

"Spiritual Formation - Obedience"

Dallas Willard at Bethel - 10/09/08

Scribe's Comments - The session was transcribed from the recording in good-faith effort but it is not verbatim. The **bold** and underline offer the scribe's emphasis and the [brackets] offer further explanation.



Session 2 - "Spiritual Formation: Obedience" (audio)

[1:16:17] [Bethel 3]

Talk #2 of 2 - 'Spiritual Formation: Special Emphasis - *The Moral Life*'

[Talk 1 of 2 - "The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge" Bethel 2]

[Bethel Pastors - "Disappearance of Moral Knowledge in the Church"]

[Links to more Willard, "Disappearance of Moral Knowledge" talks]

Obedience to Christ

It is obedience to Christ that pulls the the train of Christian spirituality.

It comes from the inside. It is not a matter of conformity of our action.

It is a matter of our heart and all that goes with that.

Moral transformation and moral knowledge is a major issue, not just for our society but especially for our churches.

The issue is - How shall we lead in these matters?

No one else is going to lead.

No one else has the position, the knowledge or the power to do it.

We look to Jesus as the person who understands these things better than anyone else. We want to hear what He has to say and enlarge on it.

We can think about actual obedience to Christ in real life becomes possible and real and how it becomes a good thing.

Most people think, "*Oh no! Not that.*"

The easy way to live is Jesus' way. The hard way is the other way.

Proverbs - "*The way of the transgressor is hard*"

His Yoke is easy and His burden is light.

"His commandments are not hard to carry, not burdensome." John

We have to shift our thinking to get into this topic. The more sanctified you are, the easier your life is. Sanctification is not hard, it's easy but you have to know how to enter into it. But if you try to do it without being transformed inwardly, it's not only hard, it's impossible.

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Key Questions

[4:30]

1.) What is the Nature of Reality?

Reality is what you can count on. That's why truth is important. Truth enables us to come to terms of reality in a good way.

* Gun Aim mechanism: If it's true, you can hit what you are shooting at.

Come to good terms with reality. If you don't have it, you'll come to terms with it anyway. Reality is what you run into when you are wrong.

Reality is God's work. We don't construct it. One of the great myths today is "Constructionism" - we construct reality, we construct truth.

2.) Who is well off?

[6:50]

We want to be well off. That's where our reality assumptions come in. It has to deal with reality. It can't be about illusions.

It's important to get this right. Jesus' teaches us about that.

Reality - God in His Kingdom

Well off - Living in the Kingdom of God.

3.) Who is a really good person?

[7:45]

Someone who is permeated with Agape love.

In particular, not controlled by desire.

If you love something, you are set to achieve what is good for it.

If you love your plant, you take care of it. If you love your neighbor, you care for them. If you love God, you look out for what is good for God.

4.) How do you become a really good person?

[8:45]

Jesus - the answer to the question of moral knowledge [9:05]

Jesus is not an airhead who stands haplessly before PhD's. Jesus is the master of knowledge. When He speaks about moral issues and spiritual issues, we listen to Him as one who knows.

The central teaching about the heart of religion, morality and spirituality is:

Mark 12:29 *"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."*

{That's the reality statement}

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

And love your neighbor as yourself."

The Torah, the Law, is not just a set of commandments, it is all we need to know to live and live well with God.

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John 13:34 - "A new commandment I give to you to love one another as I have loved you." [11:00]

He does not just teach about love, He redefines it.

It's not love your neighbor as yourself. That's good.

But, how do you love yourself?

He gives a teaching - "Love one another as I have loved you."

He redefines love by his action. He comes into the world, manifests love as He lives, manifests love as He dies and manifests love in His resurrection.

It's an old commandment because everyone knew it. It's a new commandment because no one knew how to do it.

The Cross stands over human history like no other symbol.

It represents Jesus' definition of love - "Greater love is this, Lay down his life."

I John 2:7-11 - Re-definition & understanding of love, hate, darkness, light.

I Corinthians 13 - If I don't have love, everything I say is meaningless, it's just more noise. The greatest of these is love. Love is the high-water mark of our teaching, what comes from our heart.

~ **The Whole Person** Diagram [14:30]

(p. 37, *Renovation of the Heart*)

A representation of you as described by Jesus.

Heart - Mind (Thoughts & Emotions) - Body - Soul - Social Relations

Spirit/Heart

The capacity to originate. Your will. Your independent power. You stand above nature and causation in your spirit/heart/will.

"Spirit" - character of God as independent; small independence in our case. God's capacity to exist on his own.

Exodus 3:14, "I am that I am." My existence is based only on me.

John 4 - God is spirit seeking those who will worship Him in spirit & truth

Our spirit - counts most revealing who we are.

That's why "**intention**" is fundamental in law and relation to law.

Does someone manifest "remorse"? That goes right into their heart

Intentions of the heart are the deepest layer of you as an individual. That's why they are utterly important in spiritual growth. If you are going to learn how to become the kind of person who keeps the teaching of Jesus, you have to intend to do it. "I am going to do what Jesus said."

The heart is the part of us that died when we departed from God. The primary function of the spirit is to trust God.

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The Mind

[20:25]

Our powers of representation. What we choose depends on what we think. That's why the renewing of the mind is so central to spiritual transformation. What we think and what imagine is crucial to where the mind will go. Your first freedom is where you will put your mind. That's where you turn to God. That's where "*God so loved the world*" comes. It strike your minds and triggers your emotions and elicits your will. Your "will" will renew its contact through grace with God and life will come back into your person and you will begin to grow.

The Body

[21:30]

Power pack to live. Body is a good thing. Most of what we are inwardly we farm out to our body. Body language is so revealing. It is there to enable us to act in our world without having to think about everything we do. You want your abilities to be in your body.

- * Riding in a car with someone driving.

You want them to know what to do without thinking about it.

- * Train our bodies to play a violin, speak a language.

Our body carries us into our world. We need to make sure we have the right things in our body. The body is crucial in our spiritual development because if we don't succeed in training our body it will act before we think and do what's wrong.

- * "Bite my tongue" because our tongue has already acted
- * Sexuality & Anger

Social Domain

[23:25]

We live in our body in a social domain.

- * Peter's Denial - His body in a social context

Jesus never questioned his intentions. He told him what he was going to do because Jesus knew how Peter worked. He knows how we work. He knows what has to be changed if we are going to do what we say we are going to do.

The Soul

[24:10]

All the aspects of your life to make one life. A broken soul manifests itself by the incapacity to do what they intend to do or control the stimuli that are coming from the world and direct them in such a way that they are not under control by the world around them.

Psalm 23 - He restores my soul.

Soul - Computer that runs the whole operation.

You don't deal directly with it but you can receive help.

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The Word & the Spirit of Christ through the Gospel [25:20]

It impacts the mind and the spirit responds by placing faith in God. That re-establishes connection with God. There is new life in the body and the social context then you can grow throughout the whole area of your being. That will be up to you in cooperation with grace. Intelligent action is the secret to spiritual growth. We don't change just by learning truth. We change when we begin to put things into action. The Spirit takes over and we receive more grace to do things we don't have a shot to do without.

Grace is God acting in your life enabling you to accomplish what you can't accomplish on your own. Is it unmerited favor? Of course it is but "unmerited favor" doesn't tell you what it is. It is God acting in your life.

II Peter 3:18 - *"Grow in grace & knowledge of Jesus Christ."*

That's a command to us. We're supposed to do that. You need the Spirit but we're not waiting on the Spirit, the Spirit is waiting on us.

"Apart from my you can do nothing."

If you do nothing, it will be without Jesus.

Action comes after the new birth that has established us in a new life with a new creation in us and it is beginning not move out of all the dimensions of our being. What comes out of our personality influenced by all those parts is the actions that Jesus would lead us. The change is internal.

* Francis Schaeffer - *True Spirituality* - the change that leads into true spirituality is the transformation of the inner personality. It has a profound effect on the actions that come out but we don't try to control the actions.

Rather, *"we clean the inside of the cup."*

A lesson from dishwashing. If you clean the inside, the outside will be clean. Jesus is taking that lesson and He is telling us the way to proceed is to reach the source of good & evil from the heart. Routinely what will happen is the transformation of the outside, the behavior.

Luke 6:43-45 - *"No Good tree produces bad fruit or a bad tree that produces bad fruit. Don't gather figs from thorns."* [30:40]

"Good things stored up in the heart." That's the place the work is to be done. The evil man brings evil things of the heart. If you want to have good things coming out, you have to make the heart good.

He addresses the centrality of the mouth.

Brother James addresses the Tongue & mouth - the closest physical organ to the heart and what's in it. What there is a lot of in the heart, the mouth speaks.

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The Other Concept - The Flesh

[32:40]

Flesh is the biblical term for the natural abilities of the human being on their own. It obsesses on what **DESIRE** focuses on. The flesh will take us to a particular thing desire is focused on. Flesh is not evil, it is good.

Desire is God's way seeing to it that we take care of things we need to take care of.

- * People with no appetite.
- * Depression - Desire dies.

The problem is when Desire comes to govern the life.

"Mind of the flesh is death" Romans 7

- * "Have it your way" Burger King

[\["Desire" - Willard, "Battle Between Flesh & Spirit" @ 25:40\]](#)

Flesh is important. It is not bad. It is not meant to control our lives. If it does then our love for what is good will diminish and its influence over our lives and the flesh will dominate.

The Two Wills

[35:33]

1.) The Vital Will

* A child drawn to attractive objects. *"I want that."* Sometimes we give into the child. Then it breaks and the child says, "Why did you let me buy that?" Children are dominated by desire.

2.) The Reflective Will

Oriented to what is good for the person as a whole, not just what it desires. That's the difference between "will" and "desire". "Will" is on the side of the good. That is why there is a warfare between the "flesh" & "spirit" in the human being. In a world apart from God, what is good - the Reflective Will - can not win. It winds up not seeking what is best but what it wants. Warfare leads to the "works of the flesh."

Galatians 5:17 - *"Flesh sets its desire and the desire opposes the spirit (both divine and human spirit).*

The problem is to be able to NOT do what you want.

[\[Raising Kids\]](#) Your hope for your **children** to come to the place where they can NOT do what they want to do and where they CAN do what they don't want to do.

* A student who can not do their homework because they don't want to do it is in trouble.

Human Morality - *Do what we don't want to do and not do what we want to do.* Because of the warfare, the flesh sets its desire against the spirit.

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The deeds of the flesh is a picture of human life.

"Immorality, impurity, sensuality..."

Sensuality jumps right at us from the body and says, "Me!"

Sensuality is what governs our culture. "Feelings!"

Feelings are generally what governs our culture.

* TV Commercials

* Political Campaigns - what do they appeal to.

Watch elections and ask yourself, "What is governing?"

It's feelings.

You don't have to know a thing to vote. "Do what you feel."

That is why we have so much teaching in the scripture about "lust".

It is "strong desires." [41:30]

II Peter 1:4 - *"...partakes of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."*

Corruption - break up of order

Leads to the divorce rate.

I Peter 2:11 - *"as aliens and strangers to refrain from fleshly lust that wage war against the soul."*

What breaks up your soul? Desire. It tears you apart.

James - "wars & fighting? Your desires."

The Cross & Desire

[44:55]

The Cross sets aside the flesh.

Anger - being "crossed". I might cross you - interfere with your desires.

To cross desires and will = Anger unless they have applied the Cross to themselves. The Cross enables you to be crossed without anger. You can still act for what is right. You don't have to be mad for what is right.

* Punishing a child when not angry... "What, punish in cold blood?"

[not hot blood - anger stirred blood]

When you're angry, the more justified.

Anger in the moment always appears to be justified.

Righteous indignation. I've never seen unrighteous indignation.

When you take up the Cross you can stand for what is right without anger. Everything you can do with anger, you can do far better without it.

* To a dog - Mean things in sweet voice vs. Nice things in an angry voice.

We don't live in anger, we live in "will" redeemed by the Cross.

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The Cross sets aside the flesh by Jesus and God's action -

Colossians 2:11-15 and by our choice.

"Who does not take up His cross and follow me can not be my disciple."

Not, "I won't let you."

* If you can't do fractions, you can't do Algebra.

Take up the Cross into Discipleship to Jesus into sanctification where good & right is easier than what is bad & wrong.

Take up the Cross means not having your way.

V-I-M Pattern of Change

[50:12]

VISION - of reality and what is good governs you. It will steady and direct you. If you don't have that, you can't make an intention or decision that is meaningful. **That's why it is so important that the Gospel we hear is the root of it all.** It is the vision of God that changes everything.

John 3 does not say, "God was so mad at the world..."

God is actually happy. He is joyous. Full of love, delight.

He's got a whole Universe that He stills says, "That's good!"

Many people have the vision that God does not love us, He's just letting us off the hook. He's just giving us a break.

No, not just that he loves me but that God is love. That's the basic nature of the Universe. That's the last word on things.

The Vision of God's kingdom of goodness has to be at the root of our obedience. The main thing that has to change is our understanding of God. That has to come before our will signs off. It we trust God, it won't betray us. Most people think it will betray and you can't afford to love.

INTENTION - to become a disciple of Jesus. Decide to do it

[54:40]

Without intention, means don't work.

MEANS - become effective to doing what Jesus said.

[55:40]

Elijah - "limp back and forth between two ways?"

James - "double minded"

* Expensive exercise equipment is a "means"

If you don't have a vision of what it is like to lose the weight, eat different, you won't do it. You have to transfer "hunger" in your mind that it is a good thing not just, "I need to eat."

"Hunger" is a case of desire that controls many of us.

We need to say, "Blessed are the obese".

People take a beating over their weight in our culture.

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Vision - Intention - Means —> true to everything Jesus taught.

Your hardest area?

* **Anger - "I have a bad temper."**

No, you don't have a vision and intention of yourself & others that allows you to operate on a basis other than anger & contempt.

If you want to deal with anger, you don't try to not be angry. You change your vision, you change your intention and you find means of dealing with that.

If you do find yourself being contemptuous, you go to someone you treated with contempt and seek forgiveness.

If you have a problem of lying, go back to someone you lied to and apologize.

Lust - you don't have to do that. Jesus is talking about a will invested in lusting. Thought - Temptation (not sin but inclination) - Will (sin - adultery in the heart.) You don't have to go there. You can find a way of not doing that.

* St. Benedict - jump into a briar patch

"Are you kidding?" "No, are you kidding? Do you really want to change?"

When you pay a price, the means will be effective.

You will yourself able to carry out the intention.

You're acting differently because you are different on the inside.

Prayer - Learning to pray is the same way. If prayer is the first thing you do when faced with a difficult situation, that means your body, heart, mind are in a different place.

Pornography operates on a V-I-M pattern - Vision with others, intention to satisfy and means. You can change that VIM to a godly VIM by learning to see "women" in a different way as children of God to be blessed and loved and cared for because they are God's creation.

Temptation - you broaden the view.

Desire obsesses on the object.

* *"I've got to have a donut."*

Broaden the thoughts - Think about your life.

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You broaden the view.

* "Somebody's Daughter" video

If you love people, you don't treat them that way.

God wants to bless them.

* Pray for them. Bring them before God. Failsafe response.

Your intention changes, your means change.

You will find ways of not having pornography available.

You have to have decided not to do that.

But you have to have a different vision.

Addict is a person who has signed over their will to their feelings.

A vision and formed intention that enabled them to implement the means.

If you want to do anything Jesus told you to do, you don't try to do it.

If you want to keep the law, you don't try to keep the law.

If you take the route of VIM, all that is good in the Universe will rush to your aid. You will find it is right to do what is good.

Golden Triangle

[1:08:50]

The action of the Holy Spirit is crucial - Gifts, Fruit, Anointing

Everyday life - Trials

Spiritual Disciplines - Means

The Recovery of Moral Knowledge

[1:10:10]

How life really works can lie only through obedience to Jesus Christ.

Moral knowledge is not just your head, it is your life.

He is the source of the highest moral teachings the world has known. We accept that and He begins to work in our life to where we should be. He is the route of the highest morality we have known in the world. His morality of love leads to the morality of justice and the ideals that form the framework of our life.

Only a community of obedience can make this clear. If is for **the Church** to stand up and be the light of the world and exalt Jesus and see Him as the One who knows best. He is the most intelligent person whoever lived on the Earth. In whatever you are doing, He knows best. He made it all. In Him everything hangs together.

* The chair you're seated in is held together by Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:17

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Colossians 2:3 - *"In him are hidden are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."*

He is focused on what matters most - religious and moral.

He did not give relativity equations to Peter & John. They would not have know what to do with them anyway. In those days they would have been put in Roman Numerals.

The Role of Our Churches

[1:13:00]

Our churches can be schools of obedience to train people in obedience to Christ. They don't exist to perpetuate themselves. They exist to bless the world through discipleship that reaches out to every area of life so that in every area of life the kingdom of God is implemented by disciples who are reigning in that area.

"They are reigning in life through one Christ Jesus." **Romans 5:17**

Church is for discipleship.

Discipleship is for the world.

If we become assemblies of disciples, the VIM is applied to our assemblies. Our intention is now to make disciples and teach them to do everything Jesus said.

If we implement the process, we become the light of the world to restore the understanding to the good and the right to a world that has lost moral knowledge. The people of Christ alone does this. Not any other institution or government. One of the disappointments is that Christians keep looking to the **government** to do and lead in what is right.

The **government** is not of the Kingdom of God but of this world. Our faith is in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is where the light must come. We get to be a part of that.

We are the light of the World and the salt of the Earth.

Jesus lives in us and gives us the power and the light to do that.

Tonight I talked about the details in our life for transformation and that is absolutely fundamental.

~ ~ ~ **End of Session at 1:16:17** ~ ~ ~

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