

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Inside-Out: Old Person versus New Person

by Dan Trygg

“So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the unbelievers also walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ being darkened in their understanding, estranged from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; ¹⁹ and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. ²⁰ But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²² that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” Ephesians 4:17-24

“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. ⁵ Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁶ For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its practices, ¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.” Colossians 3:2-10

We have been going through a series of studies on a topic I have called “Inside-Out”, an examination of the dynamics of the New Covenant. In the Old Covenant, God revealed His moral will and the requirements for living and serving Him by giving His people the “torah”, ...the “law” or “instructions”. They were given an understanding of what God wanted from them, and He promised that if they would follow those instructions that He would bless them. He desired that they follow His instructions and experience the benefits of living by His counsel. This would be very evident in their own community stability, their health, their wisdom and their prosperity. He wanted them to be a people set apart for Him, who could demonstrate to the world the benefits of following Him. He desired to demonstrate His holiness, goodness and wisdom through their lives. If they disregarded Him and His instructions, however, He would discipline them, by removing His protections, by allowing the negative consequences of their disobedience to come upon them, and even to begin to oppose and judge them. This was made very clear. The people understood, and they agreed to the terms of this covenant. It all was very straightforward, and did not seem to be that hard. The problem, however, was that their hearts were not in it. They did not have a heart to know, revere and honor God. They had only a heart for their own short-term pleasures. As a result, they did not follow God’s ways, and experienced His discipline instead of His blessings. Generation after generation, for nearly 1,500 years, went through a cycle of disobedience, discipline, and disaster until they, as a people, began to seek God once again. Then, He would help them, ...save them and provide for them once again. Inevitably, however, they would wander off again. The problem was their hearts, ...the wellspring of their lives (Prov. 4:23).

As Paul admonished the Christians in Ephesians 4, he described a “way of living” that is reminiscent of this. People who did not know God were living according to the futility of their minds, trying to fill the emptiness of their hearts by pursuing sensual pleasures. The problem was that they were estranged, separated or alienated from the life of God, because of their ignorance, and the dullness of their hearts. The phrase translated as “having become callous” literally means “putting-pain-away from themselves”, ...or as we might say in modern speech, “they were stuffing their pain”. Then, they gave themselves over to sensuality. They pursued “every unclean work” with greediness, ...an unending desire for more and more. Basically, they were trying to fill the inner emptiness with experiences that they hoped would distract, preoccupy, and satisfy their inner need. Paul tells the believers to “no longer live as the unbelievers live”. He had to say that, because it was quite easy to continue to live as they had learned to live, ...to continue to follow the patterns of living the surrounding culture was promoting and demonstrating.

“But y’all did not learn Christ in this manner.” There *is* another way to live! The attempt to get life from external experiences is not consistent with learning and following Jesus. The word for “learn” here is the verbal form of the word for “disciple”. It refers to learning by instruction, inquiry or experience *in order to implement* or *put into practice*. It is “learning to do”. Here, it is “learning to do Jesus”. It is “discovering how to walk like Christ”, not just in the sense of trying to emulate His life, but learning to live as He lived.

“If indeed you heard Him, and in Him y’all were taught, according as the truth is in Jesus.” Apparently, not everyone was getting proper instruction in this. Of course, if we don’t have a clear picture of what is possible, ...what is available to us, or even expected of us..., if we don’t know that there is another way to live, and we are called to

learn to live in that manner... , well, then we will probably default to what we have known. We will continue to live as unbelievers live, simply because we don't know how believers are able and supposed to live!

If we want to “learn the truth that is in Jesus”, there is a three-part process that Paul describes.

First, we are told to “put away from you the old person, and the former customary manner of living”. Note what Paul says about this “old person”: “it is being corrupted according to the lusts of deceit”. Obviously, in order for that to be true, it must still exist. Whatever “rebirth” means, it does not mean that the old life, the old self, the old identity is gone, or has ceased to exist. It is still somehow present with me, ...and it is getting *worse*. It is being corrupted, ruined, spoiled, led astray, being destroyed by “strong desires of deception”. The word for “deception” refers to “trickery, fraud, delusion, seduction, misleading-attraction, erroneous thinking”. **The old person is misled, fooled, seduced and tricked by false hopes and empty promises. It is conned by false beliefs.** It is drawn and enticed to pursue ways of living that are doomed to fail, ...unprofitable and unfulfilling. In order to discover how to walk the Jesus-walk, we have to put that whole self, that entire mindset and habitual manner of living, away from us. This is a conscious choice, ...a choice made in the moment, for that moment, ...moment by moment. We may have to make that decision many times a day, ...as often as we are tempted to just step into that default pattern of living.

Second, we are “to be being renewed in the spirit of our minds”, or, “to renew (for ourselves) by the Spirit concerning the mind”. This verb, *ananeōō*, describes making something fresh, new, revived, different than it was before. In Romans 12:2, we are to “be transformed by the renewing of the mind”. In both of these passages, **the “mind” is not just the organ of thought; it is our “perception”.** We need to pursue and experience a fresh and different perception, a new way of looking at and understanding the reality around us, and also ourselves. If we do not perceive things differently, we will not be able to live differently.

Third, we are “to put on the new person, the one according to God created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” The word for “new” here is *kainos*. It means, “new, strange, recently-made, newly-invented; something unheard of, unprecedented, something that did not exist before; of unusual, different, better and superior quality.” **This new person did not exist before. It was created within us when we came to faith. Note that its very nature is already righteous and holy.** The word for “holy” here is not the typical word, *hagios*, which refers to “dedication, separation and consecration to God”. The word Paul used here is *hosiotēs*. It refers to a heart that “desires to please God, and expresses His nature”. This new person is already righteous. It delights in God and communicates His life.

You may ask, **“How is this possible?”** Paul answers this question in Colossians 3. **We died.** We died with Christ (2 Cor. 5:14-17; Rom. 6:2-11; 7:4-6; Gal. 2:19,20; Col. 2:20; 3:3; 2 Tim 2:11). **And we were raised with Him to a new life,** ...a new, born-from-above life. In Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3, this new life is described as a new person. These are the facts. This is what Christ has done, and has made available to us. It is clear from both Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 that **there is an old person, as well as a new person.** The “real” us, the person that exists *now* and will live on into eternity with God, is that new person, which has been created in Christ Jesus. Nevertheless, while we are here in these earthly bodies, we still experience the reality of that old life, that old person, the old sinful self. The old person is affected by sin and selfishness, and is continuing to be corrupted by deceitful desires. The new person has been created in likeness of God, is righteous and desires to please God and express His heart. **Experientially, we can live by the dynamics of that former person,** ...how we used to live our lives before Christ, ...**or we can live by the dynamics of that new person.** The early church, at the time when Paul wrote Ephesians, was teaching people how to live as Christ lived, by putting aside that old self, learning to perceive things differently by the Spirit, and putting on the new person.

In Colossians, Paul made it even more practical. **Since we died with Christ, we ought to put our members to death toward sin.** Put those practices away from you (3:5,8). In Romans 6:11, Paul had said, “So consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive toward God in Christ Jesus.” So here in Colossians, if we died with Christ, then we are to count ourselves and our members as dead toward the sinful practices we used to engage in, and the unprofitable way we used to live. **Instead, we are to choose to embrace life from God, put on the new self, and give expression to the characteristics that come from that new life.**

That seems to be the key: Living the old way was living apart from the life of God. Empty souls attempted to “get life” from lifeless things. **Living the new way comes as we turn aside from that old way, ...perceive the leadings of the Spirit, ...consciously choose to identify with the new person, ...and then embrace and follow the leadings of the new heart that desires God and loves to express His life.** New hearts that are filled with God's life will naturally overflow in the fruit of the Spirit and the characteristics of God's nature. This is not a passive endeavor, however. It requires conscious thought, active choices, seeking to perceive things differently, and then obediently following the leadings of the Spirit. **This is Practical Christianity 101.** This is the “truth that is in Jesus” that we are supposed to be taught as part of our discipleship training. **We are to be taught to live by the life, leading and empowerment of the Holy Spirit,** ...just as Jesus lived.