



Acts 29 South – Central Regional
The Village Church

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“Walking With God in Integrity: The Historical Witness”

Introductory Comments: Some underlying assumptions concerning the spiritual life.

1. What does it mean to glorify God? God is glorified in his creation when it reflects His character. We are to be mirrors of what God has granted to us of Himself by the Spirit.
2. What is the point of the Bible? The focus of the Bible is the glorification of God; the Bible begins and ends with divine and creaturely harmony. The fall brought disharmony, but God is sovereign and patiently bringing a restoration when creation will glorify Him fully once again. Christ, the anticipated lamb, came in the incarnation, and purchased a people for God by paying the debt that prevented their assimilation into God’s family and God declared them righteousness in Christ. God, by His Holy Spirit, is drawing the redeemed family together. When complete the “garden” will be perfectly restored. God will be eternally glorified in his creatures.
3. What is the experience of redemption? The experience of redemption is an affectionate embrace of the beauty of Christ, a life of transforming delight in God as revealed in Christ.
4. What is the nature of the indwelling of the Spirit? The Spirit resides within us morally. Indwelling is in the nature of the nine fruit of Spirit (e.g., love, joy, etc).
5. What is the practical import of all this? The Bible reveals Christ who makes the spiritual life possible through His death for us. The experience of redemption is a sense of awe in the wonder of divine forgiveness and the beauty of a wonderful savior. Salvation is the life of God, the Spirit, within us. The indwelling Spirit is the basis of glorifying God because God beholds the Spirit in us in His glorification. It is the life of the Spirit’s moral character that we are to reflect.

With all the aforementioned in place we can more clearly define our task and pursue it. How do I arrange my life so as to reflect to a greater degree the character of God in every circumstance?

- I. What does God do to cause us to glorify Him more?
 - A. God graciously redeems us from sin’s condemning power and grants us the Holy Spirit. He provides the basis for spiritual growth (John 3:6).
 - B. God provides His children with protective mercies and preservation.
 - C. God chastises us to curb our dangerous tendencies and humble us. This is often expressed in the consequences of moral failure. For the child of God, this action is always remedial in nature, never punitive (Heb.12:5-6).
 - D. God brings disappointments into our lives to shape us spiritually in that the design is that through them we depend on the Lord more (John 9:1-3).
 - E. God uses the evil actions of others upon our lives to shape us to reflect His glory (Genesis 50:20).
 - F. God helps us to understand that this world is but a shadow of a world yet to come. This gives us perspective of the things we see. Like Abraham, we “seek after a city whose builder and maker is God”.

II. What should we do to cause ourselves to glorify God more?

Radiating the character of God involves positive action and negative action. There are old, “ten gallon” words for this dual action on our part, Vivification and Mortification, the positive increase of spiritual strength and dying progressively to sin.

Said J.I Packer, “**Sanctification has a double aspect. Its positive side is vivification, the growing and maturing of the new man; its negative side is mortification, the weakening and killing of the old man**” (*A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* [1990]).

How do I determine what is right to think about since the spiritual life is so connected to mental activity? As a controlling verse of the Bible, I often think of Philippians 4:8. “...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, what ever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worth y of praise, let your mind on these things.”

Observations:

1. The spiritual life requires discipline; it is hard work and is a produce of time and repetition. The spiritual person is described in Hebrews 5:13 as one whose “sense are trained to discern good and evil”. Habits are routines that are not easy, but over time become a delight. What you are doing is replacing one set of routines for another. Love makes the burdens of habit building less a burden.
2. We are individuals, so remember that we connect with the spiritual disciplines in different ways, proportions, and times in our lives.
3. By personality and spiritual giftedness, we are naturally given to some disciplines more than others.
4. The goal of our lives should be to incorporate those disciples we life helpful and needed at different times in our lives.
5. Length of time in devotional exercises not an issue and often detrimental, particularly if we do not progress slowly. What we most value is not what we most invest time in doping; it is what we think about and most frequently return too.
6. Remember, generally, we are better at doing than being. However, it is dangerous to confuse the two. Doing is important because it is evidence of a spiritual reality in our lives, but it must grow out of a relationship that is rooted in a love relationship.
7. Do not be discouraged by the fact that you simply cannot do one or another of the disciplines no matter how hard you try. Some cannot memorize Scripture; some find fasting unimportant; some find it hard to pray; some find it hard to read the Bible daily.
8. The important thing is to find something that you can start doing; the spiritual life is a process (what you can manage at 25 is surely not the same as 65!).
9. Do not get discouraged by you lack of doing it right; it is more important to be doing.
10. No one has their act together; we all have areas of spiritual success, areas need-



ing improved discipline, and areas of failure. Join the “club” of fallen, redeemed humanity!

11. Discipline is a fruit of a love relationship; the deepest issue is that love. It is not about how well we are doing; it is all about loving. Love is not merely an emotion; it is a state of being. That state for us is the presence of the life of God, the Holy Spirit, in our very beings.
12. Do not become discouraged by what you cannot do; delight in what you can and in the progress you see over time. This is not “bead counting;” it is a love relationship.

A. Vivification: Positive Sources of input to promote spiritual vitality

- 1) Right thoughts require virtuous input: The place of the Bible.

If you desire to think correct thoughts, you must good ideas in your mind. You simply cannot avail yourself to what is not there.

It not about the length of time in reading daily; it is about frequency.

It is not about remembering what you read. Remember that growth is only seen over time with time-lapse photography.

Slowly and carefully reading a verse or paragraph, but read daily until it becomes a habit.

If reading is hard, get tapes or a CD and listen. Most drive to work; use the time to think good thoughts.

- 2) Right thoughts require the mental expression of good ideas; good ideas come from good input.

Meditation, thinking about God intentionally. Try to think about the passage of Scripture you read for the day.

Memorize Scripture.

- 3) Prayer, verbalizing your thoughts to God.

Make a list of prayer needs.

Pray through portions of Scripture (the phrases of Psalm 23 or Matthew 6, the Lord’s model prayer).

The posture of prayer is not important.

The place of prayer is at your discretion.

The length of prayer is not the point. Is it sincere and God-focused.

Some people pray best with another or others. Join a prayer group.

- 4) Hearing, listening to thoughts about God.

Regularly attend to the preaching and teaching of the Bible.

Reading good books; listen to tapes or CDs.

Donald Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life* (NavPress, 2003)

Ken Gire, *The Reflective Life* (Chariot Victor Publications, 1998).

Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (NavPress, 1978).

Get into a Bible study.

- 5) Attend the Lord Supper meeting regularly.

- 5) Right Thoughts require good company.

Engage with Christian friends and fellowship.

Make a friend so that you can share your thoughts.

Become active in your church.

Experience the Lord's Day as a time of rest and refreshment.

- 6) Right activities promotes right thoughts.

Consider assisting a teacher in a Sunday school class.

Think about a short-term missions trip.

Engage in a serious class at church.

Find a widow or orphan to help, become a surrogate parent.

B. Mortification: Negative actions conducive to spiritual vitality

- 1) What does it mean that the dominion of sin has been crushed for the believer?

- a) The fact of the end of the dominion of sin.

"How shall we live who died to sin live any longer in it?" Rom. 6:2

"For he who has died has been freed from sin." Rom. 6:7

“Death no longer has dominion over you.” Rom 6:9b.

“For sin shall not be master over you for you are not under law but under grace.” Rom. 6:14

- b) The characteristics of the dominion of sin: Universality, the Absence of Struggle.

Perpetual Rebellion; Continuance of Practice
A Despising of Warnings and Convictions
A Contempt for the Ways of God
A Voluntary Relinquishing of Means of Grace
A Resolute Choice to Resist Correction

- c) The meaning of the dominion of sin.

“The dominion of sin is present when sin exercises control over the will of a man with no opposition from another principle.”
-John Owen, *Dominion of Sin*

- d) The metaphor for the dominion of sin: The Forrest Image.

- 2) How can the dominion of sin be crushed when the Bible and experience speaks of indwelling sin?

“The *nature* of sin does not change in regeneration or sanctification, but its *status* in us is radically attired.”
Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (1987).

- a) The fact of indwelling sin.

“I find then a principle that evil is present with me, the one who wishes to do good.” Rom. 7:21

“Grace changeth the nature of man, but nothing can change the nature of sin.”
—John Owen, *Indwelling Sin*

“When it (sin) is least felt, it is most powerful.”
—John Owen, *Indwelling Sin*

“The man that understands the evil of his own heart, how vile it is, is the only useful, fruitful, and soled believing and obedient person.”
—John Owen, *Indwelling Sin*

“Many men harbor spirit devouring - lusts in their bosoms that lie as worms, at the root of their obedience, and corrode and waken it day by day.”

—John Owen, *On Mortification*

b) The reality of indwelling sin.

“...if you by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the flesh, we shall live.” Rom. 8:13

“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin.” Rom. 6:11

“Do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.” Rom. 6:12

“Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead...” Rom. 6:13

“If we would judge ourselves we would not be judged.” I Cor. 11: 30

The mind reflects on sin generally, not on the particulars.
An enjoyment of secret sins while glorifying God in other ways.
A busyness that obscures the observation of sin’s danger.
A mental slothfulness.
Sin catches the mind by surprise.
Sin won’t let the mind rest.

- John Owen, *Mortification*

c) The evidence of indwelling sin.

Sloth and neglect of sin.
Loss of fear of God.
A complicated view of the gospel.
Lack of a serious watchfulness for Satan.
Imitation of bad examples.
Enjoyment of secret lusts of the heart.
Lack of private times with God.
An increase of knowledge without obedience.
An increase of worldly wisdom.
A failure to repent.

d) A metaphor for indwelling sin: the Forest Image.

3. What is the believer’s responsibility to indwelling sin?

“If you through the Spirit put to death the deeds of the flesh, you shall live.” Rom. 8:13

- a) The need for the believer's responsibility.

Sin is present in us and toward us.
Sin is active, though not total.
Sin is active if left alone.
If sin is neglected the inner man atrophies.
The spirit and the new nature has been given to fight against indwelling sin.

- b) The qualifications to the believer's duties.

It is not to utterly kill, root it out, or destroy it. The issue is to de-prioritize your troubles.
It is not to disguise sin.
It is not the improvement of a quiet and sedate nature.
It is not merely diversion.
It is not the occasional conquest of a sin.

- c) The metaphor for the believer's duty: The Forest Image.

- 4) How is the believer to put to death the deeds of the flesh?

"To be Spiritually Minded is Life and Peace" (Rom. 8:6).

"Watch and Pray that You Enter not into Temptation" (Matt. 26:41).

- a) Some General Reflections on Sin in our lives.

- (1) Most people are bothered by the symptoms and consequences of sin, not its causes.
- (2) Sin is not resolved by avoidance and neglect, nor inadequate, unfruitful remedies.
- (3) Sin is most often revealed in its fruitful state (i.e., "death" as personal wastefulness), not in its inceptive or casual stage.
- (4) Sin is rooted in our fallen natures (i.e., disruptive characteristics), but manifested in our social relationships.
- (5) Sin works in us in subtle and insidious ways. We must become students of ourselves to know how and when we are most liable to it.

- b) Specific Principles for the Mortification of Sin; or, what are some helpful things to do when “sin crouches at the door” of your life.
 - (1) Consider the dangerous consequences of sin (guilt of sin, loss of peace and strength, grieving the spirit, wounding of Christ).
 - (2) Load the conscious with the guilt of sin (consider God’s infinite patience and forbearance).
 - (3) Consider the state of one’s self at all times in total depravity and thoughts of one’s vileness. A common characteristic of the circumstance of sin in our lives is that contemplated action is seen as having good potential and this will improve us. Remind yourself that sin never pays long-term positive dividends.
 - (4) Trace the particular manifestation of sin to its root.

The Meaning: The cause of poor behavior is often hidden. Another way to say it is this: that which bothers us is often a fruit of a deeper cause. To make progress we must search out the underlying causes and deal with them.

“Resolved, whenever I do any conspicuously evil action, to trace it back, till I come to the original cause; and then both carefully endeavor to do so no more, and to fight and pray with all my might against the original of it”. – Jonathan Edwards

“I have concluded to endeavor to work myself into duties by searching and tracing back all the real reasons why I do them not, and narrowly searching out all the subtle subterfuges of my thoughts and answering them to the utmost of my power, that I may know what are the very first originals of my defect, as with respect to want of repentance, love to God, loathing of myself – to do this sometimes in sermons”. – Jonathan Edwards

The Illustration: Add to the forest image another; it is “the river and the canoe” metaphor. When you discover a “tree” in your forest, do not merely deal with it. If you can, try to figure out what triggers this course of action. Imagine the “river “ to be your life; the “canoe” the means for searching out your life. Get into your “canoe” and paddle up the “river” of your life and deal with the problem at the deepest cause you can discover. Problems are normally brought to our attention in the fruitful stage, not the causative stage. To root out a problem is to attack the root, not the fruit.

- (a) This is no easy task. It requires hard reflection and honesty.

- (b) There are things hidden deep in your mind that you have purposefully hidden to avoid the pain of it. Reflection over time will generally make these known.
 - (c) When things got hidden in our memory bank as children, we have adopted a non-confrontative approach to dealing with things. That is often all a child can do; however, to employ the same mechanisms as an adult leads to greater problems in handling social relationships.
- (5) Do not hurry to gain relief for your sin. Think about it before you shrug, delight yourself in your forgiveness, and go your way.
 - (6) Act quickly against the first temptations toward a sin. Learn by self-study how and when you are susceptible to solicitations. Deal with them immediately; do not delight in them though we all have a natural tendency to do so.
 - (7) Allow God to speak peace rather than assuming you have it. A lot of lessons are missed in hurray. Do not claim a verse and claim more than you should have.
 - (8) Be attentive to temptation. Learn the circumstances of solicitation. Solicitation is not evil inherently; it is the signal of the approach of what can turn into evil.

To quote a line from Calvin Coolidge, a former president”

*“The Lord gave us two ends-
one to sit on
and the other to think with.
Success depends upon which one we use the most.”*

- (9) Ask yourself what you have learned from your failure. Say to yourself, “How did this happen to me?” “What were the circumstances the accompanied this in the first place?”
- (10) Because complexity complicates and simplicity simplifies, take on only one or two trees at a time. Too many “trees” leads to frustration and defeat; too many “canoes” rides in the “river” of your life makes for frustration.



C. Conclusion: A Summary: Vivification and Mortification.

Though there are things we can do in our walk with the Lord, it seems to me that it can be summarized in the title of the hymn, "Trust and Obey". We must fill our minds with good things in order to act correctly before the Lord. Correct doctrine leads to correct behavior; incorrect doctrine leads to license.

- 1) Whole-hearted trust
- 2) Faith
- 3) Obedience
- 4) The presence of right thoughts; a recognition of some basic truths.
 - a) God's sovereignty
 - b) The effects of sin
 - c) The love and kindness of God
 - d) The wonder of Calvary
 - e) The reality of indwelling sin