

Two Contrary Dimensions, Part Two

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There is a perverse form of "taking responsibility for our sin" that demeans the cross of Christ, elevates the will of man above the sovereignty of God and subtly lays a foundation for taking some credit for being delivered from sin, for if I, and I alone, am responsible, through the exercise of my autonomous free will, for the sin in my life, then I, at least to some degree, must be responsible for my deliverance. Thus, when God delivers me, I can say that I responsibly did my part to bring about my deliverance.

How hypocritically noble the spirit of Anti-Christ presents itself. In this scenario, salvation is a mere potentiality. It grants that the potential for salvation is entirely of God, but as far as where the rubber meets the road, salvation just sits on the shelf unused and functionally helpless unless we choose to make it effective. What religious dribble! How this flies in the face of a statement by the Apostle Paul, repeated twice within a short context in Chapter seven of his epistle to the Romans.

As I have come to know Paul, through his letters, I've noticed that he is not the least bit reticent about repeating himself when he deems that the point to be made is of great importance. And when you find that he does repeat himself, you'd best take special notice or you'll miss something quite fundamental to a true knowledge of God's relationship to man. I can hear Paul saying, "Let good composition hang; this is important and I intend that you get it, even if I must appear to be clumsily redundant."

So it is with his treatment of the ambiguity of the human condition that is the subject of Romans seven. Twice, in virtually identical words, Paul issues a very personal disclaimer regarding human responsibility for the existence of sin. I refer to verses seventeen and twenty: 17) "So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me," 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." (NAS)

Wow, that would be enough to get Paul thrown out of most self-help groups. Talk about what most folk would call denial. I can hear the others gathered in a self-help circle saying, "Oh sure, Paul, the devil made you do it, huh? What a load of crap; be a man and take responsibility for your actions." Yet there it is, right smack dab in the middle of Holy Writ.

Your average commentary on Romans will do some fancy hermeneutical foot work to avoid the full impact of this shocking confession. But it is so, so very Pauline. What do I mean? Well, it's Paul all over; utterly logical and consistent.

Paul is consistent when it comes to comparing sin and righteousness. He fully refuses to take any credit for his life as we know from Gal. 2:20 where he writes, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." (NAS).

The Concordant Literal version gives us much help in clarifying the faith phrase in that verse, translating it, "...I live by faith that is in the Son of God," which is saying that it is the faith of Christ by which Paul lives. It is the faith that is in the Son of God, not the faith that is in Paul. In the same way that the apostle identifies Christ, rather than himself, as the dynamic Agent of his living, the true "liver." as it were, so he identifies sin, not himself, as the dynamic agent of sinning. Christ is really the one doing the living, and sin is the "one" actually doing the sinning.

Yes, that's what it says, "...I am no longer the one doing it, but sin that dwells in me.." Did you get it that, "...I AM NO LONGER THE ONE DOING IT..." I can hear the free will glorifiers stuttering about now, "but, but, but"-----well, butt out. Sit still, shut up and listen for a change to something other than the traditions of men handed down to you.

I quote also from Jonathan Mitchell's excellent amplified translation of verse twenty: "Yet if that which I am not willing (intending), this I am constantly doing, I, myself, am no longer producing (working down and effecting) it, but rather, the Sin (the failure; the error; the miss) continuously housing herself (making its home; dwelling) within me."

Quite clear, I would say. It's not Paul producing or effecting this deviant behavior it is Sin [personified] doing the sinning.

Isn't that interesting? Sin doing the sinning. Sin (used as a personal noun) doing the sinning (verb). Sin does its own sinning, it doesn't need any help from us. In like manner, He, who is life, does the living without our contribution. Life lives, Sin sins, and death dies. Paul writes in Rom. 6:10, "For the death He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God."

Sin's been doing the sinning, with the resulting death, but Jesus died the death, consummated it, brought all death to an end by fully dying death, once for all, and He, the life, lives eternally in us. Something/someone other than ourselves, is doin' all this. In the chapter in question, Paul makes it clear that the part he has in all this sinning sin is that of a slave. He does not, at all, present himself, in this anti-Paul, non-Paul, un-Paul scenario as having a choice in the matter.

The Paul, who is other than the Paul in Christ, is simply a SLAVE to sin. The Paul, in whom Christ lives His life, is a slave to righteousness, a bond-slave to Christ, the King who shares His throne with those He has delivered from enmity slavery to love slavery. One is false, the other is true, but neither originates from out of the decision of man.

How did this un-man man come to exist? I think it was Karl Barth in his commentary on Romans who spoke of "the un-God", or the "no-God." Now we are faced with the un-man, the no-man of Romans seven, the non-human human. In our previous article, we saw that he is a lie; an existential actuality, to be sure, and one that can be seen, heard and felt, but nevertheless, his existence is constituted by the big lie, yet I confess that I've left a lot of unanswered questions. So hang in there with me as we "worship the Lord with all our heart, soul, MIND and strength."