

# "Spiritual Formation and Salvation"

Dallas Willard

Wheaton College - April 17, 2009 [1:13:00]

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## Video Source



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCJ-qYsRbM0&t=4380s>

**\*Scribe's Comments** - The session was transcribed from the YouTube video in good-faith effort but it is not verbatim. The **[brackets]** & **bold** disclose the scribe's commentary and cross-references other Dallas Willard teachings.

For the full transcription, see *Renewing of the Christian Mind, Chapter 26*

## **"Spiritual Formation and Salvation"**

Dallas Willard

Wheaton College - April 17, 2009 [1:13:00]

## **"Spiritual Formation & Salvation"**

Dallas Willard @ Wheaton Theology Conference, 2009

[\[Two Page Outline\]](#)

*"Test yourself to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you unless in deed you fail the test."*

II Corinthians 13:5

### **Soteriology ["Salvation"] Today as We Know it**

Transformation in the New Testament

Romans 5:1-5; Colossians 3:4-17; II Peter 1:2-11

Spiritual Formation in Christ as portrayed in the Bible is not...

Spiritual Formation in Christ is...

Jesus - "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind & strength and loving your neighbor as yourself."

I Co. 13, Romans 5:5; Colossians 3:14, II Peter 1:7

To become the kind of person who easily and routinely does obey

What does being Saved have to do with this transformation?

**The Problem** - Soteriology - "Being Saved" means having your sins forgiven

The background assumption - Justification is the entirety of Salvation

If you are justified, your sins are forgiven, then you are saved and you will be okay after your death. Current Evangelism efforts to convert people to Christianity. What people generally understand to be essential to the transaction.

Often the theory of Atonement - if you believe that Christ took a beating then you won't have a beating.

They will tell you, "You ought to have Him as your Lord." But the ought does not follow from the "is".

There is no way to being move to discipleship and spiritual formation or transformation.

*"Giving you heart to Jesus." "Accepting Jesus as Lord of your life."*

# ***"Spiritual Formation and Salvation"***

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## **Grace Explained**

*A view which takes Salvation as the same as justification, forgiveness of sins and assurance of Heaven based on it, can not come to see Spiritual Formation as a natural part of Salvation.*

## **Christian View of Salvation with Spiritual Formation**

\* John 3 & "Jesus Christ is in you" (II Corinthians 13:5)

A new type of life entering into the human being.

\* Colossians 1:13 & 3:3

"Knowledge" is Interactive relationship

"Grace" - God acting in us to accomplish what we can not do on our own

A new non-human activity becomes a part of our life. Our life is interwoven with His and His amazing grace is interwoven with ours.

**What is life?** Self-Initiating, Self-directing, Self-Sustaining activity

## **Salvation is...**

Phil. 1:6 - When He gets a hold of you, He doesn't turn lose.

II Peter - Partakers of a Divine nature

Jesus really is the one. He is the anointed one, the Christ, Lord, Mater, Maestro, Governor of the Universe. Apprenticeship to Jesus and Kingdom living. Recognize Jesus as Lord

Discipleship - Staying close to Jesus as possible

\* Abraham

## **Disciplines - Means of Grace - *Caught up in the Kingdom***

"Abide" Put His word into action, into practice to come to know truth

We inhale the manner of the Kingdom. Live free from the bondage of sin.

II Peter 1:2-11; 3:17-18 - Grow in grace & knowledge

## **The Challenge & Call Before Us Believers Today**

## **"Spiritual Formation and Salvation"**

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## **"Spiritual Formation and Salvation"**

[Transcription\*]

START [01:40] - [Prior to Dallas teaching, he states he will present the material in an unusual fashion by reading a paper he wrote. \* See *Renewing of the Christian Mind*, Chapter 26, for the full transcription of the paper.]

### **Spiritual Formation and the Problems Posed by Theology**

[see "Emotional & Spiritual Maturity" Talk #3]

*"Test yourself to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you unless in deed you fail the test."* II Corinthians 13:5

The concern of the conference -

*"The Deeply Spiritual and Practical Aspects of Following Jesus."*

I would like to use my time to address...

**The Problem - Soteriology ["Salvation"] today as we know it.**

Given prevailing understandings poses almost insurmountable barriers of professing Christians into Christlikeness which is the meaning of spiritual formation in Christ.

Spiritual formation happens to everyone. It is like an education. You get one whether you want it or not. The question is which one do you get?

\* Hitler or Mother Theresa both got one.

Being saved, hence being a Christian, has no conceptual or practical connection with transformation into Christlikeness.

Transformation in the New Testament

Romans 5:1-5; Colossians 3:4-17; II Peter 1:2-11 ("Brilliant passage")

Such transformation is presupposed in the New Testament's massive descriptions of normative behavior. It shines in the lives of the great ones. All of this appears like near or distant galaxies in the night sky. Visible somehow, but inaccessible in the conditions of life as we know it. Hence, you will rarely meet an individual involved in transformation depicted in the Bible and in church history or even has a hope for anything like that this side of Heaven. You might think Christian organizations might have such transformation as their central focus but it turns out to not be true. They are doing something else.

# **"Spiritual Formation and Salvation"**

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**I. "Spiritual Formation" Clarification** - Spiritual Formation in Christ as portrayed in the Bible and the great ones is not primarily behavior modification, though modification of behavior certainly an outcome of it.

Not outward cultural form - Lutheran, Benedictine, Quaker, Baptist. That is not spiritual formation, though often especially in the Catholic tradition - usually formation of priests into a particular form or order they are going to serve in. That form of spiritual formation is alive and well. If that's all there is to it, it will only result in another form of the "righteousness of the scribes & Pharisees" which leaves untouched the inward character of the heart, the source of action of the outward bearing.

**Think of Spiritual Formation as the process of reshaping the inner side until it has, to a substantial degree, the character of the inner dimensions of Jesus Himself** - having the Mind of Christ, the heart of Christ, Christ's peace, Christ's Joy is not a fancy way of talking. In spiritual formation, you come to actually have those, then the other dimensions of the personality as well.

This is the process where the agency of the Holy Spirit is indispensable along with other instrumentalities of God and His Kingdom. One can think of the process of spiritual formation as the formation of the Human Spirit and also formation by the Divine Spirit. There are two dimensions of spiritual in Spiritual Formation in Christ.

Teachings of Jesus and his early followers. When asked to supply the greatest commandments, Jesus replied, recognition of Jehovah as the one God and "*Love God with all your heart, soul, mind & strength and loving your neighbor as yourself*" - that would be the **outcome** of the process of spiritual formation in Christ.

That is the uniform testimony of the New Testament.

High points - I Co. 13, Romans 5:5; Colossians 3:14, II Peter 1:7

All these progressions culminate in agape love.

The behavioral outcome is assured. Jesus says, "*He who obeys my commands is he who loves me obeys me.*"

\* Not - if you love me, you'll buy me a new car.

He is talking about the connection between loving him and becoming the kind of person who routinely does what He says.

*"Love does no wrong to the neighbor. Love is the fulfillment of the law"*

**Romans 13:10**

*"I have come to know him and does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him."* **I John 2:4**

## **"Spiritual Formation and Salvation"**

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**We have almost made a cultural form of saying we know him but do not keep his commandments.** [10:00]

One must understand the order that is in these sayings otherwise they will throw us into a legalistic frenzy that has happened over and over in the history of Christ's people. The practical aim of the one who takes obedience seriously is not to obey but to become the kind of person who does routinely obey, one who takes obedience seriously is not to obey but to become the kind of person who easily and routinely does obey as a result of devotion to Jesus and consequently taking Him as Lord, Teacher & Friend. The practical aim is to know Him, be devoted to Him in this inclusive manner.

**II. What does "Being Saved" have to do with such a transformation?**  
[11:00]

For almost everyone in Western Christendom, being saved has essentially nothing to do with it. We might find being saved and such transformation conjoined in an individual here and there is admirable but not normative for being a Christian. When it does happen it has to be considered other than what we take to be **the Basic Nature of Salvation**. All notable, theological and ecclesiastical traditions claim you can be right with God in ways that do not require transformation and in ways that do not routinely support and advance transformation.

These ways involve professing right doctrine, or a specific form of association with a denomination or group, or on the more liberal side, a vague or intense sympathy with what one takes Jesus to stand for. There are many ways this can be spelled out. Together these 3 paths frequently overlapping, pretty much take in the ways in which North Americans and many Europeans think of themselves being Christian, a merely descriptive point seems to be a manner of fact born out by statistics.

A more narrow group - think of salvation or being saved - having one sins forgiven and having Heaven nailed down as a result. They can't find any reason to keep you out so they have to let you in.

**III. The Problem** - Soteriology that identifies being saved with having your sins forgiven.

Our question - how "Sins forgiven" relates to salvation as a process and an outcome? The background assumption - **Justification is the entirety of Salvation**. Simply put, that is the problem.

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If you are justified, your sins are forgiven, then you are saved and you will be okay after your death. I submit to you this is what is offered in more specific forms in current evangelism efforts to convert people to Christianity. It is what people generally understand to be essential to the transaction.

Our most popular TV evangelists and teachers present salvation in those terms. Very often the theory of Atonement - if you believe that Christ took your beating then you will not have a beating.

With best of intentions they will tell you, "*You ought to have Him as your Lord, you ought to obey Him.*" But this is one of the cases where the "ought" does not follow from the "is". It is left hanging in the air and there is no way to move from being saved in this sense to discipleship, then from there to spiritual formation or transformation. Other words may be used:

"Giving you heart to Jesus", "Accepting Jesus as Lord of your life" and for some, they do move on to discipleship. That is not the usual case. It happens from something other than the gospel they heard from the version of salvation they have been given.

### **IV. Grace**

[16:30]

Salvation is by grace through faith. That is a foundational truth. It is usually understood to mean there is nothing you do to contribute for salvation. With this is a pervasive passivity enters the scene. You will even been told by some your faith in Christ is not something you do. It's not that just grace is unmerited favor. Grace is unmerited favor.

\* Bonhoeffer - *Cheap Grace*. Grace is always cheap to the person who receives it. You can't solve the problem by making grace expensive, rather you solve the problem by making grace active.

The teaching we have makes grace something that happens in God or on the records up there but not something that becomes a reality in the life of those that who are saved. When the transaction is done, it is done and salvation is complete.

Some soteriologies you still have to service the account in various ways if you are going to make it in. Faithfulness to the sacraments, periodic repentance, re-baptism, still something with Evangelicals whether or not you still have something to do or might you lose what you got if you didn't behave in certain ways.

### **Conclusion**

**A view which takes Salvation to be the same thing as justification, forgiveness of sins and assurance of Heaven based upon it, can *not* come to see spiritual formation as a natural part of salvation.**

# **"Spiritual Formation and Salvation"**

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The result will be the routine omission of spiritual formation into Christlikeness as a serious objective of individuals and groups who hold a "mere Justification" view of salvation. It seems to me that it appears to be what accounts for transformation of Evangelical Christianity at large into a version of nominal Christianity. This has happened largely over the 20th Century even though historical evangelicals have strongly opposed nominal Christianity and defined themselves in opposition to it.

## **V. Christian View of Salvation with Spiritual Formation** [20:25]

There is a recognizable view of Salvation prominent in scripture and history. Salvation understood as an identifiable status or sometimes associated with a specific event, not always. There is such a view and it comes in the form of the theological concept of **Regeneration**.

The Main Theological Point - Two things: Justification and Regeneration.

Regeneration has almost totally disappeared into Justification, so much so that Biblical exegesis is often skewed beyond recognition. Like...

**John 3** read as a justification passage.

It is not about forgiveness of sins, it is about life from above. This is the event of **a new type of life** entering into the individual human being.

*"Do you not recognized this about yourself that Jesus Christ is in you?"*  
(II Corinthians 13:5)

**If we are going to have a form of being saved that naturally leads to spiritual transformation - that is where we have to start.** We have to speak about it as reality that is both theological and psychological. It has to be a real event in the life.

Look at the New Testament - the kind of life a human being has on it's own compared to the kind of life that begins to move in us at Regeneration. In the New Testament, the passage from death to life is a constant, biblical theme where "life" is a real powerful presence in the regenerate individual. The way this works is life is tacitly referred to "after death". To have life means your name is in the book. You're going to have eternal life as something that comes after death not something that is present now.

If you study the New Testament, that is not what is meant by the passage from death to life is a constant biblical theme where life is a real and powerful presence in a regenerate individual.

*"Death unto life because we love the brethren.  
He who does not love abides in death."*

**I John 3:14**

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**If you have a version of salvation that does not include loving your brother, you didn't get life, you got something else.**

*"He who has the son has life."* **I John 5:12**

Life is the entire point of the Birth from above. Again, you'll find the "New Birth" is systematically treated as forgiveness.

Paul - *"He delivered us from domain of darkness into the Kingdom of His beloved son."* **Colossians 1:13**

To enter the Kingdom is to have the life from above. Having that life is **The Principle of Kingdom Inclusion**. It is described by Paul as sharing in the resurrection life of Jesus Himself.

*"You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."*

**Colossians 3:3**

The life you have from above as a regenerate person is so glorious, it has to be hidden from you.

Medieval Theologians said, *"The human soul in God's hands is so glorious it is hidden from itself for if one knew what it was they would be corrupted with pride."*

*"We are now called the children of God but we don't yet know what we shall be."* **I John 3:2**

This glorious life is the principal of inclusion in the Kingdom of God.

*"You are dead in your trespasses and sins but God made us alive together with Christ. Grace brought you to life in Christ."* **Ephesians 2:5**

The saving is bringing you alive together in Christ.

—> **GRACE brought LIFE.**

Birth from above - Salvation in the New Testament is in terms of "divine life" that enters the human being as a gift of God. There is then a new psychological reality that is God acting in us and with us.

Eternal life is said by Jesus to be knowledge. **John 17:3** Eternal life in the individual is not something that begins after death. It is something that is present in us now.

—> **"Knowledge" in scripture is interactive relationship.**

We have to re-work **Grace** to go along with that. **Grace** is God acting in us to accomplish what we can not do on our own. **A new non-human activity becomes a part of our life.** That's what happens at Regeneration. Our life is interwoven with His and His amazing **grace** is interwoven with ours. We must make it clear we are not just talking something up but referring to the concrete reality of regenerate existence.

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## **What is a New Life?**

[29:35]

(def.) Self-initiating, Self-directing, Self-sustaining activity

[Initiating - Father; Directing - Son; Sustaining - Spirit]

\* Gold fish or plant dies - Child asks, "What has happened?"

What distinguishes things living and things that have died is precisely this activity. An important part is living things in the environment are part of what it means to be alive.

\* Plant - soil, water, sunlight are the major environment factors

\* Kitten - balls, mice, other kittens

A dead kitten is totally indifferent to these things as is the alive plant. That's a difference in the "kind" of life.

**A human being in comparison to other living things has a real or possible environment of fantastic proportions that as of yet have not been revealed.**

*"Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man the joys that God has prepared to those who are faithful to Him."*

### **I Corinthians 2:9**

The sufficiency of God to the human being as seen in Romans 8 is adequate to the fantastic proportions. To lose that central reality means:

*"Dead in trespasses and sin."*

To lose that is to be dead in transactions of sin. Life continues for a while but in a reverse trinity - world, flesh & devil. **Ephesians 2**

That activity draws from limited, chaotic, destructive forces. Its conditions of spiritual death ends in total death. **Romans 8:5-6**

God alone has life in Himself. It is He who gives life to all things. I Tim. 3:16

*"I am that I am"* (Exodus 3:14)

Not "I am who I am". That's even true of Popeye.

What distinguishes is that God's being is predicated on His being. He is absolutely unique in that regard. That's what we say when we say "God is Spirit." In God, it is perfect. Life in anything other than God is always dependent, limited and dependent upon other things, ultimately on God.

**Regeneration** - God using various instrumentalities above all Himself, Holy Spirit, Incarnate Word, Written Word. Through these He imparts His own life to the fallen being of the human being apart from God. The Self-Initiating, Self-Directing, Self-Sustaining activity of God imparts in the human soul, begins to act in it and around it.

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*"Long my prison spirit lay,  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night,  
Thine eye infused a quickening ray,  
I woke the dungeon filled with light,  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose and went forth and followed thee."*

That's the natural progression. That's the reality of salvation!

**Salvation** - Being saved is not then a meager, merely human existence here with an account flush with Christ. It is human, meager as it may be. It is one with which the currents of divine life which has begun to pulsate.

*"Christ in you the hope of glory."* **Colossians 1:27**

We are not talking metaphorically, not trying to talk something up. We are referring to a new reality that is in the personality, the body, the soul, the mind in the person who is born from above.

**Philippians 1:6** - *"He who began a good work in you will perfect it."*

Not perseverance of the saints, perseverance of the Savior.

When He gets a hold of you in this way, He doesn't turn lose.

**II Peter 1:3** - *"Becoming partakers of divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."*

**Colossians 3:3** - *"Your life is hid with Christ in God."*

### **Life of Whatever Kind has a Natural Development**

[37:40]

\* Carrot develops as a carrot, not a cabbage, kitten or a horse

This is the absolutely crucial point for our discussion: Life is poised for a certain development by the kind of life that it is. It can be deflected or stunted. Same is true for the human being with life from above however degraded in the individual.

The first clear evidence is recognition, hearty confidence that Jesus really is the One. He is the anointed one, He is the Christ, He is Lord, He is Master, He is Maestro, He is Governor of the universe. If you believe that, you are **Regenerate**. If you believe that, not if you profess it, but if you believe it. One of the great problems in our culture is we do not distinguish between

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profession of belief and believing. When you believe something, you are prepared to act as if it were true.

\* You believe the chairs you are sitting in will hold you up.

You can profess to believe things you don't believe. We routinely baptize people on the profession of their faith. That has serious complications.

The first clear manifestation of heavenly life in the individual is recognition, hearty confidence that Jesus really is the anointed one, Christ the Lord. That is not primarily a profession. It is a gripping realization of what is the case.

\* Peter - When it gripped Peter, the Lord told him that only divine assistance could have brought it to him. **Matthew 16:16-17** Not flesh and blood. Jesus went on to say the rock of this realization would be the foundation upon which his triumphant church with "keys" to the Kingdom of the heavens.

\* Paul - *"No one can say Jesus is Lord except by assistance of the Holy Spirit."* **I Corinthians 12:3**

He was not talking about profession. Anyone can say the words.

*"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."* **Romans 10:9**

You will not only be saved, you will be off like a rocket.

To confess is own up to a condition of your soul.

\* You confess a crime you don't profess a crime.

To profess is to put forth an understanding of something.

### **Confidence in Jesus as absolute Maestro of the Universe is the first indication of Regeneration.**

It is this, not a mere credit transfer, that constitutes a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. [42:35]

\* Putting money in your account is not a personal relationship.

A personal relationship involves an understanding, a confidence, an interaction, mingling of lives. That's why knowledge and grace go together.

The natural confidence to this is an apprenticeship to Jesus in Kingdom living. Not a metaphysical impossibility. A certain degree of understanding of what comes next is presupposed in recognizing Jesus as Lord. Life in all of its forms permits distortions within limits. See Jesus for who He is sees their own situation in realistic light and wants to take measures to remedy their situation and stay as close to Jesus as possible.

### **Discipleship is a natural part of confidence in Jesus as He really is.**

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What is a faith that does not express itself in discipleship to Jesus? [44:30]

\* Vampire Christian - *"I'll take a bit of your blood to cover my debts but I will not stay close to you until I have to."*

Would not Heaven would be hell stuck forever with the magnificent Jesus and the Trinity that they did not admire or even like enough to stay as close to them as possible. After all, God is going to be unavoidable in Heaven.

There is no way you can say that such a person has faith or confidence in Jesus Christ. Not the faith that works by love. (Gal. 5:6, Ephesians 3:17) Not the faith which is a natural part of **Regeneration** as life from above.

**Discipleship** may be loosely described as staying close to Jesus as possible. It is a life with Him and from the reverse side it is His life with us.

**As His disciples we are learning from Jesus how to live our life here in now in the Kingdom of the heavens as He would live our life if He were we.**

The locus of our lives with Him is precisely obedience where we are. Our obedience will be ragged, messy and inadequate. Disciples are notoriously green. That's OK. Discipleship is not an advance stage of spiritual development.

\* Thief on the Cross - Became a disciple of Jesus. He just did not have very long to work it out. He saw Jesus for who He was. 'Jesus, remember me.' That was the reality that entered his life.

We are not trying to be righteous. That's one of the things we give up when we step into the domain of grace. We abandon our hopes. We do not deal with each other on a basis of righteousness. Our faith in Christ is the basis upon which our interactive relationship with God in Christ is based.

*"Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."*

### **Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6**

What did he believe God for that was the basis for God's acceptance of him on a basis of faith? He believed God for a male heir. That's real life confidence in God.

Justification comes about as a result of that kind of relationship to God. God looks at us and says, *"What am I going to do with you? I can't throw you away."* A relationship that involves forgiveness of sins is based upon a relationship of newness of life. The reason we invert that requires careful thought. What would lead us to think that forgiveness is first? God based his

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relationship to Abraham upon Abraham's confidence in God. So with us, obedience to Jesus Christ is not how we earn anything, it is simply...

**Where the Kingdom of God in relation to us.  
Merit is not the issue. Life is the issue.**

**Grace**

[49:45]

(def.) **God acting in our life to bring about what we can not do on our own.**

Grace is inextricably bound up in discipline in the life of follower of Jesus to do what we can not do by our own direct effort. Because in this way we meet the action of God - grace with us - and the outcome is humanly inexplicable. As was the case with Abraham & Sarah. In the New Testament, the birth of Isaac is treated as a work of grace and promise because it was not something Abraham & Sarah could do on their own. Abraham and Hagar could do someone on their own and they did.

**Disciplines** are a means of Grace. The does not mean anything is earned. Grace is not opposed to action. It is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude and God won't have anything to do with it. That's all shot. That's what we have to give up on to come in faith to Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus tells His puzzled and frightened friends, "

*If you love me, you will keep my commandments and God will give you a Helper.*" **John 14:15**

I always thought, "*Why not send the helper first and then I'll do the commandment.*" That's not how it works. You throw yourself into the deed in confidence in Christ and help comes. That's how faith works. That's how you undertake disciplines.

*"Abide in my word, you are truly disciples and you will know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* **John 8:31-32**

**Abiding** here is dwelling, living in.

*"Abide in me as at the branch abides in the vine."* **John 15**

What does it mean to **abide** in His word? Put His word into action, into practice to come to the know the truth of them. When we do that we inhale the reality of the Kingdom. That's what it means to be His disciples. One who does this will come to know the reality of Jesus and that in turn will enable them to live free from the bondage of sin. Which is exactly what Jesus is talking about in that passage. He's not talking about political freedom or some metaphysical freedom. He's talking about the freedom from the power of sin. (Romans 6 & 7)

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[54:00] - **Being a disciple or Apprentice or student of Jesus is the status into which Regeneration naturally brings us.**

Just because of the nature of the belief in Christ through which Regeneration expresses itself. **Discipleship to Jesus has as it's natural outcome the transformation of character.** Hidden realities become conformity to His commands become the easy, standard way a disciple purports himself or herself. We are not talking about perfection. When we say natural that it does not exclude but it requires supernatural. With all our faults and failures we have an indispensable role in discipleship and spiritual formation.

*"Be on the alert. Stand firm in the faith. Act like men. Be strong."*

**I Corinthians 16:13**

Once we're clear the issue is no longer merit but life, that grace is not opposed to effort but to earning, we are quite prepared to hear the ceaseless admonitions to act. Learning as we go to *"put off the old person and put on the new"* now present themselves as what they are, something we do.

*"Mortify the deeds of the flesh."* **Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5**

That is for us to do. You'll will not do it on your own.

*"If you do mortify, you will live."* (v. 13) Mortification is accomplished by the Spirit of God within us. But that's something we are to do.

*"Doers not just hearers who delude themselves."* **James 1:22**

*"The foolishness of hearing him but not doing what He says"*

in **Luke 6:49** makes utter sense.

*"The grace of God that brings salvation, but instructs us to live godly in the present age...zealous for good works."* **Titus 2:11-14**

That looks like the only way for a believer in Jesus to go.

**The key to it all from a point of view of action is INDIRECTION**

[57:30]

We want to obey Jesus but we can not do that by trying to do what Jesus says. We understand we are broken. We are not only wrong, we are wrung, twisted with parts that do not connect upright. We realize that our feelings embedded in our body in a social context are running and ruining our lives. producing godless and destruction actions under false ideas and images and messed up patterns of thinking. We must find a way to become the kind of person who does easily and routinely what Jesus said. Does it without having to think much about it, if at all.

**It is here that Disciplines come to our rescue.**

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Always encompassed by grace. In engaging the disciplines, we go to the root of the tree of our life, the sources of our behavior. We do things that will transform our minds, our feelings, our will, our body and social existence.

What our body is ready to do or not to do. Even the depths of our soul to in the words of Jesus,

*"Make the tree good and it's fruit good."* **Matthew 12:33**

We cultivate and fertilize the tree. **Luke 13:8**

We don't just try to squeeze fruit out of the end of its branches. We used tried and true methods of Christ's people as well as any sensible means that are at our disposal. We become by divine grace the kind of person who does the things Jesus said to do and avoid the things he said not to do.

In the view of our assemblies of His disciples,

*"We teach disciples of Jesus to do everything Jesus commanded."*

All of this, if we get it, can give us a practical hope when we look at II Peter 1:1-11, Colossians 3, I Corinthians 13 or the landmark literature generated by the lives of disciples throughout the ages. St. Francis, Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael...

### **II Peter 1:2-11**

[1:00:00]

**1** *"To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: **2** Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; **3** seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. **4** For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust ("epithumia" = obsessive desire)."*

This brings fully before us the picture of salvation as leading a life that is caught up in the Kingdom of the Heavens or in what God is doing in human history. It is a life in which God works all things together for the good for those who love Him and are absorbed in His purposes. There comes as a natural part of such a life the active response of discipleship and spiritual transformation.

For this reason, because of all of this, Peter continues:

**5** *For this reason, applying all diligence to add to your faith, goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; **6** and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control,*

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*perseverance; and to endurance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love."*

[1:02:30] - An adequate course in discipleship and spiritual formation would go in detail into how each of these additions comes about and explore how each lays a foundation for the later and how each of the later ones enriches and strengthens the earlier ones.

Also, such a course, (should it not be the standard curriculum of our local assemblies and denominations?), would go into detail as to how, starting from faith, one achieves virtue, and so forth. Always presupposing divine assistance and grace in the human progression. This would be done in a way that includes practical direction, training sessions and disciplines not just information.

Though the relevant information is crucial and currently, is sorely lacking, such details are not laid out in the New Testament because they were conveyed by the examples and practices of the communities arising out of the original fellowship established by Jesus with His apostles.

Peter clearly assumes that these qualities are to be yours and increasing.

*"They render you neither useless or unproductive in the genuine knowledge [there come knowledge again] of our Lord Jesus Christ."* **II Peter 1:8**

That would be the natural progression and outcome of spiritual formation in the disciple. Diligence in this direction makes one sure of his calling and election because as long as you practice these things you will never stumble. In this way the entrance of the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. (v. 10-11) We should not assume that this latter entrance refers primary to the famous gates of splendor, although that entrance is sure grand and is included in the life in question. It too is a natural part of the life in question.

*Glorification - Sanctification - Justification - Regeneration ...all go together*

**The Eternal Kingdom mentioned is the one Jesus announced as already at hand from which the regenerate person is drawing the life that is life indeed as Paul says in II Timothy 6:19.**

With all of this before us, we can make perhaps make good practical sense of the parting admonition of II Peter 3:18,

*"Grow in **grace** and **knowledge** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*

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You have to think that is something for us to do.

"Grace" we have said is God acting in our life to bring about results beyond human ability & "Knowledge" biblically is interactive relationship with what is known. They are two aspects of one reality in the concrete existence of the disciple of Jesus living out the process of spiritual formation.

For our purposes here, it is vital for us to understand we can, by our attitudes and actions, actually increase the amount of grace and knowledge of Christ that is in our lives.

### **II Timothy 2:1**, *"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."*

To increase in grace and knowledge is to open our life ever more fully to the presence or action of God with us in all we are and do. This is something we intentionally undertake and learn to do as we go.

In Old Testament language...

*"To acknowledge Him in all our ways."*

*"Increasingly humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God."*

On prevailing understandings of grace and salvation, **II Peter 3:18** seems to remain in the category of pretty words without practical implication.

Christian Education now has the mandate to change that!

### **Review & Re-emphasize**

[1:06:30]

**Regeneration** - entry of God's nature and life into our real existence and identity - has a natural progression or part entry into the status of discipleship to Jesus Christ in the power of the new life. Living in the status as a disciple has a natural part of progression of spiritual formation in Christlikeness. Progression in spiritual formation in Christlikeness leads to easy, routine obedience to the commandments Christ brought to us and to living the public life from the inside out any sincere and thoughtful person would expect from the biblical record and the track record of the great ones in Christian history.

In practice all of this is no doubt more ragged and messy than I have for the sake of simplicity made it look here. But the basic structure is clear and holds up in the demands of actual human existence.

### **The Difficult Practical Problems**

[1:07:25]

Difficulties in spiritual formation of Christlikeness in our local assemblies and larger units of Christian organization. Even indeed the Christian atmosphere

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of thought still pervading the Western world, we have to deal with a massive population of churched and unchurched people who think of being saved or being right with God merely in terms of a picture of Justification not Regeneration. Being born again is usually understood now not in terms of being animated from a life from above but in terms of a profession of faith, often a profession of faith in the death of Christ as bearing the punishment for sin that otherwise would fall on us. This understanding usually prevails in ways that do not involve, may not even make mention of, participation in divine life. Of course, one can mention it without engaging it. Then of course, the otherwise natural progression into discipleship and spiritual transformation naturally does not occur.

### **The Church**

[1:08:30]

The churches and surrounding societies flooded with discipleship-less Christians whose lives seem to not differ profoundly, if at all, from non-Christians. Because of human hunger for something deeper than a strictly physical existence, we see multitudes who say that they are not religious, not churched that usually means, but they nonetheless are very spiritual. Most often these people who think they have seen and seen through the authentic Christian way have not the slightest idea what that way is about. Ironically, the spirituality they practice commonly has no moral content, has little or no bearing on character for they despise morality almost as much as they do religion. Morality is often lumped together or confused with religion and treated as the same thing.

For Evangelical Christians, turning around the ship of their social reality and restoring the understanding of salvation that characterized evangelicalism from its beginnings in Luther and periodically after him will be very difficult, if not impossible.

It will primarily be a work of scripture interpretation, theological reformulation, but modification of time hardened practices will also be required. I mean by that simply what we do in church. Radical changes will have to be made. (See the last chapter of *Renovation of the Heart*.)

This is turn will demand the utmost in loving character, humility of mind, willingness to suffer misunderstanding and mistreatment and dependence on the hand of God in the with-God life. But that is the way it's supposed to be anyway isn't it? It can be done and it has been done providing some of the most brilliant periods in the history of Christ's people.

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### **Two Steps on the Way Forward**

[1:10:48]

1.) Responsible leaders at all levels of Christian activity began to exemplify and teach in their official activities spiritual formation in Christlike as something essential to the condition of "being saved", not as a precondition but as a natural development. How that has to be worked out avoiding works and legalism is something that must be carefully elaborated in ecclesiastical, theological and psychological terms.

2.) Efforts in evangelism and increasing church membership be very purposefully be oriented toward bringing people to the point of regeneration and discipleship. The work of turning people to Christ is not done until that point. If we continue to make converts or Christians instead of disciples animated with the life from above that comes at new birth, spiritual formation and obedience to Christ, doing all that He commanded, has little prospect other than a passing fad which will certainly disappoint or will fade into diverse legalism and vacuous spiritualities, things that fall entirely within human abilities otherwise known as flesh.

—> **The future of vital Christian life lies in the hands of the pastors and others who teach for Christ especially those who teach pastors.**

[These words gave rise to Jesus College]

[1:12:18]

What will they do? The greatest field open for discipleship evangelism today is the North American and European churches and seminaries or divinity schools. They are full of people hungering for real life which, surely we all know, is offered in companionship with Christ and His Kingdom.

**~ ~ ~ End of Teaching ~ ~ ~ [1:13:00]**

**—> Q & A next page**

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## **Q & A with Dallas Willard**

**Q** - Neuroscience - Are you a Monist view vs. Dualism? [1:13:30]

**A** - I'm a stark raving dualist. The first dualism is between God and the physical creation. It is God who establishes spiritual reality. I also believe the mind is not identical with the brain. I don't think it is ultimately dependent upon it. We are learning the structure of the brain itself is modified by the mind. That's experimentally established now. If you establish the point about God, you are not going to worry too much about the rest of it, although they are important questions of detail.

God does not have a brain. Did you know that?

That's why everything is a no-brainer to Him.

Straight forward arguments about identity: Two things are identical if every property of one is the property of the other. Properties of the thought, emotion, etc. are not properties of the brain. The brain is a very interesting piece of meat. In my present condition I would not want to do totally without one. The whole business about the resurrection of the body is something very serious about the nature of personality. I spend a lot of my time in philosophy dealing with that issue.

**Q** - Soul & Spirit difference? Lee Ann Payne seems to mix the two. [1:16:10]

**A** - These things are really very difficult to have a clear view of. I try to characterize what the Spirit is - basically the executive center of the self. The Soul is that part of human personality which arranges all the other parts of so that it constitutes a life. When it is broken, life is broken. There are different aspects of the self. I like to describe the Soul as the deepest part of the self. Because it is the part that runs the whole show. We don't have direct access to it. That's why in scripture and poetry, often the soul is referred to in the 2nd person. You talk to it because it really has a life of its own. "Why are thou cast down oh my soul." We talk to it. We admonish it because we can not do much else about it. We don't have direct access to it. It is like the computer that runs the whole operation, you hope that someone knows what to do about it, but you prefer not to hear from it. Just work. It is important to characterize them in some way that is consistent biblically and makes sense out of spiritual formation. There is a lot of room for disagreement.

**Q** - Education today forming has nothing to do with learning. Has this complicated and contributed to our problem. [references Marsden]

**A** - [1:19:44] It has tremendously complicated the problem. We have what you just said. Everyone of us go to these teaching institutions and we get PhD's from institutions that don't buy into any of the interpretation of the

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person that you would find biblically. What are they to say about character formation? It's a public fact and well known that character formation, character development is something that the learned world simply has no way of coping with. Who do you turn it over to? The physiologists. They'll fix your brain and you'll turn out to be a wonderful, loving and honest person. That's the only place they have to go.

Until our Christian institutions take up the challenge of developing a Christian, biblical, theological, sound interpretation of the human being, that's where we are going to stand. The secular world simply doesn't have the resources to cope with it. All you have to do is confront them with it and they will tell you.

**Q** - What are the tasks Christians should engage? [1:21:35]

**A** - The main one is to develop a coherent understanding of the human being and make that a part of preaching and teaching on a regular basis. Then you can begin to deal with these issues like "What is regeneration?" Instead of thinking of it as some kind of divine lightning that strikes you, you think of it in terms of what is the change that comes about? We have let so much of our language degenerate to the point where it is empty. Being "born again" is one of the main ones. The whole catalogue of terms in the New Testament that deal with the person, body, social relations, soul - all those terms, we have to give new life to.

[1:22:40] **The ones who can do that has to be the pastors and the people who teach the pastors and maybe the pastors who teach the teachers of the pastors. It's our responsibility.** [[Jesus College mission!](#)]

In the early centuries of the church, that job was picked up. The church fathers routinely and systematically wrote and taught on this. Much of that literature is lost. It remains in fragments. For example Tertullian wrote a book on the soul he intended to replace the writings of Plato & Aristotle that clearly left out the connection of the soul to God. It's tough to say but we don't really have a Christian Psychology today. We have Christian Psychologists but not Christian Psychology. That's what we need.

**Q** - [1:23:50] I think grace by definition is free. If there is some sort of effort on my part to get grace, how is grace still free?

**A** - Freedom does not presuppose passivity. Grace does not make you passive. To exclude action is to be passive.

Put off, put on...Denying ungodliness...that's something for us to do.

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\* To my Baptist brothers, we are not only saved by grace, we are paralyzed by it.

If we don't do something, nothing is going to happen. It is true Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" but if you do nothing, it will certainly be without Him. We just have to get straight on the connection between action & grace and passivity and so on and understand that to act is not to displace the sovereignty of God and the dependence of the individual upon the action of God for salvation. This is a large part of what we need to get straightened out in our teaching and preaching.

**Q** - [1:26:55] These ideas have anything to do with the Emergent Church?

**A** - As far as I can tell, nothing whatsoever. Their church is not going to emerge until they get a gospel. As of yet, we don't know what that is. Hopefully when they get one, it will not be one that breeds passivity and make discipleship and spiritual formation that leaves that dangling, or they will create groups just like the ones they will hate.

[Pastor re-writing a declaration of Baptism]

**Q** - [1:29:05] What happens to the old self in salvation do you think that matters as we expand our view of salvation beyond justification?

**A** - The old self really starts to fight. It realizes it is now occupying ground that does not belong to it. Romans 5 & 8, "Having now peace with God..." but we don't have peace with the old self. Now we have to deal with it. Before we just went with the flow. Now I'm listening to Jesus. He is saying, "Bless those who curse you." I don't want to bless him, I want to curse him back. I now have to ask, "What can I learn? How can I change?" That's what's going on. Discipleship to Jesus enables us to become a person who, when punched, instead of whooshing cursing, we whoosh blessing. It comes out of of body because our body is filled with it. That's why Jesus said, "*Those who believe in me, rivers of living water will flow from the belly*". He did not say their mouth because the problem is the whole body. The transformation is the whole body. We want the goodness and righteousness of Christ to inhabit our bodies as the old person inhabited them.

\* Israelites in the Promised Land - the first city they took on the walls fell down. How many more cities the walls fell down? None.

It's the development of human beings in godliness that this life is about. This life is about training for reigning. The problem is character, the problem is not power. God in His mercy usually doesn't give us the power if our character can't stand it. We have an eternal future ahead of us and it isn't really just about pickin' & singin'.

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**Q** - [1:32:30] The Law as any works of our hands?

**A** - I don't think Paul identifies the law with the works of our hands, he identifies the flesh with the works of our hands. Romans 8 - Paul says "what the Law could not accomplish because it was weak through the flesh." Paul's statement is the Law is spiritual, holy, good. He never comes down on the Law. He does come down on the Jewish customs of the Jewish people for they were the works of the flesh.

What is the law? *"No condemnation who walk after the Spirit...God did sending His son...that the righteousness of the law that might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."* You have a big choice. The standard way to interpret that is to say the way the righteousness of the law is fulfilled is to accept the merits of Christ. Is there another way? Yes. If you walk according to the Spirit, you will fulfill the deeds of the law.

Don't worry about perfection, you're not going to have to worry about that for a long time. It's silly to deal with perfection. It is always understood legalistically in a human, cultural form. The perfection that is presented as the Fruit of the Spirit in the New Testament is not a perfection of action it is a perfection of love. Perfecting that is presented as the fruit of the Spirit in the New Testament is a perfection of law. Love as the fulfillment of the Law is the standard feature we have to deal with. That's very important and to re-work it. The law is good. The law is not bad. Trying to justify yourself by the law is a disaster. But that's not the law's fault. The law is a primary manifestation of the grace of God. The goodness of the law is something the scripture does not question the goodness of the law. Human systems trying to fulfill the law and the righteousness by it is the death. It's not the law's fault. The fault is of human pride.

**Q** - [1:37:10] - Sanctification and Spiritual Formation?

**A** - [1:38:00] It is such a scrambled subject and a lot of harm has been done by talking about sanctification in ways that really has brutalized people. It is no longer widely used. It is important term. Sanctification refers to a process of progressing Holiness understood as being increasingly taken over by the new life that is in you through regeneration. The process at a certain point is not the outcome or status that you might call sanctification.

**Sanctification** is abiding and pervasive presence of Christ in our life. It sets you into another world - a kind of otherness. Progressively you grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You are filled with the Spirit and the scripture commands you to be filled with the Spirit. That means more and more the Spirit occupies every part of your life. That's a progression. At a certain point it is appropriate to say you are sanctified.

\* Like warming a pot of coffee, there is a time when it is being warmed that it is not warm. Then there is a time when it is warmed, maybe it is hot.

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There is a process and an outcome and we need to distinguish them. They are indispensable terms biblically and when we understand them rightly, there are indispensable to understand the process of spiritual formation. Spiritual formation, if you understand it biblically, is the process of sanctification. Remember, you can be "being sanctified" before you are sanctified just like you can be warming up before you get hot.

**Q** - [1:40:35] Jesus as a real teacher in the realm of academia?

**A** - [1:41:39] That is an unfortunate lack in our understanding of our disciplines. What secular knowledge means is that knowledge in an area has no connection to God. The common assumption today in the academic world is that's the way it is. You go to get a PhD in the university, no one talks about a connection in the subject matter to God. To be adequate in your field does not include any relationship to God. Now, that's the problem. That's why we need disciples in all academic areas who will be able to put forth the effort and receive the grace of God to make the connection.

What is the view of business that is presented in business schools? I can tell you about USC's business school - it certainly has nothing to do with God. You would think God didn't even know about it.

Suppose you say, "What is business?" That question will not be addressed. What is journalism? What is law? All of our fields systematically avoid the fundamental questions and concentrate on the techniques of success.

That's what has to be addressed when we talk about integration of faith and learning. That is the tremendous task that lies before Christians in every field, every profession, is to make the conceptual connection between the content that is taught in their field and their theology.

**Q** - When you began tonight you referenced a really remarkable move of God in response to somebody reading a paper in the pulpit. I sensed the Spirit of God moving, at least in me. I am a pastor and I sat there asking that the Spirit of God would bring life to me and to the church and I want to thank God for that move of the Spirit in a paper.

Dallas - "To God be the glory."

~ ~ ~ **Q & A Session Ends @ 1:44:58** ~ ~ ~

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