

# Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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## Why Still Live In Sin?

by Dan Trygg

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? ...<sup>6</sup> our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be rendered inoperative, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ...<sup>11</sup> Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, <sup>13</sup> and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

Romans 6:1,2,6,11-13

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; <sup>2</sup> and He Himself is the propitiation (satisfactory-sacrifice) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. <sup>3</sup> By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. <sup>4</sup> The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; <sup>5</sup> but whoever keeps His word, in him the agapē-love of God has truly been perfected (matured, fully-grown). By this we know that we are in Him: <sup>6</sup> the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”

I John 2:1-6

It is clear from the passages above that both Paul and John taught that **Christians should expect to obtain victory over sin in their lives.** Paul very clearly stated, “How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” It was incredulous to him that some people were suggesting that it didn’t matter if you continued in sin, because there was more than enough grace to cover our shortcomings. His strong reaction is, “May it never be!” He chides them, as if to say, “**Did you miss the whole point? You were put to death in Jesus for the express purpose of rendering that old sin principle inoperative in our lives. Why would you go back there? Why would you still dabble with sin?**” They had been slaves to sin, but their old selves were crucified with Jesus so that they could be set free from that slavery. “So”, he concludes, “**consider yourselves to be dead to sin, ...as lifeless and unresponsive to its calls and temptations. Instead, consider yourselves to be alive and responsive to God in Christ Jesus.**” Note that **they have a choice**, according to verses 12 and 13. **They could either allow sin to reign as a king in their lives**, with the result that they would obey its desires, ... **or they could put themselves at the disposal of God as His servants.** They could continue to offer their minds and bodies to sin as instruments to express and serve unrighteousness, ... **or they could present their minds and bodies to God as instruments to express and serve righteousness.**

**This choice is a new possibility which they did not have before they were in Christ.** By joining themselves to Christ in faith, they could now experience the life-transforming impact of being put into Christ. What he says is that **Christ took us into Himself, and paid the penalty and death for our sin.** Paul says “**we were united with Him**” (Rom. 6:5). When He died, we died *with* Him. When He was buried, we were buried *with* Him. When He was raised from the dead, we *also* were raised from the dead. **The significance of this is that all our old obligations and relationships were brought to an end when we died.** The debt which sin accumulated was death. That *debt* was *satisfied* by our death with Christ. Our *slavery to sin* came to an *end* when we died. *You can’t get a dead slave to do anything for you!* **By our death with Jesus, sin has no more claim on our lives, our minds, or our physical bodies.** Our debts and obligations were all satisfied by our death. **Furthermore, we were raised together with Christ. This is a new life free and clear of obligations or encumbrances of the past.** We can *choose* to invest our lives toward *God*, toward *life*, toward *righteousness* and *freedom*. **We can place ourselves at the ready to serve God, and give our attention, energies, resources and abilities to Him.**

While Paul emphasizes our positional, legal standing in Christ, **the apostle John emphasizes a very pragmatic approach.** He says **he wrote his letter in order that his readers would not sin. That is an important objective and possibility he repeatedly places before our minds**, as we follow his argument. He is balanced, however. He acknowledges that Christians *can*, and *do*, sin. We have an Advocate for that, Jesus, ...our Priest, Sacrifice and Defender. Don’t mistake that disclaimer as in conflict with the main point, however. The main point is that we would *not* sin. *John masterfully leads us, with simple language, to recognize that walking in disobedience, worldliness and lovelessness are inconsistent with walking with Jesus.* The underlying message is that **if we just abide in and walk with Jesus, we will walk in love and righteousness.** (Paul says the same thing in Galatians 5, but he uses different terminology. If we ‘walk in the Spirit’, we *will* walk in obedience and righteousness.) In chapter 3, he points out that, even though we don’t see the fullness of it yet, we already *are* children of God. When Jesus returns, we will experience our full redemption, and become *like* Him as He is. Those who have this hope should be purifying themselves, to become pure like He is. John tells us that **Jesus came to take away sins, and there is no sin in Him. He then restates the principle from chapter two: “No one who abides in Him sins.”**

To this, John adds another challenging thought, “Every one sinning has not seen Him nor experientially-known Him” (3:6). Both of these verbs are in a tense that implies an experience that happened in the past with ongoing effect. **There are different kinds and levels of knowledge. John is talking about a kind of knowledge that transforms a person, so that he is no longer the same.** This is not just intellectual knowledge, knowing Bible facts or even correct theology. *If a person is willing to continue in sin, John is saying he has NOT had such a transformative experience with God.* This statement also serves a teaser. **To the one who is genuinely thirsty to find freedom from sin, this indicates that there is an experience with God to pursue,** which will make a radical difference in one’s personal victory in this area. Interestingly, Paul speaks of a similar experience in Ephesians (3:14-21). **This apparently does not happen automatically.** Paul *prayed for* the believers there, and encouraged them to *seek* this. **Incidentally, this has been repeatedly confirmed by the experiences of countless Christians throughout church history.** Wesley’s doctrine of “entire sanctification” and the various holiness movements testify of this.

John continues his instruction. Verses 7-10 have often been misunderstood. **John is not talking about believers and unbelievers in these verses. He is talking about the new man versus the old man.** That is the only explanation that fully makes sense of these verses. **The basis of righteous behavior is a righteous nature,** one as righteous as He Himself is (3:7). **The unrighteous behavior comes from an unrighteous nature.** “The one doing the sin is of the devil” (3:8), says John. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. That which is born of God (the new man) *does not* sin, and, in fact, *cannot* sin. God’s seed abides in it, and it is *not able to* sin (3:9). **Isn’t this what Jesus taught? “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). So, if you are a bad tree, what hope have you? How can you become a good tree? Only by being radically changed inside by a new inner creation.** The tree must be “born again” or “created anew” in order to bear good fruit. **Isn’t that the message of the gospel? Jesus said, “You must be born again (born from above)” (Jn. 3:3-8).** “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). **“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new (entirely-different) creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).**

**The apostle Peter taught the same things.** He said that *God has given us all the power we need for living as He intends.* **It comes through a profound flash-of-insight knowledge or recognition of God and Jesus, and through understanding and implementing the promises He has revealed to us.** He called us to His glory and virtue, and intends for us to become sharers in His divine nature, having escaped the corruption of the world (II Pet. 1:2-4). Another way of saying this is that we will be filled with His Spirit and escape the cycle of sin and its consequences.

Let’s try to sum these things up, and clarify. **(1.) We were put into Jesus in His death and resurrection. This unity with Him is the basis of our freedom from bondage to sin.** Our debts and obligations were paid for and our old covenants and relationships came to an end in our death with Him. We are raised to a new identity, and a new calling. We are no longer slaves to sin. We are children of God, called to live for Him. **(2.) More than a mere legal shift, we have actually been made new. Our ability to live differently comes from the new essential nature God has created within us.** A new nature will produce new fruit. That capacity has been given to us through a new spiritual birth. **(3.) While these are true, present realities, it is also true that we still have the old bodies, minds, emotions and sinful nature with us.** The old life is familiar. We are used to living life without God. The old master, sin, still calls us to obey its voice and inclinations. **(4.) We also have the partnership and help of the Holy Spirit to prompt us toward God and His will.** The new covenant is practically manifested by the nudges, urges, promptings, reminders, emotions and leadings of the Holy Spirit. **These truths set the stage for our battle with sin.**

**How do we walk in victory?** Scripture universally expects that we *will* move away from sinful living, and learn to walk in the Spirit. How? **First, we need to know that this is a possibility, ...no, the expectation of God.** Without an awareness of this as a possibility or promise of God, we will never even pursue it. **Second, we need to repent, change our perspective on this matter.** We need to know what Christ has done, who we now are in Him, and what He has made available to us. **Third, we need to choose to believe God’s word.** We need to count ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. We need to put aside the old attitudes, beliefs, actions and patterns of behavior we have learned in the past, or that we recognize are prompted by the flesh. We need to present ourselves to God, and put on the attitudes, mindset, expectations, actions and patterns of behavior that are consistent with Jesus and are prompted by the Spirit. **Fourth, we need to watch and wait for the Spirit’s working.** This is where faith really gets tested. Our flesh wants to move ahead of God, to “make something up” rather than wait. **Fifth, we must act on the nudgings or urges of the Spirit.** He *will* lead you to do things that are different or uncomfortable. Expect that. God’s ways are *not* like our ways, so we should not be surprised that He should lead us in unfamiliar paths. **Finally, we must be persistent.** God *will* lead us into victory, but walking in the Spirit is a *skill* learned through *practice*.