



["Spiritual Formation and Theology"](#) [link]

Scribe's Comments - *The session was transcribed from the video with good-faith effort but it is not verbatim. The [brackets] and **bold** disclose the scribe's emphasis.*

[Starts @ 2:15] Your chaplain has divided the topics for speakers in the Chapel. There are a lot interesting things on the list. I came to the topic of "Spiritual Formation & Theology" and I didn't look any further. That's it for me.

Spiritual formation is the standing human problem: How do you get good people? It isn't just a Christian issue. The Christians have an answer to it but it's a human problem. If you look around you, even here on the campus, but if you look around in the world, you see so many people intent on blowing others up. You wonder where does all of this come from? It comes from the human heart. We live in a world where malice and anger dominate human relationships.

Our congress people can't even get along with each other. Our government oozes with contempt and anger at one another so that the business of government that effects each of us deeply often doesn't get done. There's a real problem.

How to Save Your Life

[3:42]

I want to talk to you today specifically on the topic of "**How to Save Your Life**". That's a question that concerns everyone. How to save your life. Well, you say, "I'd like to save my soul." How about the rest of you? Would you like to save your body? Would you like to save your mind? After all, you, the whole person, is what salvation is concerned about. But when we start talking about salvation, often when we talk about salvation, we have a shrunken view of what we're talking about.

Now, you all know being saved is big business for Christians, isn't it? Someone may have asked you, "*Are you saved?*" Or you have may asked someone else, "*Are you saved?*" And we can begin with the question, "*What were you asking?*" or that question that was asked you. And, in our circles, it almost always refers to one thing, and that is...

- *What is going to happen to you when you die?*
- *Are you going to Heaven or or are you going to that other place?*

But you know, there is another question we need to ask ourselves - If you got into Heaven, do you think you'd like it? What's it going to be like? And if your life is not caught up in God now, Heaven may turn out to be unbearable because unless you're really close to God now, you can't miss Him when you get to Heaven. Someone said the other day that if you don't like worship, you don't want to go to Heaven. If you do like worship, then you're probably going to spend a lot of time in it here and it is going to have a lot of affect on the kind of person you're going to become and that's what spiritual formation is all about!

Spiritual Formation

[6:03]

Spiritual Formation is the process of shaping the individual so they love God with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their mind and with all their strength and love their neighbor as themselves. That's big change, isn't it? I wonder if you have you thought about:

How do you love God with all your heart?

How do you love God with all your mind?

How do you love God with all your strength?

I know some of you guys here are athletes. Can you love God with your athletic ability? And then of course, all of you have lots of assignments. Can you love God in your assignments? We need to talk about that.

[7:00] I want to give you a couple of scriptures to help us think about it and the first one is in the **5th chapter of Romans**. Romans 5 of course, deals with salvation, doesn't it? It is one of the great texts on salvation. Listen to these words from verse 8 and following:

"God demonstrates His own love towards us that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Now, there is a tendency just to stop there and think that's the whole deal. Christ died for us. He paid for our sins. We can get on with our business and we'll see Him in Heaven. But keep reading, *"Much more than, having now been justified by His blood we will be saved from wrath through him."* Some of your translations when you look at them you will see they have inserted "the wrath of God". But the wrath "of God" is not there. Well, whose wrath? Maybe my wrath. Do you ever have a problem with wrath towards someone? So much of the mayhem of grief that comes in our families, and in our schools and in our world, and even in baseball and basketball and so much of sports is our wrath. This verse is talking about being saved from our wrath. It is being talking about being saved from the wrath of others.

The blood of Jesus does not save us from our wrath. It does not save us from the wrath of others, but His life does. His life lived in us saves us from wrath. *"While we were yet enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more we shall be saved by His life."*

That's what I really want to hammer you about because we hear so much about being saved by His death but how are we saved by His life? Christ is alive.

Salvation Described

[9:43]

Let me give you a description of salvation and you try it on and see what you think.

Salvation is being caught up in the life that Jesus is now living on Earth.

Salvation is being caught up in the life that Jesus is now living on Earth.

Where is He living His life? Right here.

What's His relationship with His life to your life? He lives in you.

Your songs all talk about that. We constantly address that issue.

"Christ in us the hope of glory."

We talk about becoming Christlike and living the life that Christ lived.

How do we do that?

By being caught up in the life Jesus is now living on Earth.

So, now we want to put up some screens and talk about "What is this life?"
(So the next screen if you please.)

The basic idea of salvation in the Bible is deliverance. Deliverance. It isn't just deliverance about guilt, but all kinds of things. We don't have time for a philosophical or biblical discussion, but if you just read your scriptures, you will see salvation is deliverance.

Salvation in the Old Testament

[11:18]

It applies even to the stories in the Old Testament like you may remember a story in **I Samuel 14** where Jonathan has a great victory. He fights a great battle. And Saul, his father who wasn't one of the brightest souls to show up in scripture, had made a vow that if anyone ate before the sun went down, any of his soldiers had anything to eat instead of just being busy killing people, then they would be put to death. And Jonathan had this great battle and he found some honey and he dipped his sword or something in it and eaten a little honey and Saul was going to kill him. That's not very bright but

there where you are. He was going to kill his own son because he had eaten a little honey. And the people rose up and said, "You shall not do this to Jonathan who has wrought such great salvation today in Israel."

Now remember that story just as a way of illustrating what salvation is. Salvation is deliverance. It is deliverance from all kinds of things. It is deliverance by the life of Christ in us. That life enables us to be delivered from from all kind of things that could even destroy us.

I want to put that with another passage. [12:50]

(You can go on to the next screen.)

Which is in Ephesians and we get a little more information about how that works. Listen to these words from **Ephesians 5:8-9**,

"You were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. (Now listen to what that translates into.)...for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth."

The fruit of light consists in all. How much does that leave out? You can say something. All goodness. It doesn't leave out anything. "All goodness, all righteousness, all truth." That's the focus of salvation! That's how your life is saved. You have to be careful because it can slip away from you.

Look at verses **15-16** - *"Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, (your translation says, unfortunate translation) because the days are evil."*

The old versions say, "redeeming your time". And, it's very unfortunate that this translation is not kept because redeeming is a special kind of relation. It isn't just making the most of your time. You redeem something that has already been lost. What Paul was aware of and he repeats this in Colossians. Your time is already lost if you don't be proactive and pull it back. Just the dead drag of life can defeat you. That is a real problem for those of who work in the universities and colleges because we can just grind out our classes and our assignments and those kind of things and have no idea that time needs to be brought back into the life of God and redeem or it will be lost. Ask yourself how much of your time really enters into the renewal and development of your life? How much of our time is spent doing things we have to do. Well, I have to do it. I have this assignment. I have to do it, because it will hurt my grade if I don't get it. That's failing to redeem the time. You redeem the time when you bring everything that you are living through back into the flow of God's purposes.

And we've already seen that that concerns, "*All goodness, all truth, all righteousness.*" And the challenge to you and me is to be active in bringing everything that fills our time back into God's time and make it count for Him. The great threat is that we will think we don't do that unless we are doing something religious. You know, religion can be a very good thing but it is never life. And redemption has to do with life. It has to do with our moments, our days, and our relationships with people and the way we bring that before God and expect his blessing on it. (You can go onto the next screen now.)

How do you redeem time?

[17:08]

We want to spend some time on that. You redeem your time by making sure that your gentle but persistent focus is on "*all goodness, and righteous, and truth.*"

So now, let's think about that. What's your next assignment? Well, you know. Don't tell me. I don't need to know. You know what your next assignment is. Maybe you have to read a book or you have to write a theme of some sort, whatever it may be. How do you redeem that? Am I okay here? Do you understand? We are talking about redeeming the things you are living through. And for us that is largely academic work, social projects of various kinds. How do you redeem that? How do you do that? Well, let's be as concrete as possible.

You start by being thankful.

[18:15]

So, your test that is coming over the hill, or your next paper you have to write and get in, or your next interview with a professor or someone else. Start by being thankful. "Thank you, Lord, for this test." Can you say that? Can we say that together? "Thank you Lord, for this test. Thank you for this exam."

You know, in redeeming your life, you can't make much progress without being thankful. And being thankful is sort of right up front in working with God is being thankful. Now, this is going to take some effort. God will help you. But you want to redeem your time and save your life, you start with being thankful for the next thing that's up front.

Can I just close my eyes and give you a moment to think about that and be thankful? Be thankful for the next class, the next assignment. Did you do it?

You know, redemption is a very concrete kind of thing. One of the problems with religion is it becomes so abstract. We don't live in abstractions, we live in events, in relationship with people. To be thankful for that is to acknowledge that God is there. God is there.

You say, "I didn't even want to take this course. I got stuck with it because what I wanted was already filled", or you know, something happened. I know what that's like. I once got stuck with a course in Parliamentary Law. It satisfied a requirement but it did not satisfy me.

You may be in that position in a wonderful place like Westmont. "*I did not want to take this course.*" Now take this step and be thankful for this course.

Now, that has to be combined sometimes with, "*I don't know why, but here I am and I know that you are here, and so, I am going to thank you for this, and then I am going to look for your hand to bring to life the righteousness, goodness, and truth that is in this course.*"

Now, the rule is - if you don't look for it, you won't find it. Was it there? Yeah, it could have been there. It probably was there, after all God is running the show. He's running the show so probably there is some goo there. If you start out by thanking God for it, you'll probably find it. So your next test, your next assignment.

You see, salvation is here...it's always here, it's never there. God is in our moment. That's where we meet Him, and that's where we live with Him. We take our assignments, of course, there are lots of things outside of school for each of us. And, we present those to God and it is there that we experience His deliverance. Now, excuse me while I just hammer on this for just a moment because we have real trouble bringing the wonderful words of Scripture and the Christian life down to where we are.

(If we could go onto the next screen.)

Advice from Paul in Prison

[22:50]

I want to give you a little advice from Paul. Paul was a "Jail Bird". It's said that he knew more the inside of more jails than anyone else in the Roman empire. And now, here he is, he is writing to the Philippians from jail. And

you know, those jails were not nice. They did not have TVs even. And so, you look at Paul and you see him rejoicing and telling people how to live thankfully. He says, *"In everything give thanks, pray, lift yourself up to God."* Right toward the end of this magnificent passage in **Philippians** there is this famous verse where he says **verse 8**, *"Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is..."*

Wait a minute, you say. What's this got to do with salvation?

Now see, that's the problem that we have for spiritual formation is that we have a version of salvation that doesn't concern spiritual formation. Spiritual formation, as I said, has to do with the kind of person we are becoming.

And you say, *"Well, I don't have to become that kind of person because I'm saved by grace. That means I don't have to do anything."* Is that how that works? Well, if you're just waiting to die, I guess that's it. But if you have an interest in this life, there's a lot more to it. What is Paul telling you to do? Could we do that? Listen to it again.

"Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, what is well regarded, if there is any virtue, if there is anything to be praised, keep your mind on these things."

Now, you say, *"What about God? Aren't we supposed to keep our mind on God?"* That's where God is! That's where God is!

Sometimes you read Paul and these words or the words that are in others of his writings and we think he's talking about something that does not concern us now. We are going to come to the the fruit of the Spirit in a moment and talk about love, joy, peace and so on. It those are just abstractions, they will not affect your life, and you wind up hoping that someday the Holy Spirit is going to pour it on you. It doesn't work that way. Fruit comes slowly. It comes out of the tree, out of the branch, out of the bud, out of the blossom. Then, it hangs around for quite a while on the branch there and it is good for nothing except to grow. All of that is concrete process.

[26:32] Would you like to be a person whose life is framed by love? Okay, find something around you and start loving it. You fill your life with God. (We can go onto the next screen.) You fill your life with God by constantly submitting where you are to love, to joy, to peace, and so on. That's how you focus on all the things that are righteous, true and good. That's how you

buy back your time. Because, if you don't, the time will go by and it will be lost. It will not profit you. It will not profit anyone else because you have not taken God into that moment.

The world around you is set waste your time.

[27:39]

Did you know that? It is set up in such a way to waste your time. The main way it does that is to convince you that what you are doing and what you are engaged in is not of great value. And, so you wind up having to be distracted. And, distraction is one of the main enemies of the human soul. And, the human being winds up investing what time they have in stuff that doesn't matter. When we begin to look around us at what we are doing, and you know, a place like this is just one of the most glorious places on Earth. You get to study wonderful stuff. What could be better than that? Well, that's that's the question isn't it?

If you come to look at where you are, the world around you is set to pull you away and waste your time. You have to redeem your time by coming to look at everything you're involved in as under the hand of God.

Now, when you do that you can go back and be thankful for your tests. Are any of you willing to experiment with that? Try it. See, that's where life is lived. You live your life in spiritual formation and growth by experimenting with God on the things that you're going to have to live through anyway. So, you don't waste your time. You redeem your time by filling your world with God. And then the outcome is the fruit of the Spirit. (Let's move on to the next screen.) [29:55]

I hope all of you have memorized these. There are many passages that you just need to memorize so they will be right there in the front of your mind, present in your heart and actually working in your body. If you want the Word of God to work in your body, memorize it. Because it is actually a substance and a power, and it works on its own if you take it in.

If you get a prescription from your doctor, if you don't take it, it doesn't do you any good. Set it on the shelf. If you don't take the word of God in, and especially these wonderful statements - the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness..." Now here, I hope you are thinking, "He is not talking about an abstraction. He is not talking about a having a wonderful feeling of looooooove." He is talking about loving things. The "Fruit of the Spirit is **love**." And he can help you love that test.

Joy is not effervescent stuff. You have a lot of people who get addicted to joy. They want the feeling. Joy is a condition of life. It has some feeling with it but it can be there even when you don't even have the feeling. If you go for the feeling, you can fall into addiction. Many people don't love, they love "love." You know the song, "*Falling in love with love. It gives you goose bumps an inch high.*" You don't fall in love with love, it will mess up your life. It does that to many people. They are in love with love and they get married on that basis. That's a short trip to disaster. Better love the person you marry not love. It will work much better if you do.

The Fruit of the Spirit is concrete reality. *Love, joy peace...* I am at **peace** with you. I don't just have peace. I am at peace with those around me. Maybe they are my enemies but I am at peace with them even if though they are not at peace with me. Does that make any sense at all to you? God gives me peace and I have peace with them.

And then, you know if you've gone that far, you find a lot of other things very easy. For example, **patience**. Now, if you try to be patient with someone but you don't have love, joy, and peace, "rots of ruck." It won't work. But, if you have learned concretely to live in the Fruit of the Spirit by the presence of God in your life by taking the events of daily life and turning them over to God and living in them, you're going to find patience is a walk in the park. Well, you see the whole Fruit of the Spirit there.

(Let's just go to the last couple of frames here.)

What is the saved life?

[33:44]

It is a life devoted to BEAUTY, TRUTH & GOODNESS in the power of the risen and living Christ who is with you in all you do.

Beauty, truth and goodness are where God concretely dwells with us in our life.

How much beauty is in your life? Well, actually just living on this campus you get a lot of it. **Beauty** is goodness made present to the senses. Beauty is goodness made present to the senses. **Truth** is a reflection of reality including beauty and goodness. These three all go together. It enables us to seek and find what is good. That's why Jesus said, "*If you are my disciples, you live in my word, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.*" **Goodness** is all that nourishes and strengthens human life in a proper order.

Strawberry ice cream cones are good but you don't want to live for them, do you? You know, if you had to die, a good way might be to drown in a strawberry milkshake. Something like that. But, you don't want to live for that, right? So, you have to have the goods in order. You're looking for beauty, truth and goodness as a servant of Christ.

Salvation without Beauty, Truth & Goodness [35:35]

Now, let me just finally make this point.

If your salvation does not include living with God in beauty, truth and goodness, it is going to be a very dry haul. And so much of our difficulty today for Christians in this world and for the world without a vital Christianity in its midst, so much of the problem comes from having a Christ who has no association with beauty, maybe not even truth, and not goodness.

And so let me give you this final frame to cap this off. [36:09]

A Christ without beauty, truth and goodness is a testimony against the goodness of God, the grandeur of God.

Your salvation includes these things. Jesus is the sponsor of them. He actually created them. You have to go to the Cross but you don't live there. You live in resurrection. Am I making any sense at all? See, the Cross is necessary but you do not live there, you live in the resurrection life with Jesus. The Cross is there to cut off the all of the things in our life that would keep us from the life of beauty, truth & goodness.

Beauty, truth and goodness without Christ is a wretched, failing, human substitute for the life we are meant to have.

They always deflect, and go sour and become harmful. Watch a person who is trying to make beauty their religion and see how their life goes. It will not go well. Beauty, truth and goodness, the substance of life in God, requires the presence of the Trinitarian God to hold it together and make it prosper.

I'm going to have to quit and I'm sorry, but you have to get out of here and go to class...and that's a good thing!

[End 38:10]