

How to Put on Christ:

Doing Spiritual Disciplines from the *Heart* in the *Spirit*

Dr. John H. Coe, Director Institute for Spiritual Formation, Talbot School of Theology

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"The Christian life is what you do when you realize that you can do nothing." Dallas Willard

Introduction

- We are to put on Christ and here is where obedience is crucial to the Christian life, in fact, it is a given! It is expected. It is your minimal service to present yourself in obedience. Eph. 4:22-24:
- **Spiritual disciplines are merely intentional ways to respond to the call of obedience, intentional ways to respond to the Word and Commands of God. So that is what we are talking about tonight: Obedience to the commands of God and their place in transformation.**
- The truth is: the Word of God is full of commands. What it asks of us, we are to do! Thus, it is important to get clear on how we hear the commands of God and what we do with them. And it is important to feel the confrontation of the Word, that is calling us to something and it is not to be repressed. It is crucial to get clear on this point, or we can get lost for much of our Christian life.

A. How Do We Hear [in fact] the Commands of God

- According to Dallas Willard, there is much magical thinking going on in Evangelicalism: that if we just hear good teaching long enough and believe it, it will transform our life.
- How have you responded to the Word-command of God lately?
- What are the possible ways to hear the Word:

B. Theology of Obedience and Spiritual Disciplines

1. According to Paul: the whole life is a training in Godliness or obedience to the will of God.

I Tim. 4:7: bodily discipline is of some value, but discipline yourselves for the purpose of Godliness, for this is profitable for all things in this life and the next.
I Cor. 9:27 I discipline my body and make it my self lest I am disqualified from the ministry.

2. The call of God to obey and train to become Godly is of two kinds:

a. General call of God (Word-command) to obey.

b. Specific-circumstantial call of God (Word-command) to obey. Obedience to the call of God (Word-command) in specific circumstances.

Point:

General Principle: we are to train ourselves in the General Call of God for the sake of developing a character that is ready to obey when called upon in the Specific-circumstantial call. (And some commands are for all the time, e.g., loving God, praying without ceasing etc.)

3. What is the relationship between this training in Godliness and the spiritual disciplines?

Spiritual Discipline: a specific training of the Heart by the Spirit to the General Call of God in order to develop a habit of heart to obey the Specific call of God at all times.

4. In spiritual disciplines and training, what do we lead with, where do we begin?

- We always lead with the body to open the heart to the Spirit.

“lead with the body:” the focus is “do it.

“to open the heart” to the truth of oneself in relation to God. We don’t wait for the heart, but we don’t just bite the bullet.

“to the Spirit”

5. How to identify a spiritual discipline or an opportunity for training:

Structure:

1. Take any command (e.g. “Love your wife”) or
 - any vice trait to be put off or virtue to be put on (patience)
 - any reality to be experienced (in Christ, pardoned etc.)
 - any example to be modeled (Paul, Jesus in retreat or fasting)
2. According to Willard, it is magical thinking that just by a good intention, this will become a reality from the heart.
3. The question you must ask: “What kind of person must I become to live out this command from the heart by the Spirit as a habit?”
4. If you take this seriously, you must now discern with the Spirit what you must do, give yourself to in order to become that kind of a person.

- Note:

6. What kinds of training can we give ourselves to, how to decide which to do? As you hear the General Call of God:

- a. Ask yourself whether you are being called to Putt off the Former manner of life or Put On the New:
 - Some disciplines are designed to put off the old man or former manner of life. Often solitude, meditation on passages addressing vices and soul work in prayer help us explore the vices of the heart with God. These are also **disciplines of detachment** from inordinate loves and vices.
 - The putting on disciplines are the most practiced, which attempt to develop Christ like character in the Spirit (meditation, study, worship, celebration, adoration, silence). These are also **disciplines of attachment** to what is good in God.
 - When “putting-on” disciplines are felt as purgative in desolation (that is, they expose how little our heart is interested in meditation, celebration etc.), *then these “putting-on” disciplines by intention become “putting-off” in reality by the Spirit.*

- b. Ask whether I am to give myself to an Intention, a Rhythm or a Regimen (cf. Schema and notes on next page):

Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual Regimens

[Specific Plans for
Obedience]

Spiritual Rhythms

[Classical Spiritual Disciplines
for the Sake of Love]

Lectio Divina Solitude Prayer Fasting etc.

Spiritual Intentions

[Foundational Disciplines as a Way of Being; How to Intend all the
Disciplines in Christ]

Presenting

Recollection

Honesty

Discernment

1. First, a Description of each:

a. Spiritual Intentions

- These **Spiritual Intentions** are **foundation-disciplines** to protect all the spiritual disciplines and obedience from moralism and inordinate effort or under-effort.

1. **Presenting Oneself as a Sacrifice:** the spiritual discipline of allowing the self to be confronted by the Word and command of God for the sake of a conscious response to the Will of God.

This protects the will from falling asleep to the will of God.

2. **Prayer of Recollection:** the discipline of reminding the self of its true identity “in Christ” (full pardon and full acceptance) and “Christ in me” (the Spirit is present).

This protects our life from moralism and making decisions out of false guilt, shame and my own power.

3. **Honesty or Truth-telling in the heart:** the spiritual discipline whereby upon presenting oneself to God, one opens oneself to what is truly going on in the heart so that this can be brought to God.

This protects the presenting of ourselves from arrogance, closed heartedness, superficiality etc. Let the heart be a mirror to the truth and open this to God.

4. **Discernment:** the spiritual discipline whereby we learn to watch what God is doing in us, what His will is versus our own or the devils, how we can better cooperate. Here we seek wisdom on how to respond to His work that is ongoing within us.

This protects us from responding to false calls of guilt concerning what to do in our life, to fantasy, to the demonic, to our grandiosity. Here we learn to wait on God and watch His work more than our own.

b. Rhythms of the Classical Disciplines:

- These are the classical spiritual disciplines such as solitude, silence, meditation (*lectio divina*), petitionary prayer, contemplative prayer, fasting etc. for the purpose of developing a *rhythm* in life of attachment to God, turning the heart to the love of God and loving God.
- This training of the character helps insure that *regimens* and *obedience* in general do not reduce to mere moralism and natural fortitude (Aristotle and the pagans could do “spiritual” regimens).

c. Regimens for Transforming the Character in the Spirit

- This involves the training of the person’s capacities with the Spirit into the fruit of the Spirit and a way to take seriously the commands, virtues, and realities of God.
- Structure: Take a command, example of or reality etc.):
 1. It is magical thinking that just by a good intention, this will be kept from the heart.
 2. The question you must ask: What kind of person must I become to live out this command from the heart by the Spirit as a habit?
 3. From there, you must set forth a short term plan to begin to try to practice this with the Spirit – a short term project as with the development of any new skill.

E.g. “Love God with all your heart”: I can spend 20 minutes each day opening my heart to adore, love, be with and treasure my Lord (or be open to how little I care for this = an opportunity for truth talking with God). You can develop a regimen like this for any command, practice, reality etc.

E.g. “Pray for one another”: you can take 20 minutes a day for petitionary prayer.

2. Second, how to Hear and Respond Reasonably to the Word from the Heart:

- Willard’s Point: If you shoot for nothing, you will surely hit it.
- In General: Spiritual Intentions as the foundation-disciplines are how we are to hear and respond to the Word from the heart by the Spirit:
 - a. Presenting the Self as a Sacrifice:

Intention: “God, I hear your Word; Here I am.”

b. Recollection:

Intention: "God, what ever I am to become or do, I want to do this in Christ and I don't want to do this alone but abiding in You."

c. Honesty or Truth-telling:

Intention: "God, what is going on in my heart regarding this truth/command - where am I about this, lest I deceive myself."

d. Discernment regarding what to become:

Intention: "God, what is that that you want me to become if I am to do your will?"

e. Discernment regarding what to do in light of what He is doing:

Intention: "God, What are you doing and what are you asking me to do?"

Ask: (1) Lord, should this only be an intention?

(2) Lord, should this be a rhythm?

(3) Lord, should this be a regimen?

f. Discernment regarding a plan:

Intention: Plan and do it. Lead with the body to open the heart to the Spirit.

3. Third, the temptation to do the Spiritual disciplines in the flesh versus doing these in Christ and in the Spirit:

a. We will be tempted to use spiritual disciplines and obedience to create a Christian character by our effort and fortitude rather than open to the Spirit to do this in us.

b. We can be tempted to do spiritual disciplines motivated by the habits of the heart in original sin rather than as a way "In Christ" to *counter* these habits. That is, we can be tempted to
 (1) use spiritual disciplines to appease conscience; rather, let obedience and spiritual disciplines reveal a need to fly to God.

(2) use spiritual disciplines to hide from our guilt; rather, let obedience and spiritual disciplines expose you to your sin and fly to God *in* pardon.

(3) use spiritual disciplines to cover our shame; rather, open to Christ's cover of righteousness in the midst of your sin and shame.

(4) use spiritual disciplines to fill the deep loneliness with consolation; rather, let obedience and the spiritual disciplines open you to what the Spirit would give and teach.

c. We may be tempted to not want to feel the confrontation with the Word or Command of God at all.

4. Fourth, Things to Consider and Remember about this Training:

- a. Spiritual Disciplines are relationally understood and defined.
- b. The spiritual disciplines are not a set of esoteric practices only for a select few Christians but reflect a reasonable and sincere intention necessary for all believers if they are to become not merely hearers but doers of the Word from the heart, that is, as a habit of the heart.
- c. The Spiritual disciplines are not intended to fix the self or transform us but are opportunities for presenting ourselves to God in obedience for the Spirit's transformation work (Rom. 12:1-2, 6:12-13).
- d. The Spiritual disciplines begin as acts of fortitude for the beginner or child and over much time may be transformed by trials and dark nights into fortitude in the Spirit, in neediness, open to the Spirit.
- e. Though, the spiritual disciplines are what the mature person would do in the right circumstances, they start as intentional trainings of the human spirit at any time in order to set in motion a habit that will emerge when appropriate.
- f. We will experience spiritual disciplines where we are in our spiritual development. For beginners, they may be joyful, exciting, encouraging. For others they will be all love and good. But for those in dark nights, they may be dull and dry- but still good for looking into the mirror of one's heart.