



NEW LIFE

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“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

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The True Nature of the Christian's Heart

*By Pastor William Harrell, Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Norfolk, Virginia, United States of America
(adapted from Banner of Truth website)*

If we are to live healthy spiritual and emotional lives as believers, it is vital that we understand clearly the true character of the hearts of those who are regenerated by God's Holy Spirit. In particular, it is imperative that we understand the distinction between *wickedness* and *wretchedness*. The Bible tells us that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (*Jer. 17:9*), while the Apostle Paul declares himself to be a wretched man (*Rom. 7:24*). How are we to understand these declarations? Surely they describe the heart of the natural man. But how, if at all, do they apply to those who are regenerated? Are the hearts of believers simply less wicked and wretched than they were prior to their regeneration? This appears to be the common assumption. Yet, it is an erroneous and damaging assumption.

Serious confusion of understanding and great anguish of soul result when we wrongly regard the words wicked and wretched as being synonymous. We do well, therefore, carefully to examine these two terms, noting especially any differences between them. The wicked man is throughout Scripture described in terms of his being evil, guilty, and offensive. The wicked are consistently contrasted with the righteous who are regarded as being good, just, and submissive to God. The Day of Judgement will be a time when the wicked and the righteous will be separated from each other (*Matt. 13:49*), but it will not be a day when those who are wicked are made righteous. Therefore, it should be clear to us that we who are in Christ ought not to consider ourselves or our brethren in Christ to be in any sense wicked. We may act like the wicked at times, but such action, as we shall see from what follows, issues from our wretchedness, not from wickedness.

When we consider the definition of the words used in Scripture that are translated wretched we can appreciate how greatly different wickedness is from wretchedness. The wretched man is one who is distressed, weak, and miserable. In other words, the wicked man is evil, while the wretched man suffers evil; the wicked man desires to do evil, whereas the wretched man deplores his evil doings; the wicked offends because he is strongly driven by his evil desires, while the wretched offends as a result of the weakness and imperfections of his righteous nature that is undergoing the process of sanctification. This distinction holds even when we consider what Jeremiah says about the heart being deceitful and desperately wicked, and even if we regard what he says there to apply to the hearts of the regenerate. This is so because the word in Jeremiah 17:9 that is translated in both the King James and the New King James versions as wicked, comes from a Hebrew word that means weak, sick, frail, incurable.

The implications of our believing ourselves and our brethren in Christ to be even partly wicked are bitter and painful for ourselves and for others. Such erroneous belief invariably leads us to have low esteem for our own thoughts, motives, words, and actions, and for those of our brethren, and also to esteem lightly the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Lord in our lives. It is supremely difficult for us to love our brethren and to exercise the judgement of charity toward them when we are convinced that they are self-deceived and wicked souls who ever desire to sin against God,...

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to reject his Law, and to spurn his grace. How difficult, if not impossible, it is for us to be filled with loving gratitude to God and with the joy of the Lord that is our strength when we are convinced that he has done little more in us than to make us only a bit less wicked than are the unregenerate, while he demands that we be perfect as he is perfect.

When Scripture tells us that we are new creatures in Christ and that for us all things are new (*2 Cor. 5:17*), that we were dead in sin but now we have been raised up to eternal life by God in Christ (*Eph. 2:5,6*), and that the dominion of sin has been broken in our lives (*Rom. 6:1-14*), the Word of God is clearly informing us that we are no longer wicked but are righteous, not only in status, but also in disposition of heart by which we hate sin and hunger and thirst for righteousness.

But if we are no longer wicked, why are we wretched? As Paul makes clear, that wretchedness does not come from our new hearts and transformed minds (*Rom. 7:15-23*). Rather, it comes from our flesh (*Rom. 7:18*), or what he also calls the body this death (*Rom. 7:24*). What this means is not that our physical bodies are any more evil or more difficult for God to redeem and sanctify than are our hearts and minds. Rather, it means that so long as we are in this life, we drag around with us the dead remains of what we once were apart from Christ. Those remains annoy us and serve to retard our spiritual progress in sanctification. They also exert a kind of momentum whereby unless we are vigilant to let the Word of Christ dwell richly in us, directing our way and empowering us in that way, we shall revert, at least for a time, to old sinful patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting. But such reversions cause us grief, not gladness, and they result from our weakness and frailty, not from wickedness.

If we believe ourselves to be wicked, we shall seek to hide our shame with the fig-leaves of our denials and the filthy rags of our own attempted righteousness, and we shall despise our brethren, whom we suspect to be at least as wicked as we think ourselves to be. We shall also resent the Lord as we wrongly believe that he expects wicked men to do righteous deeds. When we know ourselves to be fundamentally righteous and incidentally wretched, we cry to God for mercy and we find mercy abundantly supplied to us by God (*Rom. 7:25*). In that merciful provision we rejoice in the deepening realization that for us, there is now no condemnation from our God (*Rom. 8:1*). In turn, we who have tasted such divine mercy delight with patience and loving kindness to show mercy to our brethren who, like us, are distressed by frailties from which they desire liberation.

Twice on Sundays

*By Pastor Iain D. Campbell, Free Church of Scotland congregation in Back, Isle of Lewis
(taken from Creideamh, the website of Pastor Iain D. Campbell)*

In most of our local churches it is a given that there will be a service of evening worship on the Lord's Day. Not only so, but it is usually the case that the evening service is better attended than the morning. For many non-Gaelic speaking worshippers, the introduction of a morning service which they can attend is a thing of comparatively recent origin.

Neither of these phenomena should be taken for granted. In most places I know outside of Lewis, very few people attend evening worship – in many cases, far fewer than communicant membership rolls might suggest, and in most, far less than the number who are present in the morning.

The increase in the number of people at an evening service of worship on the island is probably related to the fact that traditionally the evening sermon was evangelistic, aimed at the unconverted, and therefore deliberately targeting a much wider audience than the didactic sermon in the morning.

The effect was that two generations of post-war adherents in many Lewis congregations got the distinct impression that the morning sermon was not for them – to the church's shame – and therefore attended en masse the evening service – to their own credit. The language aspect was probably not insignificant; if there was an English service at all in our rural congregations it...

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would have been in the evening.

The trend still continues. Certainly in our own local congregation, the greater number attends in the evening. Why that should be I am not sure; I will certainly not discourage that, but I will want to encourage attendance in the morning too. There is no need for anyone to remain at home to make the dinner.

But the other issue is equally significant. In many places, evening worship has dropped off the radar altogether. Professedly evangelical churches will advertise only a morning service; some may advertise two morning services, a 'traditional' one and a 'contemporary' one. Many Christians, it seems, are content to be in church once on Sunday.

I suspect that in a lot of cases, particularly in the context of American evangelicalism, many have simply capitulated to the pressures of a secular society, for whom Sunday is the day of sports and of big league tournaments. The earlier worship is the better, so that people can then get on with the rest of the day, and take their kids to the places all other kids go. Evening worship is dropped out of necessity: families have better things to be doing on their day off.

That, at least, is one advantage of Sunday policies in local government. There may be many arguments for opening sports facilities on Sundays, but we are mistaken if we think that it will end there. The pressure would soon be on to run competitive sports events on the Lord's Day, and it takes brave parents to buck these particular trends.

But a more subtle form of argument is also appearing. Is there a biblical rationale for Sunday evening worship? I have heard Christians argue that once on Sunday is sufficient. Is it not a form of legalism to demand more?

My instinctive response to such foolish talk is to ask – what is the advantage to cutting out a service of worship on the Lord's Day? What do Christians gain by staying at home to watch television, or by going out to dinner instead of being in church on a Sabbath evening? When God has legitimized a whole day to be an expression of devotion to him, and a means of blessing from him, what do we gain by not taking advantage of the day in its totality?

In ancient Israel, two lambs were to be offered to God each day, one in the morning and one in the evening. That was the daily routine, and it is reinforced in such psalms as Psalm 141, where David prayed that the lifting up of his hands would be 'as the evening sacrifice'. There was no question of sparing the evening lamb.

Significantly too, when the Sabbath day was changed from the seventh to the first day of the week, it was actually in the evening that Christ appeared to his disciples, on two successive occasions. Weekly gatherings were a given, and Sunday evening blessings were experienced.

Ultimately, the issue is not so much about our views of church, but about our views of Christ. He commands us in Scripture not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. He promises to be present in the assembly of his people, where as few as two gather in his name. He promises to enrich his people through his Word and by his Spirit.

If that is the case, then we ought to put a premium on such occasions. While contemporary culture squeezes religion out, by putting pressure on families and on children to be involved in many different activities on the Lord's Day, there ought, surely, to be something non-negotiable about gathering for worship with the people of God week by week.

Sinclair Ferguson is reputed to have said at a recent conference, in response to the very question about why evening worship is necessary on the Lord's Day, that if an attractive girl asked a boy to meet her at a particular hour, he would be there. The Bible offers us something better than that: the one who is the chief among ten thousand asks poor sinners to meet him at a particular hour, as he promises to be present in the gathered assembly of his people.

It is a foolish person who passes up a golden opportunity to meet with the risen Lord. Which is why I shall shout loud that Christians should worship together twice on Sundays. At the very least.

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

Our worship services begin promptly at 11.00 am and 4.00 pm.

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	Today: 01/02/2009	Next Week: 08/02/2009	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We like to welcome Michael Pavelka, Joanne Lim and Ben to our worship services last Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	John Poh	Joey Seow	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Rev Timothy Ki	Rev Timothy Ki	
<i>Message:</i>	Living by Faith	Faithfulness	
<i>Text:</i>	Hebrews 11:1-6	! Corinthians 4:1	
<i>Organist:</i>	Joy	Grace	
Evening			
<i>Chairman:</i>	Joshua Flinn	Jonathan Kim	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Rev Timothy Ki	Rev Timothy Ki	
<i>Message:</i>	The Calling from God	What is Church?	
<i>Text:</i>	Ephesians 3:1-13	1 Timothy 3:14-15	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Sophia	Hubert	
Other Duties			NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
	Today: 01/02/2009	Next Week: 08/02/2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome: We would like to welcome Rev Lim Chee Boon and Rev Timothy Ki to New Life London. Please pray for them as they minister to us for the month of February. • Calling of Resident Minister: Continue to pray for the Lord's calling for a resident minister. The church leaders are praying about calling Rev Timothy Ki. • Lord's Supper: Next week, we will be observing the Lord's Supper. Please come with your hearts prepared. • Pray for those who are sick: Douglas (knee pain), Maria (ankle and joint pain), Constance (left heel pain), Anthony (recovery from collarbone fracture), Margaret (sprained wrist – check-up 9/2) • Pray for Journey Mercies: Douglas (Ghana), Mark & Hui Min (Paris) • Pray for those who are seeking employment: John, Constance • Pre-Worship service prayer: Those serving on the Lord's Day, please gather at 10.30am for prayer.
<i>Ushers</i>	Daniel / Evelyn	John / Anthony	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	Hannah	Hannah	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Maureen	Constance	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>PA Crew:</i>	Anthony	Nicholas	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 6 Feb	7:30pm	Young Adults Fellowship: Bible Study – Survey of the Old Testament	
Sat 7 Feb	4.00pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by Rev Lim Chee Boon	
Last Week's Worship Service Collections			
Offering: £236.34		Lunch: No collection	
<u>Contentment, Not Satisfaction</u>			
<i>Adapted from "In Green Pastures" by J.R. Miller, D.D.</i>			
<p>We must distinguish between contentment and satisfaction. We are to strive to be content in any state; we are never to be satisfied in this world, whether our circumstances are prosperous or adverse. Satisfaction can come only when we awake in Christ's likeness in the world of eternal blessedness. We are not to seek contentment by restraining or crushing the infinite cravings and longings of our souls. Yet we are meant as Christians to live amid all circumstances in quiet calmness and unbroken peace, in sweet restfulness of soul, wholly independent of the strifes and storms about us, and undisturbed by them. Content in whatever state, yet never satisfied - that is the ideal life for every Christian.</p>			