

Outer and Inner-driven lifestyles

Introduction

I am going to speak today about two lifestyles: one controlled from outside, the way of law, the other produced from the inside, the way of the Spirit.

The Schoolmaster

Paul describes these two ways of living in his letter to the Galatians. In Galatians 4v1-7 he says that the way of law is like the way of bringing up a child. The child is controlled from the outside by the schoolmaster. When the child grows up and becomes an adult no schoolmaster is needed. I did not like to be at school. I was always afraid of the teachers and being punished. When I got to university and it was up to me whether I studied or not, I felt very happy and studied hard and did well.

I think that many of us find it difficult to make the transition from being children to being adults. I have found it hard. Paul describes the situation in Galatians 4v8-11.

Two Brothers

Another way of describing the difference between these two ways of living is to use the expressions "outer-driven" and "inner-driven". We see these two characteristics in the brothers Jesus describes in the story of the Prodigal son. The younger brother did what he felt for, he was inner-driven. The elder brother denied himself what he wanted and just tried to look like a good son. He was outer-driven. Both the brothers wanted to have a party. The younger left home and had many parties, Luke 15v13. The older brother just carried on working and suppressed his desire for a party. It looked very noble but inside he felt resentful of the younger brother, Luke 15v29. Outer-driven people are often very critical people. They resent the freedom of others.

I identify with the older brother. I was born into a family that belonged to a church in which there was a strong emphasis on living a holy life. In practice this meant avoiding drinking, smoking, dancing, going to the cinema or theatre, watching television, women wearing trousers or make up, working or playing on Sunday. My father always polished our shoes on Saturday to avoid working on Sunday. I also remember that when I had my first girl friend at the age of 19 and she suggested taking a ball with us when we went for a walk on Sunday afternoon, I was shocked because I had never played with a ball on Sunday before! Maybe some of you who have come from strongly religious homes can identify with what I am describing?

My parents were not dominating people, they were kind and humble but our environment affected all of us. We did not express what we really felt. We tried to be nice and to please other people. We were outer-driven.

The Cage

Children who come from this background react in one of two ways when they reach teen age. Some rebel against the whole system as the younger brother did. Others press down what they want and try to conform, like the elder brother, and like me. The problems show later! Thus I became a person whose life was outer-driven. It was so natural for me to behave like a good Christian that I did not question it. The important thing in my life was pleasing other people. I was always trying to fit in with

what they wanted. I was like a rabbit in a cage formed by the expectations of people around me.

This situation continued until I got married at the age of 28. My first wife was a strongly inner-driven person. I found her very dominating. I felt the boundaries around me starting to be squeezed. The cage was getting smaller and smaller!

I tried to be what I thought was a good Christian and suppress my own feelings even more. After about nine years I felt that my cage had got so small that even I could not fit in it. I tried to escape by withdrawing deep within myself. I felt I became a shadow. I felt a failure as a Christian.

The situation changed four years later when my wife died and I was left alone. This was in 1991. I moved my boundaries out again to the limits imposed by the sort of Christian lifestyle and friends I had been used to before marriage. I even started to make some small choices of my own and enjoyed it. I think it was about time because I was then 41 years of age. But I was still strongly governed by the outside and, like the elder brother, I was easily critical of people who failed to behave as I thought they should. This is still a problem I struggle with.

Then I married again. I had high ideals for our marriage. I wanted us to share life together totally. But to achieve this would mean that my wife had to live in my small cage. She tried at first to fit in but soon she could see it would not work. We struggled for three years before we finally accepted that we had to find a new way to live. This crisis was reached somewhere around the middle of 1996.

God steps in

However God was at work. In January 1995, I experienced the Holy Spirit touching the inner part of my being and releasing a flow of feeling, just as Jesus had promised in John 7v38. This happened first in the Mario Bergner conference on inner healing and then two weeks later and for several months afterwards in what people called the Toronto Blessing. This gave me a taste of what it was like being inner-driven instead of outer-driven. However this phase only lasted for a bit longer than a year. I believe God gave me a taste of what was possible then took it away because he wanted to teach me how to live from the inside for myself.

When my wife and I reached our crisis in 1996 I realised there was not room in my small cage for both of us. But also I realise that living in a cage was not the way for me either. I needed to find my own identity. Thus I began a new adventure.

I wonder if some of you here today are also seeking to find your identity, or perhaps you would like to start but wonder how? I found that I needed to start telling the truth of what I thought and felt. I had to do it to God in prayer and to stop being afraid that he would punish me. I was helped by the thought that if a human counsellor or friend could listen to me and not be angry at what I told, surely God could be even more patient and understanding. Jesus certainly seemed to be with the people who came to him. So I allowed myself to have my thoughts and feelings and I told them to God even if they seemed shocking to me. I found a lot of help in keeping a journal in which I wrote down exactly what I felt. I also started to talk more openly with close friends. It would undoubtedly have helped if I had had a counsellor but such people

are not easy to find. Over the past three years I have started to understand myself better and be more secure in my own identity. I am sure that just as God has led me, he will also lead you. He knows us better than anyone.

Changing is not so easy

However it was not an easy thing to change from outer to inner-driven. I found there was much in me that would indeed drive me from the inside but that some of it was not good. I discovered the truth that Jesus teaches us in the parable of the prodigal son, that neither the outer-driven life of the elder brother, nor the inner-driven life of the younger was good, not at least without a relationship with the Father. Paul gives us the solution in Galatians 5v16.

God's laws are good

In the Old Testament God gave his people laws to direct them. These were good laws. I think it is important we see that God's laws are not there to spoil our lives and make us miserable, they are there to protect us. Just go through the Ten Commandments and think how you would feel if these laws did not protect you. How would you feel if you had to work seven days a week? How do you feel if someone steals your property or takes your husband or wife? God wants to protect you; he also wants to protect others from you, so he tells you what is good and what is not.

However, there were two problems with the way the people of Israel responded to God's laws. First they made them a way of being accepted by God. A person who thinks this way considers that the only basis on which he can feel accepted is by trying to meet the standards of others. Such people are always looking for approval.

The other problem was that the people of Israel did not keep the laws. They found in themselves desires that went against God's laws, they found themselves driven by sin just like the prodigal did, and we all do.

God's solution

God wonderfully reveals a solution to both these problems. He shows that the way of trying to get acceptance by obeying law is not his way. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus makes the laws so impossibly strict that none of us could ever hope to be accepted on the basis of obeying law. He says that to break the law with your thoughts is just as bad as to do it in action. God's grace comes to us in the cross of Jesus, Galatians 3v13. Jesus has paid the price for our sins and we no longer need to try to be good to be accepted, we just need to receive what he has done for us.

The second part of the solution is that he puts within us a new set of desires, a new Spirit as it is called in Galatians 5v16. This is called being born again. It means having the character of Jesus living in us through the Holy Spirit. This opens up the possibility of an inner-driven life, but one that is driven by good and not by evil.

We need the Bible

Being inner-driven, or led by the Holy Spirit, does not mean that we do not need the Word of God, the Bible. We need it because it contains the laws of God and helps us to recognise which of the drives within us are from the Holy Spirit and which are not. Those that are from the Spirit will lead us to a life of love, which is automatically

consistent with God's laws. A person who just wants to be inner-driven without the Word of God will soon end up doing things that are destructive for him and others as the prodigal did. We have probably all met people who seem to be so very spiritual and prophetic but in the end get into bad trouble because they no longer take notice of the Bible and the teaching of the church.

I believe God wants to help each of us to move from spiritual childhood to spiritual adulthood. This means neither being driven by the need to please others nor by the fear of being punished if we break some law, nor does it mean just doing what pleases us. We need to know what we want, this is being true to ourselves. It is really what confession is about - telling honestly who we are. But then we need to learn how to follow the Spirit who leads us from within Galatians 5v25. This is the process I find myself in. It is exciting to be discovering my identity and no longer feeling so controlled by other people. But it is also a process in which I need patience and support from those close to me. Just as Paul writes in Galatians 6v1-5 about the importance of helping one another. A person who has been inner-driven for most of their lives, learns to cope with feelings, but a person who has been outer-driven can be quite unprepared to handle feelings. Each new feeling seems so overwhelmingly important, every inner impulse can be felt to be a leading from God. We can easily deceive ourselves in the joy of our new freedom. Galatians 5v13 again. It takes time and training to become balanced and mature.

House of Grace

Many find it easier to let their lives be outer-driven by Christian rules. This is why cults are so popular and powerful. But that is not the goal of Turun Vapaaseurakunta (Free Church of Turku). Our goal is to be Armon Talo (House of Grace). This means a church where people serve according to the life and gifts of the Spirit in them. It also means a church in which we accept each other as we are, unfinished, imperfect people, people in a process.