

# “Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation” Course Study Guide



*What does it mean to be saved?*

*What is your part in salvation?*

*How do spiritual disciplines come to our rescue?*

In this inspiring presentation at Wheaton College, Dallas Willard offers keen insights on spiritual formation into Christlikeness as a natural part of salvation found in the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Uniquely, Dallas reads a paper he wrote which later became Chapter 26 in *Renewing the Christian Mind* (HarperCollins). His humble brilliance addresses how Christians misunderstand salvation. Dallas presents rich teaching of grace, true salvation, and spiritual disciplines for Christlike transformation, finishing with a clarion call to follow Jesus.

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### NOTES

If you miss a session, or you want to study more, or would like to teach the material, the recorded sessions and slides are posted in the [Jesus College library](#) in addition to over 475 free resources including (21) ready-to-learn courses from Jesus College.

\* - The session scribe was Doug Webster. The [brackets] & **bold** disclose the scribe's commentary and also cross-references other Dallas Willard teachings.

## Your “V-I-M”\*\* Participation

We encourage you to make your experience more than just a free webinar added to your Christian study routine. When you make this course an intentional discipline for spiritual growth—ideally with a partner to better learn, apply, and grow in Christlikeness—you will find the sessions will become launch pad to rocket your growth into the Kingdom of the Heavens.

Here are a few suggestions to maximize this course.

1) WATCH the recommended video before each session. (See the course schedule for the assigned session and link.) Use each session summary available in this study guide to take notes and study related scriptures.

2) INQUIRE - Bring questions to digest the content and inspire other students. Linger longer for the “Q&C” after each 30-minute session.

3) COMPLEMENT - Consider adding related Dallas Willard studies:

~> [The Divine Conspiracy, Chapter 2, “Gospels of Sin Management”](#) — Here is a link to session 5 for a 30-minute teaching & PDF slides on this chapter.

~> [The Spirit of the Disciplines, Chapter 3 “Salvation is a Life”](#) — Here is a link to session 3 for a 30-minute teaching & PDF slides on this chapter.

~> [“Spiritual Formation & Theology: How to save your life”](#) - Dallas at Westmont College Chapel, 2011 (link to video + 7 pages of notes)

~> Discover a growing library on [Dallas Willard Ministries YouTube channel](#)

4) RETREAT - As part of your practice, invest one hour weekly solo with Jesus discussing with Him your key discovery from the session.

5) REFLECT - At the end of the course, type or write a 300 word summary or journal entry recognizing the impact of the study and the vision of how it can, by God’s grace, form your spiritual growth in Christlikeness.

\*\* V-I-M = *Vision-Intention-Means* — Dallas calls V-I-M the reliable pattern for spiritual change, or any change. As you envision a life of hearing God and truly intend to want to hear God, you will seek and find the means to practice a life of hearing God. For more on V-I-M, see *Renovation of the Heart*, chapter 5 ([Webinar on the book.](#)) Another rich resource on V-I-M is in the [Life With God Bible](#) Introduction, xxv-xxxvi

\*\*\* V-I-M - Dallas teaches on V-I-M in “Healing the Heart” [Video 6B](#) at 04:16

## **Course Schedule**

Video Link — ["Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation"](#) by Dallas Willard, Wheaton College, April 17, 2009

Session 1 - January 14 - "Problems with Spiritual Formation Today"  
[Start-20:25]

Session 2 - January 21 - "Christian View of Salvation" [20:25-49:45]

Session 3 - January 28 - "Grace & Spiritual Disciplines" [49:45-1:13:00 End of teaching before Q&A]

Q&A with Dallas [1:13:00 - 1:44:58] We encourage you to listen to his responses that are as insightful and inspirational as his teaching. We will address a few of his responses to the questions.

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**Miss or re-watch a Session?** — The sessions and presentation slides (PDF) are recorded and posted in the [Jesus College Library](#) in case you miss a session, you want to study further, or lead others through the material.

["Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation"](#) (video link)

*"Problems with Spiritual Formation Today"*

Session 1 — Video Part 1 - [time code 0:00-20:25]

*"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*

## **Salvation [Soteriology] 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."* Mark 12:28-31

I Corinthians 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 \_\_\_\_\_

The background assumption - \_\_\_\_\_ is the \_\_\_\_\_ of salvation. If you are \_\_\_\_\_, your sins are \_\_\_\_\_, then you are \_\_\_\_\_ and you will be okay after your \_\_\_\_\_.

Often Theory of Atonement - If you believe \_\_\_\_\_, then \_\_\_\_\_

There is no way to being moved to discipleship and spiritual formation.

## **Grace**

You can't solve the problem by making grace \_\_\_\_\_

The teaching we have makes grace...

## **Conclusion**

A view which takes Salvation to be the same thing as \_\_\_\_\_  
can not come to see spiritual formation as \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation** — Read Romans 5:1-5 as you ponder "Salvation"

## **Application**

VISION - What does being "saved" look like? Saved from what? To what?

INTENTION - Why are not more professing Christians living like Jesus?

MEANS - What is "grace" and where and how does it happen to me?

## **Videos to complement session 1**



[The Divine Conspiracy, Chapter 2, "Gospels of Sin Management"](#)

Link to a 30-minute teaching & PDF slides on this chapter.



[The Divine Conspiracy Lectures #5](#) @ 1:10:20-End

**Next Session 2 of 3** — "Christian View of Salvation" [20:25-49:45]

["Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation"](#) (video link)

*"Christian View of Salvation"*

Session 2 — Video Part 2 [20:25-49:45]

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

The Main Theological Point - Two things:

\_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_

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

A new type of \_\_\_\_\_ entering into the human being.

\* Colossians 1:13 & 3:3

"Knowledge" is \_\_\_\_\_ relationship

"Grace" - God acting in us to \_\_\_\_\_ what we can not  
do \_\_\_\_\_

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 New Life?**

Self-\_\_\_\_\_ Self-\_\_\_\_\_ Self-\_\_\_\_\_

## **Salvation is...**

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

II Peter 1:3 - Partakers of a Divine nature

Colossians 3:3 - Your life is hidden with Christ in God.

## **Life's Natural Development**

The first clear manifestation - Jesus really is the \_\_\_\_\_

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

## **Discipleship - A Natural Part of Confidence in Jesus**

Discipleship loosely described as...

\* Thief on the Cross

*"We are not trying to be \_\_\_\_\_ ."*

\* Abraham - Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6

*Where the Kingdom of God in relation to us.*

\_\_\_\_\_ *is not the issue.* \_\_\_\_\_ *is the issue.*

**Meditation** — Revisit John 3:1-16 thinking "Regeneration" not "Justification"

## **Application**

VISION - How familiar am I with "Regeneration"? What does it mean to me?

INTENTION - What blocks me from transformation with a "mere forgiveness" and "go to heaven when I die" reduced gospel?

MEANS - Who is Jesus to me? Is He more than Savior and Lord? How will I pray this answer interactively with Jesus and His words this week?

## **Video to complement session 2**



[The Spirit of the Disciplines, Chapter 3 "Salvation is a Life"](#)

Link to session 3 for a 30-minute teaching & PDF slides on this chapter

**Next Session 3 of 3** — "Grace & Spiritual Disciplines" [49:45-1:13:00]



["Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation"](#) (video link)

*"Grace and Spiritual Disciplines"*

Session 3 — Video Part 3 [49:45-1:13:00]

## **Grace Described**

Grace is God acting in our life to...

## **Disciplines are a Means of Grace**

John 14:15

John 8:31-32 and John 15

What does it mean to abide in His word? It means to...

## **Regeneration Naturally Brings us to Discipleship**

Discipleship to Jesus has as its natural outcome \_\_\_\_\_

Once we are clear it is no longer \_\_\_\_\_ but \_\_\_\_\_ ,

we are quite prepared to hear the ceaseless admonitions to act:

Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5; James 1:22, Luke 6:49; Titus 2:11-14

**The Key to the Action is \_\_\_\_\_**

## **Disciplines to the Rescue**

In engaging disciplines, we go to the \_\_\_\_\_ of the tree of life

Matthew 12:33; Luke 13:8

## **II Peter 1:2-11** - *Make every effort to partake in the divine nature*

The Bible's Adequate Course in Discipleship & Spiritual Formation

*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.*

II Peter 3:18 - A parting admonition

**Review & Re-Emphasize** — *Regeneration is...*

## **The Difficult Practical Problems & Turning the Church Around**

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

Step #1 — Responsible leaders began to...

Step #2 — Efforts in evangelism be very purposefully...

**Meditation** — Study II Peter 1:1-11 and devise a spiritual training plan

### **Application**

VISION - After hearing Dallas, what does grace look like to me now?  
INTENTION - How do disciplines and my desire form Christlikeness in me?  
MEANS - Consider reading *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard

### **Video to complement session 3**



["Spiritual Formation & Theology: How to save your life"](#)

Westmont College, 2011 (link to video + 7 pages of notes)

## "Spiritual Formation and Salvation" [Transcription]

[See *Renewing of the Christian Mind*, Chapter 26 for the paper transcribed.]

### Spiritual Formation and the Problems Posed by Theology

*"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

**Introduction** — Thank you very much, Bob, for those excessively kind words. Sometimes introductions mimic death in which your life is supposed to flash before you. But I'm delighted to be here. It's been a wonderful conference, I've benefited so much from the people who have presented and from the fellowship here in the group.

Now, I'm going to read a paper tonight. And that's not my ordinary style. But I'm going to try to avoid breaking out into preaching at least until the question and answer time. I'm encouraged that Jonathan Edwards, perhaps the most famous sermon in American history, was reading "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." I don't expect such a response in this case, but I was very thankful when Jeff wrote to me and asked me to address this topic of this conference, because over a period of a few decades, I have developed a view on spiritual formation, and the problems that are posed for it by theology. And so with that, I'm simply going to read to you, I will say a few things that may seem hard. And so please just take me on when I'm done. I'm here to learn, I assure you.

I give you a text from Paul II Corinthians 13:5. *"Test yourselves, 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, indeed, you fail the test."*

The announced name of this conference is "Life in the Spirit, Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective." Earlier indications from some of the organizers of the conference said that we would be concerned with, "the deeply spiritual and practical aspects of following Jesus." I would like to use my time to address a central issue in theology, specifically, soteriology or the understanding of salvation, that given prevailing understandings poses almost insurmountable barriers to transformation or formation of professing Christians into Christlikeness, which is the meaning of spiritual formation in Christ.

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

get? Hitler had a spiritual formation. And Mother Teresa had a different one. Simply put, as is now generally understood, being saved, and hence, being a Christian has no conceptual or practical connection with transformation into Christlikeness.

I make that as simply a blanket statement, and we can argue about it later, if you wish.

There's plenty of talk about transformation in the New Testament. I think you all would know many of the passages such as Romans 5:1-5, Colossians 3:4-17. A very brilliant passage in II Peter 1:2-11. Such transformation is presupposed in the New Testament's massive descriptions of normative behavior, and it shines in the lives of acknowledged great ones in the way of Christ, and in the literature spun off by the church through the ages. But, all of this appears to the ordinary Christian today, like near or distant galaxies in the night sky, visible somehow, but inaccessible in the conditions of life as we know them. Hence, you will rarely meet an individual who is seriously engaged in the transformation depicted in the Bible and in church history, or who even has a hope or anything like that this side of heaven. And while you might think that Christian organizations would have such transformation as their central focus, that simply it turns out not to be true. They are doing something else.

## **I. "Spiritual Formation" Clarification**

So, let us start out with some clarifications of spiritual formation as I've explained it in various writing. Spiritual formation in Christ, as portrayed in the Bible, and the great ones, is not primarily behavior modification. Though modification of behavior certainly is an outcome of it. Especially it is not being trained into one or another outward cultural form of the Christian religion — Lutheran, Benedictine, Quaker, Baptist, whatever. That is not spiritual formation, though often, especially in the Catholic tradition, where spiritual formation formation has stayed alive verbally, it is usually the formation of priests into a particular form of order that they are going to live in and serve. It actually happens to Baptists and others as well, but they don't call it that. So, that that form of spiritual formation is alive and well. But if that's all there is to it, it will only result in another form of the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, which leaves untouched the inward character of the person, the heart, the source of action and outward bearing.

It is not entirely misleading to regard this inner dimension of the self as the spiritual side of the human being, and then to **think of spiritual formation as the process of reshaping or redeveloping that inner side until it**

**has, to a substantial degree, the character of the inner dimensions of Jesus himself.** So, having the mind of Christ, having the heart of Christ, having Christ's peace, having Christ's joy is really not just a fancy way of talking. In spiritual formation, you come to actually have those, and of course, the other dimensions of personality as well.

Now, of course, this is a process process to which 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 formation of the human spirit. And we need to think of that. But of course, it is also formation by the divine Spirit. And so there are the two dimensions of spiritual that go into spiritual formation in Christ. What this looks like is indicated in various ways in the teachings of Jesus and his early followers. And lead followers, also in many cases, when asked by a scribe to state the foundational commandment of all, Jesus replied in terms of recognition of Jehovah as the one God and of our loving Him with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength, and loving your neighbor as yourself. That would be the outcome or the product of the process of spiritual formation in Christ. In various wordings. that is the uniform testimony of the New Testament. High points, of course, are I Corinthians 13, Romans 5:5, Colossians 3:14, II Peter 1:7, where all of these progressions culminate in agape love.

The behavioral outcome of such a spiritual formation is assured. Jesus says, *"He who has My commandments and keeps them, he is the one who loves me. He who does not love me does not keep my words."* And I don't think he's saying that as we might say to someone, "if you love me, you'll buy me a new car." But he's talking about the connection between loving him and becoming the person kind of person who routinely does what he says. Paul remarks, *"love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore is the fulfillment of the law."* (Romans 13:10) John says bluntly, in language which I'm glad he wrote, I didn't, I couldn't say it. *"The one who says 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) And I need to point out to you that we we have almost made a cultural form of saying we know him. But we do not keep his commandments.

And that's really what I'm saying. There's no conceptual or practical connection between. One must understand the order that is in the sayings or otherwise, they will throw us into a legalistic frenzy, as has happened over and over in the history of Christ's people. Accordingly, the practical aim of the 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, of taking him as Lord, teacher and friend. The practical aim is to know him, to be devoted to him in this inclusive manner.

## **II. What does "Being Saved" have to do such a Transformation?**

[11:00]

What then does being saved have to do is such a transformation? And we should start, I think, with the recognition that for almost everyone today in western Christendom, being saved has nothing essentially to do with it. We might find being saved and such transformation conjoined and an individual here or there and we do find that and that might be regarded as admirable. But it is not normative for being a Christian. And when it does happen, it has to be accounted for in terms other than what we take to be the basic nature of salvation. All notable theological and ecclesiastical positions with which I'm familiar hold that you can be right with God in ways that do not require transformation, and in ways that do not routinely support and advanced transformation. These ways may be involved they may involve often do, professing right doctrine, or a specific form of association with a denomination or group. Or, on the more liberal side, a kind of vague or even intense sympathy with what one takes Jesus to stand for.

There are of course, many ways in which this can be spelled out. I've tried to deal with that in various writings. But together these three paths, frequently overlapping, pretty much taken the ways in which North Americans at least, along with many Europeans, think of themselves as being Christian. And this seems to me to be merely descriptive point, a matter of fact, which would be borne out by statistics.

Now, within the broad range of Christians, a narrower group, many Catholics, Roman Catholics, Orthodox and evangelicals, think of salvation or being saved as strictly a matter of having one's sins forgiven, and of 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 we are addressing** - then arises from soteriology that identifies with being saved with having your sins forgiven. [13:20]

Our question then comes down to having your sins forgiven, how that relates to spiritual formation as a process and as an outcome?

The background assumption is that justification is the entirety of salvation. That is the very simply put, that is the problem. If you are justified, your sins are forgiven, then you are saved. And you will be okay after your death. I submit to you that this is what is offered and even still in more specific

forms, by current efforts, evangelism, to convert people to Christianity, and it is what people generally understand to be essential to the transaction. I hear it constantly offered. Our most popular television evangelists and teachers, many, many of whom are very fine people, I am not questioning that, present salvation in those terms, very often, it's a theory of the atonement. If you believe that Christ took your beating, then you will not have a beating. (I'm trying purposely to infuriate you.) [14:55]

But actually, that's what it comes out as. And with the best of intentions, they will go on and tell you, "Now you know, you ought to have Him as your Lord. You ought to obey Him." But this is one of the cases, it's not true in all cases, where the *ought* does not follow from the *is*. And so it is left hanging in the air, and there's no way to move from being saved in this sense to discipleship, and then from there, to spiritual formation or transformation.

Other words may be used, such as "giving your heart to Jesus" or "taking Him into your heart", or even "accepting Jesus as Lord of your life". And often they mean enough to some people that they do move on into discipleship. They do move on on to spiritual formation. That's wonderful. All I'm saying is that is, the first of all, not the usual case. And where it does happen? It happens because something other than the gospel that they have heard, and the version of salvation they've been given, something else has been given to them as well. And that's wonderful. I'm all in favor of it. I don't want to pick over the words. That is pointless.

#### **IV. Explain How Grace is Understood**

[16:30]

To get the complete picture, you have to explain how grace is understood in this context. So now I want to talk about grace. Salvation is by grace through faith. That is a foundational truth. But it is usually understood to mean that nothing you do contributes to salvation. And with this, as understood, a pervasive passivity enters the scene. You will even be told by some that your very faith in Christ as the sacrifice for your sins, is not something you do. But something God just produces in you, or not, as the case may be. It is not just that grace is unmerited favor. Grace is unmerited favor.

We have the great teaching of Bonhoeffer on cheap grace. Grace is always cheap to the person who receives it. It's always cheap. And you can't solve the problem by making grace expensive. Rather, you solve the problem by making grace active. But, the teaching that we have is one that makes the effect of grace something exterior. Too often it is said something that happens in God or on the records up there. But not something that becomes a reality in the life of those who are saved.

Now, when this transaction is done, it is done, and salvation is complete. On some soteriologies, you still have to service the account in various ways if you're going to make it in. Faithfulness to the sacraments, for example, or periodic repentance and efforts to do better, perhaps even re-baptism. Various forms this takes. And of course, that's a major division, especially among evangelicals, whether or not you still have something to do, and might you lose what you got if you didn't behave in certain ways. Those are all real issues. And you may want to talk about them some later. But that's just a part of the landscape when we're talking about salvation.

The conclusion I draw from all of this is that a view which takes salvation to be the same thing as justification. So, now here comes the theology in theological terms — take salvation to be the same thing as justification, forgiveness of sins, and assurance of heaven based upon it cannot come to see spiritual formation as a natural part of salvation. A natural part of salvation. The result of that 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.

The other it seems to me, adherence to this view of salvation, is what accounts for the transformation of evangelical Christianity at large into a version of nominal Christianity. This has happened largely over the course of the 20th century, even though historically, evangelicals have strongly opposed nominal Christianity, even have defined themselves in opposition to it.

So again, you certainly may disagree with that. And I may be wrong I. I'm told by my wife that I have been wrong. And I'm glad to receive instruction about it.

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

There is, however, a recognizably Christian view of salvation, one prominent in scripture and in history, that does have spiritual formation as a natural part or outgrowth of salvation. Salvation understood as an identifiable status, sometimes at least associated with a specific event, not always. You will perhaps not be surprised to hear me say that there is such a view and that it comes in the form of **the theological concept of regeneration.**

So now, to just gather up the main theological point is you have two things — justification and regeneration. And regeneration has almost totally disappeared into justification. So much so that biblical exegesis is often skewed beyond recognition. Like John 3 — John 3 being read as a justification passage. *"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that*



*whoever put their confidence in him would not perish but have everlasting life.*" Now, see that the guy with the multicolored hair in the end zone of a football game on television with the John 3:16 sign. He's trying to work a justification view John 3. John 3 isn't about forgiveness of sins, it's about life for up above. That's regeneration. This is the event of a new type of life, entering into the individual human being. A new type of life.

Now, I'm going to have to spend several paragraphs here just trying to clarify that, but I go back to the text I read at the outside. *"Do you not recognize this about yourself that Jesus Christ is in you."* And if we're going to have a form of "being saved" that naturally leads to spiritual transformation, that's where we have to start. And we have to speak about it as a reality that is both theological and psychological. It has to be a real event in the life.

Now, once you say that, you look back at the New Testament, you see the descriptions there. The kind of life that the human being has on its own is not true life, so to speak, a kind of depth compared to the type of life that begins to move in us at regeneration. Once this is mentioned, I believe the person familiar with the New Testament writings will recognize the passage "from death to life" as a constant biblical theme. Where life is a real and powerful presence in the regenerate individual.

The way this often works is that life is tacitly referred to "after death". To have life means your name is in the book, and you're going to have eternal life as something that comes after death, not something that is present now. But, I think myself, that if you simply do the study in the New Testament, you will see that that is not what is meant by it. The passage from death to life is a constant biblical theme where life is a real and powerful presence in the regenerate individual. And you see this in Ephesians, for example, is simply full of it. John the apostle states as a sure indication that we've passed out of death into life that we love the brethren. We passed from death to life because we love the brother and he who does not love abides in death. So if you have a version of salvation that does not include loving your brother, you didn't get life, you got something else.

John the Apostle uses that language, *"He who has the Son has life."* That "life" is perhaps John's favorite term for what happens when one comes to Christ. It is the entire point of the birth from above. But again, you will find the birth from above, or the "new birth" as it's sometimes called, systematically treated as forgiveness.

Paul, Colossians 1:13, *"For he delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son."* See, to enter the

kingdom is to have the life from above. **That life, having that life, is the principle of Kingdom inclusion.** It is otherwise described 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 actually now have from above as a regenerate person, is so glorious, that it has to be hidden from you. Medieval theologians used to say that the human soul in God's hands is so glorious, that if it knew itself, it would be hopelessly corrupted by pride.

And you remember John says, *"Beloved, now we are the children of God. We are now called the children of God, and we really are, but we don't yet know what we shall be."* (I John 3:2) And so this glorious life is what is the principle of inclusion in the kingdom of God. "You are dead in your trespasses and sins", he says in Ephesians 2 (v.5), *"but God even when we were dead in our transgressions made us alive together with Christ."* By grace you have been saved. Now, the saving there by grace was bringing you alive together in Christ. That's what grace did was it brought life. That is what the birth from above does.

Simple inductive study of the New Testament will, I believe, convince anyone that the primary way of understanding salvation, according to it - 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 who said by Jesus to be knowledge in John 17:3, *"This is eternal life that they would know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."* Eternal life in the individual is not something that begins after death, it's something that is present in us now. It is interactive relation. Knowledge in the scripture is basically interactive relationship. And please hang on to that because we have to rework the understanding of grace to go along with that. **Grace is God acting in us to accomplish what we can't act on our what we can do on our own.** A new, non-human activity becomes a part of our life. That's what happens at regeneration. Our life is now interwoven with his and His amazing grace, indeed, is interwoven with ours. Speaking thus, we must make it clear that we are not just talking something up, but referring to the concrete reality of regenerative existence.

## VI. What is a New Life?

[29:35]

[See Willard, *Hearing God*, 193; *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, ch. 3; "The Human Side of Holiness" #4@35:00]

What is life? What is a new life? Not to attempt here a definition of life, but observation will show that life is self-initiating, self-directing, self sustaining activity of some kind, or some degree. Self-initiating, self-directing, self sustaining activity.

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

Now, your child learns that when they come in one day and find their goldfish belly up in his bowl, and they say, "What's happened to the fish?" And you say, "It has died." Or, their plant withers and dies. And so, self-initiating, self-directing, self sustaining activity of that kind disappears.

What distinguishes living things from nonliving things, and things that are still alive from things that have died, is precisely this kind of activity. An important part of the activity that is life consists of the living things, interactions with its environment, and indeed, the kind of life that is in a thing determines what counts as its environment. The life that is in a plant makes soil, water, and sunlight the major factors of its environment. And when it dies, it ceases to interact with those factors by appropriate activity of its kind. A kitten has a different kind of life in it and interacts with different types of things in different ways: small rubber balls, mice, mice, other kittens, for example. A dead kitten is totally indifferent to these things, as the plant is indifferent to them while the plant is alive. It doesn't care about small rubber balls. So, that's a difference in the kind of life. That's what I'm trying to make clear here in a very simple way.

A human being, in comparison to other living things, has a real or possible environment of fantastic proportions that, as yet, have not been revealed. It has not. *"Eyes have not seen, ear has not heard, neither has it entered into the hearts of man, the joys that God has prepared for those who love Him and faithful to Him."* (I Corinthians 2:9)

The sufficiency of God to the human being, as you see in Romans 8, for example, is adequate to the fantastic proportions of human abilities and aspirations. To lose that central, relative reality is what it means to be dead in trespasses and sin. Life activity of a sort continues in the human being for a while, but defined in terms of the reverse trinity of the world, the flesh and the devil, which is stated there in the opening of chapter two of Ephesians. But that activity draws from limited, chaotic, and self destructive resources. It's condition of spiritual death ins in total death, as Romans 8:5-6 tells us now God alone has life in Himself. Nothing else does. And it is He Who gives life to all things. I Timothy 6:13. He alone can say "I Am that I Am." Exodus 3:14. Not please, "I am who I am." That's even true for Popeye, "I y'am who I y'am."

Everything is what it is. What distinguishes God is that his being is predicated on his being. And he is absolutely unique in that regard. And that is a part of what it means to say that God is spirit. And we're talking a lot about spirits here and I can't go back in or get... I can't go into that here. But we want to remember that's the nature of spirits. And in God, it is

perfect. Life in anything other than God is always dependent. It's self-initiating, self-directing, self-sustaining activity is always limited and dependent on other things, ultimately upon God.

In regeneration, God utilizing various instrumentalities, above all, of course, Himself, the Holy Spirit, the Incarnate Word, the written word, the living word. All of those play a part. And through these he imparts his own life to the fallen life of the human being apart from God. The self-initiating, self-directing, self-sustaining activity of God now penetrates the darkened world of the human soul and begins to act in it and around it. It has rarely, if ever been better said than this, [35:12]

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

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

**Salvation** — being saved — is not then a meager, merely human existence here but with a heavenly account flush in the transferred merit of Christ. It is a human existence to be sure. Meager it may be. But it is one in which the currents of divine life have at least begun to pulsate. It is, as Paul says in Colossians 1:27, *"It is Christ in you the hope of glory,"* It's important to understand when we say that we're not just talking metaphorically. We're not trying to talk something up. We are referring to a new reality that is in the personality, the body, and the soul, the spirit, the mind of the person who is born from above.

Philippians 1:6, *"It is He who began a good work in you will perfect it."* I don't actually believe in the perseverance of the saints, I believe in the perseverance of the Savior. And when he gets a hold of you in this way, he doesn't turn loose. It is becoming in the words of II Peter, *"it is becoming partakers of divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world, by lust."* (verse 4) It is Colossians 3:3, *"your life is hid with Christ in God."* Now, life of whatever kind has a natural development.

## **VII. Life of Whatever Kind has a Natural Development** [37:40]

That's the point I want to try to impress upon you. If you had a carrot, you would expect it to develop in a certain way, and you would not turn into a cabbage, or a kitten, or a horse, or anything like that. That's for George

Lucas to do. This is the absolutely crucial point for our discussion here. The activity that is life is poised for a specific order of development. It can be deflected or stunted and still be like the kind of life but its natural course is set by the kind of life it is. The same is true with the new life from above that enters the human being, however degraded, upon regeneration.

[Willard, *Hearing God*, 193; "Human Side of Holiness" session 4 @ 35:00]

The first clear manifestation of heavenly life in the individual is recognition, hearty confidence, that Jesus really is the one. He is the Anointed One. He is the Christ. He is Lord. He is not only Master he is Maestro. He is the governor of the universe.

Now, if you believe that, you are regenerate. If you believe that, not if you profess it, if you believe it. See, one of our great problems in our current situation is we do not distinguish clearly between profession of belief and believing. When you believe something you are prepared to act as if it were true. You all believe those chairs will hold you up. I can tell by looking at how you're sitting there. You're acting as if that were true, you believe it. Now, you can profess to believe things you don't believe. And in the tradition of which I am mainly a part, we routinely baptize people on profession of their faith. That has serious complications.

The first clear manifestation of heavenly life in the individual is recognition hearty confidence says 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. It is not possible for the unaided human being to arrive at such a condition. When it gripped Peter, and you will remember that scene. "*Who do you say that I am?*" When it gripped Peter, the Lord told him that only divine assistance could have brought it to him. You will remember the language. "*Not flesh and blood.*" Matthew 16:16-17. That was not a point upon which error could be tolerated. Jesus went on to say that the rock of this realization... (and please Catholic friends, forgive me. And let me go on here in my ways.) Jesus went on to say that the rock of hit this realization would be the foundation upon which his triumphant "ecclesion" would prevail and stand with access keys to the resources of the kingdoms of the heavens.

Paul, in helping the Corinthians come to an understanding of where God was, really pointed out that "*no one can say Jesus is Lord except by assistance from the Holy Spirit.*" (I Corinthians 12:3) Now you understand he wasn't talking about profession. Anyone can say the words. So Peter, so Paul also tells us in the famous passage from Romans 10, "*If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart, that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.*" (verse 9) You will not only be saved, you will be off like a rocket.

To confess is to own up to a condition of your soul. You confess a crime. You don't profess a crime. Confession is to own up to a condition of your soul. To profess is to put forth an understanding of something, to claim an understanding of something.

**Confidence in Jesus as absolute Maestro of the Universe is the first indication of regeneration.** [42:30]

It is this, not a mere credit transfer, that constitutes a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. You would never count as a personal relationship to someone who had merely put some money in your account. [Think of a bank loan.] A personal relationship involves an understanding, a confidence, an interaction, a mingling of lives, and that's why knowledge and grace go together.

The natural consequence of this confidence now is apprenticeship to Jesus and kingdom living. We will not say that failure to become an apprentice or disciple of Jesus is a metaphysical impossibility for one who has confidence that he is Lord of the universe. If you are sufficiently confused, you may not make the connection. A certain degree of understanding of what comes next is presupposed in recognizing Jesus as Lord. And in the midst of confused teaching and example, things may not proceed as they naturally would. Life in all of its forms permits distortions within limits of not becoming what it was meant to be. But in the nature of case of the case, one who really understands who Jesus is, sees their own situation in a realistic light and wants to take measures to remedy their condition by staying as close to Jesus as possible.

**VIII. Discipleship is a natural part of confidence in Jesus as He really is.** [44:12]

What exactly is a faith that does not naturally express itself in discipleship to Jesus? It would be that of a person who simply would use something Jesus did but has no use for him. That is the person I have outrageously called the "Vampire Christian" — *"I'll take a bit of your blood Jesus, enough to cover my deaths but I'll not be staying close to you until I have to."* Wouldn't haven't be held for a person stuck further with the company of someone, 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's no way I think that you can say such a person has faith or confidence in Jesus Christ. This is not the faith which works by love Galatians 5:6, or the faith through which Christ dwells in our hearts. Ephesians 3:17. It is not the faith, which is a natural part of regeneration, as life from above. Discipleship may be loosely described as staying close to Jesus Christ as possible. It is a life with him—with him—which from the reverse side is his life with us.

[45:57] **As His disciples, we are learning from Jesus how to live our life here and now in the Kingdom of the Heavens as He would live our life if He were we.**

The locus of our life with him as disciples is precisely obedience where we are. Obedience where we are. Our obedience, to start with, will be ragged, messy and inadequate. Disciples are notoriously green. That's okay. Discipleship is not an advanced stage of spiritual development. The thief on the cross became a disciple of Jesus. He just didn't have very long to work it out. That his belief was "*Jesus, we see who you are. Remember me.*" And Jesus remembered him. That was the reality that entered his life.

We're not trying to be righteous anyway, you know. That's one of the things we give up when we step into the domain of grace. We abandon our hopes, all hope in that direction has been abandoned. And we do not deal with ourselves or with others on the basis of righteousness. Our faith in Christ, now that we understand what it is, 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) Do you remember what he believed God for? It it's worth looking at. Go back and look at the story. And see what it was that Abraham believed God for that was the basis of God's accepting him on in terms of his faith. Ah shucks, I just have to tell you. He believed God for a male heir. That's what he believed God for. That was... that's real life confidence in God.

Now, my view is that justification comes as a result of that kind of relationship to God. In a manner of speaking, God looks at a person like that and says, "What am I going to do with you? I can't throw you away." And so, a relationship that involves forgiveness of sins is based upon a relationship of newness of life. And the reason why we customarily invert those is something that requires careful thought. What would lead us to think that forgiveness is first?

God based his relationship to Abraham upon Abraham's confidence in God, not on Abraham, having always done or continuing to do the right thing. Abraham, like David, is often a scandal to the proper Christian of today. So

with us, obedience to Jesus Christ is not how we earn anything, is simply the place where the Kingdom of God is in relationship to us. It is where we know it, where we know him. Merit is not the issue. Life is the issue. And it is life beyond merit.

## **IX. That Enables us to get Grace Right**

[49:45]

**Grace is God acting in our life to bring about and to enable us to do what we can not do on our own.** Inductive study of scripture once again will make this unmistakably clear. Grace is inextricably bound up with discipline in the life of the disciple or apprentice of Jesus. Discipline in the spiritual life is doing something in our own power that enables us to do what we cannot do by direct effort, because in this way, we meet the action of God, which is grace with us. And the outcome is humanly inexplicable as it was in the case of Abraham and Sarah.

And so in the New Testament, the birth of Isaac is treated as a work of grace, a work of promise, precisely because it was not something that Abraham and Sarah could do on their own. Abraham and Harry Hagar could do something on their own. And they did. And Paul goes on to elaborate on the consequences of that.

## **X. Disciplines is a Means to Grace**

[51:00]

That does not mean that anything is earned. See, 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. Because that's all shot, and 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 they love him, they will keep His commandments, and God will give them another helper that will always be with him."* (John 14:55)

Now, I've always thought, "Well, you know, how about sending the helper first, and then I'll do the commandment." That is not the way 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 in faith.

The famous statement of Jesus about truly being his disciples, *"If you abide in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine, and you will know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:31-32) The abiding here is dwelling in or living in. The word is "meneite". (Greek) Imperative. It's the same word that is used where Jesus in his great teaching of John 15 says,



"Abide in me, as the branch dwells or abides in the vine." But what does it mean to abide in His word? It means to put his word into action. It does not mean a nonstop Bible study, though that could do you some good. But it means to put his words into practice. That's how we come to know the truth out of them. When we do that, we inhale the reality of the Kingdom in a manner of speaking. That is what it means to be His disciples indeed, and one who does this will come to know the truth, the reality of the Kingdom and of God's action with them, 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 sort of metaphysical freedom. He's talking about freedom from the power of sin which Paul discusses in Romans 6 in Romans 7.

So, we think like this. (I think like this. You will have to decide.)

## **XI. Regeneration to Discipleship**

[54:00]

**Being a disciple or apprentice or student of Jesus is the status into which regeneration naturally brings us.** That's the natural progression. Just because of the nature of the belief in Christ through which regeneration expresses itself. Now, discipleship to Jesus has as its natural outcome, transformation of character. The hidden realities of heart, mind, soul, body and social atmosphere in such a way that conformity to his commands become the easy, routine, standard way the well developed disciple comports himself or herself.

We, of course, are not talking about legalistic perfection, or perfection in the way it has been taken in most of the battles over that subject. And of course, when we say natural here, we mean it in such a way that it does not exclude, but actually requires, supernatural. That should be clear from what we've already said. It should be clear that we, with all our faults and failures, have an indispensable role in both discipleship and spiritual formation. "*Be on the alert,*" Paul says, "*stand firm in the faith. Act like men, be strong.*" I Corinthians 16:13. Once we're clear that the issue is no longer merit, but life, that grace is not opposed to effort, but to earning, this responsibility to stand to be firm, and all that that would involve should cause no problem.

We are quite prepared to hear the ceaseless admonitions to action set down in scripture, to welcome them to undertake the corresponding actions as best we can, learning as we go Paul's admonition is to "*put off the old person and put on the new*" now present themselves as what they are —

something we do. When he says "*mortify therefore the deeds of the flesh*", (Romans 8:13, Colossians 3:5) that's for us to do. Now, you will not do it on your own. And in Romans 8 he talks about, "*If you do mortify through the Spirit, the deeds of the flesh, then you will live.*" Mortification is accomplished by the Spirit of God in us. But, that's something we are to do. James' directive to "*prove yourself doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves*" (James 1:22) is completely appropriate. Jesus's own picture of the foolishness of those who hear him but don't do not do what he says, as in Luke 6:49, makes utter sense. Paul's statement to Titus, "*The grace of God which brings salvation does not offer us a cushion, but instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sincerely, sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, not after we are dead, zealous for good works.*" (Titus 2:11-14) That looks like the way the only way for a believer in Jesus to go anyway.

**XII. The Key: Indirection** from a point of view of action. [57:30]

We want to obey Jesus. And we know that we cannot do this just by trying to do what he said. We understand that we are broken. We are not only wrong, we are wrung, twisted, with parts that do not connect up right. We realize that our feelings embedded in our body and its social context are running and ruining our life producing godless and destructive actions under the direction of false ideas and images and messed up patterns of thinking. We know that we must, instead of just trying to obey, 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, in the ordinary case.

**XIII. It is here that Disciplines Come to Our Rescue...** [58:22]

...always encompassed by grace, in engaging disciplines, we go to the root of the tree of our life, the sources of behavior. We do things that will transform our minds, our feelings, our will, our embodied and social existence. What our body is ready to do and 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 as in the story of Luke 13:8. We don't just try to squeeze fruit out of the end of its branches. And in doing this, we use tried and true methods of Christ's people, as well as any sensible means at our disposal, including where it is appropriate, professional help. And in this way, we will come by divine grace, the kind of person who does the things

Jesus said to do, and avoids what he said not to do. From the point of view of our assemblies of disciples, in Jesus's words,

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

So all of this, if we get it, can give us a practical hope when we look at remarkable New Testament passages such as II Peter 1:1-11, Colossians 3, I Corinthians 13, or all the landmark literature of discipleship and spiritual formation generated by the lives of disciples throughout the Christian ages — St. Francis of Assisi, Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael, and on and on.

#### **XIV. A Close Look at a Brilliant Passage: II Peter 1:2-11** [1:00:03]

In I Peter 1, the writer addressed,

*"Those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. [He then prays that] Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of [interactive relationship with] God and of Jesus our Lord; [He sights the fact that] through genuine knowledge of Him who called us to Him by His own glory and virtue, divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness."*

Now as you look at that, how many things does that leave out? *"Everything pertaining to life and godliness."* All of this means that "he has given us", continuing Peter's words, (v.4) *"He has given to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through desire."*

"Lust" is usually used there for "epithumia". It's kind of a colorful word. What he is really talking about is obsessive desire which runs the world apart from God.

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 good to those who love Him and are absorbed in His purposes.

And then there comes as a natural part of such a life the active response of discipleship and spiritual transformation. So, for this reason, Peter continues:

*"For this reason, [that is because of all of this] also applying all diligence, in your faith, achieve moral excellence [or virtue]; and in your moral excellence, achieve knowledge; [knowledge again] in your knowledge,*

*achieve self-control; and in your self-control, achieve endurance; in your endurance, achieve constant adoration; [“eusebion” That’s my own translation. I struggle with that translation. “Godliness” is what is often said, but I don’t think that is what it is after.] in your adoration, achieve kindness to others [brother love]; and in your kindness to others, achieve divine love. [That is agape.]*

[1:02:30] - Now, I don't have time here to discuss each of these in turn, but 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 the 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 in detail as to how, starting from faith, one achieves virtue, from virtue one achieves knowledge and so forth, always are supposing, of course, divine assistance, grace and 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, in his case, clearly assumes that these qualities are to be *"yours and increasing and that they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the genuine knowledge..."* (There comes 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, and because in this way, the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus, our Savior, Jesus Christ, will be abundantly supplied to you. verses 10 and 11.

I think we should not assume that this latter entrance refers primarily to the famous gates of splendor, though that entrance is certainly grand unimportant, and is also 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, as I think the context makes clear, 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 I Timothy 6:19.**

Now, with all of this before us, we can 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."*

Now, 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, and "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.

But, for our purposes here, it is vital to understand that we can, by our attitudes and actions, actually increase the amount of grace and knowledge of Christ that is in our lives. *"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"*, Paul instructs Timothy. (II Timothy 2:1) To increase in grace and knowledge is to open our life, or more fully, to the presence or action of God with us, and all we are and do. This is something we intentionally undertake and learn to do as we go. In Old Testament language, it is...

*"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!

## **XV. To Review & Re-Emphasize**

[1:06:30]

**Regeneration** - entry of God's nature and life into our real existence and identity, as 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 of disciple has a natural part and progression, 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.

## **XVI. The Difficult Practical Problems**

[1:07:25]

This leaves us finally with the difficult practical problems facing the project of spiritual formation in Christlikeness in our local assemblies, and in the larger units of Christian organization.

Even, indeed, in the Christian atmosphere 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, not in terms of being animated from a live from above, but in terms of the profession of faith. Often a profession of faith and 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. And of course, one can mention it without engaging it. And then, of course, the otherwise natural progression into discipleship, and in spiritual transformation naturally, does not occur.

## **XVII. The Church**

[1:08:30]

And the churches and surrounding societies flooded with discipleship-less Christians whose lives seem not to differ profoundly, if at all, from non Christians. Because of human hunger for something deeper than a strictly physical existence, we didn't see multitudes who say, as has been referred to earlier, that they are not religious, not churched that usually means, but they nonetheless are very spiritual. And often they take as a sign that they are very spiritual that they are not religious.

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. And morality now is often lumped together or confused with religion is 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 would primarily be a work of scriptural 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. I've tried to outline some of these in the last chapter of the American edition of the *Renovation of the Heart*.

This in turn will demand the utmost in loving character, humility of mind, willingness to suffer misunderstanding and mistreatment, and dependence upon 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 people.

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

[1:10:48]

One — That responsible leaders in all levels of Christian activity begin to exemplify and teach in their official activities, spiritual formation in Christlikeness, as being something essential to the condition of being saved, not as a precondition, but as a natural development. How that is to be worked out, avoiding works righteousness and legalism, is something that must be carefully elaborated in scriptural, theological, ecclesiastical and psychological terms.

Second — efforts in evangelism and toward increasing church membership be very purposefully reoriented towards 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 a life form above that comes at new birth, spiritual formation and obedience to Christ, doing all that he commanded, has little prospect other than that of a passing fad, which will certainly disappoint or will fade into diverse legalisms 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.

Thank you for your forbearance. That's the end.

~ ~ ~ **End of Teaching** ~ ~ ~ [1:12:55] —> *Q & A next page*

Q & A with Dallas Willard

**Q** [1:13:30] Do you believe there is an immaterial aspect to a human? I ask that with the popular emergence of Neuroscience with not much of a separation of the mind and body? Would you say that you are a dualist, a monist, and what evidence do you have for that?

**A** - I'm a stark raving dualist. The first dualism is between God and the physical creation. That is the first dualism. It is God who establishes spiritual reality. Now, I also believe the mind is not identical with the brain, and in fact, I don't think it is even ultimately dependent on it, although there are obvious important connections.. And now we are learning, among other things, the structure of the brain itself is modified by the mind. That's experimentally established now. The thing about it is, 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. Actually God does not have a brain. Did you know that? That's why everything is a no-brainer to Him. You just can't resist things like that.

Also in terms of the human personality - straight forward arguments about identity: Two things are identical if every property of one is the property of the other. The [roperties of thought, emotion, and so on are not properties of the brain. The brain is a very interesting piece of meat. And 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. In fact, I spend a lot of my time in philosophy dealing with that issue.

**Q** [1:16:10] In your book *Renovation of the Heart*, you devote a entire chapter to the nature and functionality of the soul. You make a clear point that the soul & spirit are very different things, and yet, Lee Ann Payne seems to mix the two. Do you two agree to disagree?

**A** - I would never disagree with Lee Ann. 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 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. "*Build thee more stately mansions, oh my soul, as the swift seasons roll...*" ["The Autocrat of the Breakfast-table" by Oliver Wendell Holmes] You talk to it because it really has a life of its own. "*Why are thou cast down oh my soul.*" (Psalm 42:5) 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 about 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 teaching institutions of the culture saying what you just said. Everyone of us go to these teaching institutions and we get PhDs from institutions that don't buy into any of the interpretation of the 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. So, 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. It is absolutely a central part to it.

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 does not have the resources to cope with it. They don't have it. All you have to do is confront them with it and they will tell you.

**Q** [1:21:35] What is ahead of us? What are the tasks the church and Christians are going to have engage? Could you pick one and expound on it?

**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, if it does, 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 and references. For example

Tertullian wrote a book on the soul he intended to replace the writings of Plato and Aristotle which he saw very clearly left out the connection of the soul to God. That's why it is very tough to say it perhaps, 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] My question is about your statement that grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. 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** - Because freedom does not presuppose passivity. If I understand you, the way you are thinking about grace is you are passive. That's what it means to exclude action is to be passive. Grace does not make you passive. To exclude action is to be passive. As an old preacher I use to know would say, "The only thing you have to do to go to Hell is to do nothing." Now, we Baptists will preach to you for an hour and a half to tell you there is nothing you can do to be saved, and then sing to you for forty-five minutes to try to get you to do something. If we were consistent after our sermons, we would just say, "You know, there's nothing we can do about it folks." But we don't. Of course, you can't. Like I mentioned, "Putting off the old person, putting on the new..." that's something for us to do. "Denying ungodliness and worldly lust..." That's something for us to do.

I like to say, especially to my Baptist brothers, that 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, "Without 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, passivity and so on and to 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. It doesn't mean that. This is a large part of what we really need to desperately get straightened out in our teaching and preaching.

**Q** - [1:26:55] [Personal comments] What do 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. When they get one, hopefully it will not be one that breeds passivity and makes discipleship and spiritual formation that leaves that dangling, because if do, they will create groups just like the ones that they hate.

[\[1:28:15\] \[Pastor re-writing a declaration of Baptism\]](#)

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

**A** - Yes, what happens is the old self really starts to fight. What it realizes is it is now occupying ground that does not belong to it. **Romans 5**, "*Having now peace with God...*" Now, we have peace with God but we don't have peace with the old self. Now we have to deal with it. Before we simply went with the flow and took what came with that. Now I'm listening to Jesus and Jesus says, "*Bless those who curse you.*" Someone just cursed me and I don't want to bless him. In fact, I probably would have cursed him back because that is what is in my body. So, now what am I going to do about that? I have to deal with that. By the grace of God I say, "What could I learn? How can I change so that when people curse me, blessing came out?" How could I change? Now 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 our 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 bodily, the whole body. That's what goes into transformation. What we want is the goodness and righteousness of Christ to inhabit our bodies as the old person inhabited them.

I like to point out that when the Israelites came into the Promised Land, the first city they took on the walls fell down. Do you remember 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. But, of course, we have an eternal future ahead of us and it isn't just gonna be about pickin' & singin'.

**Q** - [1:32:30] [Comments...] 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, it is holy, it is good. He never comes down on the Law. Now there is a usage of the Law in the New Testament that is the customs of the Jewish people and he does come down on that because they were precisely the works of the flesh.

What is the law? "*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus who walk after the Spirit, for what the Law could not do God did sending His son in the likeness of sinful flesh...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 because 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 need to worry about that for a long time. It's silly to try to deal with perfection. It is always, I said in the paper, it is always understood legalistically, and that always turns out to be a human, cultural form. That's perfection.

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. That is to say, you come to the point where your actions are governed by love. Love as the fulfillment of the law is, I think, the standard teaching that we have to deal with.

That's very important question and in deed, thank you. That is so important to re-work that and to re-think that. 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, Jewish-Christian tradition has a lot of things in it, 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. That's the fault is of human pride.

**Q** - [1:37:10] - How does sanctification function in your understanding of spiritual formation? Justification and sanctification seem to be both sides of the same coin.

**A** - [1:38:00] I would imagine the reason not much has been said about it is because it is such a scrambled subject, and also, a lot of harm has been done by talking about sanctification in ways that really has brutalized people. And so, while it was a much more common term in the past, it is no longer widely used except in a few theology books. 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. Now, the process, at a certain point, is not the outcome or status that you might call sanctification. I define **sanctification** loosely as an abiding and pervasive presence of Christ in our life. What that does sets you into another world - sanctification, holiness refers to a kind of otherness. Progressively you grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You are, to use other language, increasingly 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.

It is 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. There is a process and an outcome and we need to distinguish them. Of course, they are indispensable terms biblically and when we understand them rightly, they are indispensable to understand the process of spiritual formation. Spiritual formation, I believe 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 some field at a university, no one talks about a connection in the subject matter to God. And so, you have some impression of what it is to be adequate in your field and it 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?" Actually, that question will not be addressed. What is journalism? What is law? All of our fields now 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.

[1:43:52 - Final comment] When you began tonight, you referenced a really remarkable move of God in response to somebody reading a paper from the pulpit in North Hampton. I sensed the Spirit of God moving, at least in me. I am a pastor and I find myself sitting back there just asking that the Spirit of God would bring life to me, to my parish in the church and I want to thank God for that move of the Spirit in a paper.

**Dallas** - "Praise be to God."

~ ~ ~ **Q & A Session Ends @ 1:44:35** ~ ~ ~

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The Jesus College "Master's in the Master" is a clear, realistic, practical method to foster "Christlikeness" in ordinary people who take transformation seriously. *This is not an accredited degree.* The Master's offers you a Jesus centered, wisdom guided, community\* engaged, mentor\*\* supported, daily life integrated, spiritual growth plan.

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For information on the courses, a plan worksheet for your custom Master's V-I-M, or a personal consult with Doug Webster to discuss your desired spiritual training and growth, email us — [info@JesusCollege.com](mailto:info@JesusCollege.com)

## **Jesus College Postscript**

Thank you and God bless you for venturing further up, further in the Kingdom Among Us. We trust you received a fresh hearing of Jesus through the mind and soul of a humble follower of Jesus in Dallas Willard alongside a cadre of the crucifixion of friends from around the world. May your quietly transforming, conversational friendship with God immersed in the Trinitarian community be pervaded with joy, relaxed with shalom, and filled with agape, as you become the kind of apprentice of Jesus who willfully seeks the good of God, others and yourself.

*The free study guide was prepared by Doug Webster. We welcome your comments, suggestions and ideas on how we might better help you strengthen your apprenticeship with Jesus in the With-God life with the sole, soul and eternal goal of Christlikeness. [info@JesusCollege.com](mailto:info@JesusCollege.com)*

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