

**Articles and Sermons :: John MacArthur and One Nature****John MacArthur and One Nature - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/7/19 6:05**

I came across an interesting critique of John MacArthur which said that he taught believers only have one nature. The article also said that Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Needham taught this. It did not provide quotations from Lloyd-Jones but majored on MacArthur. The quotations are as follows Salvation is not a matter of improvement or perfection of what has previously existed. It is total transformation. At the new birth a person becomes "a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17). It is not simply that he receives something new but that he becomes someone new. The new nature is not added to the old nature but replaces it. The transformed person is a completely new "I." Biblical terminology, then, does not say that a Christian has two different natures. He has but one nature, the new nature in Christ. The old self dies and the new self lives; they do not coexist. It is not a remaining old nature but the remaining garment of sinful flesh that causes Christians to sin. The Christian is a single new person, a totally new creation, not a spiritual schizophrenic. The believer as a total person is transformed but not yet wholly perfect. He has residing sin but no longer reigning sin. He is no longer the old man corrupted but is now the new man created in righteousness and holiness, awaiting full salvation.

The relation of the old self and the new self has been much disputed. Many hold that at salvation believers receive a new self but also keep the old self. Salvation thus becomes addition, not transformation. Such a view, however, is not precisely consistent with biblical teaching. At salvation the old self was done away with. Salvation is transformation—the old self is gone, replaced by the new self.

I find this assertion fascinating. Are there any folk out there familiar enough with MacArthur's position to add any comments?

Re: John MacArthur and One Nature - posted by Nasher (), on: 2005/7/19 9:14

Hi Ron, I know MacArthur's teaching quite well and I agree with what he is getting at here, although I do not agree with many of the terms he uses (i.e. nature/self etc. are not biblical words or terms in this context).

Here are transcripts of 2 sermons dealing with this in more detail:

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/sg1928.htm>

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/sg1929.htm>

Re: John MacArthur and One Nature - posted by RobertW (), on: 2005/7/19 9:27

As I recall hearing him teach on this he attributes most of the temptations that originate from 'within' as caused by residual memories of sinful acts. Our nature is transformed, but the mind still has to come to terms with thoughts left over from past behaviors and things we subjected ourselves to. I am coming to concur with this view more all the time. The probing question that I believe settles whether or not a believer has "two natures" is whether or not a genuine born again believer has an appetite for sin itself. Can it be possible that a believer's 'meat' is to rebel against God on the one hand and 'do' the will of God on the other. A believer may sin due to causes outlined by Paris Reidhead in "The Tragedy of Third Generation Religion", but that is not the same as saying that a believer "craves sin." It has long been my view also that what fulfills a sinner is not the booze or the fornication or the idolatry- it is the 'rebellion' itself. In other words- the flesh don't care how it rebels as long as it can rebel. This is the nature of a sinner- they don't care what flavor the sin comes in as long as they can have the underlying substance of rebellion. This is NOT a characteristic of a believer. If a believer is tempted it is to fulfill a good appetite in a bad way. It is not a craving to rebel against God for sake of rebellion.

John MacArthur's view would seem to concur with this notion as thoughts that arise in the mind may give the appearance of a hunger for sin, but in reality they are merely residuals suggestions of how you "used" to behave. It is an appeal to HABIT- not nature.

God Bless,

-Robert

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/7/19 11:37

thanks guys
what an incredible resource SI is!

Re: John MacArthur and One Nature - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2005/7/19 13:39

I can agree with what has been said here in this thread but I wonder how do we interpret the following...

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (Eph 4:22-24)

Do we see this as a command from Paul or as a past event? Can we equate old nature/new nature with old man/new man?

In Christ,

Ron

Re: - posted by Eli_Barnabas (), on: 2005/7/19 13:45

Interesting.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/7/19 15:14

Quote:
-----Do we see this as a command from Paul or as a past event? Can we equate old nature/new nature with old man/new man?

This is my own understanding of this passage. I do not speak for John MacArthur. (he will be relieved to hear this. :-))
Eph. 4:20 But ye have not so learned Christ;
Eph. 4:21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:
Eph. 4:22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;
Eph. 4:23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;
Eph. 4:24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

I have taken the passage from two verses earlier to get the sense of what Paul is saying here. He is saying that they had been taught, by him (Christ), as the truth is in Jesus... This itself is a powerful statement, but that 'that' in the beginning of verse should not really be there; it has been 'supplied' by the translators, and the verb for 'putting off' is 2nd Aorist infinitive. The significance of the last point is that we might have expected to find this as an imperative if Paul were telling them that they should do it now. (that is a bit technical. If you would like more explanation, please ask.) In fact, if we drop that 'that' we can read something like...

...you were taught by him, to put off, concerning the former way of life, the old man.

Read in this way it becomes the original instruction given, by Christ, to those who have learned from Him. The original instruction then was to "put off, concerning the former way of life, the old man." I think it is important to note that they had not been instructed not only to 'put off the old man' but to 'put off, concerning the former way of life, the old man. that is, the old man and his ways. I think the sense is carried in Col. 3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; The verb for 'put off' here is different, meaning to 'strip off, away from yourself'. It is part of three uses of the idea in Colossians; Col. 2:11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:
Col. 2:15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.
Col. 3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; where the verb and its noun are r

peated. The verb in Col 3:9 is an Aorist participle and the sense is caught perfectly by the KJV; you have put off, or as Youngs Literal has it: "Lie not one to another, having put off the old man with his practices," (Col. 3:9, YNG)

It seems to me that Ephesians is reminding them of what they were taught by Christ; to put off, concerning the former way of life, the old man; whereas Colossians is reminding them of what they have already done.

the 'old nature' is a theological term rather than a biblical concept so I personally prefer to use the phrase 'old man' and 'new man' rather than theological concepts of 'nature' and 'self'.

As the putting on of the 'new man' in Eph 4:24 is also Aorist Infinitive, and would also seem to refer to something happening at a point in time rather than as a process. However, and this is vital, the 'be renewed in the spirit of your mind' is out of step with the verbs which surround it. Both putting off the old and putting on the new are Aorist Infinitives, but 'be renewed' is present tense. Present tense in Bible Greek is more like our present continuous, hence this 'out of step' instruction that they received from Christ means that 'they were taught... to be being renewed in the spirit of their minds'. This is quite definitely... process.

"And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:" (Col. 3:10, KJVS) Here in 'put on' is Aorist participle ie 'having put on the new' but the 'is renewed' is again a present participle which speaks of process. Hence the sense is "having put on the new man which is being renewed according to the image of him having created him." So the 'creation' of the new man is seen as having been accomplished, but the renewal of that same new man is a constant process.

The two transcripts provided below by Nasher are very interesting. Perhaps we can talk later about John MacArthur's "smelly old coat"?

Re: - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2005/7/19 21:18

Quote:
-----"having put on the new man which is being renewed according to the image of him having created him." So the 'creation' of the new man is seen as having been accomplished, but the renewal of that same new man is a constant process.

Thanks for opening that up for us Ron, very helpful.

Some more thoughts here, if we reject the position of two natures, do we also need to drop the two nature terminology? I mean, it seems difficult to describe the struggle that's going on in me without saying something about two opposing somethings, principles, desires, urges, etc.

In Christ,

Ron

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/7/20 5:34

Quote:
-----Some more thoughts here, if we reject the position of two natures, do we also need to drop the two nature terminology? I mean, it seems difficult to describe the struggle that's going on in me without saying something about two opposing somethings, principles, desires, urges, etc.

Is there a reason for neglecting the scriptural terms for the struggle i.e. walking in the flesh v walking in the Spirit? We are drawing near to MacArthur's 'smelly old coat' I think.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/7/20 6:00

Quote:
-----"having put on the new man which is being renewed according to the image of him having created him." So the 'creation' of the new man is seen as having been accomplished, but the renewal of that same new man is a constant process.

What I add now is only an illustration and illustrations must not be used as foundations for truth. However, here is my illustration.

monitor refresh rates. I know very little about this area of knowledge other than the higher the refresh rate the better, generally. Please correct the science of this as necessary. Cathode ray tubes are coated with a chemical that retains light briefly. The momentary image is beamed onto the chemical surface which retains the image long enough for us to see the whole picture. The image needs to be constantly refreshed, if it is refreshed at lower rates the image will 'flicker' and the image fades and is renewed. With higher refresh rates however the image is experiencing continual refreshment/renewal which will result in a 'rock steady' image with no flicker.

Although the image, of the new man, is created in a moment it needs the process of constant refreshing if the image is to be seen clearly and without flicker. I didn't mention it in the grammatical parts of the earlier posts but 'being renewed' is passive in the Greek, (that doesn't mean passive in the sense of being apathetic!) which means that the image is being 'received'. The 'putting off' and the 'putting on' are both active. This is something 'we' do (by the Spirit's enabling) but the 'being renewed' is 'passive' because someone else is doing the 'doing'.

I seem to recall that one of your favourite quoted texts is Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; It's one of my favourites too. 'Salvation' apparently is the consequence of 'regeneration and renewing'. Paul's use of 'renewal/renewing' is very consistent; Rom. 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.
2Cor. 4:16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

Col. 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:
Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

I am often challenged by the little phrase 'let us...' It seems so simple and nothing like the struggle that many experience. You can only say 'let us' to people who can do what is being enjoined upon them. What I am getting at is that all those books entitled 'aids to a holy life' etc may have started from the wrong presupposition. Perhaps they ought to have been entitled 'Hindrances to a Holy Life and how to avoid them'. The only 'aid' we need to a holy life is the Holy Spirit, but there are many hindrances.

If any choose to develop or context the illustration please do remember that it is only an illustration.

Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2005/7/20 8:51

Quote:
-----I mean, it seems difficult to describe the struggle that's going on in me without saying something about two opposing somethings, principles, desires, urges, etc.

I wrestled with this same question for years and refused to believe that the struggle did not exist. I also believed there were two opposing 'somethings' and to me it was the Holy Spirit and 'the Flesh'. I defined 'the flesh' as a carnal nature that is constantly trying to regain control of the heart. I believed strongly that there was some connection between the body and the sin nature because I saw biblical evidence that the body was made 'vile' and we needed to be clothed upon by our glorious body. I saw death as the axe God used to sever the body from the soul and thus dispense with the carnal nature.

I am not so sure now that I was right in all this. As was pointed out to me by many- if this is true "death is the Savior." I do still believe that there is something 'residual' in the born again that will be finally done away with at physical death- but

I do not see this as a factor strong enough to be called a 'sin nature'.

I believe the struggle originates in our natural desires being elevated to unnatural levels. *Temptation is a proposition to the intellect to fulfill a good appetite in a bad way* (P.R). Our appetites have to be maintained at reasonable levels or they will seek to control us. Yet this in itself is not enough. Why?

And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (Romans 8)

The presence of the Holy Spirit in our life when we are walking full of the Spirit will 'helpeth' us keep that infirmity in check. It is not enough to merely have the appetites under control- there must be the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Can we begin a conversation on just what this "smelly old coat" could be? In reading MacArthur's writings they seem to not say a whole lot less about believers have an inner 'struggle' than one who believed in two natures and he even states that Sin is still resident in our 'humaness'. These are very obscure terms (struggle, humaness, etc.). At first glance the article appears to be a contradiction if you pin him down on the points. I am not criticizing him as I highly respect his teachings. I just don't think he can make that 'bird' fly as he has written it.

Re: - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2005/7/20 10:12

Excellent points Ron and Robert.

To summarize, if I understand correctly, we have this "new man" who has not yet been made perfect. This "new man" has a struggle within and this struggle is between flesh and Spirit however, flesh does not refer to the physical body but man's immaterial being. To my thinking, this seems to lead right back to two natures.:-?

In Christ,

Ron

Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2005/7/20 10:27

Hi Ron,

What is a nature? I don't know if we ever defined that one?

Re: - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2005/7/20 11:01

Quote:

-----Hi Ron, What is a nature? I don't know if we ever defined that one?

Great question, this is critical to our discussion. I would apply the following meaning to 'nature' in the context of this thread;

When we speak of the nature of a man, or an individual of the race, we mean his particular qualities or constitution; either the peculiar temperament of his body, or the affections of his mind, his natural appetites, passions, disposition or temper.

-from Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary of American English

I am applying the understanding of the term 'nature' to refer to a set of characteristics, or disposition. A nature is not some

ething that acts of itself but the believer can be seen as acting from the perspective of a nature.

In Christ,

Ron

Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2005/7/20 11:10

Quote:

----- A nature is not something that acts of itself but the believer can be seen as acting from the perspective of a nature.

So are we referring to:

And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: (Acts 14:15)

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.(James 5:17)

Homoiopathes or "like Pascho

Pascho is 'suffering'.

I see a clue here:

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;

What can we learn from this passage? What suffering did He endure that if we do likewise we will "cease from sin"?

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/7/20 13:50

Quote:

-----To summarize, if I understand correctly, we have this "new man" who has not yet been made perfect.

Ron

I think this 'new man' is complete just as the 'old man' was complete but 'I' am capable of growth. There is a little progress report in Luke's gospel which I think is fascinating. Luke 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. the word for 'increase' is also used in Luke 2:52; Rom. 13:12; Gal. 1:14; 2Tim. 2:16; 3:9,13 which gives us the sense of definite 'development'. The 'new man' was here on earth and was complete, but continued to 'increase'. If He had not increased He would, presumably have fallen behind God's perfect plan/schedule and consequently become 'incomplete/imperfect'.

Progress is a necessary aspect of 'perfection/completion'. Here is an explosive question. If Jesus had not 'developed' would He have been 'as a babe' and unable to take 'meat'? (1 Cor 3:2) Would He have lived His life 'walking as a man' (1 Cor 3:3) and hence become 'carnal'? Is a carnal man, a spiritual man who is not walking in the Spirit?

As regards Webster's definition of 'nature', how useful is this? He is defining a theological concept rather than a biblical revelation. Was Christ's body 'vile'? (I am using Robert's word here) I presume you are thinking of Phil. 3:21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. but 'vile' also needs a definition. It derives from the Latin vilis which simply means 'cheap or base'. In its original use is simply meant something of 'humble' aspect or station. The ASV gets the sense better, blockquote>“who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself.” (Phil. 3:21, ASV) The 'humblest' station in mediaeval life was the 'villein', the most 'base' element of society, but not 'vile' in a moral sense.

No, the 'new man' is the counterpoise to the 'old man'. The 'old man' was our corporate solidarity in Adam. I often draw attention to the mixture of plural singular in the phrase 'our old man' was co-crucified... He we have a plural possessive pronoun and a singular noun. We do not have an individual 'old man'; we share one. I am not sure that we have an individual 'new man' either. The 'old man' did not struggle, and I don't see the 'new man' struggling either. 'I' may struggle but not 'our new man'. make sense?

Paul's reference to the 'old man' in Ephesians is enlightening (I think) too. Eph. 4:22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; The 'which is corrupt' is phtheiromenon which is a present participle in the passive voice and in the masculine gender agreeing with 'the old man'. The verb has a definite article preceding it. I'm sorry about this but I will try to explain how I see the significance of that. A present participle preceded by the definite article indicates 'characteristic'. So if it were active voice we would have something like 'the corrupting one'. The 'old man'; would then be characterised by his 'corrupting' influence. However, it is passive voice which implies that the 'old man' is the 'being corrupted one'. This 'image' too is to be 'renewed' (re-olded?) It is receiving its 'life' from a source which keeps its 'image' rock steady in its corrupt rebellion against God. (If you have any friends who dabble in bible Greek now would be a good time to talk to them and ask them if they think my interpretation is right.) Your first thought may be 'it is the 'way of life/conversation' which is continually being corrupted, but 'conversation' is female gender so the verb would not agree with it; the verb is in agreement with the masculine gender of 'man'.

A crucial issue here is Christ's humanity. To be goel-redeemer He must be our kinsman, so his humanity must be the same as ours in essence. He did not take a different kind of body to those the rest of us have, but was made in 'the likeness of sinful flesh'. Not in 'sinful' flesh but the 'likeness of sinful flesh'. 'flesh' becomes 'sinful' or otherwise as a result of associations of soul and spirit. (there may be trouble ahead ;-)

I'll pause...

Re: - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2005/7/20 14:16

Interesting thoughts, I'll have to chew on them for a while.

Quote:
-----As regards Webster's definition of 'nature', how useful is this? He is defining a theological concept rather than a biblical revelation.

It seems that the meaning of the term 'nature', as we are using it in this thread, is a theological issue because the terms old nature/new nature aren't found in scripture. But this doesn't mean we can't use and define those terms, rather it can be helpful to our undersanding. As an example of this, the term 'trinity' comes to mind.

In Christ,

Ron

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/7/20 14:31

Quote:
-----But this doesn't mean we can't use and define those terms, rather it can be helpful to our understanding. As an example of this, the term 'trinity' comes to mind.

Agreed, and in the context of trinity we know we are using a man-made label to express the ineffable. The word 'trinity' comes at the end of the argument rather than at the beginning. It is a conclusion rather than a starting point.

I was rather trying to avoid the Humpty Dumpty scenario where words mean whatever we want them to mean. I may call my dog a goldfish and it will do little harm. If, however, I begin to follow someone else's instructions for 'keeping goldfish' it may have serious repercussions for my dog. :-D

Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2005/7/20 14:53

I'm no prosecuting attorney, but it seems that somehow the soul and body have to be suspects in all this. I say that because the body has already received its death sentence and is essentially on death row. The spirit suffered death immediately at the fall. The only one left is the soul.

I realize it is impossible to somehow condemn sin in the physical body. That would be dualism. Our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Ghost. Which leaves me with a way out of this. Paul talked about not desiring to be "unclothed"- but "clothed upon" (with our glorious body).

So when we speak of our 'humbled' body are we talking about our bodies being in a state of inutility as is the rest of creation? I'm thinking out loud here. If that is so then what we have here is a body that is not sinful but at the same time is not physically able to carry out the will of God as our glorified bodies will be. This is an argument for 'weakness' as opposed to 'sinfulness'. The angels carry out the will of the Father like a bolt of lightning- we halt back and forth wondering if we 'can' or cannot do what God has said. Why? The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. We are to pray that the will of the Father would be carried out on earth as it is in Heaven? Ever stop to consider this? That is instant obedience without hesitation! We cannot do that in this body of humiliation any more than we can sin to our full potential. So can we say that when God put the body in inutility to slow the progress of sin after the fall it also 'handicapped' our ability to walk in instant obedience?

Re: - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2005/7/21 20:01

Quote:
-----I see a clue here:

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;

What can we learn from this passage? What suffering did He endure that if we do likewise we will "cease from sin"?

I've been thinking on this a bit. It seems the suffering could be a few things; I suppose it could be suffering physical death, sin would certainly cease then. It could be suffering for righteousness sake by denying the flesh, "crucified with Christ" comes to mind. Such a person has ceased from sin but can we say he no longer has sin dwelling in him? He has ceased from the guilt and dominion of sin but can we say he has ceased from the burden of it.

In Christ,

Ron

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/7/22 5:04

Quote:
-----So when we speak of our 'humbled' body are we talking about our bodies being in a state of inutility as is the rest of creation? I'm thinking out loud here. If that is so then what we have here is a body that is not sinful but at the same time is not physically able to carry out the will of God as our glorified bodies will be.

Hi Robert

wherever you are going with this ;-) we have to be sure that what you say about the 'body' also applies to Christ's body. The angelic beings perfectly fulfill the expressed will of the Father. He, of course (you know your Finney ;-)) would only command what is possible to them. Likewise His earthly servants will only ever receive commands which are 'possible to them', He does not expect us to move with angelic velocity. (incidentally, they 'go AND return' as a flash of lightning, which has them moving at twice the speed of light! For a human that would give them more than infinite mass, if Einstein was right. Angels, of course, have no mass.) He does however expect us to move at maximum human 'utility'. The 'human-ness' of Christ's body was never a hindrance to the will of God, and neither need ours be. Psa. 103:14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. (Oh, what a blessed comfort this verse has been to me over the years. I sometimes 'forget' and frustration is the inevitable result; He remembers and there is peace.) He sat 'wearied' (John 4:6) at the well but even here He knew how to find sustenance in 'meat' they knew not of; "my meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work". There IS time and energy and enabling enough to do all that He requires of me today . We cannot match the angels in speed but we can in obedience.

Quote:
-----So can we say that when God put the body in inutility to slow the progress of sin after the fall it also 'handicapped' our ability to walk in instant obedience?

Only if it had the same effect on His body. ;-)

Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2005/7/22 22:19

Quote:
-----Only if it had the same effect on His body.

Yeah. I like the way you flipped Finney's arguments around to debunk this theory. What was I thinking? :-?

I pondered this quite a bit more and wonder what it is about us that is keeping us from coming under the law since we have been born again? It seems reasonable that if we have been born again and are now spiritual then we should be able to come under that 'spiritual' law. I suppose I have over the many months taken jab after jab at why this is and even condemned innocent aspects of our humanity (body, etc.). I know you probably have thought this through and I appreciate the challenge of being led to think and study this out on my own. You are truly a professor in this regard. Yet, is there any glimpse of understanding you would share on this?

God Bless,

-Robert