

The Outer and Inner Life

by J.R. Miller

The inner life of a Christian is untouched and immortal, and can be renewed day by day, regardless of physical sufferings or misfortunes.

Scripture: Psalm 73:26, Isaiah 40:31, John 16:33, Romans 7:22, 1 Corinthians 15:54-55, 2 Corinthians 4:16, 2 Corinthians 5:1, Ephesians 3:16, Philippians 1:21, 1 Peter 1:24-25

Topics: "Spiritual Renewal", "Inner Life"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the distinction between the outer and inner life of a person, explaining that while the outer man may suffer and decay, the inner man remains untouched and immortal. He draws from Paul's teachings to illustrate that true life is found in the spiritual renewal that occurs daily, regardless of physical hardships or failures. Miller encourages believers to view their struggles, including sickness and aging, as opportunities for growth in their inner life, which can flourish even amidst adversity. He concludes that death is not an end but a transition to a fuller existence, reinforcing the idea that the inner life is eternal and ever-renewing.

Transcript

In every man there are two men. There is an outer man that people can see; there is an inner man that no human eye can see. The outer man may be hurt, wounded, marred, and even destroyed, while the inner man remains an untouched, unharmed, and immortal. Paul puts it thus: "Though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day." He is referring to his own sufferings as a Christian. His body was hurt by scourgings, by stonings, by exposure. It was worn by toil, and by endurance of hunger, of hardship. But these things which scarred his body, leaving marks upon it, making it prematurely old--had no effect on the inner man. His real life was not wounded by persecution. It even grew in strength and beauty as the outer man decayed.

There is quenchless life within our decaying life. The beating heart, the breathing lungs, the wonderful mechanism of the body--do not make up the real life. There is something in us which thinks, feels, imagines, wills, chooses, and loves. The poet lies dead. His hand will write no more. But it was not the poet's body that gave to the world the wonderful thoughts which have so wrought themselves into the world's life. The hand now folded shaped the lines--but the marvelous power which inspired the thoughts in the lines was not in the hand. The hand will soon moulder in the dust--but the poet is immortal. The outward man has perished; but the inner life is beyond the reach of decay, safe in its immortality.

The inner spiritual life of a Christian is not subject to the changes which come upon his outer life. The body suffers; but if one is living in fellowship with Christ, one's spiritual life is untouched by physical sufferings. The normal Christian life is one of constant, unchecked, uninterrupted progress. Unkindly conditions do not stunt it. Misfortunes do not mar it.

The inner growth of a Christian should be continuous. The renewal is said to be "day by day." No day should be without its line. We should count that day lost, which records no victory over some fault or secret sin, no new gain in self discipline, in the culture of some virtue, no enlargement of the power of serving, no added feature of likeness to the Master. "The inward man is renewed day by day."

This does not mean that all days are alike in their gain. There are special dates in every spiritual history which are memorable forever for their special advance--days when decisive battles are fought, when faults are discovered and conquered, when new visions of Christ are granted, when the heart receives a new accession of divine life, when one is led into a new field of service, when a new friend comes into the life, when one takes new responsibilities, or enters into new relations.

Then there are days in every life, when there would seem to be no spiritual advancement. We all have our discouraged days. We have days which are stained by folly, marred by mistakes, blurred and blotted by sin; and these seem to be lost days. There are days when we appear to fail in duty or in self-control, or in struggle with temptation. The inner man would appear to be crippled and hurt in such experiences as these; and the days would seem to be idle and useless, without profit or progress. We come to the evening with sad confessions of failure, and with painful regret and disheartenment. But even such times as these are really gaining times, if we are living near the heart of Christ. We are at least learning our own weakness and frailty, the folly of self-dependence, the feebleness of our own best resolves. Ofttimes our defeats prove our greatest blessings. No doubt many of our richest gains are made on the very days on which we weep most sorely over our mistakes and failures.

Then there are days that are broken by sorrow. The lights go out in our sky, and leave us in darkness. The friends of many years are taken away from us. Prosperity is turned to adversity. Misfortune touches our interests. Our circumstances become painful. Is not the growth of the inner life interrupted by such experiences? Not if we are truly abiding in Christ, and receiving from him the grace he has to give. No doubt many of the best, the divinest blessings of spiritual life come to us on just such days. The photographer takes his sensitive plate into a dark place to develop his picture. Sunlight would mar it. God often draws the curtain upon us--and in the darkness brings out some rare beauty in our life, some delicate feature of his own loveliness.

The teaching of the Scripture is that, whatever the experience of the outer life, the growth and enrichment of the inner life should never be interrupted or hindered. This is the divine purpose for us. Provision is made in the grace of God for this continuous work. We need never be harmed by anything which breaks into our life. Indeed, there is nothing which touches us in any way, that may not be made to minister good to us. Woundings of the outer life--may become pearls in the soul. Losses of earthly things may become gains in the spiritual realm. Sickness of the body, may result in new health and increased vigor in the inner man. It is the privilege and the duty of the child of God--to move upward and forward day by day, whatever the day's experience may be.

This is the meaning of the promises of peace which are found so frequently in the Bible. We have no assurance of a life without strife, trial, trouble, earthly pain, and loss; but we are assured that we may have

unbroken peace within, while the outer life is thus beset. "In the world you shall have tribulation." "In Me you shall have peace." The blessing of such a life in this world is incalculable. It becomes a source of strength, of shelter, of comfort, of hope, to many other lives.

We can be truest and best blessings to others only when we live victoriously ourselves. We owe it therefore to the needy, sorrowing, tempted world about us, to keep our inner life calm, quiet, strong, restful, and full of sweet love, in whatever outer turbulence of trial or opposition we must live. The only secret is to abide in Christ.

The lesson has a special application to sickness. Sickness is common. Not always does it prove a means of grace. There are some who are not spiritually benefitted by it. Yet it is the duty and the privilege of every Christian so to meet the experience of illness or invalidism as ever to grow in it into Christlier character. The secret is a living faith in Christ. Restlessness or distrust will mar the divine work that Christ would do in the heart; but quiet submission to the will of God and peaceful waiting for him will ensure continual renewal of the inner life, even while the outer life is being consumed.

It is well, therefore, that those who are called to endure sickness, should learn well how to relate themselves to it, so as not to be harmed by it. Sickness is discouraging. It is not easy for one with life broken, unable longer to run the race with the swift, to keep his spirit glad, cheerful, and wholesome. It is hard not to be able to do the heroic things which the unquenched spirit longs to do. Life seems now to be useless. They appear lost days, in which no worthy service can be done for Christ.

Too often those who are called to invalidism lose out of their heart the hope, the enthusiasm, the zest of living--and become depressed, unhappy, sometimes almost despairing. But this is to fail in true and noble living. When we cannot change our conditions, we must conquer them through the help of Christ. If we are sick, we would better not fret nor chafe. Thereby we shall only make our illness worse, retarding our recovery, while at the same time we shall mar the work of grace going on in our inner life. The captive bird that sits on its perch and sings, is wiser than the bird that flies against the wires of the cage, and tries to get out, only bruising its wings in its unavailing efforts. The sick-room may be made a holy of holies instead of a prison. Then it will be a place of blessing.

The lesson has its application, also, for those who are growing old. Old age ought to be the most beautiful period of a good life. Yet it is not always so. There are elements in the experience of old age which make it hard to keep the inner life ever in a state of renewal. The bodily powers are decaying. The senses are growing dull. It is lonely. There is in memory a record of empty cribs and vacant chairs, of sacred mounds in the cemetery. The work of life has dropped from the hands. It is not easy to keep the joy of living in the heart, in such experiences. Yet that is the problem of true Christian living.

While the outward man decays, the inward man should be renewed day by day. This is possible, too, as many Christian old people have proved. Keeping near the heart of Christ is again, as always, the secret. Faith gives a new meaning to life. It is seen no more in its relation to earth and what is gone--but in its relation to immortality and what is to come. The Christian old man's best days are not behind him--but always before him. He is walking, not toward the end--but toward the beginning. The dissolving of the earthly tabernacle is a pledge that the house not made with hands is almost ready.

The lesson has its application also for death. That seems to be the utter destruction of the outer man. The body returns to the dust whence it came. What of the inner life? It only escapes from the walls and fetters which have confined it on the earth. It is as when one tears a bird's cage apart, and the bird, set free, flies

away into the heavens. Death is not misfortune; it is not the breaking up of life; it is growth, development, the passing into a larger phase of life. We need death for life's completing.

"Death is the crown of life;

Were death denied, poor man would live in vain;

Were death denied, to live would not be life;

Were death denied, e'en fools would wish to die.

Death wounds to cure; we fall; we rise; we reign;

Spring from our fetters; hasten to the skies,

Where blooming Eden withers in our sight.

Death gives us more than was in Eden lost;

This king of terrors--is the prince of peace."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jr-miller/the-outer-and-inner-life/>

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