

Transforming Ungodly Habits I

By Dallas Willard

Announcer:

-Cafeteria, all you can eat. Tater tots instead of shrimp today. But maybe next year we can work on that shrimp. We know you're coming in advance. Go ahead and make your way to your seats please. And we'll get started. As you know our speaker this morning is Professor of Philosophy over at USC and Richard Foster was right when he said that Dr. Willard holds his own with any any intellectual around today. He's incredibly bright man has some some insights on some things that a lot of us have just really never thought about. I went and visited his office at SC one time and he's just just real friendly real open to chatting with students and although he's very intelligent sometimes we associate people that are intelligent being out there too far and unapproachable he's very approachable a very humble man and I just feel it's a great pleasure that we can have him here so please help me welcome up Dr. Dallas Willard.

Dallas Willard:

When I'm described as humble I often remember Winston Churchill Winston Churchill's comment on one of his colleagues who someone had described as a humble person and Churchill replied yes but then he has so much to be humble about. And that is certainly true for me. It's good to see you again and great to be able to come back and pick up the thread of thought from

last evening. Now we were given pretty specific instructions by your leaders as to what we were to talk about. And the center part of my topic not only for this hour but for the next session is to be habit and the role of habit in spiritual formation. Habit and this is a great complement to the intelligence of your leaders because this is absolutely central habit, both good and bad in spiritual formation. Because you see our lives basically run on habit.

If you have to stop and think about what you're doing that means you're not doing too much and the mark of your immersion in any significant activity is the extent to which you can turn it over to habit. For example if you're trying to learn to speak a language I think perhaps most of you would have some experience with that. And. When I go to France ordinarily the first thing I say is Je ne parle pas français, I'll say I don't speak French very well to which they usually say Oui. [Laughter]Yes. And then of course they're very gracious and usually they speak English as well as I do or in German. The appropriate phrase there because otherwise they would be justified in just killing me. And one of the things one of the things that's so bad of course is I often have to think about every word I'm putting out. You know every word I have to you see the reason for that is because I don't have the requisite habits. All of my habits are in the other language and habit is the enemy or the savior if you wish from a natural point of view of the human self. To have good habits in any area is to master that area.

It's what you don't have to think about that shows what your habits are and your character now that works equally for bad habits. You see because of our bad habits we are immediately involved enmeshed in sin very often. Before. We could run ahead and stop and think to stop and think you remember that Jesus on one occasion had before him a man with a withered hand. And he turned and asked the people whether or not this man should be healed on the Sabbath. And the greatest condemnation of that group was they had to stop and think about

it. They had to stop. See that showed where their habits were. Their habits of thinking about God their habits of compassion for others. All of that revealed what was the character of their soul. So we're going to talk about habits today and we're going to go in some depth and I'm going to try to carry you as deeply as I can and give you some rereading of scriptures with which you may be familiar. I hope you are. But I believe we don't understand them well enough because we try to read them as if they were dealing with doctrine when in fact they are also and primarily dealing with the dynamics of the individual soul.

How many of you believe that the people who wrote the scripture understood human personality? That a safe bet? The right to one of our problems is that we don't read the scriptures with psychological realism. That is to say we don't take it as applying directly. To the states the conditions and the processes of the self and because we don't do that then we are at a loss as to how to confront many of the teachings of scripture some of which I'll be dwelling on today in the seventh chapter of Romans which is notorious for just upsetting everyone's theological apple cart. Seventh chapter of Romans that's just like a declaration of war to mention the passage. But let's begin by just thinking about the Great Commission. The Great Commission. You remember the Great Commission at the end of Matthew says. It says all power all authority has been given to me in heaven and earth, go ye therefore to all ethnic groups. All kinds of people. It's not just talking about nations as we understand the word nation like France and Canada and Brazil but to all types of people all ethnic groups and make disciples make disciples students and baptize them in to the name baptize them into the Triune name.

Now folks if you will allow me to just say as one who believes in getting people wet all over when you baptize them. This isn't talking about water baptism. This is talking about baptism into the Triune Name, the Triune reality of God. That's the real event that happens when we put

people under and it's because that happens or only if that happens that they come up anything more than a wet sinner we make students and there's no question whose students they are. They are students of the Lord Jesus Christ. We surround them in the reality of the triune name because we are a community of people inhabited by a tribe and God so when I go to a person and I present them with the gospel and I ravish them with the vision of God's greatness and goodness so that they say this is the Pearl of Great Price. This is the treasure hid in the field. I'll give everything I have to have this you see so then I've I've got them in the position where I can make them a student of Jesus Christ.

I say to them here's how you have it you trust Jesus Christ and in the sense I explained last evening that means to really believe he was right about everything. To really believe that he is the maestro of life. Paul called him the prince of life. That means he's the one who really knew what it was about. When Jesus is called The Son of Man and he adopts that name for himself I think you should understand that as saying listen this is the fair haired boy of humanity. This is the one who really understands what it's like to be human. That's why as Paul says in Acts 17 everyone is going to be judged by him. It's because he's the measuring stick. He's the one who really knows what it's about. And now that disciple that I've made I bring them into the context of the community of those who together have formed the living dwelling place of God. And that's what it means to baptize them into the name it means to baptize them immerse them surround them in the Triune reality of the Godhead. Are you up for that? Now. Having done that we're ready for the next stage. They have become students. They've said they've paid their tuition. They've entered the course they're ready to learn. They're now surrounded in a context in which the learning can be made real by example by truth by inspiration in the community of the faithful.

And now they're ready for the next stage. You remember what the next stage is? Teach them to do all things whatsoever I have commanded you teach them to do all things whatsoever I've commanded you. And see if we're going to be serious about that, we're going to have to understand the nature of the human soul and in particular we're going to have to understand what habit is and how it works. Because to teach them to do all things that Jesus commanded them means to lead them through a course of training which drains the old poisonous habits out of their socialized and embodied self. And replaces them with new habits that makes it possible for them to walk circumspectly through a world where as God said to Cain sin is crouching at the door where it's always ready to seize you always ready to take you in and to use your in order to deal with the alertness of wickedness and sin both inside and outside of our own bodies. And our own souls. We have to be able to enter into the understanding of Christ in such a way that it takes possession of our bodies.

So that's what we're going to be talking about. We're going to be talking about how righteousness takes possession of our whole self our embodied self. And if we understand that then we're in a position to actually begin to teach people to do all things whatsoever I have commanded you now you know if you're worried about perfectionism at this point you've got a long ways to go before you need to get seriously concerned about it. Just put that out of your mind and let's concentrate on doing a lot better. Won't that be enough for a day or a weekend to do a lot better? And it's right to have a book on your shelf named I am a mess and you're a mess. But you might want to have one next to that titled I'm doing better and you can too so let's not worry about perfectionism. You will always have room for improvement. But the other side is we must do justice to the commandment of Jesus to teach people to do all things whatsoever I have commanded now teaching that does not mean teaching them that they ought to do. That is

not a matter of making sure that they're fully informed about the most recent list of do's and don'ts from God. Rather it is a matter of enabling them actually to enter into the doing. It's a matter of yes preaching and teaching but also training of directing their experience by example by precept. Until they've actually come to enter into the doing and all of the things which looks dreadful. You know we have books about the hard sayings of Jesus. Well I'd like to see one sometime about the hard sayings of the devil. He's got hard sayings Jesus can't begin to match. We all think we are that those sayings are easy because we are messed up but when we began to get it straight we began to see how hard Satan's sayings are and how good and how right the teachings of Jesus.

And we began to gain the strength that comes from walking in the yoke with him from learning from him and we learn as he said my yoke is easy my burden is light and you will find rest unto your souls. And do you know what those words cannot pass through Satan's mind. His yoke is hard. His burden is crushing and you will find torment unto your soul. You see what I mean. See this is why it's such a great message of hope when we begin to look. At the teachings of Jesus and understand that he's actually saying I'll give you all of this what you see in me can be yours. And so then as we begin to taste that we go out to teach others about that to teach them to do. All things whatsoever. Command to join he says low. I am with you always even unto the I'm sure you had to say that because these guys were absolutely fainting at that point you know like yes we had such such success the Lord with the lost sheep of the House of Israel that now it's time to expand the business. Yes Lord. You know. It's hard for us to imagine what it would have meant to a group of Jewish men who didn't have much going for them anyway to be informed that now you get to do the whole world.

But you see that's what Israel was called to be that Israel was called to be a light to the gentiles the Abrahamic covenant is in thy seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. You know we have a hard time getting out of that new kind of holy gobbledygook language. Right. I mean we have to say that what what does it mean to say that in thee and in thy seed all the nations of the earth be blessed. Well you see the people of Israel the heirs of the Abrahamic covenant as you are with them today they were given the opportunity to show the world. To teach the world how to live in this world under the rule of God. The creation covenant of Genesis 1 had been violated and violated and broken and human beings had fallen into the terrible condition in which they exist but that Abrahamic covenant God a personal God who comes in a personal way to a man a human being who is far from perfect also.

And he enters into a covenant agreement with him. Here's how we're going to do it folks. You get to be. You get to be the light of the world. That's how we fulfill. The Great Commission. That's how we do. We get to be the light of the world. Where we are and Israel was called to that. And now the Great Commission is just a way of saying now we're going to do it. Well we've been working on that for a while. But part of our problem is that repeatedly we've fallen back into old ways of thinking and acting. Above all we have not understood that the redemptive covenant through Christ with God in His kingdom is not something about special religious activities. It's about how we live our whole life. And that has kept us from confronting and liberating ordinary life into the Kingdom of God. And it will always do that. So we have to be very concrete. We have to look hard at human life as it really exists and we have to go right into that. Great center of consolidated evil. With something that is powerful enough. To break it up and disperse it Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.

That's what he came for. That's what I'm here for and that's what you're here for. You're his extension where you live where you work. Who you are. The center of your life. As the people of Jesus Christ is to destroy the works of the devil. Now you're not going to do that by all coming together in a building and having a service you are going to do that by taking the kingdom of God with you and the king with you who said Lo I am with you always even until the job is done. To the end of the age so you take him with you. Where you you take him into your home and into your family. You take him into work. You take him into the casual discussions that you have by the way you take him to school. You take him to your studies of chemistry and Hebrew and Greek and literary theory. You take him with you and you as you sit and walk and do your work. You do so always with him by your side. And as Hebrews 13 tells us then we have no need to fear because. I have said I will never leave the door forsake thee. You see when you move in your uh your total life when you move out of the dominion of fear you have broken the whole of Satan over you and I'll have some limitations in how far I can explain that. But I want to try to get very specific and concrete with what that means.

But the first step out is when you break the whole fear over you know Jesus is always coming down the road saying cheer up. Cheer up. Say it like that would you instead of saying be of good cheer. I don't see how you could cheer up if you had to say be of good cheer. That sounds like something bad is coming. Cheer up; you have a lot to be cheerful about. And he was a person of great cheer. Jesus's Joy was amazing, amazing. And he said I'm going to give my joy to you. You will have my joy that your joy might be full. And when he said that those people that were with him did not say oh boy pass the aspirin because they knew what his joy was. They understood they had seen it they had watched him even tell him things they couldn't stand to hear about his death and resurrection. Don't believe there is ever a moment in Jesus's existence when

he was gloomy. Just don't believe it. He can be serious but not gloomy because he understood the basis of his hope. Now he brings that to you and he breaks the hold of fear over you know I mention fear because fear is the main habitat of human beings. And that's why the Bible says fear not so often something good happens and Angel shows up what does he have to say first thing.

Fear not fear not because we're we're all. See that's the result of the human project of self-idolization. We put ourselves as managers of the world and dear friends we've got plenty to fear. Because we have got a failing project from the word go. So be scared. Early and often but you see when we hear the gospel of Christ. And we we appreciate the unbelievably good news that he came to invite every person to go in business with God with their whole life just go in business with God. That's the meaning of the gospel. That's what he meant when he said repent for the kingdom of heaven is at saying look at how you've been thinking about things in the light of this new fact. That now God is offering to take you in business with him. That's what that that's what that phrase means. And you need to really run it through your head and work it around in the context because one of the primary tasks of Satan for centuries has been to rob us of the precious meaning of these words. People understood it in his day by and large understood it quite well. They sometimes could hardly believe it because it was such good news. But you know they understood it from the simple fact that he was mobbed by people who understood that he was offering them contact with the rule of God.

So the kingdom of God is simply God's rule you have a kingdom everyone has a kingdom your kingdom is the range of your effective will. Now if you've been running it on your own. You need to hear the word Metta no Ettie [sp] think it out again. Think about how you've been thinking about it because you had the wrong approach to your own kingdom and Jesus

comes this incarnational reality which can deliver us from evil Jesus comes and inducts us into his kingdom. Now when he does that. We immediately run into. A confrontation with. The incredible complexity of ourselves because when we come in contact with the Kingdom of God and the first mark of that is always faith we actually do believe we actually do trust Jesus Christ if you with your mouth will confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead. You will be saved. Folks I'm telling you when you understand what that means.

You could just read it like when you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. You go off like a rocket. Now see our problem is that we have for so long have professed things we don't believe that we no longer know that we don't believe them. And that's not just us. That's the way tradition does us. You remember when Jesus came in he was trying to present his truth to the leaders of his day the Gospel of John. They said. We are Moses's disciples. He said you don't believe Moses if you believe Moses you'd believe me. And that's really true. The law had been so distorted that it had very little to do with Moses anymore and he said to them you remember the words if you believe Moses you'd believe me but see they didn't know they didn't believe Moses and so often we have religious habits and traditions that prevent us from understanding what we do believe in what we don't believe. Now when we really come to believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead that is a miracle. That's why we speak of it as a confession. You know a confession of faith is owning up to something why I actually do believe this what a miracle.

And Paul you remember says no man. Can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit. First Corinthians 12. No man can call Jesus Lord. See that is a supernat-. That's an indication that that fire of heaven has begun to burn in your life. That's regeneration folks. That's what it is to be

regenerated it is to have a new life a heavenly life that begins to move in to yourself and to move towards taking all that's evil out of you and replacing in you all that is good but you see that won't happen automatically. We are called on to cooperate and the place we confront our work is precisely in our habits. What is a habit? Well let me just give you a few thoughts about it. And for those of you who are more deeply interested I really encourage you to read the chapter on habit in William James's two volume psychology. Best thing that's ever been written on it habit. Is an automatic tendency to action habit is an automatic tendency to action based on use or practice. Based on use or practice, triggered by specific specific circumstances triggered by specific circumstances the action of a habit does not depend either on will or on understanding. It runs on its own and the primary form that sin takes in our personality are habits habits the ways we respond are keyed to the world.

Now the Apostle John says in the second chapter of his first letter there are three things that are in the world three things that are in the world and if you want to know what makes the world tick and what too often makes us tick and keeps us from growing and forming into Christ likeness then you have to take the honest and earnest practice of finding these things in yourself. Here they are three things. The lust of the flesh and lust was colorful word. Just means desires. The lust of the flesh the lust of the eyes and the pride of life lust of the flesh lust of the eyes and the pride of life lust of the flesh have to do with those basic tendencies that we associate with the appetites of the body and these are elevated as an ultimate and become a central part of what is in the world food sex comfort are the main ones food sex comfort security and adventure are also important. Variety. Action those of you who have read psychology will know that there is some effort to identify what the basic drives are often. And many of those turn out to be just the desires of the body. Now the lust of the eyes. Very different very important. For the lust to the eyes. You

ought to see what it is just while you're checking out at your grocery store just pick up a cosmopolitan or Self magazine and thumb through it. Don't buy it. Well just look at that and what you will see in most advertisement.

By the way is the lust of the eyes lust of the eyes have to do with looking upon desirable things and looking desirable or impressive? A major part of the lust of the eyes is how we want others to see us and this has to do with all sorts of pomp and circumstance and clothing and. Houses and equipage and all that sort of thing that is used to make others think Well of us. We want to look good and that's perhaps the simplest description of what the lusts of the eyes are but there's also a great deal of enslavement to having things having good things to look at. I mean why do you want the furniture arranged and arranged in a particular way and the table sat in a certain way and all of that. Well nothing wrong with that in itself. Anything anymore than something is wrong with the desires of the flesh.

It's just when they are elevated to an ultimate when life is made to revolve around them. That we began to see how they make up an evil system which we call the world. And thirdly the pride of life pride of life is basically ascendancy ascendancy. It is the desire to be the king of the mountain. Kids learn to play that game. Very young king of the mountain if you want to see it in some of its most disgusting forms. Watch the dances that athletes now do after they do something which they think is big. See they are as we say showing off. But what they're doing as they show off is they are exercising ascendancy over others, right. Sports have been almost destroyed as a benign influence in our society by the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. So now you're here you have John's analysis and what is he saying to us, what he's saying to us is that if you just look at ordinary human life you will see that it is run by those three things and that these three things now they exist in the socialized embodied self of human beings. That's me folks.

That's you. So when someone comes to me and they want to. Assassinate the character of one of my colleagues now what am I going to do. You see there's a whole system of evil that goes with that. More informally just gossip. Gossip. Interesting structure. But it has to do with how others are treated and habits of dealing with others. Why do we enjoy gossip? Why do we enjoy Gossip? Gossip always creates the context in which we feel superior and that is such a delicious feeling. It creates a context in which we feel superior also creates a context in which we feel acceptance. You know just between you and me and the gatepost that creates a little circle and human beings desperately want to have a circle to be in. That's one of the primary ways that the world has taught us to reassure ourselves it is the natural reaction of a being that was created to live in the kingdom of God but who is not living there.

And so they always try to create a circle see those are habits. The habits of driving on the freeway we often talk about those because there are so much a part of our society you see being in a car and driving is a major part of our sense of power and superiority. What is it you call a person who does something wrong in traffic. Usually. Well you know for us it starts out with things like stupid. Now that is something that Jesus taught about and I'm going to in these two hours I want to go through the Sermon on the mount and just show you how Jesus is dealing with everyday situations in life but these are just illustrations now of what we confront when we begin to take seriously the idea of spiritual formation we confront the way the world has come to dwell in our personalities. Now personalities are not separate from our context. Human beings are not a little self-contained abends. You'll hear James Houston so often emphasize the relation of nature of human beings and what an important truth that is because you see we live in a world which is a part of us and we have to recognize that there is a threat in that world the way we have set out

we have to recognize things that like if we are going to be spiritually formed different differently we're going to have to form our world differently. But that's where we are now.

You remember that Jesus on the night he was betrayed when he went out before he went out to the garden shall we say before he went out he said. Now this is Satan's hour the wicked one is coming. You remember that wonderful phrase he said. Think about it. He has nothing in me. Now that's where we want to be. We want to be in a position where he has nothing in me. There's no hook. He can get a hold of his main hook his fears I've already said his main hook is fear the desire to survive to live and to not feel pain. These are a part of the lust of the flesh and he tricks us into thinking that we are bodies he tricks us into localizing all of our focus in life around our body. And of course if you do look at Cosmopolitan or self or most of these magazines you'll see that that's where the emphasis is. I mean you're promised things like happiness and good life just in terms of the shape of your body and how much hair you have in the right place. And all those kinds of things are ridiculous. It's stupid. Right. And I mean that's the only thing to write over these magazines is this is stupid. It's ill informed.

Everyone knows when they stop to think that it doesn't work and yet. Because our lives are so focused on the body we keep returning to that as the scripture says as the dog returns to its vomit and the sow returns to the mud hole. You wash them up. You clean them up they just go right back. See that's because for ordinary human beings contrary to what Jesus said Satan has his hooks in us he has his hooks in us and these hooks take the form of what we are immediately ready to respond to on the basis of habit. Let's take now just a few moments to look at some passages in Romans and quickly move through them. Romans 7 then maybe just a line or two from Romans 6 because I'm really hopeful that I can convey to you the idea that when Paul. Wrote. What he did he was writing with a full understanding of the nature of life. We sometimes

need to re-say that to ourselves that these people who wrote the scriptures were extremely intelligent people who knew exactly what they were talking about and knew how to say it. And there are so many things that militate against that. We almost pick up from the air we live and breathe in a kind of bird nest theory of scriptural texts you know how a bird builds a nest, he sort of gathers a little something here or something there a little something there and puts it all together and makes a nest. And the idea that there are these not too bright people that kind of struggle along and composed of few words and then some more not too bright people who copied things out and put it all together. I'll tell you that's a disastrous idea.

Now I know that here at Talbot and Biola you don't have that idea about scriptural text but there is a real problem with it affecting us even though we don't officially endorse it. And sometimes that comes through us in the form of setting aside the teachings that are given as if somehow they didn't mean something real in our own experience Let me just look at Romans 6:13 for example. Don't go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of righteous righteousness. Now what does that presuppose that presupposes that you have been doing that doesn't it. Now what do you suppose it means in practice. What I want to suggest to you that it means just exactly what I've been talking about. It means utilizing the members of your body in the world a system of habits that constitute rebellion against God. Concrete rebel-

[End of Part 1]