

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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The Secret of Victory in the Christian Life

by Dan Trygg

“So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.”

Matthew 7:17-18

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. ⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

John 15:4-5

I was talking with someone this morning, and they were asking me **how it is that we can really get victory in our lives. If we have a sin problem, how can we get free?** If we really want to change, how can that happen? What do we have to do to really grow?

A lot of people misunderstand what the Christian life is all about. Many people are trying to patch up, fix up and prop up their old lives so that they look more presentable. *That is not Christianity at all. What the New Testament teaches is not rehab; it is replacement. It is not simply about changing our old lives; it is about exchanging them for another life.* We are not trying to defrag, debug and rearrange our old hard drive; we are to operate from another entirely different hard drive, one with a different operating system. **We are not to be trying to perfect our own righteousness; we are to learn to live in and operate out of Christ's righteousness within us.** We are not to live out of our own strength; we are to live out of the strength of the Spirit inside of us. We are not to love out of our own ability; we are to be vessels that express the limitless love of God that is within us. **Neither are we to try to continually die to ourselves; we are to consider ourselves to be dead *already* and choose to live out of the new life that is inside of us by the Holy Spirit** (Rom. 6:11).

The key to victory in our spiritual walk is summarized in the two verses at the top of this page. **Jesus plainly taught that a bad tree cannot bear good fruit, but a good tree cannot bear bad fruit.** A good tree will only produce good fruit. The application to our lives is that we were born sinners. **Every human being since Adam and Eve has been born with a “bent”, a propensity toward sin and selfishness. In that sense, every person is a “bad tree”, ...unsound, defective, decayed, rotten and unsuitable.** *The word picture for “bad” is of food that has gone bad and is therefore useless and unprofitable to eat.* **There is no one who can claim to be better than anyone else. Every one of us is a “bad tree”, with “rotten, unprofitable fruit”.** It does not matter how we may try to dress ourselves up, upon close examination our lives still reek of death and rottenness. Like Isaiah the prophet wrote, “For *all of us* have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment (lit., menstrual rags); and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away” (Isa. 64:6). The apostle Paul said, “For we have already charged that *all*, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: ‘*None* is righteous, no, *not one*; ¹¹ *no one* understands; *no one* seeks for God. ¹² *All* have turned aside; together they have become worthless; *no one* does good, *not even one*’” (Romans 3:9-12). Imagine going to a restaurant, and the waiter brought out a plate of spoiled food. The meat was sour and mushy, the potatoes had mold in them, the salad was wilted and full of flies, the green beans were slimy and red in places. However, it was obvious that an attempt at presentation on the plate had been made to make it look nice. There was even a sprig of parsley to make it *look better*, but the *smell* of the food was *awful*, and was a dead giveaway as to the poor quality of the food. Would you eat it, just because it *looked better* than another plate of food that was obviously rotten? No. No matter what the appearance, both plates were equally inedible and unprofitable. **No matter how we may dress up our best attempts at being righteous, they will still reek of the death and rottenness of our selfish, sinful nature.** A bad tree cannot bear good fruit, no matter how it may try.

The good news is that Jesus came to offer us *an entirely new life, ...a new existence, ...a new creation, ...a new nature* (Rom. 7:6; II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:16; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). **He came to offer to exchange our old defective life for His new, sound, whole, healthy life.** He comes to offer to make us a good tree, ...a healthy, sound, profitable tree that will only bear good fruit. **A tree will bear fruit according to its nature.** A defective, unprofitable tree can only produce defective, unprofitable fruit, but a sound, profitable tree can only produce sound, profitable fruit. As Jesus said, “You can't gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles, can you? (Matt. 7:16) The opposite is true, as well. You can't get thorns from grape vines, or thistles from fig trees. So, Jesus declared, “Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit” (Matt. 12:33). **That is the essence of the gospel: Jesus came to make us a good tree. More than that, He came to graft us into Himself, so that we would be part of Him.** We would be a branch of Him, the True Vine.

There can be no question that His nature is good, so if we are a branch of Him, how can we *not* bear good fruit? Being righteous, loving, and gracious is as natural to that new inner life as figs growing on fig trees.

So, what is the problem? Why is it that we struggle so much with sin? Why is there still rottenness in our lives? Return to what Jesus said, “A good tree *cannot* bear bad fruit.” **Somewhere, somehow, we are not living out of the power and life of Jesus inside of us. Instead, we are living out of that old nature, ...that old life, ...that old tree.**

I think there are two basic problems:

First, many of us are only hearing a truncated version of the gospel. We never hear about the whole idea of the exchanged life. All we get is the message that Jesus came to forgive our sins, and that is as far as we ever go. *That* is not the whole gospel, however. Jesus did not come to just deliver us from the *penalty* of our sin, He came to deliver us from the *power* of sin in our lives. **The only way for that to happen, however, is that we must forfeit our lives to Him, so He can live His life through us. We must exchange our lives for His.** Isn't that what He said? “He who would love his own life will lose it, but he who disregards his life in this world will keep it for life eternal”? (Jn. 12:25) “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me” (Lk. 9:23). “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5). Paul understood and preached this. “I have been crucified with Christ. ²⁰ It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:19-20). Unfortunately, a carnal Christian life has become the norm for most people in Western Christianity. We don't even realize that we could live a much more victorious and power-filled life, so we don't even consider trying to pursue it.

Secondly, we continue to live out of our old selves, instead of by the power of God within us. This is not a new problem. It is the same thing Paul had to address numerous times in his letters (Rom. 6-8; Gal. 5:1-25; Eph. 4:17-24; Col. 3:1-16). Jesus did not save us to live mediocre lives. He did not spill His blood so that we could live lives of mixture, ...lives that are centered more in fleshly desires and worldly counsel, rather than centered on His Lordship and His purposes for us. **Jesus clearly stated that if we followed Him and His word, we would find victory over sin** (Jn. 8:31-36). **He clearly expected that we ought to be able to obey all that He commanded us to do** (Matt. 28:19,20). **He told His men that if they followed Him, He would teach them to become fishers of men** (Matt. 4:19). The apostle Paul clearly expected that the people he was working with would be able to put away bitterness, angry words, unforgiveness, deception, and learn to walk in love and righteousness (Eph. 4,5). He fully expected that the fruit of the Spirit was a present possibility, not some religious fiction (Gal. 5:22,23). **We continuously find excuses and rationalizations as to why these things that clearly stated would be the result of following Jesus should not be expected of us.** The problem is that we look at these things from the standpoint of our old selves, our old fleshly nature. We think, “I know myself, and I know I am not capable of these things.” We know ourselves as the bad tree, and we accurately realize that the good fruit cannot come from that unclean, rotten source. **What we forget is that Jesus makes all the difference! Christ in us is the hope of glory** (Col. 1:27,28). **If we learn to live by the power of Christ in us, none of these things is impossible.**

So, how does this all work? What do we have to do to walk in the power and victory of Christ in us?

(1.) Know clearly what God's word says is true, namely that Jesus took us into Himself and put our old selves to death in Him, so that the body of sin might be nullified. We were buried with Him, and raised with Him by the resurrection power of God to newness of life. I am not the person I was. I am an entirely new person, living in my old body. This new self is a good, healthy tree, one that is incapable of producing bad fruit.

(2.) Believe that what God's word says is true, and begin to navigate by it. In spite of what you feel, or the defeats you may still experience, this is the bottom-line absolute truth. *This* is reality; it is just a matter of learning to walk in it.

(3.) Abide in Jesus as your source of life and as the director of your life. This means that you must focus on Jesus. The new life comes from Him by the power of His Spirit. The Spirit desires to honor Him, so don't bypass Him. He is the source. Your deliverance is in Him.

Abiding means:

(a.) to learn everything you can about Him – who He is, what He did, how He operated;

(b.) to ask for revelation and insight into what it means that He lives in you;

(c.) to learn to differentiate what is the leading of His Spirit, and what is your own flesh;

(d.) to quickly acknowledge and confess when you have stepped into the flesh, and put failures aside;

(e.) to develop a prayerful life of dependence, asking God to manifest His life through you;

(f.) to take risks to obey what you may perceive to be the promptings of God in your life.