

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Death and Life in Our Bodies

by Dan Trygg

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; ⁸ *we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹ For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death works in us, but life in you. ¹³ But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed, therefore I spoke,’ we also believe, therefore also we speak; ¹⁴ knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. ¹⁵ For all things *are* for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. ¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

II Corinthians 4:7-18

We have been looking at the notion of the “exchanged life”, i.e., that what it means to be a follower of Jesus is to abandon all self-rights and self-righteousness in order to receive from God *His* righteousness, *His* character, *His* empowerment and *His* plan for your life. The Christian life is not just a clean-up program to make our souls more presentable to God. Jesus and the apostles did not call us to try to get better and better, through self-effort and discipline. No. They taught that such moralistic or religious efforts were totally in vain to truly transform our inner selves. **The Christian message is counter-intuitive. It goes against all of our natural tendencies and expectations.** Until we come to see and understand the genius of God’s plan for us, we will keep trying and trying in our own strength to get better, ...or we will give up in exasperation and defeat, and settle for a pathetic substitute for what God had in mind for us.

Instead of trying to make our lives acceptable to God, we need to understand that **His intent is to convince us to give up our old life, our old self, and our old mindset in order that we might receive from Him an entirely new and different life, a new self, and a new way of thinking and living.** This message starts at the beginning of the gospel preaching of the New Testament. We are to “repent”, that is, “change our perspective” and trust in the good news that God’s Kingdom (His dominion) has come. **Jesus taught that if we wanted to follow Him, we must deny our selves, take up our crosses, and pursue Him** (Lk. 9:23). Note carefully what He said, ...and what He *didn't* say. **He didn't say that we had to deny things from our selves.** We could relate to that, and many of us would be OK with such an expectation. **The battle line is not primarily about activities, things or experiences.** He does not advise us to give up things in order to make ourselves better. No. **Instead, He exhorts us to deny our very selves!** This goes much deeper. No. **This goes right to the core.** To be a Christian means to hold your life and heart open to God and say, “Here I am, Lord. I throw open my entire being, my whole identity, thoughts and expectations about my life, who I am, my purpose, my agenda, and I lay all these things aside. **Do with me as You will.** I want to want what You want for and with me. **I choose to denounce my right to be a separate self, and willingly devote myself to fulfilling Your purpose for my being here.”**

How many of us have really thought of following Jesus in those terms? How many of us have ever really, honestly given God the place of being our King? How many of us have really, honestly said, ...*and meant*, “Thy will be done on earth, ...*in my life*..., as it is in heaven”? **Have we ever really come to the place where we really embrace, “I have come to do Your will” (Heb. 10:7)? Is that really what your life is all about? Are you here to do God's will?** Has that become the focus and passion of *your* life? This is what Jesus is talking about when He said that we must deny ourselves and follow Him. He has to have pre-eminence. He has to have first place. **In order for that to become a reality, we have to choose to deny our self-agenda, our self-expectation, our self-preferences, and be ready for anything that He might bring for us to do.** We must deny ourselves, take up our cross (our death to self), and follow Him.

A key aspect of NT preaching is that our death to self has been accomplished for us in Christ. In other words, we don't have to go through a long, painful, arduous death-process in order to put down the self and be made new. Paul tells us that we *have been* crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:19; 5:24; 6:14; Rom. 6:6). Some do not understand this, and are still attempting to accomplish what has already been done for us in Christ. **This is a finished work. We are exhorted by Paul to “count on it” (Rom. 6:11). The same is true of the new life. We don't have to create a new self. That, too, was done for us when we trusted in Jesus.** We were born from above, not from human will or self-effort, but from God, as we responded by trusting in the gospel message we heard (Jn. 1:12,13; 3:3-5; Jas. 1:18; I Pet. 1:23).

The apostle John emphasizes this by assuring us that *now we are children of God*. **It may not be fully apparent in our experience, yet, but it is a reality. If we are born again, new things have come, and we are not as we were.**

This brings us to the passage for our study today. The “treasure” Paul talked about in verse 7 is the light of God’s Spirit inside of us. In the word picture, we are likened to a clay pot, in which God has put “the light of the experiential-knowledge of the glory of God”. The point of the illustration is that **anyone who saw light emanating from a clay pot would know that there was some other light source there**. Clay does not burn or produce light. In a similar way, when our lives reveal the character and nature of God, it is quite evident that this is not the result of human effort. It is only something God could produce. This implies some interesting concepts. First, **whatever the life of God in us would look like, it would be as dramatically different as light coming from a rock!** It would *really* stand out! Secondly, anyone who knows *us*, or *any* human being, would automatically recognize that, whatever this behavior may be that reveals God’s presence, *we* did not do it! This life-from-God is radically different from what humans can produce or sustain. **People just don’t, or can’t, live this way. The conclusion must be, “This person must be indwelt by God!”** Isn’t this stated or implied elsewhere in the NT? Weren’t people *amazed* by the love and power evident in the early church? Doesn’t Paul indicate that we are *not* to be living like mere people (I Cor. 3:3)? Didn’t they recognize something in Jesus and the disciples that defied explanation (Matt. 13:54; Acts 4:7-14)?

How does this work? How does this come about, or how is it made evident? In general terms, Paul would say that the power and presence of God are made visible when we give expression to His leading. There is an obvious spectrum of responses to the Holy Spirit’s leading. **Anytime we are responding to Him, we are revealing His heart and His nature. The inner presence of God’s life becomes dramatically visible, however, when we do things that are radically different than what we could or would otherwise do.**

In this chapter, Paul is talking about how the life of God is most clearly seen when we are called to embrace the death of self. Again, the death of self has already been accomplished for us in Christ, just as surely as we have been born again by His Spirit. *In our experience, however, we must make the choice to agree with those facts, to count on them as true, and give ourselves to walk them out in our actions.* You see, **“death” in the scriptures means more “separation” than “annihilation”.** When Paul says that our old man was “put to death with Jesus”, he is referring to the reality that Christ *broke the bond* to the old man. We are no longer *bound* to live from that old source, or by that old way of living. That tie is broken, and a new possibility exists. We can now live from a new source, by the power of God. The confusing part is that **we still must “put off the old man, with its evil practices, be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and put on the new man”** (Eph. 4:22-24). So, **there is an eternal once-for-all, factual basis for our freedom from self, but there is also a moment-by-moment experiential application of Jesus’ death-and-resurrection-work in our lives.**

It is important to see that Paul is largely focusing on the difficulties that we face in order to walk in the power of the Spirit. This does not mean that it is *always* heavy or oppressive. There are certainly times of victory, praise and glory. **The road to victory in the Spirit is to embrace the death of self.** This is *not* a punishment for sin, nor a way to earn God’s power. Again, the old self was put to death with Jesus. **This is simply a matter of deciding what we are going to walk in, the power of self or the power of God. We can only live one way or the other at any given moment.** If we want to live the radical, supernatural life of God, ...the life that others will see and recognize as being from God..., then **we must choose to walk with Jesus even when our flesh would protest, whine, complain, shrink away from, or resist. In that sense, we bear in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus could be made visible in our mortal flesh.** Just as Jesus had to make these same choices, and lay His life down to accomplish God’s will, so we too must choose to disregard self-agenda, and step forward in faith into God’s leading. **Note that the death of self is not the goal, or the end point. It is merely choosing to put aside the mindset and resources of self in order to make room to receive the power and resources of the indwelling Holy Spirit and walk into the will of God.** As we step forward into God’s will, His life will become evident in what He works through us.

Finally, please **look carefully at the reality of the death struggle** in verses 8,9. We are afflicted or squeezed by life, but we are not totally crushed, restrained or stopped. Life pressures us, but cannot keep us from God’s will. We are perplexed or at a loss regarding what is going on, sometimes, but not utterly at a loss. God will leave us enough clues and markers to continue on. We are persecuted, but not abandoned. When people oppose us, God will comfort us (I Pet. 4:14). We may be “thrown down”, but not destroyed. People may attack, and even harm us, but nothing can truly destroy us. These things may temporarily oppose us as momentary, relatively insignificant afflictions. **As we recognize that it is not about us, our agenda or temporary comfort, but it is about carrying out the Father’s will, we can choose to disregard fleshly fears and selfish distractions, and press forward in obedience.** As we partner with God, He will reveal His peace, love, grace, and power through the very things that would otherwise have defeated us. **The key is to look not at things as they appear in the short term, but to focus on the eternal perspective.**