

Spontaneity—An Inner Knowing

by Brian Coatney

The important word “spontaneous” has been studied by some of us with increasing intensity in the past few years. Though the word, as such, is not found in Scripture, some in UNION LIFE at times seem to have elevated it to the stature of words such as “justification” and “faith.” Why? Just how important is it to know what “spontaneity” really means? In what sense can we spontaneously live the Christian life?

Because mankind’s history of sin has taught us to be suspicious of our feelings and impulses, I suspect your Christian friends would look at you in horror if you suggested that they follow their feelings and impulses. As a result, most of us see a need for constant watchfulness and self-denial, which implies constraint, effort and premeditation—the opposite of spontaneity.

A critical issue emerges here. Who are we? Are we a set of sinful impulses and feelings which need governing? The Apostle Paul thought so until he was struck by a revelation shared with us in Romans Seven. He had, just prior to this, expressed frustration because he found himself always doing the evil things that he hated, and unable to do the good things he wanted to do. Suddenly a revelation hit him. He realized that his heart was pure. His problem was not an impure heart with evil desires, but the inability to bring his righteous desires to fruition.

Seeing ourselves as totally pure of heart is a tremendous hurdle to cross, so let’s pause here for a moment. Romans 7:17 (“*So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me*”) is where we plant our feet and resolutely say that the sins we commit are not really us. This sounds humanistic and irresponsible at first, for it sounds like a “devil made me do it” outlook. Or it could sound like we are creating a mystical illusion.

Let’s be clear. This is Paul speaking—one who was, in Christ, transferred from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of Christ. And Paul was not fuzzy on sin. He knew the difference between good and evil, and even prefaces Romans Seven by saying it is written to those who *know* the Law. The Law had done a thorough work in Paul to teach him the difference between holiness and sin. Without this knowledge, spontaneity could be a sham, with people preferring the spontaneous doing of evil to a struggling effort to do good. But this is not the spontaneity Paul is talking about. His desire is to *spontaneously do good*, and to *spontaneously avoid doing evil*.

Also, Paul does not deny responsibility for the evil expressed through his members. When he said that it was no longer he doing the evil, he didn’t expect people to look off in the sky somewhere. He recognized that *it was in his members that the law of sin was operating*. What Paul does say is that he was not really being his true self when he sinned. We’ve all experienced this. When someone we know begins to act strangely, we comment, “He’s just not himself today.” Imagine if this went on to the point that no one knew who we really were. People would think we were someone we weren’t, and we would think so too, unless we knew the truth.

Isn’t this just like our Christian experience? We became new creatures in Christ when we were born again, but most of us continued to think of ourselves as sinful persons now forgiven by God. Our new love for Jesus Christ certainly brought about a new sensitivity to God and the Scriptures. And in our zeal we threw ourselves into *trying* to please Him. But somehow, as time went on, we became more and more disappointed in ourselves, and the fingers of self-accusation and guilt began to make us feel more unclean than before we knew Jesus Christ. The more we tried, the more it confirmed our evil hearts. Or so we thought. Finally, we too get that striking revelation of Romans Seven that we really are

pure and righteous, because that is the desire of our hearts. We come to see that we have been made partakers of the divine nature, and thus have Christ as our nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

This *knowing* is the first key to Christian spontaneity: that our nature is Christ within us, and that our union with the spirit of sin has been broken. Sin can pull on our feelings and impulses, but now we are dead to sin. We are not dead to temptation, or the ability to commit sins, but we are not sinners by nature, as we were when we were joined to, and controlled by, the spirit of error. Before I knew these things, I had trouble recognizing many temptations, because I thought that the temptations were just a sinful nature manifesting itself.

This first key to spontaneity, knowing Christ only as our nature, is related to Webster's second definition of spontaneity: "occurring or produced within of its own energy." We now feel the energy and desires of Christ pounding in our hearts, desiring to press through into every aspect of our lives.

But hold on a minute. Paul wasn't out of the woods just because he discovered the frustration of trying through his own efforts. How beautiful that he could finally say, "*Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me?*" (Rom. 7:24.) This brought Paul to the second key to spontaneity: Nothing in the Christian life is achieved through self-effort. By itself, the flesh can only serve the law of sin and death. Though our faculties and human potentials are beautiful creations of God, they cannot manifest Spirit-life without being operated by the Spirit Himself. In fact, when not operated by the Spirit Himself, our self-effort plays into the control of Satan from without. For Satan is the god of self-effort.

Paul is not down-grading his flesh in any way. He is simply giving his conclusion that all human efforts toward righteousness are doomed to wretchedness. *Praise God that they are!* Accepting this truth is the doorway to faith. When Paul cried out, "*Who will deliver me?*", he was calling on Another, namely God. At that moment, Paul entered by faith into trusting the Spirit of God within him to fulfill the spontaneity in his Christian experience.

Once we begin to experience spontaneity, how do we become established in it? I would like to suggest that the answer is found in an exhortation given in Colossians 1:9,10:

- a) "*that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will,*
- b) *that you may walk . . . bearing fruit,*
- c) *increasing in the knowledge of God."*

From this, I would say that the Bible term for spontaneity is "knowing." It is not just the apprehension of the spiritual mind, but *knowing* that we know, and operating naturally from this knowledge.

What Paul says is that we first come to know by means of revelation in our spirits. This is a real knowing, initially apprehended by *faith*, but then followed by *living out*—or experiencing—the truths revealed to us. We might call it the *application stage*. During this time, trials and temptations are used to settle us into the truth of our union, and to teach us to rest in it rather than believe the pulls of Satan on our feelings and thoughts. At first this does not seem spontaneous, but ultimately it exercises our personhood in establishing a *righteous spontaneity*. This discipline may be difficult, but "to those who are trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11). This stage is not to be scorned, or passed over, in our zeal to be a spiritual father. "Fathers" first had to be the young men described by John—those who are strong and who have overcome the evil one through the word of God abiding within (I John 2:12-14).

Sometimes I observe people refusing to acknowledge that the Lord teaches them anything, or that He has something for them in a situation. Because we are for others, they say there is nothing for us to learn. It is true that we are for others, and that we shouldn't back down from who we are. But this should not stunt a full learning experience during the young-man stage. Fathers will be fathers in due time: "Let endurance have its perfect result" (James 1:4).

The good news is that what we give ourselves to, sooner or later, gives itself back to us. Through a curious paradox, we come to know spontaneity because we choose (really His choice in us) to say that we are spontaneous and that we can live freely from Christ within. When that initial, deliberate faith-choice merges into an almost unconscious knowing, we are home free. What we chose has chosen us.

This unconscious knowing sets the tone for our lives. We live spontaneously, yet are not surprised when new challenges of faith rise up and seem to carry us through the same process again. More and more, however, we discover that the issue to us is no longer establishing our own pure hearts, and the freedom to express them, but the pressing through to the top on behalf of others. Our development in the young-man stage, which we initially saw as only for ourselves, really was and is for others as well. Something that seemed only for us is now "for us— for others." This allows for the complete fulfillment of the human self. But we are carried beyond personal fulfillment—to become rivers of living water for others.

In a world where a host of things would attempt to convince us that we are separated from Him (Rom. 8:37-39), this life gives us plenty of opportunities to press through to knowing that we are "more than conquerors."