

Contrast 4) of Old & New Self

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Nine years ago, a man living on the streets suddenly was cast into the limelight. He was dubbed the “man with the golden voice.” He was offered a job as a radio DJ, received interviews, and was suddenly popular! While he did experience sudden fame, he’s also had his share of struggles in the past years. A few times after his breakout into fame he fell back into a destructive addiction. His vow to do things right sometimes fell flat. I don’t know exactly what he has for faith, but it seems like he did make a public expression of Christian faith during his interviews. A Christian who struggles with sin and addiction? Can that be? I once had the opportunity to go to a workshop presented by our church body. It was titled, “Addictions and the Child of God.” Some might wonder, “how can those two things go hand-in-hand?” We find the answer today we continue our series on the contrasts found in Paul’s letters and consider the strong contrast between the old self and the new self.

When it comes down to it what child of God would be exempt from being labeled a “recovering addict”? In the broadest definition we are all addicts. An addiction can be fed. An addiction can grow. An addiction wants to control you. The apostle Paul understood the root problem: sin controls people. This is what Paul spoke of in Romans chapter 7. He spoke from personal experience of his struggle to stop sinning. He wanted to do good. But the evil that he didn’t want to do, this he kept on doing. He doesn’t have to say exactly what sin he struggled against. He makes it all clear: he fails to cut out all his old sinful habits. He has the desire to quit the evil thoughts and actions, but he can’t carry it out. He has the desire to do good, but he can’t always carry it out. Paul calls it “sin living in me.” It’s the old self ruled by sin.

Sound familiar? The smoker says she wants to quit. But she’s failed many times. The alcoholic wants to regain his life, but he feels powerless and falters over and over. The drug abuser knows her habit is destroying her life, but she continues to manipulate, steal, and lie to feed the addiction. The compulsive gambler knows he is about to put his family’s fortune and all on the line; but he doesn’t hold back. He ends up losing it all. The sex addict says he can stop, but the pornography is like a gateway drug with no limit, he is never satisfied. I’m sure you have known Christian men and women who have fallen into and come out of such things and who still struggle.

And are they the only addicts? What about the father who knows he is working so much that he isn’t a father anymore, just a source of income for the family? When he puts in all the hours, what is controlling him? Can he stop, or will he just allow his family to suffer? What about the daughter who obsesses over clothes and make-up and having the latest style? Her ceaseless gazing into the mirror becomes a relentless life-long chasing after appearances. How much is she willing to spend on beauty products and clothes to feed the habit? Is the man who can’t stop his unhealthy eating addicted to anything? He wants to control his eating habits and says, “It’s just another slice of dessert.” He thinks he could really have said no if he really wanted. But a part of him did want to and couldn’t say no. We can go on and on. What about the person who is addicted to only thinking and talking about self? Every conversation with such a person reveals a world which only revolves around them. What about the person who is addicted to wasteful TV watching, wasteful gaming, leisurely activity like golfing, hunting, or internet surfing? They know they could serve others more with their time, but they need to feed their desires for leisure. They waste time, energy, wealth, with their obsession for their hobbies. The mind is set on what the sinful flesh desires, and it must feed those desires.

What about you? You’re a child a God. Are you also an addict? Consider your own life. Paul said, “The good I want to do, I don’t do, and the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing.” As a pastor, I can relate to Paul, I can relate to the many people I have talked with. “Why can’t I stop doing the very thing I don’t want to do?” We’re all recovering addicts when it comes to sin.

Do we always see the mindset of old self for what it is worth? It’s a bigger problem than we might sometimes like to consider. Is an addiction something that might damage your relationship with your spouse? Or is it an even bigger problem? Is it just something that makes it hard to come by money? Is it just something which eats up your time? Or is it an even bigger problem than that? If the only reason someone wants to stop an addiction is to live a longer and more productive life, save a faltering relationship, or stop people from getting on their case, then their sinful flesh fails to see the real problem. “The mind governed by the flesh is death.” The addictions which control the old self lead to death. They are an offense against God. It will meet its due payment of God’s wrath over sin. If sin is only a human-relational problem, and only dealt with as such, you will only find a human cure, not a real one. The old self brings us condemnation.

But today we see that the child of God has more than the old self. To begin with God has dealt with the condemnation we deserve. “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” God doesn’t say they never will sin again. He

doesn't say we just might escape God's harshest wrath. God doesn't even say that there is a second chance for the old self to do better. Our old self can't do better. The "sinful flesh is powerless against sin...The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." God's solution for us and his cure is far greater for us. What God has done is removed the punishment over all our sin. The emphasis in the Greek is the very first word of this section "none, nada, completely nothing." The condemnation is totally removed.



God sees Paul, the recovering addict to sin, sees his struggle and sees his failure. But he still declares, "I will never condemn you; you're completely free of condemnation." God sees you who are in faith in Christ Jesus and sees your sinful desires and struggles.

He sees the sinful pull of your hearts and the sinful actions. But he removes the condemnation over you. It's gone! The struggle we have against sin remains, but the condemnation is gone. Peter once asked Jesus how many times he ought to forgive someone who sins. He thought seven times was surely good enough. God's forgiveness is without limit. Jesus said to forgive not seven, but seventy times seven, or forget the count! No condemnation means guilt free. It means that no matter the past, no matter the present, no matter the future.

How can this be true? It is because it depends on the work of God in Jesus. What we were unable to do God did. He "sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." Note the operating word here: likeness. Jesus wasn't born with any sinful flesh. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin. He was born without sin. People saw the man Jesus, and many assumed he was just like the rest of humanity. They assumed that because he appeared as fully human that he had the same struggles with jealousy, anger, lust, hate, and envy. But he did not. He was entirely without sin.

And the reason he took on flesh was "to be a sin offering." God's plan was to send his Son as a substitute for a world addicted to sin. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely through the redemption, the payment to set free, made by Christ Jesus. He offered himself once for all in place of every sinner on the cross. He faced the condemnation which we deserve because of our old selves. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus –because he took it all.

Why did God do all this? Because of his great love for the sinner he set us free from condemnation. You never have to wonder, "Does God still love me?" If you are in Christ Jesus, trusting in his redemption, you are free.

Now all who have faith in Christ stand in strong contrast from the old self. They are free from sin, death, and condemnation of hell. They are alive and free from condemnation. *"You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you...if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness."*

The Holy Spirit is God, and he has set you free from sin's curse and control by bringing you to faith and new life. He was there at creation. He spoke through the prophets. He poured out his gifts on the church. And he called you to faith in Christ Jesus. The moment you were called to faith the Spirit of life created new life in you. You have a new self with your connection to Jesus. The Holy Spirit is your source of new life. He gives you faith and forgiveness. He works in your new living and new desires of thanksgiving to God. Jesus didn't free us so that we would continue to desire to live according to the flesh and death. God works in you to now will and act according to his purpose. There are only two ways to live: according to the sinful nature with the mind set on the things of the sinful nature. This results in death. This is not the life of a recovering addict, but the one who despairs, gives up, or doesn't even care anymore. The other way to live is according to the Spirit, with the mind set on the Spirit. It's called the new self.

It's a strong contrast. The old self peers out of its dark origins and can only chase after death. It is powerless, and under condemnation. It comes from within us. But the new self shines from heaven above and desires only to live in righteousness. It assures us that we are freed from condemnation. It comes from the Spirit who gives life. It relies on Jesus' life, his sacrifice, and his resurrection. The child of God might struggle against addiction, but the child of God has a new self and is free from condemnation. The child of God has a new life in the Spirit. The old self is powerless as it relies on self-sacrifice which will fail. The new self is filled with power from God because it relies on the sacrifice of him who came in the likeness of sinful flesh and who never fails us.

"The man with the golden voice" got a new life. He is currently hosting a reality TV show about second chances. But what we have in Christ Jesus is far greater than a golden voice or a second chance at life. It is the Spirit of God which gives us a whole new self. That's the contrast we focus on knowing our God loves us. He freed us, so now we live in him. Amen.