

## (Finishing Up Session 4...) When the Will is Not Surrendered...

Pride: the basic sin. Pride is fundamentally self-sufficiency.

- It sets us outside the kingdom of God and puts us in our own kingdom.

The Beatitudes take a list of the people who on the world's scale are last and says that those people in the kingdom of God are blessed. It's not a list of things you should try to do; it's a list of people who are blessed, contrary to human expectation, in the kingdom of God.

- Luke 6: the "woe-be's" are an inversion of the world's order and the kingdom's order. Not "woe-be" *because* of the condition.
- You are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world! That is said to people on the assumption they'll be alive *in the kingdom of God*.

Jesus has come to fulfill the law not to destroy it. By that he meant, "I've come to show you how to be the kind of person who will keep the law."

If you want to keep the law, you don't try to keep it; you try to become the kind of person who will keep the law.

- That applies to any temptation that you have: don't try not to do it, try to become the kind of person who looks at it and says, "who needs that?!"
- You can only do that as you learn to live in the sufficiency of the kingdom.

Pride is pointless at best, and terribly destructive at worst, because it tends to uproot you from the Kingdom atmosphere in which you are designed to live.

Matt. 5:20: "*Unless you go beyond the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of the heavens.*"

- The Scribe and Pharisee tried to be righteous by *doing* and *not doing* specific things.
- For Example: Don't swear at all! If you do it comes from the evil in your heart...which is the desire to manipulate people by your song and dance. Just say yes, it's this way, or no, it's that way. More than that comes from evil; the evil is the desire to manipulate other people.

Matt. 5:21 and following is spelling out the righteousness of the kingdom - a righteousness of the *heart*.

- Not just the righteousness of someone who doesn't kill the other person. It's the righteousness of the person for whom that kind of thing *wouldn't even come up on the horizon*.
- Not the righteousness of the person who wouldn't commit adultery; it's the righteousness of the person who *looks at people in such a different way* that doesn't even come up. That's the righteousness of the kingdom.

It's not talking about going to heaven when you die! It's talking about entering the kingdom of the heavens, NOW.



More Barriers to Eternal Living: Strongholds of Thought and Feeling  
Living the Eternal Life Now, Session 5  
© 2024 Dallas Willard Ministries

That'll take care of the other issue, (heaven when you die). As we change, our lives become different, because we have changed inside. And our will is the root of that change. When the will turns, surrenders to God, says yes to God, we begin to make the steps.

The transformation of the mind is the single most thing that we need to have in our focus when we go beyond the surrender of the will.

## Session 5 Topic: Strongholds of Thought and Feeling

---

*The primary form of spiritual warfare is in our thoughts.*

---

2 Cor. 10:3-5:

*For though we walk in the flesh (our natural abilities) (flesh is not bad unless it becomes ultimate; then its bad) we do not war in terms of the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh (not "from nature"), but they are powerful to God for the destruction of strongholds - dissolving ways of thinking and every "higher" thought raised up against the knowledge of God...and taking every thought captive to obedience to Christ.*

Even in Paul's day people spoke in terms of "higher thought." This still happens today. It refers to something beyond ordinary people's understanding.

- Always want to ask, "by what standard is it higher?"
- Higher thinking is normally a way of setting aside the opinions of ordinary people.
- "Higher thought" as that phrase is used becomes something that disarms the ordinary person's sense of what is right and wrong and what is good and bad.

The idea of the "higher thought" of evolution...

**Ideas are very powerful; we can't live without them.**

- **We live at the mercy of our ideas.**
- The will can only act in terms of the ideas and feelings we have.
  - Our ideas determine even what we can will, and if we aren't careful, we will subject our will to ideas that are false or harmless, or harmful. The problem with that is that when you subject your will to ideas that are false, you always have unpleasant encounters with reality.
- **Reality is what you can count on. Reality is what you run into when you're wrong.**

Ideas are extremely important. The Gospel comes to us when we're dead in trespasses and sins because in that condition, we don't have any ideas that can lead to liberation. Once the Gospel comes in, we can begin to think in different terms because we've been presented with a new set of ideas. And then we're being transformed by the renewing of your mind.



Conference with Dallas Willard, February 18-21, 2010, Church of the Apostles, Fairfax, VA

More Barriers to Eternal Living: Strongholds of Thought and Feeling  
Living the Eternal Life Now, Session 5  
© 2024 Dallas Willard Ministries

TRANSFORMATION INTO CHRISTLIKENESS IS A FUNCTION OF THE MIND.

- People have to think differently in order to be transformed.
- You cannot be transformed by willpower. Your will has to be carried by knowledge, by feelings, by the Holy Spirit.
- The single most important means (to transformation) is your ideas.

YOUR BASIC FREEDOM IS WHERE YOU WILL PUT YOUR MIND.

We don't trust riches. We don't place our well-being in riches; in comfort...

- There is nothing wrong with that if it is put to God's use.
- **The virtue is not poverty it is stewardship.** That means to hold everything on behalf of God, and it is desperately important that people who are stewards should direct the wealth of the world.
- The corresponding virtue on behalf of those who own is frugality, simplicity, generosity, responsibility for the use of what they own.
- Jesus was not poor! He had enough money to have a full-time embezzler as his secretary treasury.

IF A PERSON IS TRUSTING IN THEIR RICHES THEN THEY'RE IN REAL TROUBLE BECAUSE THEY'VE MISLOCATED THEIR KINGDOM.

"Woe-be unto you who laugh." Jesus wasn't giving laws; he's saying people who think their well-being lies in having a good time are in real trouble. He is *correcting ideas*.

Four Basic Questions of Human Life

- 1) What is real?
- 2) Who is well off?
- 3) Who is a good person?
- 4) How do you get to be a good person?

We answer these questions by how we live, if we never even think about it. We as Christians have the answers to those questions.

Here's how Jesus answers the questions:

- 1) God and his kingdom are real. That's reality; God and his kingdom. His kingdom is everything that is under the effective direction of his will. That includes physical reality. It includes everything except some personal wills and characters that are set up against God, for now.
- 2) Anyone alive in the kingdom of God is well off.
- 3) Who's a really good person? Anyone permeated with agape love; the kind of love that characterizes God.
- 4) How do you become a really good person? By being a disciple of Jesus.

The way we represent it most of all is by the way we live.



More Barriers to Eternal Living: Strongholds of Thought and Feeling  
Living the Eternal Life Now, Session 5  
© 2024 Dallas Willard Ministries

Feelings (an impulse toward/against something; rooted in and governed by thoughts or ideas)

All these ideas have feelings associated with them. Feelings are very important. The fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, kindness – these are not feelings, but they have feeling states associated with them.

- We have a great temptation in our culture to worship feelings.
- Many of the non-Christian spiritualities compete with Christianity in terms of feelings, most commonly with feelings associated with peace.
  - If you want to give peace a chance, you must do more than get the feeling.
- Sometimes what we call worship is basically about feelings. And we judge a worship session, often by how well we feel.
- All these ideas and associated feelings come out in action...
  - ...action either puts us in harmony with reality or not....
    - ...If it does, we can move on to what is good and well being and well doing.
- But if we are subjected to the feelings, without the ideas, we have nothing to guide us in terms of what is good, and we just go for the feelings.
- We have little or no direct control of our feelings.

YOU CAN'T DEAL WITH FEELINGS DIRECTLY. YOU MUST DEAL WITH FEELINGS THROUGH IDEAS.

You can change your ideas and change your feelings but if you try to change your feelings it won't change your ideas and you're apt to become enslaved to feelings.

- We live in a culture of sensuality where feelings are appealed to and used to manipulate the will of people to get them to do things.
- We have little to no direct control of our feelings. That fact makes it badly advised to try to manage our lives by managing our feelings.
- Faith -> feelings: the fallacy of putting feeling first. Instead, you put faith first, that's in terms of your ideas, that puts you in touch with fact and then feelings will follow.
  - This can help, for example, in our devotional life, to keep us from judging our devotional life by what we feel.

And we will be able with discipline and grace to direct our faith in such a way that it is in tune with reality. And then our feelings, which are always variable, will come along.

- Stay the course, with the ideas that come from Christian teaching, and the contact that comes from acting on those ideas.
- Just the ideas alone won't change much. But if you act on them, you're on the way to genuine liberation.
- Our entire lives are directed increasingly towards what is good in the kingdom of God.



More Barriers to Eternal Living: Strongholds of Thought and Feeling  
Living the Eternal Life Now, Session 5  
© 2024 Dallas Willard Ministries

DELIVERANCE FROM DOMINATION BY FEELINGS COME THROUGH KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT IS GOOD AND  
SURRENDER TO THE LOVE OF GOD.

- Remember, salvation is deliverance.
- **Love seeks what is good.** You love someone if you seek what is good for them.
- You must see/know what is good, and that is primarily God. "God is good!" Nahum 1:7

The Great Law: Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, all your strength and your neighbor as yourself. Mark 12:29-31

- Love has a direction, and this alone pulls our life straight.
- Love God first. "Then I'll deal with..."
- Keep that first, then everything else will be pulled straight. Not just because now you're thinking straight but because now you will be relating to God and his kingdom. The power and order of that kingdom will become a part of your life.

Titus 3:1-7 refers to the process of being pulled straight:

*"Remind those to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed. To malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. And when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness but according to his mercy, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs, according to the hope of eternal life.."*

- Paul uses the figure of the Word and the Spirit of washing through our whole being, like you might wash a shirt in water.
- That's the picture of how as our thoughts change, we are washed progressively in all aspects of our being.
- Love takes over.

At the center of the universe is not a black hole. It's a community of loving persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- The future of the cosmos is love. We are a part of that. Revelations 22:5...what we'll be doing through ages of ages.
- We'll be in the presence of God, He will be the light of everything, and we will live and reign with him forever and ever. That's love, triumphant in the universe.
- **Love increasingly dominates my life. Not a feeling; a will to what is good dominates my life.** Why do I do what I do? From love.

The wonder is not that Christ loved me; the wonder would be if he didn't.

- We don't understand God, if we think that it is amazing that he should love, because he IS love.
- Love is the nature of God.



Conference with Dallas Willard, February 18-21, 2010, Church of the Apostles, Fairfax, VA

More Barriers to Eternal Living: Strongholds of Thought and Feeling  
Living the Eternal Life Now, Session 5  
© 2024 Dallas Willard Ministries

- Jesus on the cross: how was it he easily forgave? It was not hard for him to say! Because that's what was in him.
- We need a turn around in our ideas about God.

*"Don't be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* Romans 12:2

Jesus said, when he came, "try to put away your ideas about God, because I'm here to let you know what he's really like."

*"There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."* 1 John:4:18

Original Notes from Dallas's Teaching that didn't directly correspond to his verbal teaching but contain useful insights and Scripture references:

THE MATURE LIFE OF LIGHT, OF LOVE, TRUTH AND POWER PERFECT PEACE

- "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee." Isa. 26:3
- "I have set the Lord always before me. He is at my right hand. I shall not be moved." Ps. 16:8
- "If God is for us, who can be against us." Rom. 8:31

VICTORY OVER FEELINGS

- See them for what they are.
- Want to not have them, or not have them dominate us.
- Change their underlying thoughts and habits by reasonable means and grace.
- For example: love of money, trust in possessions, pornography, resentment and unforgiveness, racial contempt/hatred.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

- Now we are possessed by the Fruit of the Spirit: the overall structure of life—
- "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, loyalty, gentleness, self-control." Gal. 5:22-23.
- We "let our minds dwell upon whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute....and the God of peace will be with us." Phil. 4:8-9



## Questions & Comments

Q: Can you speak briefly to the anguish of a parent who sees that their adult child has a fractured soul? And how would the parent pray for and/or talk to the child?

- There are cases where one cannot do much more than just pray.
- If possible, try to draw nearer to the child and be with them. **Words cannot take the place of presence.**
  - That's the first thing...but you're going to have to be very comfortable in the kingdom of God, living in the kingdom of God to do that.
- That's really the only way that you can effectively express your love for a child like that. Do that, give it time, keep praying, acknowledging the presence of the Spirit, *then* it may well be that you can begin to help the individual see what is broken in their own soul.
- Abuse breaks the soul and gets people to where their parts don't react correctly with one another. If you are able to assure the child of your love, that is the way forward. Then you can begin to be with them in ways that are healing.
- Bring them into church fellowship...if you can.
- **Broken people are disruptive people.**
- We need an order of love that allows people who are not putting order first, to come into our midst.

Q: How do you reconcile "God is love" (1 John 4 and elsewhere) with the concept of God's wrath revealed from heaven against all ungodliness? (Romans 1:18) When Jesus comes again, what will be the look on his face toward those who have hated him?

- God gets mad at things that are hurtful.
- "Hate the sin and love the sinner." In many parts of our world today people cannot receive that because **they cannot distinguish themselves from their sin.** They will not allow you to separate what they do from who they are. Partly because they want to make you accept their sin.
- Scripture is not always telling us what the right thing to do was, it is telling us what was done and what was believed to be right.
- You must read the Scripture as a whole...
- I'm not one who thinks that you ought to think that God was exactly like he was presented in some passages, when later you see that his character wasn't like that.
- There is a real negative effect of God on wickedness – also seen in human situations where people by their own goodness and righteousness are a rebuke to wickedness.
- God is happy!

Q: In Session Three, you had a slide on a ministry of grace. There was a bullet there, power and character, which you didn't address. Where does character fit in?

- Grace is God acting in our lives.
- Two things appear through the action of grace: **character** and **power**. We want to grow in both of these.
- We want to understand that the power that God will give us is normally in proportion to the character that we have. (Although sometimes that's not true.)



More Barriers to Eternal Living: Strongholds of Thought and Feeling  
Living the Eternal Life Now, Session 5  
© 2024 Dallas Willard Ministries

- It's sometimes true today that God will bless people with more power than their character can stand because he wants to serve people.
- Leadership is especially prone to this. Power makes corruption apparent. Absolute power makes it absolutely apparent.
- Power always makes a demand on the structure that has to carry it.
- Problems are created if you divorce gifts – which are power, from fruit – which is character. The fruit of the Spirit is the basis upon which the gifts of the Spirit are exercised safely.
- **We want to come to the place where we walk easily and routinely in the character and power of Christ.**

Q: Earlier you said by filling our minds with this God, peace and rest possesses our whole being. What are some ways we can fill our minds with God?

- One of the most helpful things you can learn for yourself is how to pray without ceasing.
- The breath prayer: "Jesus, Son of God have mercy on me, a sinner."
- **Frank Laubach** knew that **if you brought something to mind, it did not disappear immediately**. He tried to develop the practice of every minute, bringing something of God – some image, phrase, something from a song, or just a thought about God in the mind, and then renewing that every minute. *"The Game With Minutes"*
- The mind is a creature of habit like the body. You can train it to return to God every minute.
- Praying without ceasing doesn't mean to be praying every minute, every second...
- Develop the habit of invoking the presence of God into your life as you go through the day.
- Put forth the effort to form a habit of keeping God present in our minds.
- If you can worry all the time, you can pray all the time.

Q: When you speak of the eternal life – is that the only option is life in God's kingdom eternally. Isn't all life eternal? It just depends on how or where you spend it. Or do non-believers just die while believers reign with Christ.

- Eternal life is not a duration. Duration is a consequence of eternal life.
- Eternal life is a *kind* of life. The kind of life that characterizes God.
- It's a matter of the *quality* of life that one has.
- Eternal life refers to the kind of life that God has. When we talk about leading eternal life now, I'm talking about involving our life in his life.

Q: You say that fear is the anticipation of evil. I'm having difficulty balancing that with appropriate fear of the Lord.

- Fear of the Lord is often translated in different ways than just fear. For example, standing in awe of something, or concern about harming something very valuable.
- Fear as it is normally experienced is anticipation of something bad going to happen, or that we're going to do something that will cause harm.
- In the presence of God there is a sense of something incredibly precious, that we are standing before in awe.



More Barriers to Eternal Living: Strongholds of Thought and Feeling  
Living the Eternal Life Now, Session 5  
© 2024 Dallas Willard Ministries

Q: Please address forgiveness. We have in our Lord's Prayer, asking forgiveness for ourselves and then as we forgive others...I would like to hear from you some of your thoughts about this forgiveness. We forgive, and then God forgets it. After we repent of our sin, he forgets it. It's in the sea of forgetfulness but then on that judgement day, I think the accuser of the brethren brings it up again. Would you address that for us, please.

- Forgiveness is the decision not to punish someone for what they've done.
- In the judgement, you are going to be forgiven because you have placed your confidence in Jesus Christ and accepted him as your Lord. That puts you on a different basis with God, and he has decided not to punish you for your wrongdoings.
- So many people think that God never does forgive that he just took it out on Jesus, but he never forgave. That is a terrible picture of the atonement.
- When you place your faith in God through Jesus Christ, God looks at you and says, "I am accepting the basis of your faith in me as the basis of our relationship. Let's go forward from here."
- Unforgiveness is really poison, because it carries the resolve to punish.
- To forgive means that I lay that down.
- Forgive does not mean to forget. Forgetting is something that may come as a gift, in time, from God. But it's not a part of forgiveness.
- God does forgive those who trust him.

