

- The early days of our faith were probably more vibrant than now
- At one time we were growing, then we stalled

“... over time this sense of progress stalls out. Instead of life flowing with rivers of living water, I yell at my children whom I love. I worry too much about money or my job. I grow jealous. I use deception to get out of trouble or to get what I want. I pass judgment on people easily, casually, arrogantly. My prayer life is up and down. I am stuck in a gap.” – John Ortberg, *The Me I Want To Be*

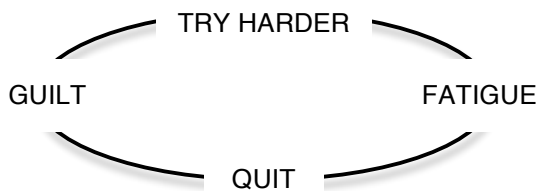
• **Gap Management**

- There is a gap between who I am and who God wants me to be
- So what do we do? We try to close the gap
 - We work harder
 - We put in more effort
 - We read more books
 - We listen to another talk
 - We learn some new disciplines
 - We attend more studies
 - We serve more, do more
- More effort does not produce living water
- More work does not produce rest
- More self-righteousness does not produce His brand of righteousness

• **Death by Comparison**

- One of the first things we do is compare
- We look for those who appear to have their spiritual act together
- They pray two hours every morning so we feel bad – even though we’re NOT a morning person
- Someone else has memorized tons of scripture – so we determine to do the same

The Cycle of Defeat



- You try harder, even though you don't enjoy it
- You operate off the philosophy, "NO PAIN, NO GAIN"

NOTES

NOTES

- But you just grow tired and worn out
- Eventually you quit
- Then the guilt sets in
- The very enemy who tried to stop you from beginning, not condemns you for stopping
- So you start something else
- You find a new goal and start the cycle all over again

SELF-IMPROVEMENT IS NO MORE A PART OF GOD'S PLAN THAN SELF-SALVATION

*And I am certain that God, who **began the good work** within you, **will continue his work** until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. – Philippians 1:6 NLT*

*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who **began a good work** in you **will perfect it** until the day of Christ Jesus. – Philippians 1:6 NASB*

epiteleo – finish, complete, bring about

• **Spiritual growth is hand-crafted, not mass-produced**

- God is growing you as an individual
- The body of Christ is vital, but we each grow individually
- We grow in community, but always as individuals
- Spiritual growth is not a one-size-fits-all affair
- You are unique
 - Unique personality
 - Unique spiritual gift(s)
 - Unique physical makeup
 - Unique emotional makeup
 - Unique personality
 - Unique background
 - Unique experiences
 - Unique problems

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. – Ephesians 2:10 NLT

- God is doing a unique thing *in* you and wants to do a unique work *through* you

• **Discovering and accepting God's spiritual growth plan for you**

- David and Saul – 1 Samuel 17

NOTES

- The Philistines have come against the people of God
- Saul and his army are camped across a valley from them
- Every day the Philistine champion, Goliath, comes out and taunts them
- He was over 9 feet tall
- He intimidated everyone, including King Saul
- Then David shows up on the scene
- He is appalled at what he sees
- He can't imagine why anyone would allow this to happen day after day
- So he volunteers to fight Goliath
- At first Saul laughs at his offer

"Don't be ridiculous!" Saul replied. "There is no way you can go against this Philistine. You are only a boy, and he has been in the army since he was a boy!" – Vs 33

- Then he changes his mind
- He decides to give David help

Then Saul gave David his own armor—a bronze helmet and a coat of mail. – Vs 38

- Isn't that what we do?
- We give everyone a once-size-fits-all spiritual success strategy
- We tell everyone to do what we have done
- But Saul's armor had not done him much good

David put it on, strapped the sword over it, and took a step or two to see what it was like, for he had never worn such things before. "I can't go in these," he protested. "I'm not used to them." So he took them off again. – Vs 39

- David had to do God's work according to his own strengths and unique abilities

He picked up five smooth stones from a stream and put them in his shepherd's bag. Then, armed only with his shepherd's staff and sling, he started across to fight Goliath. – Vs 40

- **Grow in God's Way For You**

- His plan to grow you will not look the same as His plan for someone else
- God never grows two people the same way
- He is a hand-crafter, not a mass-producer

NEXT STEPS

WEEK 14

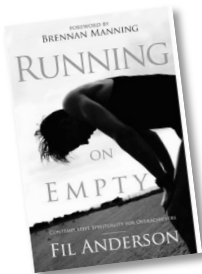
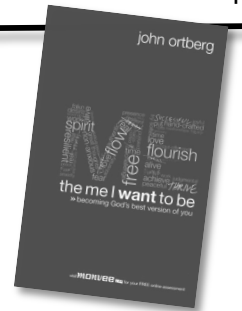
...keep your eye on what you're doing; accept the hard times along with the good;
keep the Message alive; do a thorough job as God's servant.

— 2 TIMOTHY 4:5 (MSG)

Well, this is it. We are wrapping up the second part of our series, BASIC Training. For the last 14 weeks we have been talking about the actions or behaviors that should flow from a life of belief. We have talked about what it means to walk the talk – to live out what it is we say we believe. Our studies have covered such rare topics such as devotion, trust, gratitude, rest, surrender, and prayer. These are behaviors that most of us don't normally think about or associate with action. They seem more calm and less active. Yet they are essential for any believer who wants to live a life that makes a difference. Let me encourage you to continue reading and studying about these topics even after we break. Don't take the summer off. Meet together occasionally with some other guys to discuss a book you are reading or a sermon you've listened to on CD. Continue to push each other further in your walk. Take that Next Step.

1. BOOKS TO READ THIS SUMMER

Let me recommend a few books for you to consider this summer. At the top of the list is the one we have been reading for the last several weeks, *The Me I Want To Be*. I finished it while on vacation last week and it is a phenomenal book.

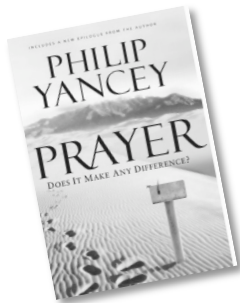
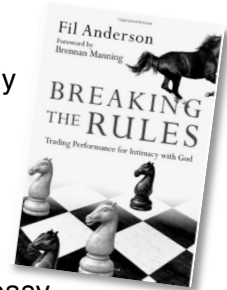


Running On Empty by Fil Anderson

You've heard me talk about this one a lot over the last few weeks. It is one of those rare books that truly strikes a chord and makes a difference.

Breaking the Rules by Fil Anderson

Another great book by the same author. Fil clearly and simply explains what intimacy with God can look like. Rather than struggling with false agendas in an attempt to "get right with God," he invites you to consider trusting God instead.

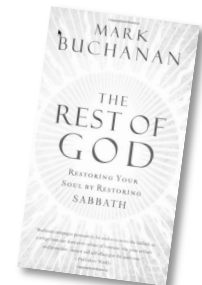


Prayer by Philip Yancey

Of all the books out there on prayer, this is one of the most easy to understand. We all know we should pray, but most of us struggle with it and see few, if any, results from it. Yancey makes prayer accessible, achievable, and enjoyable. A must-read if you want your life to be a life of prayer.

The Rest of God by Mark Buchanan

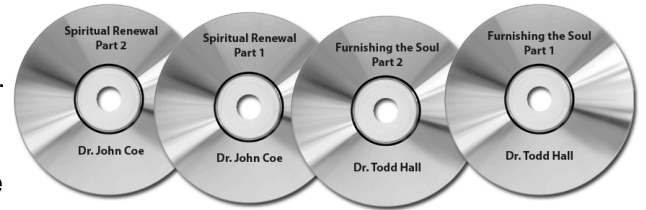
Rest is a hot commodity these days, but few of us ever really get to enjoy it. In this book, Mark outlines in easy-to-understand terms the purpose for and blessings of the Sabbath. He makes the rest that God offers something that moves beyond promise to reality.



2. LISTEN TO OUR RESOURCE CDs

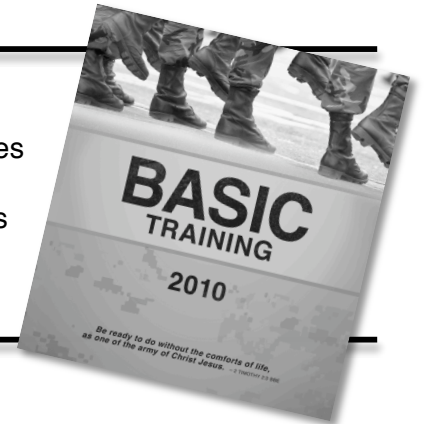
For this final week we are going to listen to four CDs.

Two are by Dr. John Coe and the other two are by Dr. Todd Hall. Both of these men are associated with Biola University. Dr. Coe is going to address the topic of spiritual renewal. Dr. Hall will cover how we furnish the soul. Both men will give you a better understanding of what it means to grow in Christ and in your relationship with God. Listen to them. Share them. Discuss what they have to say. Ask God to help you apply what you hear to your life.



3. SHARE THIS SERIES WITH A FRIEND

If you are interested, we would like to make available this entire series in a notebook for you to go through with a friend, your son, or even your wife. We will provide all the handouts and Next Steps as well as the audio from each week's lesson. If you are interested, please email Ben Brummet at benb@christchapelbc.org.



4. JOIN US ON THE QUEST

While your enjoying the summer off from BASIC Training, why not consider reading with us through the Old Testament as part of *The Quest*. You can get a reading guide at the information desk or online at ccbcfamily.org. You can also read along with the daily blog Ken writes on the readings for that day. Just log on to ccbcfamily.org and click the QUEST link at the bottom of the page.

5. ARTICLES TO READ

This week we have three articles for you to enjoy. But if you never got a chance to read all the rest of the articles we have provided over the last 14 weeks, be sure to go back and enjoy them. Even if you've read them once, read them again. Share them with a friend. Discuss them. Debate them.

- *Waiting on God* by John Orberg
- *Spiritual Formation and the Warfare Between the Flesh and the Human Spirit* by Dallas Willard
- *Spiritual Formation in Christ* by Dallas Willard

6. SUMMER STUDY

If you find yourself missing the weekly study once the summer gets here, why not try our 6-week series called **D-Day: Prepping for Invasion**. It starts Thursday evening June 10 at 7:00 p.m. We'll be meeting each Thursday night from 7:00-8:30 p.m. in Fellowship Hall. This series is designed to build on what we've learned in BASIC Training and give us some solid direction for making a difference in the world in which we live. Child care is available and Women in the Word will be meeting at the same time for those six weeks, so your wife can study the Word at the same time! Hope to see you there.

Waiting on God

by John Ortberg
Romans 8:23-25

How do you feel about waiting? Do you enjoy a nice, long wait? I don't like to wait. I don't like it when I have to stand in line at the bank or the post office. I don't like being at a stoplight sitting behind an accelerator-challenged driver when the light turns green. I don't like it when I pull into a gas station and all the pumps are occupied, and I have to wait for somebody to pull away. How good are you at waiting? I thought I'd give us a pop quiz. I'm going to walk you through a few scenarios and ask you to think through how you would respond.

Here's the first one: You are at a tollbooth. The driver of the car in front of you is having an extended conversation with the tollbooth operator. Think for a moment about how you would respond. I'll walk you through a few possible responses. A: You are happy. You observe they are doing the tollbooth in community. You think about forming a small group—with you and the other driver and the tollbooth operator. B: You think of things that you'd like to say to the tollbooth operator. Invite him to the Christmas Eve service perhaps. Or, C: You attempt to drive your vehicle between the other person's car and the tollbooth.

Second scenario: You've been sitting in the waiting room of your doctor's office for an hour. How do you respond? A: You're grateful for the chance to catch up on the 1993 Reader's Digest. B: You tell the other patients you have a very highly contagious and fatal disease in an attempt to empty the waiting room. Or if you have little more flair for the dramatic, C: You force yourself to hyperventilate to get immediate attention.

Now, these are fairly casual kinds of waiting, but we put up with them. However, there are other, more serious and difficult kinds of waiting. There's the waiting of a single person to see if God has marriage in store for him or her. There's the waiting of a childless couple who desperately wants to start a family but day after day, week after week, their prayer goes unanswered. There's the waiting of someone who longs to have work that's meaningful and significant and seems to matter, but it doesn't happen. There's the waiting of a spouse that's trapped in a hurting marriage that seems unable to change. Lewis Smedes puts it like this: "Waiting is our destiny. As creatures who cannot by themselves bring about what they hope for, we wait in the darkness for a flame we cannot light. We wait in fear for a happy ending that we cannot write. We wait for a 'not yet' that feels like a 'not ever.'"

Waiting on the Lord is an act of obedience.

Waiting is the hardest work of hope. When we turn to the Bible, God himself - God who's all-powerful, all wise, and all loving - assures us over and over to wait. Psalm 37:7: "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him." Wait for the Lord, the Psalmist goes on, keep to his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land.

Spiritual Formation in Christ:

A Perspective on What it is and How it Might be Done

Dallas Willard

Published in *The Great Omission*, San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2006.
See the HarperCollins website for reprint instructions and permissions.

"... until Christ be formed in you." (Gal. 4:19)

"Spiritual formation" is a phrase that has recently rocketed onto the lips and into the ears of Protestant Christians with an abruptness that is bound to make a thoughtful person uneasy. If it is really so important, not to mention essential, then why is it so recent? It must be just another passing fad in Protestant religiosity, increasingly self-conscious and threatened about "not meeting the needs of the people." And, really, isn't spiritual formation just a little too Catholic to be quite right?

We could forget the phrase "Spiritual formation," but the fact and need would still be there to be dealt with. The spiritual side of the human being, Christian and non-Christian alike, develops into the reality which it becomes, for good or ill. Everyone receives spiritual formation, just as everyone gets an education. The only question is whether it is a good one or a bad one. We need to take a conscious, intentional hand in the developmental process. We need to understand what the formation of the human spirit is, and how it can best be done as Christ would have it done. This is an indispensable aspect of developing a psychology that is adequate to human life.

The reason for the recent abrupt emergence of the terminology into religious life is, I believe, a growing suspicion or realization that we have not done well with the reality and the need. We have counted on preaching, teaching, and knowledge or information to form faith in the hearer, and have counted on faith to form the inner life and outward behavior of the Christian. But, for whatever reason, this strategy has not turned out well. The result is that we have multitudes of professing Christians who well may be ready to die, but obviously are not ready to live, and can hardly get along with themselves, much less with others.

Most statistical measures and anecdotal portraits of Evangelical Christians, not to mention Christians in general, show a remarkable similarity in the life-texture of Christians and non-Christians. Even among clergy, simple rest in and obedience to Christ is not something to assume without special indications; thus, we should look carefully at the whole issue of spiritual formation, especially to identify the essence of the gospel and the eternal kind of life that may correspond to it.

Too often spiritual formation is regarded as a catch-all category that conveys little specific information. Gerald G. May writes, "Spiritual formation is a rather general term referring to all attempts, means, instructions, and disciplines intended towards

deepening of faith and furtherance of spiritual growth. It includes educational endeavors as well as the more intimate and in-depth process of spiritual direction."¹

It is useful, therefore, to speak of "spiritual formation" by distinguishing three different meanings or moments. First, identifying certain activities as "spiritual" work or exercise, one can think of spiritual formation as training in these special spiritual activities. Certainly, this is a large part of what is found in many cases to mean "priestly formation," or the "Spiritual formation" of the priest, as spoken of in Catholic literature, with the recognition that such formation goes beyond overt behavior and deeply into the inner or spiritual life of the individual. Marcial Maciel's *Integral Formation of Catholic Priests*² is an excellent treatment of spiritual formation as it bears upon the vocation of the priest.

The Protestant counterpart is the outward behavior of the successful minister, pastor, leader, or fulltime Christian worker. Spiritual formation can be thought of as the training that makes individuals successful in the aforementioned roles. Although it is recognized that the heart must be right, if one is successful enough in certain outward terms, very likely no further inquiry will be made. And, if something is known to be lacking on the inside or in the private life of the worker, as is often the case among those on a Christian staff, it may well be overlooked or justified for the sake of the ministry.

Occasionally, today one also finds those who think of spiritual formation in terms of practicing spiritual disciplines. This is a relatively recent development among Evangelicals. The disciplines are regarded as part of the process of spiritual formation—which is not an altogether bad idea—or as the practice of spirituality, and formation is regarded as whatever it takes to bring us to where we are able to engage rightly in a life of spiritual disciplines. In any case, one way of thinking about spiritual formation is to identify it by references to certain specifically religious practices. Often such practices are spoken of today as "a spirituality."

Secondly, spiritual formation may be thought of as the shaping of the inner life, the spirit, or the spiritual side of the human being. The formation of the heart or will (which I believe is best taken as the 'spirit') of the individual, along with the emotions and intellect, is therefore the primary focus, regardless of what overt practices may or may not be involved. Here, what is formed is explicitly the spiritual dimension of the self. We speak of spiritual formation in this case precisely because that which is formed (the subject matter shaped) is the spiritual aspect of personality. Of course, it is assumed that there will be effects in the realm of overt practice.

Thirdly, spiritual formation may be thought of as a shaping by the spirit or by the spiritual realm, and by the Holy Spirit and other spiritual agencies involved in the kingdom of God, especially the Word of God. We speak of spiritual formation here because the means (or agencies) that do the shaping of the human personality and life are spiritual.

Now, we need to recognize that spiritual formation in all of these senses is not necessarily a Christian spiritual formation. Spiritualities abound on all sides, and we are fast coming to the point where we have a spirituality of practically everything. A recent television commercial for a certain kind of truck starts out with a man saying that a truck is "a spiritual kind of thing," and he goes on to talk about the special meaning it gives to life.

I believe that spirituality is the arena in which specifically Christian faith and practice will have to struggle desperately in the coming years to retain integrity. All other 'spiritualities' present themselves as equal under such slogans as "interfaith" and "ecumenism," terms that increasingly apply to all religious cultures, not just to the branches of Christianity.

The 12-step programs, often the bearers of great good from the viewpoint of obvious human need, are currently doing much to place anti-Christian, or at least achristian, spiritualities solidly in the midst of Christian congregations and lives. Also, the push for inclusivism presupposes that all cultures are equal, and how can that be unless the corresponding religions are too? Moreover, if lifestyles are equal, must they not be equal morally? And how can you fault whatever religion is practiced in them if they are morally equal?

How, then, are we to think about spiritual formation that is faithful to the gospel and to the nature of that eternal life which is present in Christ and given to us with him?

Let us begin with practices, overt behavior. Spiritual formation in Christ is oriented toward explicit obedience to Christ. The language of the Great Commission, in Matthew 28, makes it clear that our aim, our job description as Christ's people, is to bring disciples to the point of obedience to "all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Of course, this assumes that we ourselves are in obedience, having learned how to obey Christ. Though the inner dynamics are those of love for Christ, he left no doubt that the result would be the keeping of his commandments. "Those who have my commandments and keep them, they are the ones who love me. And they who love me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love them, and will manifest myself to them" (John 14:21).

Much of the current distress on the part of Western Christianity over how to conduct our calling as the people of Christ derives from the fact that the goal and measure of Christian spiritual formation, as described previously, is not accepted and implemented. This has long been the case, of course, reaching back for centuries. But it may be that the modern world's challenge to the Church has not been equaled since its birth.

In the face of this challenge, I know of no current denomination or local congregation that has a concrete plan and practice for teaching people to do "all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Very few even regard this as something

we should actually try to do, and many think it to be simply impossible. Little wonder, then, that it is hard to identify a specifically "Christian" version of spiritual formation among Christians and their institutions. As we depart from the mark set by the Great Commission, we increasingly find it harder to differentiate ourselves in life from those who are non- or even anti-Christians.

Now, of course, spiritual formation in this sense cannot be done by focusing just on actions or practices. That way leads to legalism, failure, and death, as Jesus made very clear in his "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt. 5:20). But this does not mean we must surrender the behavioral aim set up by Christ himself. We teach people to do "all things whatsoever" by shaping their hearts to love Christ and his commandments, and by training their entire personality (soul, mind, body, and to some degree even environment) to side with their new heart or spirit, which is the creative element of the self that we also call the will. To will (*thelein*; Rom. 7:18) is important, if not crucial. But the person acts, and more is involved in action than willing.

Indeed, the 'spirit' or heart may even be eager (Matt. 26:41), but unless the flesh or embodied personality as a whole is trained to go with it and support it, the follow-through in action will not occur, or will not reliably happen, or may even be in direct conflict with the spirit or will: "What I hate I do!" (Rom. 7:17). While the spirit or heart is the ultimate source of life (Prov. 4:23), we do not live there. We live in our body and its world. Christian spiritual formation works from the spirit or will and from its new life "from above." But its work is not done until we have put off the old person and put on the new (Eph. 4; Col. 3).

This is an active, not passive, process, one that requires our clear-headed and relentless participation. It will not be done for us; however, we cannot obey Christ, or even trust him, by direct effort. What, then, are the indirect means that allow us to cooperate in reshaping the personality—the feelings, ideas, mental processes and images, and the deep readiesses of soul and body—so that our whole being is poised to go with the movements of the regenerate heart that is in us by the impact of the Gospel Word under the direction and energizing of the Holy Spirit?

These means are, primarily, the disciplines for life in the Spirit: solitude and silence, prayer and fasting, worship and study, fellowship and confession, and the like. These disciplines are not, in themselves, meritorious or even required except as specifically needed. They do, however, allow the spirit or will—an infinitesimally tiny power in itself that we cannot count on to carry our intentions into settled, effectual righteousness—to direct the body into contexts of experience in which the whole self is inwardly restructured to follow the eager spirit into ever fuller obedience. This is the second meaning or moment in Christian spiritual formation.

The processes of spiritual formation thus understood require precise, testable, thorough knowledge of the human self. Psychological and theological understanding of the spiritual life must go hand in hand. Neither of them is complete without the

other. A psychology that is Christian, in the sense of a comprehensive understanding of the facts of spiritual life and growth, should be a top priority for disciples of Jesus, particularly those who work in the various fields of psychology and who consider it an intellectual and practical discipline. No understanding of the human self can be theoretically or practically adequate if it does not deal with the spiritual life.

Of course, spiritual formation in the second emphasis only works because of the third and final moment: formation by the Spirit of God in Christ. This comes initially and mainly through immersion in and constant application (John 8:31; 15:7) of the word of Christ, his gospel and his commands that are inseparable from his person and his presence: "The words that I speak to you," he said, "are spirit and life" (John 6:63). But it is the movement of the Spirit in the spiritual formation of the individual personality that transforms the roots of behavior throughout the soul and body of the believer which goes beyond simply hearing and receiving this word. Thus, when we have put on the new person—and we must act to do this, as it will not be done for us—we find the outflow of Christ's character from us to be, after all, the fruit of the spirit.

The movements of the spirit of Christ in the embodied personality are often identifiable, tangible events. Frequently they come in the form of individualized 'words' from Christ to his apprentices who are involved in kingdom living. He is our living teacher, and we are not asleep while we walk with him. Spiritual formation in Christ is not simply an unconscious process in which results may be observed while the One who works in us remains hidden. We actually experience his workings. We look for them, expect them, give thanks for them. We are consciously engaged with him in the details of our existence and our spiritual transformation.

However, it is not the immediacy of such experiences that tells us that it is the Spirit of God in Christ by whom we are being formed. Rather, the proof, if not the comfort, lies in the persons we become and the deeds that flow from us. The tree is known by its fruit. When the Spirit who forms us causes us to love Jesus Christ above all and to walk in his example and deeds (1 Pet. 2:21-23), when it upholds us in obedience, then we know that he is the Spirit by which we are formed (2 Cor. 3:17). And with this knowledge as our framework, we may also take comfort in the immediate feeling of the movements of the Spirit in our personalities, lives, and surroundings.

Spiritual formation in Christ is accomplished, and the Great Commission fulfilled, as the regenerate soul makes its highest intent to live in the commandments of Christ, and accordingly makes realistic plans to realize this intent by an adequate course of spiritual disciplines. Of course, no one can achieve this goal by themselves, but no one has to. God gives us others to share the pilgrimage, and we will be met by Christ in every step of the way. "Look, I am with you every instant," is what Jesus said; and it is also what he is doing.

We must stop using the fact that we cannot earn grace (whether for justification or for sanctification) as an excuse for not energetically seeking to receive grace. Having

been found by God, we then become seekers of ever fuller life in him. Grace is opposed to earning, but not to effort. The realities of Christian spiritual formation are that we will not be transformed "into his likeness" by more information, or by infusions, inspirations, or ministrations alone. Though all of these have an important place, they never suffice, and reliance upon them alone explains the now common failure of committed Christians to rise much above a certain level of decency.

At the core of the human being is will, spirit, and heart. This core is reshaped, opening out to the reshaping of the whole life, only by engagement. First, engagement is to act with Christ in his example and his commands: "If you love me, keep my commands," he said, "and I will ask the Father to send you another strengthener, the Spirit of truth" (John 14:15-17). The engagement must come first, followed by the helper insofar as obedience is concerned; as we try, fail, and learn, we engage with the spiritual disciplines. We add whole-life training to trying. We recognize that religious business-as-usual, the recommended routine for a "good" church member, is not enough to meet the need of the human soul. The problem of life is too radical for that to be the solution. We enter into activities that are more suited to our actual life condition and that are adequate to transform the whole self under grace, allowing the intention to live the commands of Christ to pass from will to deed.

Christian spiritual formation understood in this way is automatically ecumenical and inclusive in the sense that those thus formed, those who live in obedience to Christ, are thereby united and stand out as the same in their obedience. The substance of obedience is the only thing that can overcome the divisions imposed by encrusted differences in doctrine, ritual, and heritage. The lamp that is aglow in the obedient life will shine. The city set on the hill cannot be hid. Obedience to Christ from the heart and by the spirit is such a radical reality that those who live in it automatically realize the unity that can never be achieved by direct efforts at union. It is not by effort, but by who we are: "I am a companion of all those who fear Thee" (Ps. 119:63, 74).

Some years ago, ecumenism attempted to center around the confession of Christ as Lord. Little came of it because, in the manner to which we have been accustomed by history, the attitudes and actions of real life were left untouched by such a profession. But actual obedience to Christ as Lord would transform ordinary life entirely and bring those disciples who are walking with Christ together wherever their lives touch. Christians who are together in the natural stream of life would immediately identify with one another because of the radically different kind of life, the eternal kind of life, manifestly flowing in them. Their mere non-cooperation with the evil around them would draw them together as magnet and iron. Any other differences would have no significance within the unity of obedience to the Christ who is present in his people.

Now, unfortunately, the other differences (cultural, social, denominational, and even personal) are the ones that govern the disunity of those who nevertheless identify

themselves as Christians. Usually the power of these differences are tangibly at work when professing Christians from different groups are together. I cannot really imagine that this disunity would continue if all were centered in actual obedience to Christ. Set the clear intention and implementation on this aim, and all else follows. Without that, what else really matters? Heaven matters, of course, and attaining it surely does not depend upon attaining maturity in Christ. But to plan on that as a course of action, or to teach it as the normal Christian pattern, is quite another matter, one hardly to be recommended by anyone who actually has confidence in Christ.

The proper Christian exclusiveness will also be largely taken care of, I believe, by Christian spiritual formation centered on obedience to Christ from transformed personality. This will have the exclusiveness of "the God who answers by fire." Let the other spiritualities be equal to that which flowers into obedience to Christ if they can, and let the others themselves be the judges. "Their rock is not like our Rock, our enemies being the judge" (Deut. 32:31).

The real issue relating to exclusiveness is whether or not the Christian actually has a relationship with God, a presence of God, which non-Christians do not have. Apart from Christian spiritual formation as described here, I believe there is little value in claiming exclusiveness for the Christian way.

The realization of this may be what is reflected in the current mass abandonment of the exclusiveness of Christianity that is going on among Western Christians now, especially in its academic centers. Why should one insist on the exclusiveness of Christianity if all it is is one more cultural form? But let the reality of Christian spiritual formation come to its fullness, and exclusiveness will take care of itself. If the homosexual, the witch and the warlock, the Buddhist and the Muslim, can truly walk in a holiness and power equal to that of Jesus Christ and devoted followers, there is nothing more to say. But Christ himself, and not Christianity as a form of human culture, is the standard by which 'we' as well as 'they' are to be measured (Acts 17:31).

Perhaps this auspicious occasion in the life of a leading Evangelical training center is an opportunity for us to ask ourselves: Are we seriously and realistically about the business of Christian spiritual formation as measured by unqualified love of Jesus Christ, and as specified by the 'job description' of the Great Commission? How does our work, what we really do, actually relate to the charge he has left us. How much of what goes on in ourselves, our local assemblies, our denominations, and our schools is dictated only by "vain conversation received by tradition from our fathers and mothers"? (1 Pet. 1:18).

Suppose we were to engage in ground-zero planning—planning which, armed with the best theological and psychological understanding, considers only the aim without attempting to salvage or justify what is already in place through previous efforts. How much of what we now do would then be omitted? How much of what

we now omit would then be done, if all we were trying to do was bring ourselves and others "to do all things whatsoever I have commanded you"? This question is surely put to each of us individually, as well as to all our institutions and programs, by the one who said: "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things I say?" (Luke 6:46).³

NOTES

¹See p. 6 of May's *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit* (Harper 1982). (back to text)

²New York: Alba House, 1992. (back to text)

³For further discussion of the matters discussed in this article, see my *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1988.

God comes to Abraham. Abraham is 75 years old and God says, “Abraham, you’re going to become a father. You’ll be the ancestor of a great nation.” But it won’t happen today, it won’t happen tomorrow. You know how long it was before that promise came true? Twenty-four years. Think about being 75 years old and being told you’re about to become a parent—and then waiting 24 years. That’s how long Abraham had to wait. God told Israel, his people, that they’d be a nation, able to leave the slavery of Egypt and be independent, but they had to wait 400 years. And then God told Moses he would lead the people to the Promised Land, but they had to go to the wilderness and wait 40 years. Then came the great promise that the Messiah, the Savior, the Redeemer from God, would come. God’s people waited. They waited generation after generation, century after century, when God seemed silent. Then, strangest of all, when the Messiah came, he was only recognized by a few. He wasn’t at all what they thought they were waiting for. In fact, he was only recognized by those who were waiting for him.

Luke 2 tells us about two people who recognized the Messiah because they were waiting on God. The first is a man named Simeon. Luke 2:25: “Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout,” and then verse 25 says he was, “waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.” Waiting can be translated either “waiting for” or “looking forward to.”

“It had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him into his arms and praised God, saying, ‘Master, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.’” I’ve been waiting my whole life; now my wait’s over, God.

Verse 36: “There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of 84. Year after year, decade after decade, this amazing woman, a prophet of God, never left the temple, but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were waiting for” (or looking for, again, it is the same word that’s used earlier and can be translated either way) “the redemption of Jerusalem.”

So the Messiah came, Jesus lived and taught, and his disciples kept waiting for him to bring in the kingdom the way they expected, to right all the wrongs. But he was crucified.

He’s getting ready to ascend, and so they ask again, “Are you going to restore the kingdom? Is our waiting over now?”

Jesus had one more command, in Acts 1. He says, “Don’t leave Jerusalem, but wait.” So they did. They waited in the upper room, and the Holy Spirit came.

But that didn’t mean the time of waiting was over for the human race. Paul writes in Romans 8, “We ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see we wait for it with patience.”

We wait and we wait. Forty-three times in the Old Testament the people are commanded, “Wait on the Lord.”

This runs all the way through the Bible to the very last words. In the last chapter of Revelation, John closes by saying, “The one who testifies to these things says, ‘Behold, I am coming soon.’” It may not seem like it, but in light of eternity, it’s soon. Hang on. And then John writes, “Amen, even so. Come Lord Jesus.” All right. We’ll hang on. But come. We’re waiting for you.

Obvious question: why? Why does God make us wait? If he can do anything and if he’s all-loving, why doesn’t he bring us relief and answers now?

I certainly don’t understand all of this, but I believe at least in part, to paraphrase Ben Patterson, what’s going on is this: What God does in us while we wait is as important as what it is we’re waiting for.

Paul says while we’re waiting for God to set everything right, we suffer. But suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character, and character produces hope. God is producing these qualities in us while we wait. What that means is that biblically, waiting is not just something we have to do until we get what we want. Waiting is part of the process of becoming what God wants us to be.

In the time that remains tonight, I want to talk about what it means to wait on the Lord. First I want to say one word about what biblical waiting is not.

Biblical waiting is not passive waiting around for something or someone to come along that will allow you to escape from your trouble. People sometimes say “I’m just waiting on the Lord” as an excuse not to face up to reality, take appropriate action, or own up to their responsibility. That is not what waiting on the Lord is.

I’ve heard of people with horrible financial habits—impulsive spending or refusal to save money—get into a huge money mess and say, “We’re waiting on the Lord to provide.” That’s not biblical waiting. Waiting on the Lord in this case does not mean sitting around hoping you will get a letter from Nordstrom’s saying, “Bank error in your favor, collect \$200.” That falls under the general theological category of “don’t be stupid.”

Waiting on the Lord in this case probably means dragging your self to a good sense seminar and learning about biblical principles for a life of stewardship. Biblical waiting is not passive; it’s not a way to evade unpleasant reality.

Waiting on the Lord is a confident, disciplined, expectant, active, sometimes painful clinging to God. Waiting on the Lord is the continual, daily decision to say, “God, I will trust you and I will obey you even though the circumstances of my life are not turning out the way I want them to, and they may never turn out the way I want them to. I’m betting everything on you, God, and there is no Plan B.” That’s waiting on the Lord. It’s the hardest work of hoping.

Waiting on the Lord requires a trusting heart.

There are three requirements to waiting on the Lord.

The first is this: waiting on the Lord requires patient trust. Will I trust that God has good reasons for telling me to wait? I don't know what they are. But will I trust that God knows what he's doing? Will I remember that things look different to God because he views things from eternity?

This is what Peter writes about (2 Peter 3:8-9): "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise as some think of slowness but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance."

God has a different perspective. An economist read this passage and was quite amazed by it and talked to God about it. "Lord, is it true that a thousand years for us is just like one minute to you?"

The Lord said, "Yes."

The economist said, "Well then, a million dollars to us must be like one penny to you."

The Lord said, "Well, yes."

The economist said, "Well, Lord, will you give me one of those pennies?"

The Lord said, "All right, I will. Wait here a minute."

Often we want God's resources, but we don't want his timing. We want the penny but not the minute. We want his hand, but we don't want his calendar. We forget his work in us while we wait, which is as important as what it is you're waiting for. Waiting means I must trust that God knows what he's doing.

Maybe you're single. We live in a society where often the assumption is that marriage is normal and singleness is not. You feel the pain of that stigma. Maybe you feel a legitimate longing for intimacy. Waiting is so hard, and maybe there's a relationship at your fingertips that promises to take that loneliness away. But you know that relationship is not honoring to God. Maybe you know in your heart that this is not the right person. Maybe this person does not share your ultimate commitment to God. Maybe this person is putting pressure on you to be involved sexually even though you're not married. But because of the pain, you're tempted to think, *I've been waiting long enough. I'm going to reach out for whatever satisfaction I can get in this life and worry about the consequences later.*

So I'm asking you, if you're in that situation, will you wait on the Lord? Will you courageously say, "OK, God. I will take you at your word. I will not get hooked up with a relationship that I know would dishonor you and bring damage to the souls of those involved. I will seek to build the best life I can right here where I am. Not knowing what tomorrow holds and even though I sometimes feel like nobody in the world understands how painful it is, I'll trust you. I will wait."

Will you do that? Maybe you have a dream about certain things that you'd love to accomplish, a mark you'd like to make, something about your work or your ministry, and for reasons you don't understand, what you always hope for is not happening. You don't know why; you just know it hurts. And you are tempted to try to force things to happen, to manipulate, or to use people. Or maybe you're tempted to give up ever trying to realize the potential God has given you and just drift along. Will you have the patience neither to try to force it nor to quit, but wait patiently on God?

Continue to learn about your giftedness. Humbly and openly receive feedback and coaching from others. Grow in the truth one step at a time and trust God's plan for you rather than what it is you think you need.

This last week I read one of the most beautiful pictures of waiting on God that I've ever seen. Many of you know Henri Nouwen, who died just a year or two ago. Not long before his death, he wrote a book called *Sabbatical Journeys*. He writes about some friends of his who were trapeze artists. They were with the circus, and their lives had an effect on him. They were called The Flying Roudellas. One thing they told Henri Nouwen is that there's a very special relationship between the flyer and the catcher on the trapeze. The flyer is the one that lets go, and the catcher is the one that catches. As you might imagine, this relationship is important—especially to the flyer. When the flyer is swinging high above the crowd on the trapeze, the moment comes when he must let go. He arcs out into the air, and his job is to remain as still as possible and to wait for the strong hands of the catcher to pluck him from the air. This trapeze artist told Nouwen, "The flyer must never try to catch the catcher." The flyer must wait in absolute trust. The catcher will catch him. But he must wait.

Some of you are in a vulnerable moment right now. You have let go of what it is God has called you to let go of, but you can't feel God's hand catching you yet. And you want to start flailing around. Will you wait in absolute trust? Will you be patient? Waiting requires patient trust. That's the first thing waiting on God requires. The second one is this: Waiting on the Lord requires confident humility. Isaiah wrote these words: "the fruit of righteousness will be peace." The effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever. The result of righteousness, the prophet says, will be these two character qualities: confidence - the conviction that God is able and a fearless orientation towards the future - and, oddly, quietness. This is the opposite of arrogance and boasting. It's the humble recognition of my limits. Waiting is something by its nature that only the humble can do—or at least only the humble can do it with grace. To wait for something is to recognize I am not in control. I'm not calling the shots; the timing is not up to me. In our society, there's a direct correlation between status and waiting. The higher your status, the less you have to wait. Waiting reminds me I'm not in charge. I'm the creature. But, we're not just waiting around; we're waiting on God. And God is doing something in us.

Therefore we can trust his wisdom and his timing, and we can wait with confidence. Therefore the single most important activity for people waiting on God is prayer. Prayer is the primary form that waiting on God takes.

It's prayer that allows creatures, humbled human beings, to wait without worry. Recently, I had a night where I could not sleep and was troubled by all kinds of thoughts—"what-if" kinds of thoughts. What if I don't get what I think I so desperately need? What if some things don't turn out the way that I desperately want them to turn out? These were frantic voices inside me, and there was a semblance of truth in what they said—bad things can happen, but those words didn't lead to life. The next morning I was reading in Mark 4 where Jesus and his friends are in the boat during a storm. They become frantic and panic. Remember what Jesus is doing in the boat? He's sleeping. The disciples wake him up, and he says to them, "Pipe down," and he says to the storm, "Pipe down," and everything becomes calm. This story struck me as an example of one aspect of life that God does not experience. Jesus experienced nearly every human emotion, including sorrow, joy, pain, tiredness, anger and hope. But there's one aspect of our lives that God never experiences: God's never frantic. God never panics. God is never in a hurry. That gets irritating to those of us who are in a hurry. But God never is.

Lastly, it is important for us to learn how to recognize God's voice. How do you learn to recognize anybody's voice? You pick up the phone, and if you know somebody well you know their voice. It's by experience. You've listened to it many times, and it has a certain tone. One thing you need to know about God is God's voice is never frantic. When you hear desperate thoughts, or panicky thoughts, that's not God's voice. God's voice will never lead you into panicky desperation. When you find yourself being led into panicky desperation, you can know that you are not listening to the voice of God. "My sheep know my voice," Jesus said. It's the voice of the shepherd who cares for his sheep. Always. We wait with confident humility. We can be confident because God's leading us. We express humility because we are not in charge; we have to wait.

Waiting on the Lord requires inextinguishable hope. For in hope we were saved. Hope that is seen, Paul wrote, is not hope, for who hopes for what is seen? In other words, if I already had it I wouldn't have to hope for it. But if we hope for what we do not see, what we cry out for and hunger and thirst for but don't yet experience, we do so with patience. In the Bible we find a most wonderful promise attached to waiting on the Lord.

What we wait for is not more important than what happens to us while we're waiting. The one we wait for will be worth the wait. He will.

Even youths will faint and be weary and the young will fall exhausted. There is a limit to the strength of the strongest human being. "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not grow weary. They shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:30-31)."

John Ortberg is teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, and a contributing editor to Preaching Today. His most recent book is Love Beyond Reason.

(c) John Ortberg
Preaching Today Tape #199
www.PreachingTodaySermons.com
A resource of Christianity Today International

Spiritual Formation and the Warfare Between the Flesh and the Human Spirit

By Dallas Willard

Published in the Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care, Spring 2008, Vol 1, No 1. John Coe, editor.
A publication of The Institute for Spiritual Formation at Biola University.

ABSTRACT: In response to the common assumption of perpetual moral and spiritual failure in human life, this article offers a view of personal transformation and, in particular, of the role of the human will in such formation, that clears a way forward in progressive conformity to the character of Christ. Drawing from St. Paul's understanding of the "flesh" and the human "spirit," distinctions are made between the impulsive, the reflective, and the embodied will. It is the embodied/reflective will of the person that is captured by Christ through inner transformation, such that the crucifixion of the flesh and walking by the Spirit brings about routine, easy obedience to Christ, from the inside out.

"Do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace." (Romans 6:12-14)¹

Spiritual formation in Christ is the process through which disciples or apprentices of Jesus take on the qualities or characteristics of Christ himself, in every essential dimension of human personality. The overall orientation of their will, the kinds of thoughts and feelings that occupy them, the "automatic" inclinations and "readinesses" of their body in action, the prevailing posture of their relations toward others, and the harmonious wholeness of their soul—these all, through the formative processes undergone by his disciples, increasingly come to resemble the personal dimensions of their Master. "A pupil is not above his teacher," Jesus said, "but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

This holistic transformation is what Paul means by "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14), and by "Lay aside the old self...and put on the new self" (Eph. 4:22-24). His are not just pretty words, but the practical directions of an intelligent and divinely inspired man who knew by personal experience the reality and truth of what he was talking about. Routine, easy obedience to Christ with reference to specific actions, then, is the natural outcome of the transformation of the essential dimensions of our personality

into Christlikeness. But such obedience is neither the direct aim nor the standard of discipleship. And any idea that we can achieve such obedience to perfection or that we can do it in our own strength alone is emphatically ruled out by the New Testament writers. Very well. But is such obedience then possible at all?

Today there is the wide spread conviction—and corresponding levels of practice—that sin wins. Certain statements also made by Paul, or elsewhere in the Bible, are wrongly understood and applied to the life of the disciple, and are taken to mean that we must remain in perpetual spiritual and moral defeat. In short, spiritual formation in Christlikeness is impossible. The power of sin and its penetration into fallen human nature requires, it is thought, that the ideals of transformation and obedience clearly set forth in many parts of the Bible, and especially in the New Testament, cannot be realized. Goodbye to the Sermon on the Mount, I Corinthians 13, Ephesians 4 & 5, etc. etc. Goodbye even to "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8) We just can't have such a life, according to this view, but must live in constant moral failure and spiritual defeat.

It may seem like that is certainly the New Testament view, if you choose your verses carefully. Paul says that "the flesh sets its desire against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you wish." (Gal. 5:17—That sounds so grim that we suddenly forget the previous verse, where he tells us, precisely, how to foil the flesh. More on this later.) And then there is Paul's most famous statement on this point: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom.7:19 KJV). This can easily be made to sound like a declaration of the perpetual human condition. And did not Jesus himself say, when confronted with a peculiarly poignant case of human failure, that "the human spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak"? (Matt. 26:41) And then there is Jeremiah: "The heart is more deceitful than all else and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (17:9).

The problem that confronts us here is not, we should note, one that is peculiar to Christians. It is a severe difficulty at the heart of humanity. It is the problem of not doing the good that you would sincerely say you intend to do, that you clearly wish you would do, and that you grieve over and regret not having done. It is a fundamental problem for all who see life clearly and think deeply about it. Greek thought and civilization (such as it was) eventually failed in its attempts to solve the problem of how to do and bring others to do what they knew to be right. Socrates, famously, insisted that if you really knew what was good and right you would do it. Such "moral optimism" clearly puts too much weight on knowledge or on our cognitive faculties. Aristotle struggles with the problem at length under the heading of "weakness of will," in Book VII of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Although he regards Socrates' position as simplistic, he still locates the essential factors of failure at the level of cognition. But the Apostle Paul had a deeper view of the dynamics of human action. He understood sin as a condition of the

human self with which the Greek thinkers never came to grips. And he knew how to deal with it.

People today rarely do justice to Paul as a great thinker and one who, as a slave of Jesus Christ, laid the foundations of the millennia-long Western understanding of human life. Sir William Ramsey, of another day and with a clearer view, remarked that "In Paul, for the first time since Aristotle, Greek philosophy made a real step forward."² In his *A Man in Christ*, James S. Stewart remarked that "For sheer mental force, apart altogether from spiritual experience, Paul's place is with Plato and Socrates and the world's giants of thought."³ To understand the battle between the flesh and the human spirit, according to Paul, and to learn how that battle can be won for Christ in the process of spiritual formation, we must take pains to use his words as he himself understood them.

"Flesh," on Paul's understanding, consists of the natural human abilities, considered in themselves and on their own, unaided by Divine assistance and direction. Flesh is not necessarily bad, and it certainly is not "fallen or sinful human nature." For one thing, it is not human nature, but only one part of it. For another it is not essentially sinful, fallen, or bad. It is a good creation of God, and needs only to keep or be kept to its proper function in life before God. Thus, "the son of the bondwoman (Hagar) was born according to the flesh" (Gal. 4:23)—that is, from normal human abilities. But "the son of the freewoman" (Sarah) was born through the promise and action of God, along with her and Abraham's normal human abilities. The mark of the action of the Holy Spirit with our action is always the incommensurability of the result with the outcome you could expect from normal human abilities and efforts alone. The "mind set on the flesh" is death (Rom. 8:6), because it draws upon natural human abilities alone, not upon the gracious actions of God in our life. Those who invest solely in their flesh get back only "corruption" (Gal. 6:8), for that is the only outcome of natural human abilities on their own, dominated by desires. To be corrupt means to be broken into pieces, to perish through internal disintegration.

Flesh naturally works by desire. Obsessive desire (ἐπιθυμία)—the kind of desire that can rule your whole life—is usually translated as "lust" in the New Testament. Desire is the impulse toward possession or experience of its object. Desire "locks on." It cares for nothing else but its own satisfaction. "I want what I want when I want it," the song says. Of course anyone caught in the grip of "lust" is already in real trouble. They will sacrifice what is good, for themselves and others, to get what they want. This overriding drive for gratification is the genuine root of "weakness of will," and Paul and the other New Testament writers saw it clearly. Desires taken by themselves are inherently chaotic (James 4:1-3), each clamoring for its own gratification. And they are deceitful (Eph. 4:22), for they each promise a fulfillment which they cannot deliver, and they drive us ever onward in the blindness of sensual futility (Eph. 4:17-19). Thus, "fleshly lusts wage war against the soul" (I Peter 2:11), against the inner principle of personal unity and integrity. And we all have to be delivered from "the corruption (the disintegration of life) that is in the world by lust" (II Peter 1:4).

The terrible "deeds of the flesh"—"sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these"—which Paul enumerates as he continues his discussion in Galatians 5 are the natural and inevitable outcomes of "lusts" given free rein.⁴ What is good and right is lost before the onslaught of human desire. The will, the human spirit, cannot prevail going one-on-one with desire. That is the situation described by Paul in Romans 7:19 and Galatians 5:17.

The human will or "spirit," by contrast, is very different from flesh actuated in unrestrained desire. It considers alternatives. That is its essential nature. It is our God-given ability by which we have an interest, not just in this, but in what is better or best. It takes a broad view of possibilities: not just of one desire and its object, but of other desires and goods. That is where choice comes in. Choice involves deliberation between alternatives, with a view to what is best. It seeks light. It treasures the law. The conflict between "the flesh" and the (human) spirit is the conflict between desire—what I want—and the will for what is best. And hence it is also the conflict between desire and love, which is always directed toward what is good for its objects. Love is will-to-good. Desire and love are two utterly different kinds of things. You may say you love chocolate cake, but you don't—you don't will its good, nor perhaps your own—you just want to eat it. That is desire.

Law also is directed toward what is good. That is why it conflicts with desire. Desire says "Let's have sex" or "I wish you were dead." The law says: A greater good is at issue here—the purity of human love and faithfulness toward other human beings, or the preciousness of human life. So: "Thou shalt not." And beyond the explicit law is the general drive toward what is better and best. That is "the spirit of the law." That is love, which is committed to the well-being of its objects and so is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:10). Hence in my will or spirit "I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good" (Rom. 7:16).

So the human will or spirit, the power of choice, always seeks a wider perspective than "what I want." But in the lives of people who are "without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12), desires actually enslave the will, or even pose as the will. Many people lose any understanding that they have a will that is distinct from their desires, and they come to think that freedom is doing what they want, not what is good. We might even speak of a "vital" or "impulsive" will. That would be a willing that is outwardly directed and moved by and moving toward things that simply are attractive. You see this in a baby. A little baby very quickly begins to be attracted to things, to reach for them, and to move in relationship to them. That's all there really is to will in the baby. If the person does not develop beyond this stage, they will identify themselves with their will, and their will with what they want. They will never subordinate themselves to God and what is good, as a whole person living in God's world. Thus, "I want to" and "It pleases me" are now widely regarded as overriding reasons for doing something, when in fact they should

never function by themselves as a reason for action. The meaning of the cross of Christ in human experience is that it stops any mere "I want to" from functioning as an adequate reason for action. The cross is therefore central to the moral life of humanity.

Impulsive will must give way to reflective will. The reflective will is oriented toward what is good for the person as a whole, in their communal setting, not merely to what is desired. So here arises the conflict that we all know too well, between the good and the bad, the good and the not so good, and the good and the better and the best. This conflict goes on constantly in human lives, and it trips up people at all levels of life in contemporary Christian circles. Moral and spiritual failure happens in cases where, for whatever precise reason, the reflective will has not effectively guided life. We then "do what we would not, and fail to do what we would."

By contrast, when we bring the reflective will to life in Christ (birth "from above"), and add the instruction of the law and the presence of the Holy Spirit, along with the fellowship of his Body, we have the wherewithal to live in such a way that God is glorified in everything we do. The anticipation of this is seen in such great passages on the life in Christ as Colossians 3:17: "Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father through him." That becomes a real possibility, and progressive transformation toward inner likeness to Christ makes it increasingly actual.

Vital or impulsive will is where you simply choose what you desire, and reflective will is where instead of just doing what you want, you choose what is good—and especially, as Christians, what is good under God, in the kingdom of God with Jesus. A crucial third perspective on the will (human spirit) is to see it as embodied will. Embodied will is where impulsive will or reflective will has settled into your body to such an extent that you automatically, without prior deliberation, do what they dictate. This is a sad—even a tragic—condition for those who have allowed their desires to enslave their will, but that is the standard situation for most human beings on earth. Their body is running their life in terms of desires ("pleasures") that have enslaved their will and positioned their desire-enslaved will in their body. In this sense the body becomes the immediate, but not the ultimate, source of "the deeds of the flesh." This is perhaps what Jesus had in mind when he said that "everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin" (John 8:34).

Peter's denial of Christ perfectly illustrates this. It was an exercise of his embodied will. He did not reflect on the situation and then decide to deny Christ. When concretely faced with the accusation of association with Jesus he blurted out the denial. It was just sitting there in his tongue, ready to go. Such is embodied will for evil. After the fact, Peter discovered what he was really like "inside." He discovered what Jesus already knew about him. To take another case, when people are verbally assaulted, what do they do without having to think about it? They assault back. When they are hurt, they hurt back. That is embodied will as it exists in a fallen world. When you are driving your car and don't do what someone thinks you should, they may honk at you, or make an

obscene gesture, or other such things. The responses that then arise in the ordinary person are similar in kind. They are expressions of the embodied will. When someone "disses" another person, the other person (usually) does not say, "Huh, I have just been dissed. What shall I do?" No. It's WHOOSH! "Right back at you!" Just like that. We can call that an "epidermal response," because it lies right at the surface of your 'skin'—in your embodied thoughts and feelings.

Now it is the embodied will that must be captured by Christ through inner transformation. That will cannot be effectively controlled by "watchfulness" alone, by conscious monitoring, for it is always "out in front" of any conscious monitoring that we might do. Once Christ has captured the embodied will, watchfulness becomes very effective. But if we are living for desire, our embodied will will have already embroiled us in evil before we can reflectively take up a different direction. Our body must be spiritually developed to the point that what it is "ready" to do is what is good and right—what we "would" do. It then becomes a primary resource for living the life to which Christ calls us and for which he prepares us.

Let us say, then, that Christian spiritual formation is the process through which the embodied/reflective will or "spirit" of the human being takes on the character of Christ's will. Think of Paul's magnificent statement: "The life which I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). Not just faith in Christ, but the faith of Christ—the one by which he lived. I have taken his faith into me. I am now being inwardly the person that Christ has called me to be, and this inward faith has now spread throughout my social, embodied self—more or less, and progressively more than less.

Let us be as clear as possible. When we speak of spiritual formation we are speaking of the formation of the human spirit. The spirit is the will or the heart, and, by extension, our character, which, in practice, lives mainly in our bodies. The main reason why the idea of spiritual transformation through merely being preached at and taught usually doesn't work is because that does not involve the body in the process of transformation. One of the ironies of spiritual formation is that every "spiritual" discipline is or involves bodily behavior. We have to involve the body in spiritual formation because that is where we live and what we live from. So now spiritual formation is formation of the "inner" dimensions of the human being, resulting in transformation of the whole person, including the body in its social context. Spiritual formation is never merely inward but is always also explosively outward.

In direct confrontation between human flesh and human spirit, between what is desired and what is good, sin wins. The futile human struggle with evil proves it. But fellowship with Jesus Christ in the new life from above brings new possibilities into play on the side of the human spirit in carrying out its intentions for good. Sin then loses as the desires of the flesh are ordered under the goodness and power of God in us. Thus, Paul tells us to "walk by the Spirit (now the Holy Spirit), and you will not carry out the desire of the

flesh" (Gal. 5:16). After listing the deeds of the flesh and outlining the fruit of the Spirit, he continues: "Now those who are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by (or follow) the Spirit." (vv. 24-25) In the other masterful passage in which he deals at length with the opposition between flesh and spirit, Romans 8:1-16, he states that "if you are living in terms of the flesh, you are about to die, but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live on." (vs. 13)

Instead of engaging in futile, direct confrontation with the desires of flesh, organized by the evil one into a "world" set against God and what is good (Eph. 2:1-3; cp. I John 2:15-17), the wise and inspired Apostle gives us a twofold counsel of indirection: (1) To crucify the flesh, and (2) to walk by or follow the Spirit. These are well summed up in his admonition to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to lusts" (Rom. 13:14)—that is, merely to achieve what the flesh wants. I believe that in following this counsel we should think of the two parts as being carried out simultaneously.

(1) You will notice that crucifixion is not something you can do to yourself (you do not have enough hands). That is why Paul says, "if you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live" (Rom. 8:13, KJV). Endless grief has come to the people of Christ through efforts to use natural abilities and arrangements to restrain the flesh. Such efforts produce the many "circumcisions" that are found in "religious" life. Restraining the flesh is an essentially divine work, though we also must act. And what do we do? We simply refuse natural desires the right to direct our life. We decide that we shall not live for them to be satisfied. Living to satisfy natural desires is, as Jesus pointed out, how "Gentiles," those who don't know God, live (Matt. 6:32). We make a general surrender of the right to get what we want in favor of the call to do what is good under God. This is the right and healthy understanding of "death to self."

Following upon this general surrender is the practicing of specific disciplines, such as solitude, silence, fasting, study, worship, service, and so forth, to quell our desires that have been running our life and embed the will of Christ into our body in its social setting, making his will our embodied will. That is what Paul has in mind with "I bruise my body and make it my slave" (I Cor. 9:27). The radical disciplines of abstinence, solitude, silence, and fasting, are especially useful and necessary to re-train our body, along with the other active components of the self. "Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother, my soul is like a weaned child within me" (Ps. 131:2). That is our new reality. The chaos and turmoil of the self-life is now quieted, and I can stand firmly and effectively for what is good and right in the strength of the Lord. I am walking by the Spirit.

(2) And what does that mean? It means, above all, to count on, to expect, that the Holy Spirit, God, Christ—the unbodily personal power that is the Trinitarian God—will act in my life to enable me to do the good and right in all things I am engaged with. I no longer

"have to" do what is wrong in order to make things "turn out right." The ancient wisdom of the Proverbs says: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own cleverness. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will smooth your paths" (3:5-6). To walk by the Spirit means to recognize Him in everything you do and to expect His action. It means that you "set your mind on the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5; II Cor. 4:16-18). It means, negatively, that you do not place your hopes in what natural abilities by themselves can accomplish (Jer. 17:5).

Jesus has arranged with the Father to give us a "Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My; name" (John 14:26). He will always be with us, and will direct and empower us, as we rely upon him and invite him into our activities. Now obviously the experience of God in our affairs will strengthen our commitment to not having "our way," and the use of spiritual disciplines will train us away from trying to run things on our own. So (1) and (2) encourage and reinforce one another. They make for and fill out a life that is "from above," a "resurrection life that is already beyond death" (Col. 3:1-4), a life that is even now an eternal one (John 17:3 and I John 2:17).

In such a life the desires of "the flesh" retreat to the very subordinate role for which they were created. Natural desires are good within the proper ordering of life. But they no longer control us, dictate our actions, and defeat the will for what is good: the love that fulfills the law and goes "beyond the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" (Matt. 5:20). Now, by intention, discipline and grace, I do the things I would and do not do the things I would not. Integrity is restored to my soul and spreads throughout my life. No doubt that is not yet perfectly so, but it is increasingly so as I grow in grace and knowledge toward a scene in which "that which is perfect has come and that which is in part is done away with" (I Cor. 13:10). The peace of Christ and the joy of Christ and the love of Christ possess us, and, whatever battles remain to be fought, the outcome of the warfare between the flesh and the human spirit is no longer in doubt. Spiritual formation in Christ conquers the flesh and makes it the servant of the spirit, human and divine. That is the testimony of Paul, and the testimony of disciples through the ages.

NOTES

1. All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Version unless otherwise noted. (Return to text)
2. William M. Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul: Their Influence on His Life and Thought* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1907), p. 4. (Return to text)
3. James S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ* (New York: Harper), 1935, p. 21. (Return to text)
4. Paul gave much thought and expression to the dreadful chaos of the sinful life. See his lists in Romans 1:29-32 and 3:10-18, as well as II Timothy 3:2-7. (Return to text)