

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Positive Change For Positive Credibility

by Dan Trygg

“...you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

Matthew 1:21

“It is a trustworthy saying, ...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...”

1 Timothy 1:15

“...He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in Him sins...” 1 John 3:5-6

“...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; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died together-with Christ, we believe that we shall also live together-with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, being-raised from the dead, no longer dies; death no longer is master over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Even so consider yourselves corpses to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign-as-king in your mortal body so that you obey its strong-desires, ¹³ and do not go on offering the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; instead, offer yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

Romans 6:6-14

“Wake up..., and stop sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.”

I Corinthians 15:34

“As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For He says, ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, NOW is the time of God's favor, NOW is the day of salvation. ³ We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. ⁴ Rather, in everything demonstrating ourselves as servants of God...”

2 Corinthians 6:1-4

I was at a restaurant one day, and one of the workers there asked, “Pastor Dan, could I ask you a question?” “Sure,” I replied. This person said, “I just wondered if somehow gluttony has been removed from the list of sins God is displeased with. I serve people here at the restaurant, and, I’m sorry to say, so many of those who come here for Bible study, or are coming from church meetings, have obvious problems with overeating. More than that, they are often demanding, impatient and disrespectful. I’m not a Christian, but shouldn’t their faith be making a difference in how they live? I mean, they shouldn’t be like that, should they?” I assured them that God’s standards and expectations haven’t changed. They were absolutely right. **Following Jesus should bring about positive changes in peoples’ lives.** I said, “It is a sad reality that many church people are *not* good examples of what it means to be a Christian. However, **their poor behavior does not change the truth of who God is, or what He expects.**”

While it is true that the negative example of some believers does not change the *facts of what Jesus did, or what God expects*, **it does tend to cause people to shy away from a closer look at Jesus. It is bad advertising. One of the common objections people have against believing in Christ centers on this very issue, “What about all the hypocrites in the church?”** We may tend to minimize *our* hypocrisy, by measuring ourselves against others whose sin issues are worse (at least in *our* minds), or more blatant. We are not fooling anyone, however. Isn’t it interesting that even **an unbeliever, who would not profess to be an expert in theology or religion, can easily put a finger on actions and attitudes that seemed contradictory to what a Christian “should be like”?** It is not rocket science.

Following Jesus *should* bring about a positive change in character and behavior. Right? **What this person was struggling with was the conflict between what apparently *should be* happening in the lives of those who claim to be following Jesus, and what was *actually experienced* in dealing with them. They call this conflict “*cognitive dissonance*”. It occurs when what you *expect* should be does not match up with what *actually is*. There is a moment of confusion, as you try to sort things out. **This is a very uncomfortable state of mind. You can’t stay there. Typically, you will make some kind of decision to alleviate the confusion.** In this case, you will either decide that *the claims of Christianity are not true*, ...or that *your expectations are misguided*, or that *these customers are just poor examples*. The sad part is that **many people choose to reject Jesus because of what they see in people who claim to be His. This is understandable. We have been wired to recognize and respond to evidence.** God created us with the ability to reason, and to recognize causal relationships. Even Jesus said that **we would recognize the false prophets and teachers by examining the fruit of their lives** (Matt. 7:15-20). In another place, He said, “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; ³⁸ but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father” (Jn. 10:37-38). **Not only did Jesus expect and invite people to examine His life for consistency, He told His disciples that *people would recognize those who were His real disciples by the fruit of their lives, ...especially that they would have love for one another*** (Jn. 13:34,35). The observations of this server were right on. The *walk* did *NOT* match the *talk*.**

If you will read through the selected passages at the top of this handout, you will note that they have to do with (a.) *Christ’s purpose in coming*, as well as (b.) how God expects us to utilize the power of Jesus in our lives. We see:

(1.) Jesus came to save sinners. The word “save” means to deliver, free, rescue, liberate, keep safe and preserve. What did He come to save them from?

(2.) Jesus came to save sinners from their sins. He came to save us from the power, bondage and penalty of sin. Note that these really are inseparable concepts. Wherever sin is, it exerts its deceptive influence, its relentless temptation, and destructive consequences. To be freed from sin would mean to be able to expose and cut off the cunning foreplay of sinful temptation, to successfully and repeatedly escape from its suggestion, and to learn to replace old sinful, selfish behaviors with positive actions prompted by the Spirit of God.

(3.) Jesus came to save sinners from their sins so that they would serve God. Jesus did not come merely to offer us a way to overcome troublesome habits. Jesus came to liberate us from service to the devil and secure our dedication and obedience for God’s purposes.

(4.) Jesus came to save sinners from their sins to serve God so that other sinners would see credible evidence that Jesus can save them from their sins. As we mentioned above, if the lives of Christians show positive change and growth, people will generally become curious and interested in the gospel. However, when believers in Jesus tend to demonstrate little practical, positive growth or change in character, people tend to reject the Gospel message as irrelevant or powerless.

(5.) Jesus came to save sinners to serve God in practical ways that others can see so that these others would believe the gospel message and be saved from their sins.

How does this salvation-from-sin work? The key to understanding how Jesus can save sinners from their sins, ...*you and me from our sins...*, involves grasping the depth and significance of Jesus’ death on the cross and the power of His resurrection. **The basic message of the gospel is that Christ died for our sins** (I Cor. 15:3,4). **He did that when we had done nothing to deserve His sacrifice. It was totally God’s grace, His gift offered to us.** The reality is that *we could never pay for the sins we have committed, and we could never deliver ourselves from our own inner sinful tendencies* by any amount of strength of will or personal discipline. **God took the initiative**, and reached out to us to save us from our sins, ...the penalty, the power and even the sinful, selfish nature which has riddled us through and through. We were *hopelessly lost, ...hopelessly unable to undo the damage we had done, and ...hopelessly unable to escape selfishness* on our own. What *we* could not do, *God* did. **Not only did Jesus pay the debt we owe, giving His life as a ransom to free us from the penalty of sin, ...but He was also able to disengage its deceptive power in our lives, ...and even place within us a radically different nature, one inclined toward good.** The Bible teaches that God incorporated *us* into Jesus, totally identified *us in Him*, so that when *He* died, we died together with Him, when He was buried we were buried together with Him, and when He rose from death we rose together with Him. The significance of this is that **in Jesus we are dead to the old debt, the old master (sin), and even the old nature (selfishness).** The resurrection is practically made a reality by a new spiritual birth. Jesus said, “...unless one is born from above (“born-again” is a mistranslation) a person cannot see the kingdom of heaven” (Jn. 3:3). New birth is made available to those who *believe the offer* God has extended to them through Christ, and *take Jesus* as their Savior and Master (Jn. 1:12,13). **Moreover, God has given the Holy Spirit to every Christian ...to teach and guide them, ...to empower them to love people and obey God, ...and to equip them to do His will. Our new standing with God as His children, our new nature and new empowerment are the possession and birthright of every Christian.**

While God has done everything possible to give us freedom and victory over sin, we still have to learn to apply what He has made available. *We have to learn to apply the provisions of God in practical ways in our experience.* In the OT, God told Israel that He had given them the land of promise. It was theirs for the taking. He would give them victory, but *they would still have to go up to fight* to take the land. In a similar way, **God has made the provision for us to have growth in our character and victory over sin issues in our lives, but it doesn’t just happen by itself.** We have to *learn how* to disregard the old inclinations and embrace the leadings of the Spirit. **We have to learn how to live differently, so that we can live differently.** Paul said we would be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). That means learning how to perceive and think differently. **If we apply ourselves to grow and mature, God will give us what we are looking for. But if we do nothing, we will get nothing.** God says we will receive growth proportional to our investments in growth (Gal. 6:7,8). If we keep doing what we have been doing, we will keep getting the results we have received in the past. Paul tells us *not* to go on doing what we did before. If you are *at a standstill* in your Christian life, *try something different!* Doing the same things over and over probably won’t give you the results you are looking for! God has shown us incredible grace, ...much more than what most of us comprehend. **Too many of us, however, are not pursuing the growth, maturity and victory God desires for us to experience.** We have settled for something much, much *less* than what God intends. **Paul had to urge people not to take the grace of God in vain. Apply it! Make use of it! Keep working it out in your life!**