

Spiritual Formation and the Fulfilling of the Great Commission

By Dallas Willard

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By saying simply this that I believe that Jesus Christ could be a student at Biola or a teacher at Calvin. So now my first the first level of my intention is to live my life there as he would live in if he were me if I were running a service station or driving a truck or in the army or wherever I was that would be the first level of my intention. Sometimes that's hard for that. That itself is hard. And certainly that's why I address that right off is because very often we just can't imagine Jesus living our lives. And so we need to we have to intend to do that and think about it. His identification in the Incarnation with us is to be understood I believe in that way that he could have been you in terms of the occupation you're in family you're in.

He was really a human being. And so that's the first thing that I would say to that now than in any occupation if I'm if I'm running a service station or something I have attention to the good which has to be done as an act of love to myself and others in that occupation. And through that the glory of God to be achieved by my occupation. So that applies then as a student or as a teacher. And we need to focus on what it is we as students and teachers and just like you would focus on what it is you do if you run a service station. What is it you do with students and teachers? And often our problems arise at each of these levels where we ask the questions we haven't asked the questions we don't have the answer and so we move along rather vaguely making a living getting credentials finding acceptance and so on and so instead of having as our vision and the faith supported on it instead of having love of God and love of neighbor

implemented in what we're doing our overriding concerns are the concerns of making a living getting accepted establishing ourselves securing ourselves then to go back to what I was talking about in the chapel service. Then of course we were ready to react wrongly. We were ready to be impatient and angry with people and call them twits and twerps and fools and worse. Uh we are ready to utilize others as the objects of our lust or respond to them on the basis of our anxieties. You see well everything goes wrong in short, if we miss that fundamental point Why am I here. What am I doing? I'm here as an act of love and service to God and my neighbor. Now then as a student in an economics and economics course. Let's suppose that I'm I'm picking a course in economics. It's a requirement for my degree and so on. How do I approach that I approach that in terms of the knowledge to be gained and its use the use to which I would put it. Now often in this very move I've made a tremendous challenge to the whole educational system. Does the system of which I'm part fit into the objective of equipping me to be a loving wholly powerful person walking in the steps of Christ? Sometimes I'm afraid we have to accept some things as a kind of something that we don't necessarily see the point of but something like a new kind of emphasis or a field of interest among evangelicals.

So I need to enter that into the proceedings. I am basically a minister of Jesus Christ. I have never thought of myself any other way in any other way since I was about 17 or 18 years old. The young conventionalities of how I happened to spend my time to me have very little to do with it and as I have tried to present Jesus Christ and His Gospel as well as to live him and his Gospel. I have been led along certain lines of study and teaching and I hope also growth and this has eventuated. And here I am. There really was not any intention as far as I was concerned in that there have been nodal points. There have been moments of I would almost say epiphany when things have come together for me and understanding as I have sought to present the truth

of the Gospel and to live it out in the context of the real world as we sometimes say. And one of those moments was the time when I after many years in ministry pastorate and otherwise teaching and all kinds of things. I haven't been the church secretary but almost any other thing you can think of in church I have been and I was deeply burdened about why I did not see such. I did not see regular, if you wish spectacular growth in Christ likeness and there was a moment when it I'm sure it had been building for years and all the studies I've done and things of that sort where it became clear to me that there was not a problem with the people that the problem was with my teaching that I was not teaching them the right thing. That I was not teaching them something that would even give them a clue about spiritual growth.

Now as we go through these sessions I will be saying some things to spell that out but basically that was a great turning point and I began to see well what was I not doing. And I began to look into the Gospels and to look into the book of Acts and subsequent church history to see what people actually did to grow spiritually and began to compare that with my own experience which is fairly plain wrap evangelical Southern Baptist was my background and I began to compare that and say well what do we do that they did not do. And what do we not do that they did and began to look at it and that is really the thing that led me to the emphasis on what has come to be or what is called spiritual discipline so just that much in the way of a personal explanation of how I stand here before you. Also I find myself speaking in many areas where I am by no means competent. I'm not a New Testament scholar. I've worn out quite a number of them but I'm not a New Testament scholar. I'm not a trained systematic theologian.

There are many many things that I can dispense so I'm here to learn as well as to try to say some things and I hope that you will be forward in teaching me. Now with all of that aside let's just begin with our topic of spiritual formation and fulfilling the great commission that is the

topic for this hour. Spiritual formation and fulfilling the great commission. The interest in evangelical circles and indeed in Protestant circles in spiritual formation has been very small in past decades. In fact I would guess that it would be correct to say for the last hundred years or more. If you look a few years back you'll walk through many Protestant and evangelical church without ever hearing the word spiritual formation. Of course it is an old term in Catholic circles and there is a recognized literature on spiritual formation from the contemporary literature. I think Marcial Maciel's book "The Integral Formation of the Catholic Priest" is a really excellent presentation of spiritual formation as it is viewed from within Catholic tradition where it does apply mainly to the priest. Now it isn't exclusively applied to the priest and for example if you discuss among Catholics spiritual formation they will normally assume that if you're talking about a lay person they are under what is called spiritual direction and what comes out of spiritual direction is spiritual formation. The formation of the priest on the other hand is a much more elaborate sort of structure and involves a number of different leaders in a in a monastery or theological training setting. But still what you have there is an established usage. As far as I can tell frankly we don't have an established usage yet among evangelicals. That will emerge, but we don't I think have one and rather what we have is the emergence of some language to address a felt need and I want to just briefly describe that felt need because I think this is that this need is at the root of quite a number of things that show up today in Protestant and more narrowly even evangelical circles. I think what we've found is that an assumption about ministry and spiritual growth that has governed us for a rather long period of time now at least back into the 19th century isn't true and that assumption is simply that if we adequately preach and teach the world it will adequately form the faith of the hearer and then that faith of the hearer so adequately

formed will shape the character of the hearer. And I think that what we can say we now know is it doesn't work that way. Doesn't work that way.

History is so hard to trace the serpentine ways of influence and history and society. Any simple diagnosis is bound to be wrong but I think that what has happened is that we are living now in the effete stage of the Protestant Reformation and what we are reaping is the historical twisting distortion development, not all bad by any means, of the motifs which arose out of Luther and Calvin and these primarily have to do with the centrality of the word, the sufficiency of faith, the idea that you cannot accomplish anything by works and there are a number of different factors that all come out to the fact that we now largely have developed in many of our Protestant circles a kind of consumerist mentality towards services and our idea is that we would go and we would be preached at and sung at or performed over or whatever it is we're doing and we will come out inspired informed and we will change. And there are certainly cases of such change but what we are looking at if my view is right and there's no reason to assume that just because I'm up here talking I'm right. So I challenge you to think about what I'm saying deeply because it affects our life deeply. We've come out to the place to where we have a method of carrying on with our practices of religion which do not lead to the deep modification of character into Christ likeness. Now in fact of course we have to say that spiritual formation and I'm going to spell out three different senses of this in a moment. Spiritual formation is like education. Everyone gets one. Everyone gets spiritually formed and everyone gets educated. But some of them are not for the better. Everyone is spiritually formed. We have had in fact a Protestant and evangelical spiritual formation and the results of that is what we have to deal with. And the general uh failure, we have multitudes and multitudes of professing Christians.

The general failure to radically change their lives into Christ likeness is the result of our actual evangelical spiritual formation. So when we talk about spiritual formation on the one hand we want to remember that everyone has one. Even those who are totally lost have a spiritual formation. It's just a terrible one and you can't avoid it. The only question is how can you get a good one and the same way with education. Let me give you three senses now of spiritual formation. The first one has the first sense of spiritual formation and actually I think it may be better just to think of these as moments in spiritual formation. I hope you will see they don't really compete with one another but it is possible to go to seed on one or another of them learning to rightly engage in spiritual activities or practice. In approaching spiritual formation in this way the first thing we do and this is this happens in nearly all religious context Christian and non-Christian. We identify certain practices as constituting a spirituality and it may be Benedictine, it may be charismatic or Buddhist or American Indian or whatever you want.

There are certain practices like a medicine man or woman in a native setting learns through a long period of practice and instruction how to carry out the rituals and to have and to produce the experiences that are required. And the point of reference here now is the practices. And when we think of spiritual formation in many contexts it really is nothing more than learning how to be successful in these religious practices. That is unfortunately a possibility for evangelical ministers as well and evangelical church members and very often that actually happens you have people who are very successful in their practices their practices may be evangelization or administering a church or whatever it may be but inwardly, well the reality of Christ is not there that often happens. Now these outward practices are important. And what I shall want to say later on is that the outward practices of keeping the commandments of Christ are the essence of Christian formation Christian spiritual formation but they are not the whole

story. They are the outward flow of an inward reality. Nevertheless there will always be some measure of emphasis upon the development of the outward as well as of the inward. But the outward always also threatens to become an empty husk an empty husk and we have historical portrayals of this and the history of the church. For example the controversy over whether or not the righteousness of the priest affects the efficacies of the ritual or does the righteousness of the minister affect the power of their evangelistic work.

I've had people in this area come to me and say here's this outstanding minister I was converted under them. Now they have divorced their wife and run off with another woman and I saved see the church has had to deal with this and still has to deal with it constantly. So this is one sense of spiritual formation. And when it is understood rightly it is something that we absolutely have to include as a part of Christian spiritual formation.

Secondly, can you all read this? Would it be better if I used green? The shaping or forming or training of the inner or spiritual dimension of the human being. Now here we are talking about things like the Will in biblical terms. I like to think of the world as the primary constituent of the heart. Thoughts, including our images, the way we interpret things very important in the shaping of the inner side of the human being and information, thought includes all of those things. And of course the Gospel comes in the form of thought. If you don't think you don't get the gospel. That's why we speak of it as good news because it is information that we need to very firmly firmly keep the Gospel located among other things in the category of information and should be clear about what that information is. Feelings to include both bodily feelings pleasure and pain in all of its dimensions and emotion shaping of that when you think of the fruit of the spirit love joy peace longsuffering gentleness goodness and so forth. You're looking at an intersection of this and just finally bodily habits. Now in the later period today after

dinner this is going to be what I'm concentrating on at great length but for now just think of of this complex of realities and then think of spiritual formation as the shaping of those so that the inside of the person has insides like Jesus Christ. Remember the old language in Paul's letters I beseech you brethren by the bowels of Christ bowels bowels are the inner part and it isn't just a physical reference it's a reference to what we would today call guts and guts means the part of the personality that drives that chooses and sticks with the choice that [inaudible] that thinks and feels and whose body supports.

See this is, a large part of this is what is called flesh in the Bible. It's not itself bad. It's very important that we have it on the side of our will and our spirit so that we don't wind up in the position of having a heart that is eager a spirit that is eager but flesh that is weak and flesh is not just meat. It's more like the natural powers of the human being the natural powers of the human being without immediate reference to assistance from God. So we think here now our spiritual formation because what is being shaped is spiritual it's the spiritual side of the human being and what spiritual means, again that's something I'm going to discuss later on today. But fundamentally it refers to the heart or the will the capacity to creatively choose to produce things, to act for good or or evil. So that's a second sense now shaping and I hope you will see how important that is. In truth we can even put it this way however good this may be in Christian spiritual formation, we don't want it apart from this to just set this up as Christian spiritual formation is to fall into legalism and death no matter how wonderful these activities are how important they may be. If we take that as the heart of the matter then we have lost the spirit. What we want is these works flowing naturally from a reshaped interior we make the tree good and the good fruit comes we purify the fountain and the bitter water stops flowing the sweet water comes see, and the secret now of carrying out the Great Commission is all was not just to

train people to figure out literally what Jesus was saying and try to do it but to get the kind of heart in people from which the commandments of Jesus naturally stand. So that to put it in another way that may be helpful in understanding to do the deeds of Christ to follow his commands and his example is the easiest way for this person to live. It is the easiest way because of what has happened in the dimension of their heart and their inner spirit. See that's the way of Jesus. When Jesus hung on the cross for example and said Father forgive them for they know not what they do. That was the easy thing for him to do. It wasn't the hard thing. The hard thing would have been for him to have ripped off a few curses and said Father send them to hell immediately. That would have been very hard for him to do.

And we want to keep that in mind now when we think about Christian spiritual formation because we are following one who said that his yoke was easy and that his burden was light and the old Apostle John said his commands are not grievous. So we want to live in that spirit and we want to understand that the following of Christ is the easy way to live. But it is after receiving the heart of Christ it is after in Paul's words it's after taking off the old person putting on the new person and how we do that is what I'll be trying to talk about in our last session tomorrow. One more distinction just as in the first one the emphasis is on the outward practice and the second when the emphasis is on the internal dimension the spiritual dimension of the human self. That's the subject matter of the shaping. In this case the instrumentality of the shaping is spiritual. God is a word of course all of the other instrumentalities including the holy spirit including angels whatever there may be of spiritual nature from God and beyond God in God and of course is the primary focus of spirit in the universe. If you want no spirit you go to God. You can find a little bit of it in human beings and you can see some of it in motion in history and in society. But finally we simply have to come back to God who is Spirit. God is spirit. A lot of our problem

today is a failure to make sense of the spirit. The spirit and the spiritual and we can't really understand the project of Christian spiritual formation unless we are prepared to really come to grips with the nature of the spirit. But we have so far progressed. I say we. And if you want to exclude yourself any time I use we'd just be my guest. It's a way of talking generally I'm referring to Protestants and more narrowly to evangelical training but I don't mean to corner you with that language. But recently for example I was in South Africa for five weeks teaching among mainly ministers and what was so distressing. The only encouraging thing is they had come to the place where they largely recognized it is that they had been through decades of Atheological training. That is a training where God really meant nothing.

And if you go back and you look at major movements in theology Protestant theology generally and I realize that this is not specifically talking about evangelical theology but still there's a tremendous influence that often comes just because we do not or cannot get up and effectively resist these trends of thought. If you go back and you look for example you think about Barth's attempt to defend theology by essentially segregating it off into a world that is so totally other and God is so far away so other that you cannot by any rational means begin to try to think about and approximate and understand his impact or his person. You just have to accept it. You see how close that is to death of God theology and death of God theology unfortunately is not dead. It has moved on into various forms of liberation theology so-called interfaith various parts of the world this is very troublesome and the basic idea is that we don't really know about God. The spiritual is downgraded from the substantial reality that underlies everything else and is only touched on if at all as the inner dimension of the human self or human history so that in many descriptions of theology today that are written you will see that they don't even mention God. It's something like the quest for human meaning or something of that sort. And we have

many many causes from the environment to equal rights all of them important. But they gradually take the center place so that theology is sometimes defined in terms of these causes. And so we really have a problem in making sense of the spiritual and of God as spirit. I mean how much sense does it make to speak of God as a spiritual being? For many people very little but this is an absolutely indispensable dimension of spiritual formation is to recognize the causation of God. Now I realize that in some sense we do that and especially in our kind of churches our kinds of churches evangelical churches we speak about the power of the word and so on and that is a way of speaking about how the spirit comes and people are formed by the spirit. But unfortunately I don't think that we have fully understood and adopted the full range of the spirit. And so do we then we may go off in some charismatic direction and you may be told that you're not charismatic if you don't do certain kinds of things and therefore not with it and all the battles that break out over the spirit we need to return to careful thinking about the spiritual side of human beings the spiritual nature of God, and above all we need to stand in front of a world that is committed against the spirit or reducing it to the very last possible way of explaining anything and affirm that the spiritual is first the spiritual is primary and we'll be saying more about that later but it's such an important thing to say that we need to perhaps just inject it here. Now if spiritual formation is being influenced reshaped to fall Christ likeness by the Spirit. Now unfortunately I need to just quickly say that spiritual formation need not be Christian and I believe personally that the battle on which the ground upon which the evangelical church is going to have to fight for its integrity in the coming years is going to be the ground of spirituality. And that makes it all the more important that we understand what we're talking about and it will come in many many forms. One of the primary ways in which the integrity of the

Christian Church today is under pressure is through the many varieties, and please hear me out on this the many varieties of 12 step programs.

Now the 12 step programs especially alcoholics anonymous have saved many people's lives but it gradually becomes an invitation for you to think about spirituality in any way you want to and in many quarters any way you want to as long as it isn't Jesus Christ himself. And I've had many many people to explain to me how they have discovered the limits of tolerance. When they said the way that I choose to think about the higher power is the risen Christ. Now spirituality in many many ways is coming to the point where there's a spirituality for practically everything it has to do with cultures all cultures are equal. How can they be equal unless the religions of those cultures are equal? Once a week I have to sit down with some young person struggling as a Christian or not a Christian or somewhere on the borders or on one side or the other who is coming in. Today I sat down with a young Korean man who had been in my classes in the past and here he shows up and wanders around the office awhile and finally gets around to talking about what he wants to talk about. And he was just saying my mother is a Buddhist. What is the difference between Buddhist spirituality and Christian spirituality? Now we have to be ready to answer those questions and we have to be able to explain why it isn't merely a matter of choice. That what we believe on these matters makes a difference. And increasingly there is the tendency to assume that what you believe doesn't really make a difference and that is partly dependent upon our inability to explain the spiritual nature of the human being and what what difference belief makes between the individual and God. And the idea that somehow everyone is equal is allowing increasingly various forms and teachings about spirituality to come in and various teachings about spiritual formation. A Buddhist has the four noble truths the eightfold path the rituals the practices and the prayers. And that way is looked

upon as a way of spiritual formation enlightenment and deliverance. If it is not equal to what you get at the first Baptist church or whatever church it is that you might point out what is the difference.

We have got to think about spiritual formation carefully. We cannot ignore the reality which lies under the phrase and to do so I think we have to simply turn and come back and look at our job description in Matthew 28 the description which is often called the Great Commission. And we have to ask ourselves if we were to take that as the standard for Christian spiritual formation what would we be doing and what would we not be doing. We asked the question if we take that as the standard of Christian spiritual formation would we have a problem with exclusiveness and inclusiveness. How would we stand in the world if that is what we're doing? I remind you of what it says it says go to all ethnic groups and make students baptizing them and I believe that that means to surround them in the reality it does say baptize them in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit. Yes that's true but I don't believe it means you get them wet while you say those words over them. I believe it means that you are called to surround them with the reality of the triune God and the community that professing community of which you are a part. You reach out to the world from that. You enroll them as students in that community and you surround them in the spiritual reality of God and then you teach them to observe to do all things whatsoever I commanded you. Now I want to say something which I hope you will prove me wrong on. I have said it in this book *The Spirit of the disciplines*. I said it in many many contexts. I don't mean to be unpleasant or mean or to gripe and groan at anyone. I don't believe in that sort of thing. I'm a I'm a very happy man. I do not know of a single denomination or church or Christian institution that has a concrete plan to do what the great commission says. In particular to teach students of Christ to do everything he said. I don't know of a single one.

Now I'm in real trouble and I haven't even had dinner yet. But I wonder if you were to look at the program of your favorite religious school or seminary and ask how does their program relate to the Great Commission in the respect that I just singled out it might be difficult to determine. Think for a moment of the things that Jesus commanded. Take some of the perhaps well-known simpler commands bless those that curse you do you know of any place that runs seminars on how to do that. Have you ever had a seminar on how to bless those who curse you? Well you really studied what went on even those who curse you without using dirty words? As is often done in Christian circles. What is it to curse? It is to wish for evil to happen to others. It is to invoke supernatural agency in bringing that evil to pass. How do you really bless someone who is cursing you? How do you do that? Well I suppose that we just sort of wait for lightning to strike. Or perhaps we say try real hard and of course one of the things we learned when we began to try to seriously follow Christ is that trying is never enough. To obey Christ is a matter of the development of the self of becoming a certain kind of [gap in recording] goes onto one fingered waves and terrible glaring looks and words obscenities see that again that hammers away at the self that is there. How do you do that? How did Jesus do that? See Jesus did that when he suffered. He didn't curse when he was reviled. He didn't revive again. But as 1 Peter says he committed himself under him that judgeth righteously. And that passage and 1 Peter 2 you remember he's talking about us being called to follow in his steps. Well I've said some pretty mean things here I'm afraid. But I do encourage you to just think about them.

If we're going to deal with spiritual formation what is going to be the level of our objective how are we going to distinguish Christian spiritual formation from the other brands of spiritual formation and my suggestion is that we take the great commission and use our best brains and experience as well as all of the help that we can get from our communities from the

holy spirit from God the father from the risen Christ from the word of God that all of these be put to the simple objective of teaching people to observe all things that Christ commanded. Does that sound reasonable as a project of Christian formation? Now for many people it won't. They will be threatened for example by things like perfectionism. You want us to be perfect. Well I like that but it doesn't seem very promising. We don't need to worry about perfection until we've gone a long way down the road from here. Would you agree with that that we could be a lot better without being perfect. And we can just concentrate on that see we can concentrate on the shaping of the inner self of being accessible to the spirit of God in all of his ways of working. We can look deeply into the self by whatever instrumentalities we have. We can learn from art and psychology and from the physical sciences and sociology we can learn from all of these areas. What goes into the making of a person who is formed in Christ-likeness? Every one of these disciplines has a bearing on that question. Every one of them does because we are not talking about the formation of a disembodied spirit but of an embodied self in a social world. And the shaping that begins of the spirit and by the spirit in order to return to the explicit practices that show obedience to Christ must come through the world in the body where action occurs. We might live from the heart but we don't live in our heart. We live in our bodies in our world. So when we think about Christian spiritual formation let's think of these three dimensions that I've listed and let's think also of the standard that is set by Christ for us. And let's understand that not something that we have to do but is something that is opened up to us that is given to us. And I'll just conclude with this final remark.

Now because when I present this material as I do in many different settings it nearly always runs up against the idea that however interesting it all may seem it isn't essential because what does it have to do with the gospel. The gospel is about having your sins forgiven so that

you can go to heaven when you die. Isn't that it? And what does that have to do with all of this stuff? See there is a primary disconnection between what is often presented as the fundamental information in the gospel and spiritual formation into Christ-likeness you see many attempts to deal with it many ways across the ages. We've recently had our little warfare over lordship salvation and among evangelicals in the United States. It's an old story it was fought out in puritan America men fought out many many times you find things like well you ought to be grateful enough for your salvation that you would obey Christ and in fact the Heidelberg confession explicitly mentions gratitude as the primary emotion uh motive to obedience for Christ. It doesn't work however you put it. It does not work. The work that has to be done to follow Christ rarely ever is sustained by gratitude for the forgiveness of sins. I just want to make that as a flat statement. Again I may be wrong and I welcome you to quarrel with me. But we have to understand the Gospel in such a way that it affects the whole person and I'll just very shortly say it. The gospel is trust Jesus Christ and receive life in the Kingdom of Heaven now. The Gospel is Jesus Christ is here he is the mediator we can trust him. It is not a theory of the atonement and many times what we hear as the gospel is a theory of the atonement and we were told that if we believe that righteousness will be credited to us in the bank of heaven so that when we die we will go to heaven.

I don't think the Bible says that the Bible says if you trust Jesus Christ you will receive forgiveness of sin but you will also receive eternal life in the same package. They aren't two packages so when we think about Christian's spiritual formation we want to make sure that we have the right information in the Gospel and once we do that then we will see that formation diet discipleship learning to live in the commandments of Christ is a part of one gift of grace. One gift of grace not to where you can choose see what we have in many cases is what I refer to

humorously hoping to enable people to remember it as [gap in recording] they're Christians people who say in effect I would like to have a little bit of your blood just enough for the forgiveness of my sins. But I really don't care to hang around with you. I'll see you in heaven. Now there are a lot of folks that would never say that but they think it and they practice it and we have to get the Gospel straight to provide the foundation for the implementation of the great commission as the embodiment of Christian spiritual formation. Well thank you very much. I'm going to quit now but I would be glad to stay here for questions or anyone who wants to take time or not just questions but comments. So whoever is in charge just decide what we should do. Thank you. Good. And if you do need to go please don't feel restrained but questions or comments yes. [inaudible question] Yes. I'll try to have a shot at that. I think by the way you find it just take Colossians 3. Colossians 3 is a perfectly adequate description and Galatians 5 does well also. So I use those but I will try to talk more about that if you wish. And I'll try to be more specific it really has to do with the transformation of the will and the thoughts and the feelings in the body in such a way that the works of Christ flow from this.

Someone else. Yes. [inaudible comment] It does go far beyond it but on the other hand you can say it very simply spiritual formation is a matter of the structuring of the soul. That's what spiritual formation is. It means that the alignments in the self which characteristically in the person who is lost leads them to doing as Paul says I hate what I do. And he wasn't talking about his job. See that's characteristic. I mean you you find that people are not able to do the things they know they should do. They are not able not to do the things that they know they should do. And this goes. This pervades human society and is very much a part of many of our churches. I was at a church last Sunday where they used a confession which if I can find I'd like to just share with you because it's really quite characteristic. Now here's what it said. Merciful God we

confess that we have often failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will. We have broken your law. We have rebelled against your law. We have not loved our neighbors and have refused to hear the cry of the needy. Forgive us we pray and free us for joyful obedience through Jesus Christ our Lord. Now that prayer is very interesting I think expression of a whole set of attitudes. First of all it's in the plural. It's the church confessing it is not individualized. It talks as if somehow this is just the normal course of events. And that's accepted. It's accepted. That's the interesting thing. It's quite accepted. Now note it doesn't conclude by saying forgive us we pray and we're not going to do that this week it doesn't say that. It says free us for joyful obedience. Well how about not joyful obedience probably some of that would be an order. Wouldn't you say? How about meaningful obedience. You see there's a whole attitude here that well this is the normal kind of thing. Now that comes from an assumption about the structure of the soul. And so what we have to do is to recognize precisely now that will have to do with everything from, and I'm going to talk about this this evening, practicing the will the will needs to practice of righteousness the will is a reality. It's like a muscle. And many people in our society today don't even know they have that muscle. And that's you see that see the passiveness free us up for joyful be come on Lord free us up for joyful obedience. No no. You know gird up your loins and obey whether it's joyful or not. How about that. And after a while it'll get joy.

All right so that's a different approach. The will, the thought. One of my favorite verses is Psalm 16:8. I have said the Lord always before me. He is at my right hand. I shall not be moved. I see that's both a choice and an idea. It's a habit. It has to do with how I use my body because if I do certain things with my body I won't have the Lord before me. So the answer is as far as I can give it now. That's exactly right on. That's the way we want to go. Someone here. Yes. And back here in a moment. [inaudible question]

Yes. Grace I believe we should not think of grace just in a forensic model but rather in a relational model. In other words. [inaudible question] Well how you're going to be compelled. I'm not going to compel you. Who's going to compel you? Well now wait a minute. You mean the grace of God is going to overwhelm you and you're going to find yourself practicing spiritual disciplines. There are a number of levels of description. One is to begin with a sense of need a sense that somehow things are out of place and I should read and I said seek to find a way. But I think what will motivate you finally to engage in the things that will cooperate with the grace of God because again you never do it on your own. While Grace won't do it for you. You won't do it without grace. You understand that. Still it's not going to be poured on your head. And the only thing that will motivate you is the desire to be like Christ. Yes exactly. Yes exactly. Absolutely. You aren't dead anymore. Used to be dead. And so we can talk about that. That's important to understand. You didn't resurrect yourself. But now that you're resurrect- here's the words, Colossians 3. If he had been risen with Christ seek those things that are above where Christ set up on the right hand father now above is not beyond Jupiter. The above is right here the heavens and the Bible means space around you and out. OK.

I know I'm in trouble on that too but believe it. Believe it just go back and read what the old testament says about heaven and ask yourself when the angel appeared to Abraham and spoke to him out of Heaven was the angel sitting on the moon. Or was he possibly a little closer. Heaven you see seek those things that are above we are born not just again but from above. Christ is from above. When Christ prayed he often looked up into the heavens. Why do you suppose he was looking up into the heavens? Yes why. The one he was talking to was up there. Believe it. Believe it. See that's a part of our problem with the spiritual is it has been relocated so that when we pray Our Father who art in heaven we mean our father who is a long way off and

away later when we should understand it means our father always near our father always here with us. Heaven means the direct immediate accessibility of God to the human being. See. We have to recognize that God is with us. Now we have to act. [inaudible jumbled comment] Well sure it'll fall into grace if you mean by that that you couldn't get it without grace. That's right. But it won't fall under grace. If it means that if you do nothing it will happen. I say it's you have to keep that balance if you do nothing you won't even get saved. I don't care if you are dead and trespasses and saying if you don't do something you will not be saved right. So we had to keep that in mind it's very important to keep that balance and you are an active being. And people often say to me do you believe in total depravity. I would say no I believe in enough depravity. There is enough depravity so that anything good comes out of this mess you're going to say thank God. But if you don't do something nothing's going to happen.

Now I realize that we have a part of our tradition which says you're you can't do anything to get saved. And I've had I won't mention the denominations I present in this material before a denomination some months ago. And one of their leading clergy just said up and down that there was nothing you could do nothing you could do to grow spiritually. And I mean I just finally just kept feeding him back the wording from Paul until he gave up but he still didn't believe it. This gentleman over here and then I have a lady here. [inaudible/gap question] Well first of all the practices are individual as well as corporate. The formation of this is directed outwardly towards the community the formation by the spirit is as it involves the administrations of the church the prayers and exhortations of the saints the relationships and the redeemed community. There is you cannot take the great commission. This is one of the I one of the responses I get when I present obedience to Christ as the goal is oh that's privatization. Oh you're spiritualizing it. I always say one thing to people like that. Put it into effect and see what happens to your

community. Say you can stop most of the wrongdoing and evil in a community by just obeying Christ just obeying Christ. We have the evangelical church in the United States has the cure to the problems of the United States. If they just obey Christ that's all the savings and loan fiasco wouldn't have happened if the evangelical Christians who were accountants and lawyers who knew what was happening had stood up and said it was happening but they cooperated with the evil that's very important to understand that it is not just personal truth telling is not personal. I'm so it isn't just a religious issue I'm constantly dealing with professional ethics and teachings about ethics and I'm just so amazed at people who will think that truth telling is something private. Just tell the truth always and be uncompromising with deceit and lies and see how private you are. Those are when I when I talk about the discipline's among other things the discipline the fellowship and confession and submission even as a dread word. But. So it's your emphasis is right. And I thank you for bringing it up because it does need to be said is that it.

Speaker 2:

That's it I'm afraid.

Dallas Willard:

Thank you very much.

Announcer:

Thank you so much Dr. Willard for the stimulating lecture. I'm sure you want to take advantage of the rest of the opportunities that we have. Faculty will be meeting with Dr. Willard for dinner but at 630 we'll be meeting back here in this area. And those of you who are students are welcome to come back faculty as well welcome to come back and join us at that time. And I'm sure there are some unanswered questions you have that you can ask at the end of that hour I remind you also of the schedule tomorrow 930 is chapel with Dr. Willard and then an informal interaction between faculty students and Dr. Willard in the Board conference room at ten thirty tomorrow morning. I also want to publicly thank Dr. Mike Wilkins the Dean of Faculty for putting together this whole forum. Appreciate all that he has done to give us a very stimulating. Time we'll see the rest of you at 630 this evening. Thank you.