

Basilea Schlink:

We are all the same. We live with our families or we spend time with other people at work or at school, and always notice their behaviour very accurately. Some are irritable and touchy; others easily lose their temper. Some are hurt so easily; others are dishonest, and still others give in to all their impulses. We find it hard to put up with these things. We are irritated every time we see people do these things. Usually we cannot say anything, because they would take it the wrong way. But if only there were a way, we would do everything we could to get rid of the blemishes in their personalities.

But there is something very strange. If we ourselves are often irritated, angry, bitter, jealous, untruthful, impulsive, we usually do not get at all excited and do not take offence at ourselves. Perhaps just because of the fact that we believe in Jesus Christ, we are convinced that we have the assurance of salvation; we are in the "boat" that will lead to heavenly glory. But we do not sense how Satan is perhaps scornfully laughing at us-and justifiably so. Without our knowing it, he has taken our boat into his hands, because we are persisting in sin.

WAKING UP

But one day I woke up spiritually. Before that I was accustomed to reacting angrily when anything did not suit me or when someone said something that irritated me. But I did not think I had done anything wrong. These reactions were beginning to become part of my personality. I had been converted, and, after all, that was the important thing. Until one day, a few decades ago, my eyes were opened. I can still remember where I was sitting when I began to cry bitterly, after I had once again "let loose" at someone in an irritated tone of voice.

What was it that made me cry? Suddenly I was faced with the fact that Jesus had paid the price of redemption for me so that I could be redeemed. Jesus had shed His blood for me so that I could be remade into the image of the Son of God. Where were the similarities between me and Jesus, the Lamb? He was meek and He had promised the kingdom of heaven to the meek. But had I become meek? My relationship to Jesus had become like a relationship to a dead person. It was almost as though Jesus had become just a mathematical formula for me. Certainly I believed that He had paid the price of redemption for me, that I had been bought free, that I was justified. But during the course of time this faith had become an empty formula.

Where was this wonderful, living Christ in my life? Because He is alive today, we can still grieve Him as much as His disciples did long ago. Yet He is the Lord whom we should not grieve, because He has laid down His life in love for us.

Now I could see how much we grieve Him and put Him to shame through our lives, when we do not fulfil His last plea, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13: 35). That went deep into my heart. My behaviour towards my neighbour was not an example of love, but sometimes just the opposite. Love does good things for others, but I was making life difficult for others. I had taken grace for granted and accepted it lightly as if it were something cheap. Yet grace was bought for us with a high price, with the sacrificial death of Jesus, so that we can only reply to such grace by committing ourselves completely to the Lord. But then we have to hate what He hated so much and what He paid such a high price to overcome: sin. He hated it so much that He died to put an end to it.

HATRED TOWARDS SIN

Did not Jesus say, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate . . . even his own life"-and by that He means our ego, our sinful self- "he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14: 26)? I was deceiving myself! I thought I was a disciple of Jesus, but I really was not, because I did not have a hatred towards sin. At this time, more than thirty years ago, God suddenly opened my eyes and let me see what sin was all about. It has to be hated so much that Jesus says it is better to pluck out our eyes rather than give room to sin and tolerate it in ourselves. It would be better to cut off our hands than to tolerate what is evil and sinful. Now I saw that sin spreads like a cancer. But I had not recorded as sinful my rebellion and my angry reactions when I had been wronged. Suddenly I saw that it was the same in other cases. For instance, I no longer tried to do everything to keep the Sabbath holy. And Jesus had said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14: 15). His commandments were, first of all, the Ten Commandments, which He interpreted with a much deeper meaning in His Sermon on the Mount, making their scope much wider. Had I not read what the disciple who was closest to Jesus had written? "He who says 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" 1 John 2: 4).

So I was a liar. And although I said I believed in Jesus, I was outside the Kingdom of God (Gal. 5: 19-21). That

means that such people will be shut out from the kingdom of heaven for eternity. Jesus says the same thing with unmistakable clarity in the parable of the unmerciful servant who was bound by Satan and taken into his kingdom because he did not want to forgive (Matt. 18: 32).

UNREDEEMED DESPITE REDEMPTION

Now I could see that there was something wrong in my life of faith. Certainly I knew about the sacrifice of Jesus. As the Lamb of God He redeemed us so that we might "walk in newness of life". But it was merely knowledge. It does not do us any good to have money in the bank, if we do not go and claim it. Nor does it do any good to know about the sacrifice and blood of Jesus, if we do not claim them. So the great grace that had been offered to me remained "dead capital". I realized then that knowledge about Jesus' sacrifice does not make us new men. Only living faith, which is put into action in a battle of faith, can do this. Holy Scripture says, "Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of eternal life" (1 Tim. 6: 12). If I am supposed to take hold of something, I have to do something myself. If I am supposed to fight, I have to make an all-out effort. And I had not made this effort. The Apostle Peter wrote-and it was directed to believers-that the "adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour" (1 Pet. 5: 8). I had not reckoned with the truth of this fact. It means that I am in danger, even if I can show my "spiritual credentials": being baptized, converted or filled with the Spirit. I have an enemy who is always on my heels, ready to fight and get me down. He wants to have me as his prey. If the enemy is not only threatening me but has already begun to fight, I will be lost unless I take hold of weapons myself and enter the battlefield. So it is not left to our fancy whether we would like to fight the battle of faith or not, but it is a matter of absolute necessity. Otherwise we are irretrievably lost. We cannot afford to be passive and not do anything, unless, of course, we are not interested in whether we become the enemy's prey.

In the face of these facts I now realized that I had been building castles in the sky, because I had not taken seriously what Jesus and the apostles said so clearly in the Holy Scriptures. So it was no wonder that there was no victory in my life. The Holy Scriptures are permeated with the call to fight against sin so that we can overcome and attain the victory wreath. In the Book of Revelation Jesus says to the churches, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things" (Rev. 21:7 A.V.).

THE REASON FOR JOYLESSNESS

That is why it was not surprising that, at that time, I did not rejoice over the wonder of redemption, and that others could not see the joy of Jesus in me. And it was no wonder that I was not happy. I had taken the wrong path, the path of cheap grace, which was not the way of Jesus Christ and which could never lead me to the goal. If we do not fight, we will not be crowned. And what a fight the Lord demands of us! It is a fight to the point of shedding blood, as the letter to the Hebrews tells us (chapter 12: 4).

However, I had not taken action against my particular sinful bondages every day with prayers of faith. I had not fought against my sinful traits which put Jesus to shame, and which bind me to this earth and to Satan. I had not taken seriously Jesus' command to pluck out our eyes. In other words, I should have taken up an uncompromising fight against the causes of sins. I should have had such a hatred towards everything which gives room to the evil in us that I would not rest until it had been put to death. Now, all of a sudden, I realized how unnatural my passivity was. The moment a person discovers that he has a cancer, he leaves his job and his family, undergoes an operation and probably even spends a great deal of money for it. Although such a cancerous growth can only bring him physical death, he still makes every effort to recover.

SIN IS A CANCER

And what a harmful breed of cancer sin is! Sin is something dreadful. Scripture tells us this, and the reality of life tells us it also. It is rampant in our lives; it makes an imprint on our faces and our behaviour and ruins our personality. It makes us guilty towards God and man. It makes us and others unhappy. Sin will lead us to a terrible place for eternity, a place which corresponds to its evil and darkness. It is the kingdom of darkness, which Jesus talks about so much, a place of horror and torment.

Yes, sin is a poison, which will bring us death, eternal death, a dreadful dying. That is why Jesus says to His disciples, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10: 28). This fear had not gone deep down in my heart. I knew this truth, but it did not radically change my life.

Actually I had the opposite attitude in my heart. I took my physical illness much more seriously than my

spiritual illnesses of sin, which could really be deadly. Against the latter I had not waged a vigorous campaign to become free and healed. I did not let the knife cut into me by bringing my sin into the light and confessing it as the Holy Scriptures say we should do; "Confess your sins to one another" (Jas. 5: 16). There were several things I did not confess, because it would have cost me something-it would have injured my pride. I did not make a break with my sin. For instance, when I had a false attachment to another person, I did not endeavour to avoid her. And yet, if I were physically ill, I would take it for granted that I should go to the hospital and break away from my loved ones. Or, similarly, when I was at odds with someone, I did not go and reconcile myself with him, because it would have cost my pride too much.

SYMPATHY WITH SIN

Although I knew so much about the Bible, I had not comprehended that everything in the Bible was concerned with one thing: hatred of sin. Only for that reason does Christ's redemption have such a great significance. For as long as I let sin continue to live in darkness and did not bring it to light through confession, I tolerated it and nourished it, so that it could spread. And Satan, the lord of darkness, then had a claim upon me.

So instead of taking a stand in hatred against sin, I had words of self-pity and excuses for my sin. I felt sorry for myself, because people were making life so difficult for me. I tried to excuse my bitterness. I did not notice that this attitude let my sin grow strong and take deep roots. My motto should have been, "Death to my sin! Into the light!" But instead I handled it tenderly with kid gloves so that it continued to live.

Where did I stand at the time, even though I confessed Jesus as my Redeemer? I thought that I belonged to Him. Yet I had more or less lost Him, because I did not keep His commandments and so I could not inherit the Kingdom of God. I was far away from Him.

SAVED - FOR GOOD?

Can we ever be sure we are saved? Yes, we can, but not with the prerequisite of cheap grace. That became clear to me. Every sinner, no matter how bad he is, can have assurance of salvation.

But he has to admit concretely the truth that he is a sinner. He has to have contrition, i.e. grief about his sins. If I am as grieved over my illness of sin as I would be over a cancer, I cannot tolerate what causes me so much pain. Then I will do everything to get rid of this pain and the sin that makes me so unhappy. And this is possible. Jesus' blood has been shed. His sacrifice at Calvary has taken place, and I can claim it. He declared, "It is finished!" And I can hold Him to it. He has given me everything; I just have to accept it. I do not have to accomplish it; He has done everything. He has already redeemed me-but I have to claim His victory.

The fact that I am a sinner and will remain a sinner all my life, cannot infringe upon my assurance of salvation. On the contrary, my assurance of salvation will be kept from becoming an empty formula of faith, if I fully realize this truth. The joyful knowledge of His forgiveness and the assurance of my salvation will always be kept fresh in my heart.

In that way I can really lie at the foot of the cross with a contrite heart and ask for grace. Then, just like the thief on the cross, paradise will be open for me. But during the last few years, before this turning-point, I had ceased to do this. I no longer cried about my sin; I had no longer had a contrite heart. So I was no longer, dependent upon grace. That is why I was not filled with thanksgiving and praise for grace. For I had been living from cheap grace, which did not bring me the fruit of redemption, and the great joy of being able to reflect more and more of Jesus Himself.

It became abundantly clear that remaining in our hereditary sins and unbroken nature, without regretting it, will lead to terrible consequences. Nietzsche could defend himself by saying: "Christians will have to look more redeemed, if I am supposed to believe in a Redeemer." Countless other people who have renounced Jesus and risen up against Him, have followed Nietzsche's example, defending themselves by citing the fact that we Christians are so unredeemed. On this day my eyes were opened and I could see how wrong my attitude towards sin was. All the biblical truths not only faced me, they sank deep down into my heart and hit my conscience. Full of grief I realized what I had done by taking my guilt towards God and man so lightly. I began to hate sin, which cost Jesus so much. It is something so dreadful that it destroys both the life of the individual and of family or community. Yes, it even binds us to Satan.

LIFE'S CONFESSION - LIFE'S TURNING-POINT

This day brought me the gracious turning-point in my life. I brought my sin more radically into the light than ever before. For I could clearly see that as long as it remained in the dark, hidden from human eyes and ultimately also from my own because I did not want to confront it, it could continue to spread. I brought it into the light, because I knew that light unmask the enemy. To bring something into the light means to confess it before God and man. So I went to someone and told him what my sin was. I called it by name. I brought it to Jesus again, in the presence of my confessor and renounced it. I knew that without this confession I would not be free; the enemy would continue to hold me in his hand with this hidden sin.

Now that sin had taken on its true meaning for me, I realized that it is not my sin itself that is the important thing, but rather my attitude towards my sin. If I keep it to myself, in my heart, either out of indifference or out of discouragement, I give Satan the opportunity and the right to use my sinning and to turn it into a fruit of hell. But if I bring my sin to Jesus, if I confess it to men, I will find that it is blotted out in Jesus' blood. If I claim the sacrifice of Jesus again and again in the prayer of faith, I will find that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5: 20).

THE NEXT STEP

However, confession and taking a stand against sin was not all that I had to do. Now I had to go to the particular individuals whom I had wronged, whether it was through word or deed. Although I can never actually "make amends", out of thanksgiving for Jesus' forgiveness and out of grief over what I had done to others, I was compelled to do whatever I could to heal the wounds that I had given them.

The sinful deed was now blotted out through the blood of the Lamb. I no longer needed to be despondent about it; I no longer needed to accuse myself and I no longer needed to wallow in this sin. But even though I truly believed that the sinful act-whether it was in word or deed-was blotted out through the blood of the Lamb, I also knew that the root of this sin, that is, the sinful trait, was still in me. I could sense this. And I knew that I now had to fight battles of faith proclaiming the victory of Jesus over my sin. For the blood of the Lamb has power not only to cover sin, but to free me and cleanse me from this sinful trait that lies so deep in my personality and disposition.

DAILY BATTLE OF FAITH

It is a matter of fighting an intensive and persevering battle. So I began to fight this battle of faith and I did this daily. Daily I brought my sins to Jesus and called them by name. Every day I took at least fifteen minutes to call upon His name and to pray a litany of victory such as:

"In the name of Jesus and in His wounds is victory.

Jesus has trodden the head of the serpent under His feet.

Hallelujah! Amen.

I am free from..."

Each time I filled in the name of one of my sins.

I sang verses of victory:

Let praises ring aloud this day,

That Jesus' name has pow'r to break apart

The fearful chains of sin that bind us*

* This song along with others in this book is taken from Mother Basilea's song book, Well-spring of Joy.

And I praised His precious blood, because I knew that something would then happen. To speak in metaphors, the blood of the Lamb is the best medicine for my sinful ailments. I cannot afford to leave it untouched. When we praise the blood of Jesus, Satan yields. He and his demons are standing behind the specific sins in our lives. It had now become a great gift of grace for me to be able to believe in Jesus, the Victor, in His sacrifice and His words: "It is finished!", to believe in the transforming power of His blood. If we claim this victory in

faith, by glorifying His sacrifice and His blood shed for us, we will be transformed.

Your precious blood has such great might,

It saves from Satan's hold so tight.

I praise Your blood that sets me free

From Satan's grip and tyranny.

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Then I experienced in truth how the Lord freed me from various sinful bondages during the course of years according to His Word, "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8: 36). I found out that these are not empty words. Through such a battle of faith we can really be released from our chains. Jesus calls Himself the Redeemer. So He cannot help but free us from our chains of sin. His name is Yea and Amen and he will act according to His name. It is His ministry to redeem us. This knowledge filled me with great joy. There is no sin for which His redemptive power is not effective. Whether we are untruthful time and again, give in to our desires over and over again-or to envy, to being hurt, to strife, etc.-no matter what the sinful bondage is, we can be freed from it, even though we remain weak, sinful people as long as we are here on earth.

Yes, because the Victor over all sins and powers of the enemy is fighting on our side, the final victory will definitely be ours no matter how long the battle may last. There may be a long series of lost battles, but there will never be a lost war, so long as we endure in faith and do not shy away from being humiliated when we realize how tightly we are bound.

CRISES OF FAITH

Certainly it often happens when we begin to take up the battle of faith against certain sins, that everything seems to be worse than before. But then it is a matter of continuing to fight in the knowledge that the enemy is only raging and making every effort to keep his hold on us, because he knows that a mighty victory, a release, is coming. Whoever does not shy away from this fight but patiently treads the long path of humiliations will experience the redemptive power of the Victor, Jesus Christ. That I can bear witness to.

Knowing about the unconditional victory of Jesus during such times when I was in an especially difficult battle brought great joy into my heart. I have a Lord, who has sacrificed His life for me. I have a Lord who is Victor. I can fight against my sins by proclaiming, "Jesus is Victor!" I have a Lord, who, as the Lamb of God, has triumphantly broken the power of Satan and sin. This I can grasp in faith. This is the truth. And this truth will make every power of Satan and sin capitulate.

Although this book is about our various "sinful illnesses", I am writing it with great joy, because we do not have to keep our "sinful illnesses". When we are physically ill, we do not know whether we will get well, whether there is really a medicine that will cure us. But what a triumphant fact: we know that we can and will recover from these serious illnesses of ours, whose consequences reach into eternity, for there is a medicine which will make us completely whole. It is the blood of the Lamb, which freely flows from His wounds. Therein lies the victory. There are His words, "It is finished". There is the sacrifice on Calvary. Whoever claims these truths in fighting the battle of faith will get well spiritually. He will overcome his sins, if he is also willing to let the Lord chasten him so that "we may share his holiness" (Heb. 12: 10), and may, to Jesus' glory, reflect His image.

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