

February 2006

*“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”
~ Galatians 5:18*



Living Beyond the Law

By Alan Medinger

*“For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, there is no transgression.” (Romans 4:15)
“Apart from the Law, sin lies dead.” (Romans 7:8)*

As a man who has dealt with habitual sexual sin, and as one who has ministered to hundreds of men and women living in the grip of sex addiction, these passages from Romans, the one at the top of the page from Galatians, and others like them, have perplexed me.

Theologically, and logically, what does it mean to say that we are no longer under the law, or going further, what does it mean that the law brings death?

What do these passages say to Charlie, the Christian man who finds himself three or four nights a week spending an hour or two staring at pornographic images on his computer screen? I don't think any serious

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Christian would say, “Hey Charlie, it's okay for you to do that; you're under grace, not under the law.” Nor are many apt to say (or believe) that if Charlie

would just forget about the law, his pornography addiction would simply go away.

I am sure that theologians and Bible scholars would have many ways of addressing these questions, but let me share with you, from practical experience, how I have found meaning and help in these passages.

In some areas we are like children

As a parent and grandparent, I know that children need the law. “Zach, you are not to play in the street.” “Jake, don't hit your sister.” “Emily, you must be home by ten o'clock.” Children need these rules and limitations, and they need them until they have grown to the point where they know that streets are dangerous, that we don't physically hurt other people, and that we

do need to get enough sleep. The process we hope they will go through is one in which, what are at first externally imposed rules, eventually become a part of them. They take residence in their hearts and become their natural (new nature) inclination.

I believe that an adult who is continually engaging in harmful or destructive behavior is, in a way, like a child. One of the clearest marks of immaturity is the inability to defer gratification. Habitually seeking the comfort and pleasure of lust is clearly a mark of immaturity. The person who cannot stop acting out sexually is like a child—at least in this part of his or her life.

I am not saying that people who struggle with sexual sin are themselves immature, but that they are immature with respect to their sexuality. Their relationship with sex is that of an adolescent. And, as regards sex, they still need the law.

Our experience has shown that the more severe the addiction, the more stringent the law needs to be. AA tells the alcoholic that he or she can *never* take an alcoholic drink. In our ministry we have people who have to cut themselves off totally from the internet, others who can only use the internet with filters, and still others who have progressed or grown up to the point at which the internet is no longer a threat.

Being set free from the law is a process

Before sin entered the world, no one was under the law. When we go to be with the Lord, there will be no law. But in the in-between time—now—there is a place for the law. God put his first covenant people, the Jews, under strict law. Then, through Jesus Christ, He set us free from having to live under the law. Truly, Jesus has set us free; we don't have to sin ever. But sin is not totally purged from our bodies. The Spirit dwells in us to draw our hearts to righteousness, but the last embers of

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sin in us have not yet been fully snuffed out.

I no longer live under a law that says I must not have sex with men. Although I was once addicted to such behavior, the thought of having sex with a man today never seriously crosses my mind or challenges my will. That law has no application to me any more. But the thought of indulging in a little sexual fantasy does show up on my radar screen from time to time, so I do have a law that says, “Don’t even start to entertain such thoughts.”

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Look forward, not backward

Consider that living under the law reflects life before Jesus and freedom from the law is a goal towards which we are headed. This means that when we look at the law, we tend to look backward. But an essential part of our life as new creatures is that we don’t have to

constantly look backward. The cross has taken care of the past. Our aim as believers should be to look forward, and when we look forward, we look beyond the law. We look towards who we are becoming.

I believe that looking forward is a great strategy in gaining victory over sexual sin.

The modern evangelical focus regarding sexuality is very sin-centered. Look at the number of Christian books we have on dealing with sexuality; except for a few marriage books, most Christian books deal with sex from a sin perspective.

This is looking backward. How about looking forward; looking not to who we have been, but toward who we are becoming? What if our primary view of sexuality were centered not on sexual sin, but rather, on God’s beautiful plan for sexuality? This is the theme of Pope John Paul II’s teaching on the “theology of the body” (which we will review in this newsletter later this year). Josh Glaser and I have been reading these teachings, and we are finding them a tremendous help to us personally and professionally.

What is it we look forward to? First, we meditate on the wonderful gift our sexuality is, and what a joyful thing it can be if we use it the way the Designer meant it to be used. Then we start to imagine ourselves becoming the men or women God created us to be. We look forward to becoming sons and daughters who, in our sexuality, as well as other ways, bring delight to the Father’s heart every day. We look forward and we see that we are becoming men or women who:

- Reflect God’s perfectly designed masculinity or femininity.
- In our hearts see sexuality as a wonderful gift from God, a gift so precious that it must be saved for the one special person who is or will become husband or wife
- Or (in the case of single people) view a chaste life is a precious gift to God
- Through God’s power, have gained mastery over ourselves, and therefore walk in true freedom.

To the extent that sin has some power over us, we do live under the law, but let us turn our eyes to the days beyond the law, towards who we are becoming.

Resisting sin pleases God. But I would imagine that our becoming more and more the sons and daughters He has created us to be, brings even greater joy to His heart. As our hearts focus on who we are becoming, we take our eyes off of sin, and we start living beyond the law. ■

Please Pray With Us . . .

Thanksgiving – Join us in thanking God:

- For leading and sustaining this ministry so faithfully through the years.
- For the ongoing restoration of our Baltimore office’s downstairs space, and for financial provision through the flood and subsequent reparations.
- That at the writing of this newsletter, we are current on all our financial obligations (see page 4).
- For continuing to “show up” for us in our support groups and programs, truly ministering to the deep places in the lives of those who have come to us for help and healing.

Petitions – Join us in praying:

- That the Lord would guide us as we move forward this year. The ministry is undergoing some significant changes (more on this in our next newsletter).
- For our dear staff and their families—for guidance, grace, and provision for all their needs.
- For the men and women in our groups, many of whom are struggling to surrender areas of bondage and brokenness that have wrought havoc in their lives for years.

* For more information or in-depth monthly prayer requests,
E-mail josh@RegenerationMinistries.org.

What Do You Seek?

by Josh Glaser

When I first came to Regeneration 10 years ago, I was interested in one thing: Getting rid of my sexual sin. God was interested in something else. Yes, He wanted to lead me to sexual purity, but He also had in mind addressing areas of my life fundamentally much more important than just stopping sin. And addressing these areas would take more time and energy than I had initially planned to give.

In Mark 2, we read about a paralyzed man who was brought to Jesus. We don't know much about this man, but when he and his friends arrived where Jesus was teaching, they couldn't get in the door because the place was so packed. It must have been like showing up early to see a much anticipated show, only to find that a flood of others were already there. But for this man, it wasn't a show. He was missing his one chance to ever be able to walk.

Have you ever felt like that? Perhaps you've struggled with homosexuality for years and feel you've missed your chance to have a family. Or your extramarital affair has torn apart your marriage and it looks hopeless to restore. Or because of your sexual sin you've been asked to step down from a position in ministry.

Fortunately for this man, his friends weren't going to let a hundred other needy people stand in their way. They climbed onto the roof, hoisted him up, cleared a way, and lowered him down in front of Jesus. This was a pretty brazen move. Jesus was speaking to a large crowd but these guys didn't wait. They cut in line. They interrupted Jesus' message and dropped their friend onto center stage. They were desperate, and they knew what they were after.

What happens next is significant. Jesus looks at the paralyzed man and says simply, "My son, your sins are forgiven you." Now our attention at this point is usually drawn to the Scribes grumbling about Jesus' audacity to forgive sins. But let's stick with the paralyzed man here. What's going on in his mind? How do you think he felt when, after all this trouble, Jesus responded to him by telling him he was forgiven?

My guess is that he was deeply disappointed. In that day and age, it was common belief that chronic illnesses or disabilities were God's judgment on people of noteworthy sin. But this man had come to be healed, not forgiven. He wanted to walk. He didn't want to continue to suffer with paralysis day after day, year after year. He wanted to live life as a man among men, not a cripple among the healthy.

Have you ever felt like that? Have you prayed and prayed for change, only to wake up again to another day of temptation? Have you come to support groups, read books, tried everything you know, and still you don't have that which you want the most?

But Jesus knew something this man didn't, and perhaps something you don't. Jesus knew not only what this man so desperately *wanted* but also what he so desperately *needed*.

Walking is great, and God's original intent for him was that he'd be able to walk. But restoring this man's ability to walk was not the most important thing to Jesus.

Why have you come? Do you want healing? The unmanageability in your life to go away? A change in sexual orientation? What if Jesus' priorities are different than your own? What if, as He is looking at your life, there are other things on His "To Do List" that take priority over removing your sexual struggles? Will you take your eyes off your goals and realign them with His? Will you press on or will you give up?

Eventually, Jesus spoke the words the paralyzed man had been hoping and waiting to hear: "Take up your mat and go home." What are the words you long to hear? Keep coming to Him, keep climbing, keep laying yourself before Him. There is no better place to be than lying before the One who holds healing in His hand. Jesus knows what you want. And He knows what you need. ■

What if, as Jesus is looking at your life, there are other things on His "To Do List" that take priority over removing your sexual struggles?

"Can God deliver you? Of course he can. If he isn't doing so at the moment, he may, incredible though it may seem to you, have a prior concern with something else in your life. . . . God has his own order in dealing with sin. Sin is always serious. But when an injured man comes into the hospital, his injuries must be dealt with one at a time."

(John White, *Eros Redeemed*)

Ministry News

Flood Update

With our last newsletter we included a letter about the flooding that took place in the downstairs of Regeneration's Baltimore office, which was the administrative center of the ministry and the home of Regeneration Books. Here's the current update:

The insurance company brought in a great clean-up team who truly seemed like "angels" to us as they went above and beyond the call of duty in their service. Insurance and the landlord covered all repairs to the facility (carpets go in today!), and we anticipate all the ministry's claims for destroyed books and equipment will continue to be fully reimbursed. Please pray that this will be the case.

Karen Woollen did a fantastic job moving quickly to get Regeneration Books up and running again, though not yet back to full speed; and Lani Bersch moved her offices and computers upstairs to make sure the other administrative components of the ministry did not lag behind. Currently, the entire ministry is operating on one floor and we've moved our support groups off-site. ■

Where Are the Newsletter Changes?

For the past couple of months in this newsletter we've been announcing the upcoming change in format, so you may be wondering, "Now that it's the New Year, what's new?" The answer, quite simply, is nothing yet! In classic Regeneration form, we're moving more slowly than initially anticipated. We do plan to extend and revamp the newsletter in the coming months, so stay tuned!

Regeneration in Your Neighborhood?

Each month we receive calls from around the country from individuals who are looking for a ministry like Regeneration in their area. Regeneration is a small part Exodus International, a large network of sexual wholeness ministries. So while Regeneration does direct ministry in Northern Virginia and Baltimore, over 100 other Exodus ministries are serving nationwide. If you would like information on what is available in your region, visit Exodus at www.exodus.to. And if there are no such ministries right in your back yard, contact the nearest ministry to find out if they know of other resources closer to you. God bless you as you seek to find person-to-person help!

Financial News

Thank you to those of you who gave a year-end contribution to the ministry. At the writing of this newsletter, we are currently up-to-date on all outside and internal financial obligations (excepting replenishing the \$25,000 reserve fund to pay staff salaries during financially lean months). This is a great blessing!

However, as we look ahead to the next several months, we believe the year could be a challenging one financially. Your support and prayers are vital components of the health of this ministry—a ministry we know you believe in as we do. We value your continued partnership with us as we serve Christ and His Church. May God bless you!

Regeneration Is...

Baltimore Office

Alan Medinger
Executive Director

Lani Bersch
Director of Operations

Karen Woollen
Director of Regeneration Books

Joshua Glaser
Baltimore Director

Laura Suffecool
Accounting Manager

Marcia Schuett
Office Assistant

Northern Virginia Office

Bob Ragan
Northern Virginia Director

Melissa Coffey
Ministry Associate

Group Meetings

Baltimore, MD

- Living Waters
- New Beginnings (Sexual Addiction Group)
- New Directions
- Growth Into Manhood
- Wives' Group

Northern, VA

- Living Waters
- Women's Group
- Wives' Group
- Men's Group
- Parents' Group
- s.a.l.t. (Sexual Addiction Group)

Washington, D.C.

- Men's Drop-In Group

Regeneration Books

Regeneration Books is the major distributor of books addressing homosexuality and related subjects from a Christian perspective. To receive a free catalog call us at (410) 661-0284 or visit us online at www.regenbooks.org.