

I am powerless over sin. That I confess to you this day, I am powerless over sin. Like the alcoholic who comes to the end of his rope, who has bottomed out sometimes faces the truth, confessing that he is or she is powerless over alcohol, so I must say, I am powerless over sin.

I've said it before as we read together, Most merciful God, we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. Slaves of sin, powerless over it. The words are easy to read even if my heart doesn't believe its true.

Like the alcoholic I've sought my excuses. In my heart I have continually justified my actions. Did I fail to make a call that should have been made? I was busy, or there was no one at home when I tried, or I just forgot. But never could I admit that I didn't care ^{enough about the person in need to make the call.} ~~about that person.~~ Did I lose my temper, cutting another with my harsh words? Well if she hadn't attacked first, criticized without understanding, then none of it would have happened. Does someone choose to leave this congregation and join another? It must be what someone else has said and done, or that you aren't friendly enough, it couldn't be that I have failed.

Sometimes I think it is just a matter of trying harder. Then I'm like the alcoholic who who quits for a week or a month or a year just to prove he is powerful over alcohol. I get full of energy, I go and I go and I go I try to be the perfect pastor, the perfect father, the perfect husband. I fail but I redouble my efforts to preach the better sermon, to pray for everyone in need, to take time for each of my children, to help Sue around the house. Until one day I start to feel like I'm the only one who cares and who is trying and bitterness bitterness and resentment toward you and God and everything fills my heart.

Sometimes I do it another way. I tell myself that you and God can't really expect much from me, I'm better than so many others. I'm good enough. If I sin, so does everyone else, its no big deal, I'm in the top half of the human race, surely that will be good enough. No one has started a drive to run me out of town because I am such a poor excuse for a Christian so I must be

good enough. Again I lie to myself, like the alcoholic who justifies his own drinking by looking at the drinking of those around him. Afraid to look at myself honestly I just let things slide and wonder why my heart feels so cold and empty and joyless.

YET I know why. I know why I must make the excuses, why bitterness creeps in, why my heart grows cold. I choose to be the master of my fate, the captain of my soul. God never created me for that. I was not born and baptized so that I could dress myself in my own power and accomplishments. God did not make me to be Lord over my life. But with Adam and with every one of his children I cling to the very thing that proves death for me, I cling to being in control of me.

Now before faith came, Paul writes, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. ~~Nothing other says that God's law is prison~~ ~~xxxxxxx the law~~ Before faith came. It is exactly there that I choose to live as I look to me for my life and my strength and my hope. Under the law.

Let others judge me by what I do, I say. Let God judge me by what I do. And I will judge myself by what I do. This is the law, it seems to promise life to me. But it leaves me never knowing. Have I done enough, do I really love God and you, or have I only acted like it? Living under the law I never know.

Before faith came. But Paul continues, But now that faith has come we are no longer under a custodian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith.

In Christ it is different. I know where I stand in him. When I believe and trust in him, no longer is it what I have done that counts. It is not my love, my sacrifices, my efforts that matter but his love his sacrifice his giving himself for me that makes me a son of God. Under the law, making it on my own there is bitterness and fear and sadness of heart and the need to have you constantly assure me that I am doing all right. Through faith in Christ there is joy and peace and hope.

For through faith in Christ Jesus we are children of God. Then Paul
continues, " For as many of you as were baptized into Christ ~~Jesus~~ have put on
Christ. When I was baptized, God dressed me in Christ. When God looks at
Lynn Schlessman, no longer does God look with the critical eye of one making
a decisions. God is not forever judging me weighing my deeds on the scales.
God looks and sees me as a baptized one, one dressed in Christ, God looks
at me and sees his son. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ
have put on Christ. That is what God speaks through Paul. Were you baptized?
then you are dressed with Christ. Christ is the garment in which God has cloth-
ed you.

It is so very simple, but that old Adam within me does not want to let
go. And we never will as long as I am dressed in the flesh and blood of this
life. That old Adam wants me to be boss. None of this coming as a beggar to
receive all that Christ has so freely given for me. Froud is that old Adam with
in me. Pride ^{is} sin's name. Why be beholding to God when you can make it on
your own. Why trust in him who I cannot see when I can trust in me that I
know so well.

Yes, I am powerless over sin. I must learn the lesson some alcoholics have
learned so well. Each new morning I must confess my powerlessness and place my
day in the hands of another. Dressed in his righteousness, depending on his
guidance, receiving him as Lord of my day this is the way to life for me.

My hope is build on nothing less than Jesus blood and rightness, no merit
of my own I claim but wholly lean on Jesus name, on Christ the solid rock I
stand, all other ground is sinking sand.