

The Way of Jesus

Week 2

*A 12 Week Seminar For Disciples Of Jesus
St Stephens/Sewickley
January-March 2010*

Seminar Outline

- Week 1:** Introduction to Discipleship
Weeks 2-3: The Gospel Jesus Taught and Brought
Weeks 4-5: How Christian Spiritual Growth Happens
Weeks 6-12: Specific Training on Some Fundamentals in "The Way of Jesus"

The Gospel Jesus Brought, Part I

*And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.
Jesus in John 17.3*

There is a widespread gap these days between Christian **profession** and Christian **behavior**.

Set up any comparison of major categories of moral behavior: marital fidelity, honesty, integrity, generosity – the data says there is no statistically significant difference in behavior between those who profess faith in Christ and the normal population. Yet lengthy and frequent passages in the New Testament indicate that this should not – and was not - always so (see for starters: 2 Cor. 3:18, Rom. 5:1-5 & 12:2, Eph. 4:14-16, Col. 3:4-17, 2 Peter 1:2-11 & 3:18, etc.) We want to understand what is going on.

For starters, the linkage between belief (conviction of your 'heart', your 'core values') and behavior is so strong that you can actually tell what people believe by their manner of life (remember the fruit and the trees saying of Jesus Luke 6.43-45, Matt 13.33?). How people **live** is a more faithful indicator of belief than what they **profess**. This would suggest that it is possible to profess one thing and actually believe another! Understanding this is important for discipleship.

'You cannot actually trust [Jesus] and fail to be his disciple...' (D Willard).

The interplay between the gospel and Christian formation is unavoidable; what you believe matters.

"The whole purpose for which we exist is to be thus taken into the life of God. Wrong ideas about what that life is will make it harder."

C.S.Lewis, (quoted in "Apprenticeship with Jesus", Gary Moon, p.29)

With all this in mind, let's revisit a popular understanding of the gospel. Many modern evangelical Christians think the gospel offers us:

- **Christ's Forgiveness for our Past,**
- **Christ's Eternity for our Future**

This is certainly true, but look carefully for a moment. Do you notice **what it leaves out?** **Today.** And every today God gives you. And it is not the gospel of the NT, at least not all of it. It is what Dallas Willard calls (and it is a crass phrase, so take a breath) '**vampire Christianity**'. The kind of Christianity that **says to Jesus**, 'I want a little of your blood to take care of my past and secure my future – but I don't have much interest in you for my today's. I'd like to manage those myself...'

The gospel of the NT is something far larger; it would be better charted like this:

- **Christ's Forgiveness for our Past**
- **Christ's Life for Our Days**
- **Christ's Eternity for our Future**

It includes your past, your future, AND your today's, all swept up by the mercy of Jesus, all transformed by his grace. Nothing is left out. No hope or dream, no relationship, no possession, no job or career, no thought or action, no sin or failure, no matter of character or attitude of life – all swept up under his mercy, all infected by His Spirit, all lived for his glory - your yesterdays, your today's, and all your tomorrows – for a long, long, long time!

Theologically the Bible teaches that salvation starts with **justification**, moves right into **sanctification**, and is destined for **glorification**.

Dallas Willard (The Great Omission, p. 65) provocatively sums it up like this:

If there is anything we should know by now, it is that a gospel of justification alone does not generate disciples. Discipleship is a life of learning from Jesus Christ how to live in the Kingdom of God now, as he himself did. If you want to be a person of grace, then, live a holy life of discipleship, because the only way you can do that is on a steady diet of grace. Works of the Kingdom live from grace."

What is the alternative? Again we follow along with Dr Willard (*Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation, Presented at the 2009 Wheaton Theology Conference*):

*But is there a recognizably Christian view of salvation—one prominent in scripture and history—that does have spiritual formation as a natural part or outgrowth of "salvation," **the theological concept of regeneration**. This is the event of a new type of life entering into the individual human being. 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**. (Eph. 3:20; 2 Tim. 2:1)*

***John the Apostle** states as a sure indication that we have "passed out of death into life, we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death." And also: "He who has the Son has life." (1 John 5:11-12) "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" as*

*discussed in John 3—a passage that is desecrated by the usual reading of it as focused upon forgiveness of sins. There the "life" is associated with seeing and entering the kingdom of God. "Birth" and "life" of course go together. **Paul** describes the action of God in saving us: "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." (Col. 1:13) To enter the kingdom is to have the life "from above." That life is the principle of kingdom inclusion. It is otherwise described by Paul as sharing in the resurrection life of Jesus himself. "You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Col. 3:3) Again: "You were dead in your trespasses and sins.... But God..., even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and positioned us with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:1-6) 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 is in terms of a divine life that enters the human being as a gift of God. There is then a new psychological reality that is God acting in us and with us. Eternal life is said by **Jesus** to be knowledge. Knowledge in biblical language is an interactive relationship, and in this case with "Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." (John 17:3) Eternal life in the individual does not begin after death, but at the point where God touches the individual with redeeming grace and draws them into a life interactive with Himself and His kingdom. A new, non-human activity becomes a part of our life. Our life is now interwoven with His and His (amazing grace indeed!) with ours. Speaking thus we must make it clear that we are not just "talking something up," but referring to the concrete reality of regenerate existence.*

In short, 'salvation is a **life**', in particular, nothing less than the life of the triune God himself, given to us in Jesus to live.

Homework for Week 2

- Read Philippians 2 this week, devotionally
- Read Luke 7-12 this week, devotionally
- Pray through the '12 Confessions of a Disciple' this week with special attention to confessions 1-3. This is a bracing discipline designed to help us be honest with God about who we are and what we really believe. Make each step a confession to Christ, being as specific as you can, and always concluding with a prayer that Christ's own presence and life and will and character and Spirit would fill and shape us more and more.

Dallas Willard, among others, believes a well designed discipleship process will look much like the shape of AA's 12 Steps. These steps are modified for our purposes.

12 Confessions of a Disciple

1. I admit that I am powerless to fix the brokenness of my life on my own. My life has become unmanageable.
2. I believe that God, through his actions and those of his Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit – can restore me to sanity.
3. I will turn my will and my entire life over to the care of God. Father, I'm asking for a total transfusion of your will, power, presence and love.
4. I will make a searching and fearless inventory of my life to discover all the ways I have engaged in self-worship (by being in control instead of living surrendered to the will of God).
5. I will admit to God, to myself, and to another human being the exact nature of my wrongs.
6. I am entirely ready to have God remove all the defects in my character and replace them – through his presence – with the thoughts, emotions, will, behavior, and relationship patterns of Christ.
7. I humbly ask God to help me become willing to deny myself – and the desire to live life on my own terms – and to remove my shortcomings.
8. I will make a list of all the people I have harmed and become willing to make amends.
9. I will make direct amends to all I have injured.
10. I will continue to take personal inventory, and when I wrong someone, I will promptly admit it.
11. I will through prayer, meditation, and the practice of other Christian disciplines attempt to improve my conscious contact with God.
12. Having experienced some measure of authentic transformation as a result of surrendering all aspects of myself to the power and presence of Christ, I will carry this message to others and continue to practice these principles in all my affairs.