

## **Do You Have a Good Heart?** Gerald McKibben

This is primarily a review of Ron Merryman's 17-page booklet entitled *The Passion War. Spiritual Conflict in Every Believer*. That there is a spiritual conflict within every believer is obvious from Galatians 5:17: "... the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."

Dr. Merryman powerfully comments on this principle in the first paragraph: "There is a passion war going on in you if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ! It is a war that you cannot avoid nor opt out of. There is no neutrality in this war. Involved is animosity between opposing forces that cannot be suppressed."

The stated purpose in the book is to "clarify the issues underlying this passion war." He goes on to state that in recent years a few popular teachers have been teaching that believers have only one nature. This seems somewhat surprising when you consider that, according to Dr. Merryman, just twenty-five years ago anyone in Bible believing circles who taught the eradication of the sin nature would have been shunned. Several well-known figures who teach one-naturism are mentioned, including John MacArthur and Kay Arthur.

One key issue in *The Passion War* is how the proponents of one-naturism (the teaching that a believer has only one nature, not two) substitute other words or phrases for "old man" and "sin nature". This caught my attention also, when reading a popular book teaching one-naturism, when the author denied we have a sin nature but several times referred to the "earth shell" that we each carry around with us. Which reminds us of the lines from *Romeo and Juliet* "That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet." By implication this "earth shell" is a hindrance to our Christian walk. Proponents of one-naturism insist that we're not talking about mere semantics; that there is disagreement about what is meant by a "New creation in Christ Jesus".

In fact, there are those who testify that they didn't experience victory over the flesh until coming to see that they are, in fact, new creations, and that this new creation does not share the throne with another nature. They seem to have an awakened awareness of just what Regeneration has done for them. Any principle holding them back is seen as only the "remnant of the old nature's thinking found in the soul". On this issue Dr. Merryman suggested telling that to the "man who wrote Romans 6 & 7." In this familiar passage Paul wrote that sin (he also called it "another law") dwelled inside him, "warring" against the law of his mind.

Much of *The Passion War* is devoted to in-depth definitions of terms such as sin, flesh, and body of sin, and to exegetical mistakes made by propagators of one-naturism. The author makes a strong point in commenting on Romans 6:6 ("Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him...") that this passage cannot be used to teach the annihilation of the old nature. He rightly points out that death in the Scriptures always means separation, and never annihilation. (Physical death is separation of the soul and spirit from the body, and spiritual death is separation from God.) Thus "Our old identity in Adam stands crucified as it relates to our new identity in Christ." If our old man does not still exist there would hardly be any need for the admonition to "...lay aside the old man..." (Eph. 4:22).

Perhaps the lesson to be learned from the controversy is that we need to emphasize more just what it means to be a new creation in Christ. And we need to act like we are a new creation and realize that the old nature cannot contribute anything whatsoever to this "new person" we are in Christ. Any compromise with the old nature can only hinder the new one, who has been born of God. "for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." (I John 3:9). But I believe a caution is in order for those who believe in one-naturism: We could make a serious mistake by having confidence in our own thinking (our heart). "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts." (Proverbs 21:2).