

Excerpts from Renovation of the Heart

By Dallas Willard

Victory, Revolution, and Renovation

“Spiritual formation in Christ is an orderly process...all of the hindrances to our putting off the old person and putting on the new one can be removed or mastered. And that will enable us to walk increasingly in the wholeness, holiness, and power of the Kingdom of the heavens. No one need live in spiritual and personal defeat. A life of victory over sin and circumstance is accessible to all....”

“The revolution of Jesus is in the first place and continuously a revolution of the human heart or spirit...his is a revolution of character, which proceeds by changing people from the inside through ongoing personal relationship to God in Christ and to one another. It is one that changes their ideas, beliefs, feelings, and habits of choice, as well as their bodily tendencies and social relations. It penetrates to the deepest layers of their soul. External, social arrangements may be useful to this end, but they are not the end, nor are they a fundamental part of the means.”

“[Jesus] saves us by realistic restoration of our heart to God and then by dwelling there with his Father through the distinctly divine Spirit. The heart thus renovated and inhabited is the only real hope of humanity on earth.”

Verses:

Prov. 4:23-watch over heart

Gal. 4:19-Christ formed in you

Six Aspects

“Those with a well-kept heart are persons who are prepared for and capable of responding to the situations of life in ways that are good and right...The human heart, will, or spirit is the executive center of a human life. The heart is where decisions and choices are made for the whole person...When we take a closer look at the whole person, we find that there are six basic aspects in our lives as individual human beings....

1. Thought (images, concepts, judgments, inferences)
2. Feeling (sensation, emotion)
3. Choice (will, decision, character)
4. Body (action, interaction with the physical world)
5. Social context (personal and structural relations to others)
6. Soul (the factor that integrates all of the above to form one life)

“...The ideal of the spiritual life in the Christian understanding is one where all the essential parts of the human self are effectively organized around God, as they are restored and sustained by him. Spiritual formation in Christ is the process leading to that ideal end, and its result is love of God with all of the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and of the neighbor as oneself.”

Fear of God

“Fear of God, the proverb tells us, is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). Although not the end or outcome of wisdom, to be sure, it is the indispensable beginning, I believe, and the principle part. One begins to get smart when he or she fears being crosswise of God: fear of not doing what he wants and not being as he requires. Fear is the anticipation of harm. The intelligent person recognizes that his or her well-being lies in being in harmony with God and what God is doing in the ‘Kingdom.’”

Verses:

Proverbs 1:7-fear

Proverbs 9:10-fear

Death to Self

“Christian spiritual formation rests on this indispensable foundation of death to self and cannot proceed except insofar as that foundation is being firmly laid and sustained....The cross is an instrument of death, of ‘losing your life.’ ...Those who are not genuinely convinced that the only real bargain in life is surrendering ourselves to Jesus and his cause, abandoning all that we love to him and for him, cannot learn the other lessons Jesus has to teach us.

“To take him as our master means that we trust his way is right and, as he himself did, always look to the larger good under God. Like him we keep on entrusting ourselves to the One who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23). This is ‘losing our life and thereby saving it’ in the manner Jesus taught....

“It is love of God, admiration and confidence in his greatness and goodness, and the regular experience of his care that frees us from the burden of ‘looking out for ourselves.’

“Being dead to self is the condition where the mere fact that I do not get what I want does not surprise or offend me and has no control over me....the one who is dead to self will certainly not even notice some of the things that others would-for example, things such as social slights, verbal put-downs and innuendos, or physical discomforts....They do not have to look out for themselves because God-and not they-is in charge of their life...those who are dead to self are not controlled in thought, feeling, or action by self-exaltation or by the will to have their own way, but are easily controlled by love of God and neighbor.”

“...To accept, with confidence in God, that I do not immediately have to have my way releases me from the great pressure that anger, unforgiveness, and the ‘need’ to retaliate imposes upon my life.”

Verses:

Gal. 2:20-crucified with Christ

Luke 9:23-take up his cross

Vision, Intention, and Means

“If we are to be spiritually formed in Christ, we must have and must implement the appropriate vision, intention, and means.

Vision:

“The Kingdom of God is the range of God’s effective will, where what God wants done is done....What we are aiming for in this vision is to live fully in the Kingdom of God and as fully as possible now and here, not just hereafter.”

Intention:

“...we intend to live in the Kingdom of God by intending to obey the precise example and teaching of Jesus.”

Means:

“Here the means in question are the means for spiritual transformation, for the replacing of the inner character of the ‘lost’ with the inner character of Jesus: his vision, understanding, feelings, decisions, and character.”

Verses:

Proverbs 29:18

Thoughts

“Thoughts are the place where we can and must begin to change. There the light of God first begins to move upon us through the word of Christ, and there the divine Spirit begins to direct our will to more and more thoughts that can provide the basis for choosing to realign ourselves with God and his way. The ultimate freedom we have as human beings is the power to select what we will allow or require our minds to dwell upon.”

“This is the basic idea behind all temptation: God is seen as depriving us by his commands of what is good, so we imagine that we must take matters into our own hands and act contrary to what he has said.”

“A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse. I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.” --A. W. Tozer

“My patterns of thinking will conform to the truths of scriptural revelation, and I will extend and apply those truths, under the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit, to all of the details of my daily life. Am I undertaking some task? Then I in faith do it with God, assuming and finding his power to be involved with me. That is the nature of his kingdom. Is there an emergency? I will meet it with the knowledge that God is in the midst of it with me and will be calm in a center of intense prayer. Am I praised? My thoughts (and feelings) will move immediately to the goodness of God in my life. Am I condemned or reproached? I know that God is supporting and helping me because he loves me and has a future for me. Am I disappointed and frustrated? I rest in the knowledge that God is over all and that he is working things out—that ‘all things work together for good to those who love God and are called into the fulfillment of his purposes.’ And so forth. I constantly and thoughtfully engage myself with the ideas, images, and information that are provided by God through the Scriptures, his Son Jesus, and the lives and experiences of his people through the ages...Spiritual (trans) formation of my thought life is achieved by the ministry of the Spirit in the midst of my necessary and well-directed efforts.”

“The intention to be formed is to have the great God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ a constant presence in our mind, crowding out every false idea or destructive image, all misinformation about God, and every crooked inference or belief.”

“The transformation of our thought life by taking on the mind of Christ-his ideas, images, information, and patterns of thinking-opens the way to deliverance of every dimension of the human self from the oppressive powers of darkness.”

Verses:

Philippians 4:8, Col. 3:16, Rom. 12:2, 2 Cor. 10:3-5

Feelings

“Feelings are a primary blessing and a primary problem for human life. We cannot live without them and we can hardly live with them.”

“The proper course of action is to replace destructive feelings with others that are good, or to subordinate them-anger and sexual desire, for example-in a way that makes them constructive and transforms their effects.”

“Self-control is the steady capacity to direct yourself to accomplish what you have chosen or decided to do and be, even though you ‘don’t feel like it.’ Self-control means that you, with a steady hand, do what you don’t want to do (or what you want not to) when that is needed and do not do what you want to do (what you ‘feel like’ doing) when that is needed.”

“Being ‘accepted in the beloved’ (Ephesians 1:6, KJV) is the humanly indispensable foundation for the reconstruction of all these positive feelings, moods, and their underlying conditions.”

“What then are the feelings that will dominate in a life that has been inwardly transformed to be like Christ’s? They are the feelings associated with love, joy, and peace.”

“Faith (confidence) and hope are also very important in properly structuring the feeling dimension of the mind and self.”

Verses:

1 Cor. 13:13, Gal. 5:22,23, Eph. 4:22-24, Col. 3:8-10

Will

“Single-minded and joyous devotion to God and his will, to what God wants for us-and to service to him and others because of him-is what the will transformed into Christlikeness looks like.”

“In the progression toward complete identification of our will with God’s there are distinctions to be noted. First there is surrender....if grace and wisdom prevail in the life of the one who only surrenders to God’s will, he or she will move on to abandonment. Then the individual is fully surrendered....Beyond abandonment is contentment with the will of God: not only with his being who he is and ordaining what he has ordained in general, but with the lot that has fallen to us....gratitude and joy are the steady tone of our life. We are now assured that God has done, and will always do, well by us-no matter what!

“...Beyond contentment lies intelligent, energetic participation in accomplishing God’s will in our world....The strongest human will is always the one that is surrendered to God’s will and acts with it.”

“A major service of spiritual disciplines-such as solitude (being alone with God for long periods of time), fasting (learning freedom from food and how God directly nourishes us), worship (adoration of God, as discussed in chapter 6), and service (doing good for others with no thought of ourselves)-is to cause the duplicity and malice that is buried in our will and character to surface and be dealt with.”

Verses:

John 8:29, Heb. 12:1-3, 2 Cor. 5:9, Matt. 26:39

Body

“Most of what is called ‘character’ (good or bad) in normal human life consists in what our bodies are or are not ‘at the ready’ to do in the specific situations where we find ourselves....We wear our souls ‘on our sleeves,’ even when we ourselves are oblivious to them, and that governs the quality of our relations to others.”

“The proper retraining and nurturing of the body is absolutely essential to Christlikeness....The outcome of spiritual formation is, indeed, the transformation of the inner reality of the self in such a way that the deeds and words of Jesus become a natural expression of who we are.”

“...what should we do? There are a number of things:

1. We must actually release our body to God.
2. No longer idolize your body.
3. ...do not misuse your body.
4. ...the body is to be properly honored and cared for.

Verses:

Rom. 12:1, 1Cor. 6:19, 20, Rom. 6:13

Social Dimension

“The natural condition of life for human beings is one of reciprocal rootedness in others. As firmness of footing is a condition of walking and secure movement, so assurance of others being for us is the condition of stable, healthy living. There are many ways this can be present in individual cases, but it must be there. If it is not, we are but walking wounded, our life more or less a shambles until we die.”

“Love comes to us from God. That must be our unshakable circle of sufficiency. Our purpose must then be to become one who loves others with Christ’s agape.”

“The secret of all life-giving relation to others, and of all that is social, lies in the fact that the primary other for a human being, whether he wants it or not, is always God.”

Verses:

1 John 3:14

Soul

“Meaning is one of the greatest needs of human life, one of our deepest hungers-perhaps it is, in the final analysis, the most basic need in the realm of human experience. Almost anything can be born if life as a whole is meaningful. But in the absence of meaning, boredom and mere effort or willpower are all that is left. ‘Dead’ religion or a dead job or relationship is one that has to be carried on in ‘meaningless’ human routine.”

“Our soul is like an inner stream of water, which gives strength, direction, and harmony to every other element of our life. When that stream is as it should be, we are constantly refreshed and exuberant in all we do, because our soul itself is then profusely rooted in the vastness of God and his kingdom....”

“What we most learn in his yoke, beyond acting with him, is to abandon outcomes to God, accepting that we do not have in ourselves-in our own ‘heart, soul, mind, and strength’-the wherewithal to make this come out right, whatever ‘this’ is. Even if we ‘suffer according to the will of God,’ we simply ‘entrust our souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right’ (1 Peter 4:19). Now, this is a major part of that meekness and lowliness of heart that we also learn in his yoke. And what rest comes with it!”

“Humility is a great secret of rest of soul because it does not presume to secure outcomes.”

“...transformation of our soul requires that we acknowledge its reality and importance, understand scriptural teachings about it, and take it into the yoke of Jesus, learning from him humility and the abandonment of ‘outcomes’ to God. This brings rest to the soul. Then our soul is reempowered in goodness by receiving the law and the Word into it as the structure of our covenant fellowship with God in grace. The law is the structure of a life of grace in the kingdom of God.”

Verses:

Psalms 19:7, 8

Composite Picture

“Where the children of light differ is primarily and most importantly on the ‘inside’ of their life....”

Thought life: “...they think about God....They adore him in nature, in history, in his Son and in his saints. One could even say they are ‘God-intoxicated’ (Acts 2:13; Ephesians 5:18)....”

Feelings: “The emotional life of these children of light is deeply characterized by love....They love lots of good things and they love people....Because of what they have learned about God, they are confident and hopeful and do not indulge thoughts of rejection, failure, and hopelessness, because they know better.

Will (spirit, heart): “They are attentive to righteousness, to kindness, to helpfulness, and they are purposefully knowledgeable about life, about what people need, and about how to do what is right and good in appropriate ways....They are abandoned to God’s will and do not struggle and deliberate as to whether they will do what they know to be wrong. They do not hesitate to do what they know to be right. It is the obvious thing to do.”

Body: “Their body has come over to the side of their will to do good. It is constantly poised to do what is right and good without thinking.”

Social relations: “Because of their confidence in God, they do not try to manipulate and manage others. Needless to say, in their social contexts they do not go on the attack or on the hunt, intending to use or to hurt others.”

Soul: “Finally, as you come to know these people...you see that all of the above is not just at the surface. It is deep...it is effortless. It flows....these are features of life that well up out of a soul that is at home in God.”

Verses

Galatians 4:19

Evil and Sin

“To the person who is not inwardly transformed in each essential dimension, evil and sin still look good. They are strongly attractive....as Jesus trains them...all of that begins to reverse. At that point it is sin that looks stupid, ridiculous, as well as repulsive-which it really is. The illusion that sin is really a good thing arbitrarily prohibited by God is dispelled, and we see with gratitude that his prohibitions are among his greatest kindnesses.”