

How to Be a Sinner: Identifying the Sinning Self

An online retreat • April 4, 2020 • Peter Bouteneff

Introduction: Three Prayers

I believe, O Lord, and I confess that you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God
Who came into the world to save sinners, *of whom I am the first.*

Pre-communion Prayers

How shall I begin to mourn the deeds of my wretched life?

What can I offer as first-fruits of repentance?

In Your compassion, O Christ, forgive my sins.

Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, Ode 1

Give me understanding, O Lord, that I may weep bitterly over my deeds.

Canon of Repentance

Why Pursue the “Sinner Identity”? Some reasons

To See Each Other Face to Face

An Inkling of the Love of God

Not Judging:

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions/
And not to judge my brother/sister

St. Moses the Black — “If you are occupied with your own faults, you have no time to see those of your neighbor.”

St. Seraphim Sarov — “We condemn others only because we shun knowing ourselves.”

But: who or what is my *self*? (Or do I have two?)

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ...*But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

I can *will* what is right, but I cannot *do* it. ... Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. *For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self*, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! ... For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus *has set you free* from the law of sin and of death.

Romans 7:15-8:2

My innermost self

St. John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*, pt 2:

Never confuse the person, formed in the image of God, with the evil that is in him, because evil is but a chance misfortune, illness, a devilish reverie. But the very essence of the person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement.

From the Funeral Evlogitaria:

Blessed are You, O Lord, teach me Your statutes.
I am the image of Your ineffable glory,
Though I bear the brands of transgressions:

...Grant me the homeland of my heart's desire,
Making me again a citizen of Paradise.

...Restore me to that image, and to my former beauty.

From the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, Ode 2:

With passions I have darkened the beauty of my soul
and permitted my whole inward being to become a mire.

I persist in caring only for my outer garment,
while neglecting the temple within --
one made in the image of God.

Through love of pleasure
has my form become deformed
and the beauty of my inward being has been ruined.

In our life of prayer and contemplation we ought to be in the business of identifying the true self, and "calling out" that which *seems to be* our self but is in fact only posing as our self.

The sweetness of compunction

How much joy, how much peace of soul would a person have wherever he went . . . if he was one who habitually accused himself . . . that person would have complete freedom from care.

St. Dorotheos of Gaza

The one who wears blessed, God-given mourning like a wedding garment gets to know the spiritual laughter of the soul.

St. John Climacus

Calling myself “sinner,” acknowledging my sins in repentance before a merciful God.
Some of the gifts:

- Living in truth.
- A right stance before God and your fellow humans.
- Freedom
 - from self-justification.
 - from care about what others think of you.
 - from taking offense.
 - from judging others.
- Love and mercy for others.
- Love for your true, innermost self.
- Taking responsibility for wrongdoing.
- Addressing your attachments, compulsions, and passions.
- Experience of forgiveness and love.
- Knowing the sweetness of unearned love.
- Inner peace.
- An appreciation of beauty and goodness in the world.
- Discernment of evil in the world.
- Closeness to Christ.

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