

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Inside-Out: Suppression versus Expression

by Dan Trygg

“Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. ⁵ For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. ⁶ But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. ⁸ ...apart from the Law sin is dead. ⁹ And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died; ¹⁰ and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; ¹¹ for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me... ¹⁴ I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. ¹⁵ For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. ¹⁷ So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. ¹⁹ For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. ²⁰ But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.”

Romans 7:4-6,8-11,14-20

“I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”

Galatians 5:16

“The law of the Spirit of the life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”

Romans 8:2

One of the challenging realities of learning to walk out our new life in Christ is that we need to discover a totally different way of living than what we are used to. We have been taught, since we were little, that we are to *suppress* the inappropriate urges, noises and actions that other people would find offensive or wrong. We were disapproved, reprimanded, ridiculed or punished for behavior that was not considered acceptable. We learned to suppress those actions that are not agreeable to the standards of those around us, ...or even our own moral code. **The problem, however, is that, in Adam, we are sinners. The reality is that sin, the principle of selfishness which is within us, is pervasive. It continues to affect our thoughts and emotions, and motivates those negative behaviors we otherwise try to suppress.** Even now, having been born from above, and having the life of the Holy Spirit, we find that sin is still at work in our lives. As Paul described in the passage above, we find ourselves choosing to do the very things we do not wish to do, sometimes. We also find that we still gravitate toward things that appeal to our fleshly desires, ...things that are out of balance, or not consistent with our Christian values.

Usually, we try to face sin head on, and tell ourselves, “No!” We measure our selfish urges against the moral standards we know are “right”, and we try to limit ourselves. We suppress the inappropriate urge, ...at least if we are trying to be like Christ in our attitudes and behaviors. As we study the Bible, we become more aware of what God is looking for from us. Try as we might, however, we still find ourselves giving in to things that we know we shouldn't, or blurting out something cross or impatient, or participating in activities that we know do not honor Christ. Many people don't seem to care, but, ...even though we *do care*, we find our success at being “good” or “kind” or “upright” is not much better than that of others. Maybe we don't go to the extremes that others do, but we see sin popping up in our lives way more than we want. It is frustrating, disturbing, and even defeating.

Often, we try harder. We discipline ourselves more stringently. We take on a number of religious practices, or limit our exposure to the things we struggle with, hoping to keep our lives under better control. Sometimes people will go to church, or religious gatherings, *more*, ...thinking that being more devoted will help. Others, add more extreme practices, ...fasting, harsh treatment of the body, extended times in prayer or solitude, going on pilgrimages, or even getting involved in Christian service or missions..., but find that **even these endeavors do not seem to defeat or stop the lusts of the flesh, or the selfishness that is revealed in the unguarded moment**, or the self-centeredness and pride that often follows such “spiritual heroics”. The Pharisees were experts at such measures, but they fell prey to sins of the heart, ...pride, arrogance, judgment of others, ...as well as materialism and greed, ...and some indulged in “acceptable sins”, such as over-eating, ...and others still dabbled in the more egregious sins of the flesh, such as sexual lusts, fornication or adultery. We have our contemporary religious figures who have no better success than they did, ...even those who outwardly confess Jesus. Before we judge them too harshly, or totally dismiss their faith commitment, we should read again the passage above. **People may “believe in Jesus”, but not know how to successfully walk out their faith commitment.** Their moral failures and defeats may be destroying their own souls, as they find themselves again and again caught up in the insanity of sin that seems to control them. Many have even taken their own lives, because they saw no way out of the hypocrisy and shame of their existence.

The problem is that *suppression of sin does not work.* Simply *not doing* the things we are drawn to do does not address the underlying activity of sin, or deal with the things we do that empower it to rise up within us, deceive us and cause us to fall. **We act out in sinful behaviors, attitudes and words, because sin is still active within us. Our old nature, ...our Adamic self..., is sinful.** Paul tells us that the old person is continuing to be corrupted according to the lusts of deceit (Eph. 4:22). It still is drawn to those old attractions, former patterns of living and the past lies we believed. If we continue in that mindset, it is only a matter of time before we find ourselves doing the former behaviors of our past. **We choose to sin because the power of sin is in our members.** If we dabble with it, or agitate it, or empower it, it will rise up, deceive us, pull us into sinful behavior, and the alienation and lifelessness of death (disconnection from the life of God's Spirit) that accompanies it.

One of the things that aggravates or empowers sin is the law, ...any moral standard that we try to live by in our own strength. As soon as we focus on some "good standard" to try to do, or we identify some "bad behavior" we try to avoid, **the power of sin within us is awakened, revived, it seems to rise up inside of us and begins to work in our minds and emotions, distracting, preoccupying, deceiving, agitating until we are set up to act out in ways we sometimes don't even want to.** The law seems to give rebellious sin some solid ground to push against, and we find ourselves choosing to act according to that selfish nature. "The power of sin is the law", Paul wrote (1 Cor. 15:56).

The good news, however, is that there is another way to live, ...a way that leads us from bondage to freedom. The crux of it is to recognize that we who are in Christ are no longer bound to sin, or the law. We were put to death with Him, so that we could be free from them, "...so that we might be joined to Another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God." In Romans 6:6, Paul wrote, "our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be made powerless, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin." The phrase, "be made powerless" literally means to "be idled down". We were also joined with Him in His resurrection "so that we too might walk in newness of life" (6:4). So, **Paul concludes that we are to consider ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. The legal tie is broken.**

Now we have a choice who we will serve. We can present ourselves, ...our members, the parts of our being ..., to sin, as instruments for unrighteousness, ...or, we can present ourselves to God as tools for righteousness. **Since Christ has set us free from sin and death, then we ought to no longer give ourselves to serve them.** Paul writes, "Sin will no longer be master over us, because we are no longer under law, but under grace" (6:14). Grace here is *not* just the grace that pays for sin. *Grace here is the life of God in Christ* (cf. Heb. 4:16). So, we have a choice. **We choose to serve sin, either directly, or by trying to live by the law by the power of the old life and self-determination, ...or we choose to present ourselves to serve God by the power of the grace-life made available to us in Jesus Christ.**

Whichever way we choose, we will get the results of our choice. If we choose our own way, the way of sin, self, and self-discipline, we will experience death (life-less-ness, alienation from God), ...but if we choose to serve God by the grace-life of Jesus, we will experience righteousness and life. **God's plan was to put us to death with Jesus so that we could be separated from sin, and we might belong to Another, to the One who was risen from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.** This last phrase, "that we might bear fruit to God" is pregnant with meaning. **It implies a relationship of dependence, one where we receive life from Jesus, which grows and matures in us until it produces HIS fruit in us.** This life *from Jesus through* us will be dedicated *to* God's praise and glory. It is a life *from Jesus to* God. **Jesus is the Source of our life, and God is the goal of our existence. Everything comes from Him and points to Him.**

The key to this new way of living is that, instead of focusing on *suppressing sin*, we are to focus on *expressing the life of Jesus* which is in us through the Holy Spirit. Instead of dealing with sin, head to head, **this way of living bypasses sin entirely.** It is *irrelevant*, in one sense, in that **it is already defeated and separated from the core of who we are. Now we are new creatures, with a new life inside.** God will bring to completion the work He has begun in us (Phil. 1:6). We have the resurrection life of Jesus within us, mediated to us by the Holy Spirit. **Now we are to learn to perceive and respond to the leading of the Spirit. Instead of *suppressing sin*, which is in our members, our "outer person", ...our new manner of living is all about *giving expression to the grace-life of Jesus which is within our "inner person"*.** Instead of trying to "do our best" in our own ability, we learn to wait for the expectation of empowered righteousness which comes from the Spirit (Gal. 5:5). Instead of living by our own minds and understanding, we learn to wait upon the revelation and direction of the Spirit inside of us.

There are clear parallels with this, and with Jesus' teaching about the Vine and the branches. He said that if we would simply abide in Him, we would be healthy, sound, full of life and vitality, and we would produce abundant fruit, ...fruit that would bring glory to Him. *The key to all of this is to develop a relationship of nurture, sustenance, and fullness from Him.* **So much of what we do that is sinful comes about as we are in a place of lack, a condition of emptiness, dissatisfaction, stress, exhaustion, irritability. If we can learn to find our vitality and fulness in the life of Jesus, so that He is our fullness, satisfaction, peace, invigoration and calmness, sin will have no place to express itself.**