

Forgetting the Real Me

“The beginning of moral change is a new self-esteem. That’s given to us in Christ. Self-hatred ruins the process of growth.”

I don’t think I’ll ever forget those words taught to me years ago. The conversation was about Romans 6, if memory serves (and it doesn’t as well these days). I’ve quoted them often in church. I’ll probably refer to them again soon in a message I’ll be doing. Doesn’t matter. I plan to keep repeating them. While I find those words easy to remember, I find the reality of who I am in Christ all too easy to forget. But then, so did the Apostle James, as he notes in his epistle. So I don’t feel so bad. That’s pretty good company.

The walking contradiction that is, at times, every Christian makes those words forever relevant. It also makes them easy to forget. Since we’re in the flesh, we’re in an everyday battle. We can’t allow ourselves the luxury of simply saying, “Yeah, I know that” and walk away. Admit it. You forget. And sin makes forgetting the reality of who we are much, much easier. Let’s dive into a reminder. Here it is.

You’re sinless.

At least you are in your inner person. So says the Apostles Paul, James, and John. So says God’s word.

The same Bible that is a mirror that reflects the glory of God we looked at last time also reflects to us our true selves. If you think about it, it makes sense. When we see the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, we’re seeing what He has made us by our new birth and what we will one day be when we see Him face-to-face (1 John 3:2). We’ll look at this further, but for now, let’s look at James 1:22-24

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.”

When we read God’s word (the “mirror”) it shows us our “natural face”. That phrase is literally the “face of his birth”. There is only one birth talked about so far in James and that’s our spiritual birth. It’s in 1: 18 and reads, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures”. The phrase “brought us forth” literally could be translated “gave birth to us”. And He did it by “the word of truth”, the Scriptures. Those same Scriptures that gave birth to us also show us the “face of (our) birth” or natural face. That face of our birth is our perfect inner self.

If you’ll notice, that’s what we forget. It’s not what I thought for so many years. I thought it was my sin James was discussing. The problem is that’s not what James is saying. Honestly, how many of us have problems remembering we are sinful? It’s not really a problem, is it?

Before, we learned from 2 Corinthians 3 that the “veil” over our hearts is lifted by faith when truth is shown to us in the mirror of God’s Word and we believe in Christ. We also learned that as we continue to live by faith and look into God’s word, it transforms us by showing us the glory of God. God’s word is an instrument of change in the hands of the Holy Spirit.

In Jas. 1:18, he tells us that new birth is given by the Spirit and brought on from the Word. Then, he explains that we have to learn His word (Jas. 1:21) and obey it by realizing who we truly are (1:22-24). That’s when we will find God’s word is actually a “law of liberty” (1:25). When we see who we truly are in Christ in God’s word. We also find out how righteous people should act. When we obey, it actually enhances self-esteem because we realize at the deepest level of who we are that we are only being ourselves; our real selves.

When we sin, we often forget, or don’t believe, that reality. “How can I do this and be a Christian?” “It can’t be true that I have a perfect inner self and say/think/do that”. Because it is true that our inner selves are sinless, we are disappointed, frustrated, and even hate ourselves for our hypocrisy. It is our real selves that are repulsed by our flesh. And unless we respond the right way, it only leads to more sin!

What I was taught is true. Self-hatred ruins the process of growth.

And, of course, Paul was also right. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me”. If Christ lives in me, to the degree that life is by Him, it is sinless. John writes, “We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him” (1 Jn. 5:18). Some translations seek to adjust the meaning, but the more literal is also the most accurate. The “one born of God” does not sin. As a total person, of course we sin. But that regenerate side, the one born of God, is sinless and beyond the grasp of Satan’s influence, since God’s “seed abides in him” (1 John 3:9). I wish that were also true of our flesh!

Paul truly understood this with his back-and-forth found in Rom. 7:14-25. When he talks about who “I” and “me” are, he makes clear there is a battle between the flesh and the inner man. This is never clearer than in 7:22-23 where he writes, “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”

So, the Christian life is all about becoming in experience who we are in our inner selves. We are, literally, becoming who we are when we walk with God. We’ll continue to explore how that happens. But it starts with seeing and embracing your true self in Scripture.

I hope you don’t forget my teacher’s words either, “The beginning of moral change is a new self-esteem. That’s given to us in Christ. Self-hatred ruins the process of growth.”