

Does Paul Teach Two Natures?

Much confusion about salvation and sanctification comes from treating Paul's terms "old man," "flesh," and "body of sin" as though they describe something inside a person that must eventually be eradicated. This is not the best way to understand Paul's terminology. These expressions primarily describe the fallen person and life under the dominion of sin, not a separate sinful entity residing within us.

The Old Man / Old Self

The "old man" (KJV) or "old self" (ESV) is not something inside us. It is who we were in Adam before being made new in Christ—the totality of our former sinful life. Therefore the Christian is not an old man with a new man added to him.

The Flesh

Likewise, "the flesh" should not be understood as a sinful substance or entity living inside us that must be eradicated. Paul frequently uses "flesh" to describe human life oriented away from God and operating independently of His Spirit. Romans 8 makes this particularly clear: "You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you." (Romans 8:9 ESV). If "the flesh" were simply a sinful entity residing inside an unsanctified Christian, Paul could hardly tell Christians that they are "not in the flesh."

Saved people have been transferred into a new sphere of existence. They are in the Spirit, although they must still resist fleshly desires and refuse to live according to the flesh. Therefore, the flesh is not something inside us waiting to be eradicated. It describes life apart from the governing presence of God.

The Carnal Mind

Paul then speaks of what the KJV calls the "carnal mind" and the ESV calls "the mind that is set on the flesh": "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God..." (Romans 8:7 ESV). Here we come closer to the inward problem addressed in sanctification. The carnal mind is the inward disposition of fallen humanity—the self-centered orientation of the heart that resists complete submission to God.

This is why I believe "carnal mind" is more helpful than speaking of "carnality" as though carnality were an independent agent or substance residing within us. Entire sanctification does not eradicate a thing from us. It cleanses and reorients the heart itself.

One Human Nature—not Two Natures

Human beings do not possess two separate natures—a human nature and a sin nature. Scripture gives us no reason to believe that Adam received an additional "sin nature"

after the Fall. Rather, human nature itself became fallen and depraved when humanity lost its proper relationship with God. The natural desires and propensities God created within humanity became disordered. Instead of being centered upon God and governed by love, they turned inward toward self.

This self-centered corruption of our human nature is the essence of depravity. Salvation does not give us a second nature to fight against the first. And entire sanctification does not remove one nature while leaving another behind. God saves, cleanses, and transforms the one human person.

Not a Jekyll-and-Hyde Christian

The two-nature theory can produce a misleading picture of the Christian as almost two persons living inside one body—a righteous new nature struggling against an evil old nature. This can become a kind of Jekyll-and-Hyde picture of Christian experience as some holiness expositors have described it.

Paul gives us a better picture. The believer is one redeemed person who has been made alive in Christ but whose fallen dispositions, desires, habits, and self-centered orientation are a part of his human nature that must be cleansed from the heart. They do not constitute a second nature. We do not need to invent two separate natures to explain it.

The Body of Sin

The “body of sin” in Romans 6:6 should likewise not be understood as some sinful entity inside the believer that must later be eradicated. Paul writes: “Our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing...” (Romans 6:6 ESV). The “body of sin” belongs to Paul’s description of our former existence under sin’s dominion—the old self with its sinful orientation and sinful practices expressed through our embodied life.

Romans 6: Resurrection to a New Life

Romans 6 presents salvation as participation in Christ’s death and resurrection. We die with Christ and rise with Him: “...just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4 ESV). This is the spiritual reality represented by baptism. The old self is crucified. Sin’s dominion is broken. The believer rises to a genuinely new life in Christ.

Romans 8: The Spirit and Sanctification

Romans 8 then shows what this new life looks like under the governing presence of the Holy Spirit. The believer is no longer “in the flesh” but “in the Spirit.” Yet the Spirit continues His sanctifying work within us: “If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13 ESV). This progressive sanctification brings us to entire sanctification happening at a point in time.

Sanctification therefore should not be pictured primarily as God removing a sinful object from inside us. It is God cleansing and transforming the heart, correcting its self-centered orientation, and bringing the whole person into loving submission to Christ.

Romans 12:1 and Entire Sanctification

This brings us naturally to Romans 12:1: “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God...” (Romans 12:1 ESV). Here we have a powerful biblical picture of entire sanctification. The believer presents the whole person to God. The self-centered orientation of the heart is surrendered. The heart is cleansed and brought completely under Christ's lordship.

Entire sanctification, therefore, is not best described as the eradication of the old man, the flesh, or the body of sin as though these were sinful entities living inside us. What remains necessary is the Spirit's cleansing and transformation of the heart itself, bringing our one human nature into complete surrender to God and dedication to his purposes. Sanctification doesn't just deactivate the sinfulness of the heart. It motivates us to use our talents to advance God's kingdom.

The fear of the Lord compels me to be biblical in both my terminology and my doctrine. Entire sanctification is the cleansing and full consecration of the person to God. It is the fullest expression in the believer's experience of the old self—the old man—having been crucified with Christ. The entirely sanctified person is no longer carnal, for the heart's sinful bent toward self and sin has been cleansed. The carnal mind-set has given way to the mind of Christ.

This does not weaken the biblical doctrine of heart cleansing; it clarifies what is cleansed. People do not have an entity apart from the human nature to be eradicated from within them. God cleanses the heart itself and brings the whole person into wholehearted love and submission to Christ.

Historical Development of the Two-Nature Framework

Brethren writers described the believer as possessing two distinct natures—the old Adamic nature and a new divine nature—and sometimes identified the “old nature” directly with “the flesh.” Later dispensational writers taught essentially the same thing: “within him there are now two natures,” the fallen nature of Adam and the new nature received through regeneration. But Wesley, Flecher, Asbury, and Phoebe Palmer faithfully articulated entire sanctification holiness without the framework of two natures or using the word eradication.

And there is an important historical connection with the Holiness controversy. An 1890 Brethren article actually defended “The Two Natures in a Believer” against “Holiness People,” arguing that the old fleshly nature remains in the Christian.

So instead of saying, as Brethren/dispensational teachers did, the old nature remains throughout life, some Holiness teachers said, in effect, the old nature remains after regeneration but is eradicated in entire sanctification.

Wesley's framework was different. He certainly taught that sin remained in believers after justification and that entire sanctification brought a deeper cleansing. But his characteristic categories were inward sin, corruption, pride, self-will, unbelief, and the cleansing of the heart to one filled with perfect love—not two independently existing natures residing together in the Christian. Yet he did teach a distinction between outward sin and inward sinful desires and dispositions.

Likewise, Phoebe Palmer built her holiness teaching around consecration, faith, the altar, holiness, perfect love, and entire sanctification. Her Way of Holiness appeared in 1845 and became enormously influential in the emerging Holiness movement. So the foundational Wesleyan-Holiness stream did not need a two-nature anthropology to teach entire sanctification.

The much more sharply defined two-nature doctrine appears in nineteenth-century Plymouth Brethren teaching and later became especially prominent in dispensationalism. The Brethren formulation was strikingly literal: regeneration gives the believer a new nature, while the old nature remains unchanged. The two coexist within the Christian. The old nature is inherently corrupt; the new nature is inherently holy. George Cutting was one influential Brethren exponent of precisely this “old nature/new nature” understanding.

This theological stream is associated particularly with the nineteenth-century Brethren movement surrounding John Nelson Darby. Dispensationalism itself arose in the nineteenth century in Darby's teaching and spread widely in British and American evangelicalism.

Scofield and Chafer helped popularize it in America. Later dispensational theology made the formulation even more explicit. Lewis Sperry Chafer taught that regeneration produces something wholly new that the Christian possesses alongside the old nature for the remainder of earthly life. In that scheme, the new nature cannot sin and the old nature cannot produce holiness.

So you get the classic formula: Old nature + New nature = the regenerate Christian. The Christian life then becomes a struggle over which nature controls the person. This is substantially different from saying: One fallen human person → regenerated by Christ → inward corruption cleansed through entire sanctification.

The Holiness movement obviously rejected the Brethren/dispensational conclusion that the sinful condition must remain throughout life. Holiness people believed that Christ could cleanse the heart completely. But some later Holiness theologians increasingly used terminology that sounds remarkably like the two-nature framework while giving it a Wesleyan-Holiness conclusion.

You can actually see that terminology in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* in the **first issue of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, published in 1966**. The wording is: “Although at regeneration man is given a new nature, the old nature remains and must be purged.”

This gives us: Regeneration: new nature received + old nature remains. Entire sanctification: old/sinful nature purged or eradicated. This distinguished from the Brethren/dispensational scheme: Regeneration: new nature received + old nature remains. Christian life: both natures remain until death

Wesley taught a profoundly corrupted human heart that required cleansing. He described entire sanctification as salvation from inward sins such as pride, self-will and unbelief and positively as perfect love filling the heart. Thus he faithfully articulated Biblical holiness without using the two-nature idea.

But later Holiness teaching sometimes moved toward terminology such as “old nature,” “sin nature,” “inbred sin,” and “eradication.” The 1885 Holiness Declaration of Principles, for example, used the particularly strong language of the “extinction of the carnal mind” and “eradication” of the principle of sin.

Meanwhile, nineteenth-century Brethren theology and subsequent dispensationalism were explicitly teaching that regeneration resulted in two natures residing in the believer.

The mistake the holiness teachers made was using the two-nature framework to defend the truth against those who taught that depravity must remain in the believer throughout life. By describing the believer as possessing an old sinful nature alongside a new nature, and then teaching that entire sanctification eradicates the old nature, they incorporated two-nature anthropology into Holiness theology while rejecting the conclusion of those who originally promoted it. The result was a non-Wesleyan framework being used to defend a distinctly Wesleyan doctrine.

H. Orton Wiley writings show he did not agree with the two-nature idea. In his *Christian Theology*, Chapter 29 of his discussion of sanctification and what he calls the antinomian teaching of the Plymouth Brethren, he describes the Plymouth Brethren position this way: Regeneration is regarded as “the creation of a new personality” existing alongside the old, with “both natures remaining unchanged.”

Wiley is describing this position in order to reject it. He associates it specifically with Plymouth Brethren theology and argues that it produces an erroneous understanding of regeneration and sanctification.

Wiley says in Chapter 28: “Regeneration is a moral change wrought in the hearts of men by the Holy Spirit.” And then: “The person does not receive “a new ego” and that the same faculties of intellect, feeling, and will remain but are “given a new direction.” Most significantly, Wiley says: “the whole man, and not merely certain powers of his being, is the subject of this spiritual renewal.”

Plymouth Brethren literature explicitly teaches that regeneration leaves the believer a “complex being, possessed of two natures”, with the old remaining alongside the new. Wiley specifically identifies and opposes that conception.

He rejected this Plymouth Brethren two-nature conception of regeneration. He understood regeneration not as adding a second nature or personality alongside the old one, but as the Holy Spirit morally and spiritually renewing the whole person and giving the person's existing faculties a new direction.

In a culture that was less apt to be sceptical and questioning, the idea of the two natures may not have been a great problem, because sanctification truth came through in spite of the poorly described doctrine. But into day's sceptical culture where even modern psychology does not require two separate inner natures to explain conflicting desires and behavior, it behooves us to be scriptural in our terminology. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit can more clearly convict when properly described doctrine is preached.

Why Do We Need the Second Experience of Grace?

Apostle Paul's terminology shows us the need of entire sanctification as a second experience of Grace. He says to the Corinthians, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a **second experience of grace** (2 Cor 1:15 ESV). And he says to the Thessalonians, **Now** may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess 5:23 ESV).

By the way the teaching is clearer here than in the KJV. Notice the words in bold. The KJV uses the vague term, “second benefit,” instead of “**second experience of Grace**” in 2 Cor 1:15. And it does not use the word, “**Now**,” in 1 Thess 5:23, showing the experience happening at a point in time (instantaneously). One has to look into the tense of the Greek word for sanctify to get that understanding in the KJV.

Why can't a person fully surrender to God and be entirely sanctified when he first comes to the Lord for salvation? Let me illustrate: There is a man who is out of a job, living in poverty and not having a proper food and clothing supply. This man is in a *frame of mind* to desperately look for a job with the single purpose of providing for his need. When a person first comes to God in faith and repentance, he likewise is in the *frame of mind* to focus only on his need as he should. “It's not my brother, or my sister, but me O Lord standing in the need of prayer,” according to the spiritual. In his seeing God he gets gloriously saved.

Back to our illustration, after the man gets a good job, he begins to do well. He now doesn't have to worry about where the next meal is coming for himself and his family. He can also buy the other necessities his family needs. Plus, he develops real love for the company he is working for and the services they provide. So eventually he comes to the point where he says, “Now I want to give myself to the company so I can help the company and introduce others to the great services they offer. It is no longer

just about me. It is about dedicating myself to the company and surrendering to all the requirements of employment, so I can be at my best for the firm.” But the man could not have been in this *frame of mind*, to thus dedicate himself when he first applied for the job.

Likewise, the saved person grows more and more in love with his Lord as he develops relationship with his Savior. He has the peace that passed all understanding and the joy of the Lord. And God blesses him in many other ways. He so appreciates what the Lord has done for him that he has the *frame of mind* to give himself to the Lord in a much greater capacity than he could have when he first got saved. He says, “Lord you are so good, and your cause is so great, that I want to fully dedicate (give myself to you) in full surrender to all of your requirements so I can better serve you.” I no longer just ask, what can you do for me? I now ask, what can I do for you and your kingdom?

Yes, a person who has experienced God’s grace for a time can be in a very different *frame of mind* which enables him, with God’s help, to fully dedicate himself to God and fully surrender to all his demands. This is not just progressive sanctification; it is entire, or complete, sanctification. However, this is not to say, that he has arrived spiritually to the extent that his sanctification does not have room to get deeper and greater. We will always need to keep seeking God and growing in grace.

Sanctification of a person’s single nature begins when he first come to the Lord to be saved. Then as he walks in the light God gives him, sanctification of that single nature progresses until he comes to the point where God entirely sanctifies his whole being and fills him with the Holy Spirit.