does not support the position taken concerning acting like the old man is dead when he is not. Considering that the Scripture above may be interpreted, that since Christ is alive, Christians are also alive by faith in Him.

The actual position is much simpler and less complicated. The old man is dead. A Christian can not be an old man and a new man. A Christian is one or the other. They are either a dead old man or an alive new man (creature) in Christ Jesus. According to the Apostle Paul the old man was crucified. For Paul that meant death to the old man and death to sin. Paul's teaching does not support the view that the old man and the new man are operating simultaneously within the believer. The term crucified is the term which is identified with the crucifixion of Christ to put the old man to death. The old man was put to death just as sure as Christ was put to death by crucifixion. To suggest that the old man was crucified but still lives begs the question of continuing crucifixion. There is no such thing as a two thousand year crucifixion. Paul made it plain that the process was crucifixion (Christ, Christian's old man), death, then resurrection to a new life. Needham's inclusion of a quote which states that the old man is no longer present and that Christians are to stop acting as if the old man is present is an admonition worth heeding. The final statement for an actual crucifixion or death to the old man is, the old man no longer exist after a Christian's regeneration because the old man has been put off and a new man has been put on.

Third Argument

Needham looks at the positions taken by those who believe that the death of the old man is positional and judicial and finds that it is nothing but double talk. Needham questions these positions by asking four questions. If the old nature is dead why does the Christian have to make sure it is kept in the coffin? Why should the new man have to contend with the old man? Why must a Christian learn to live with, control, and dominate his old nature? Those who take this view and attempt to answer the questions do so according to Needham without a Scriptural basis. For Needham the four positions are supported with double talk and misconstrued Scriptural references and can not make a case for death not being actual. The four views are, one, the making of a case that death can not be considered as actual because one makes the body of sin and the old man synonymous. Two, that 1 John 1.8 would be contradicted. Three, that death does not mean extinction or cessations but separation. And four, that the old man is not dead until physical death or rapture.

The proper view according to Needham is that the old self that was in Adam is gone. The new self or new man which includes powers which are mental, thought, reason, and imagination are part of the Christian's members (See Rom 6.13). The old self being dead is no longer an obstacle to the members of the body and the members can now be used to glorify God.

CONCLUSION

It might be good for all Christians to recognize that the old man or old branch has been cut away from the flesh and sin.

The moment you were born again, the unregenerate person you used to be--your old self (crab apple)--was sliced off, crucified. What you had been by nature, 'a child of wrath,' you are no more. There it lies on the ground, dead.²

The new man has become a new branch which has been grafted to the tree of life in Christ Jesus. Continued reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit can prove to Christians that sin is merely temporary insanity and that living a life pleasing to God is temple indwelling.

Every Christian should be assured that Christ has pronounced a judgment of death on the old man. The Christian's acceptance of Christ as Savior has resulted in a new man. The old man is crucified, dead and buried, the new man is resurrected. The new man is in Christ Jesus and living a life in the power of the Holy Spirit. The "old man," and "flesh" are not synonyms.

²David C. Needham, Alive for the First Time (Oregon: Multnomah Books, 1995), 85.

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Other writings;

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The Decree of God.

The Deity of Christ.

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The Ministry of Angels.

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