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IN NOMINE JESU

Ephesians 4: 24 Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

LIVES REMADE

For thousands of years the religion of almighty God has claimed that human personality can be improved, that lives can be remade. But during the last century this affirmation was challenged and denied. A godless critic of Christianity by the name of Cotter Morrison said: Nothing is gained by disregarding the fact that there is no remedy for a bad heart. Others have echoed his words: You can't change human nature! These words have become a kind of proverb in our civilization. They have ingrained themselves into our whole way of thinking, our whole outlook on life. Many a wife has said of her husband: He'll never change. He'll always have a mean temper, use filthy language, and get drunk on pay day. Husbands say of their wives: She'll always have a sour disposition, persist in nagging and heckling me, and complain about taking care of the children. Even of fellow Christians we are inclined to say: So-and-So will always be that way - happy so long as he or she can be in the limelight and boss every congregational affair according to his own pet notions, but hard to get along with if somebody else should have a different opinion. Sometimes we say of our neighbors and the people we know: The only way you'll get him into church is to carry him in after he's dead. You can't change human nature!

I am here today to tell you that if there is one thing in all the world that can be changed, it is human nature. Under the Cross of Christ human nature can be changed. At the heart of the Christian Gospel is the teaching that there is a remedy for a bad heart - the transforming power of Christ. Christ can change you! Christ can transform you! Christ can make an entirely different person out of you! St. Paul expresses his limitless confidence in the Gospel of Christ, when he says: Put off concerning the former conversation the old man...and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Again Paul declares: If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

This new life is far from being superficial. It goes right down into the core of your being. It is more than simply playing a Christian. It is more than pretense. Jesus demands repentance. Jesus demands a whole new revolutionary reversal in your life. Jesus does not simply white-wash the old barn. He re-makes you into an entirely new creation. This involves major surgery - a serious operation. The Great Surgeon cuts down deep into the heart and removes all the poison and infection of sin. When a man honestly confronts Christ, he is confronted with all the ugliness and filth of his own deceitful heart. It is not a pretty picture. When you come before the splintery, blood-soaked Cross of Christ, you are coming before yourself as you really are - ugly, distasteful, filthy. You are seeing yourself as you really are - without any mask or camouflage of pretense. Look at Him, and know that it is your sin that has put Him there! Look at Him, and see yourself - for He hanging, dying, bleeding for you. He has taken your place. Every cold chill that convulsed His pain-racked body, the extreme suffering, the dried out mouth, the parched tongue, the torment that took Him into the deepest depths of hell - all is a picture of you, you and your sin. Every drop of blood that fell from His hands and feet into the dust of the ground fell for you - to cleanse you of your sins. By the dymamic power of this Cross there is not a person living on this earth who cannot have a new life, a life patterned after God, created in righteousness and true holiness.

Of course, none of us like to be confronted with our sin. Our flesh balks at the prospect of such an operation. It hurts our pride. We try to cover up. Satan whispers into our ear that we are not really so bad. We become indignant! So what if I drink too much? So what if I curse and swear! Nobody is going to tell me how to run my life. I am perfectly capable of handling my own affairs! My life is all right the way it is! And we begin to think that sin pays off. Like the Prodigal Son, off we go into the far country. A student cheats on an examination, gets a higher grade, and comes to the conclusion that sin pays. A man cheats in his business, and as a result has more money in his pocket. Crime

pays, he says! It is possible to go hunting or fishing on the Lord's Day and shoot some birds and catch some fish. You can make yourself very popular with the world by engaging in sinful sport, telling dirty stories, or running somebody's good name and reputation into the mud. But Jesus says: What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Sin pays, all right. It pays off in the long run in unhappyness, despair, defeat, death. The wages of sin is death! At death the soul flies to the judgment bar of God. It is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment. And unless that soul is covered with the cloak of Christ's righteousness, it will die eternally. Except a man be born again, said Jesus to Nicodemus, he cannot see the kingdom of God! This new birth, this new life, is God's own life fused into a man. It comes when a man stands under the Cross, and by the quickening power of God's Spirit, believes in Jesus as his personal Savior. This does not mean that he now ceases to sin. Sinless people there simply are not this side of eternity. Even John, the disciple who was closest to Jesus, declared: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Every day we must put off our former manner of life, which is corrupt. Every day we must put on the new man. But when the love of Jesus floods a man's heart, he will not deliberately and maliciously violate that love. Day by day by the power of God he will improve his life. The closer Jesus gets to him, the more it will grieve him when he falls by the way.

St. Paul certainly knew what he was talking about, when he told the Christians at Ephesus to put off the old man... and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. He was speaking from first-hand experience. The very fact that he was a Christian was in itself eloquent testimony that the faith of Christ can change a man. From Saul the self-righteous, self-sufficient, self-satisfied Pharisee, he was changed into Paul, the little man, whose only sufficiency came from God. That day, on the Damascus road, a glorious new light dawned on Paul's soul, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. From that moment on his life was lived from

a new center. Christ liveth in me. The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. There was now a wondrous peace in his heart, the peace of God, which passeth all understanding. Paul was a new man - a man in Christ!

What happened to Paul on the road to Damascus was not something that happened only once. It has happened again and again - not always so dramatically perhaps - but very real nevertheless. Thousands upon thousands of lives have been remade by the power of the Gospel. The experience of Paul, in its essential feature, may become the experience of everyone. The Spirit of God, the Lord and Giver of Life, is still at work opening the eyes of the spiritually dead, showing them their beautiful Savior, bringing them to faith in Him, and so making them breathe and live.

In apostolic days when Peter and John stood on trial before the Sanhedrin, it is recorded that the man who had been healed by the apostles at the gate of the temple took his place beside them. We read: And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. Of course not, for they were witnessing the unanswerable argument for Christianity - the healed man. Similarly, as the church today produces healed men and women, it is bringing the best possible testimony of faith to an unbelieving world. Wherever this Gospel of Christ is proclaimed we see discouraged men and women winning the battle at the very point of their former defeat, enslaved men and women mastering the appetites and passions that previously had mastered them, frustrated men and women tortured by feelings of guilt for the wrongs they had done confronted suddenly by Christ, experiencing the divine forgiveness and going forth with the peace of God in their hearts. Lives have been remade!

I pray God that no one leaves this church today a Christian in name only. I know of no passage in the Bible that says a man can live as he pleases and still be a Christian. If you are Christians, as you say you are, then let Christ and the love of Christ show through in your lives. Put on the new man, which after God is is created in righteousness and true holiness. Amen.