

Transforming Ungodly Habits II

By Dallas Willard

Announcer:

To the three O'clock session this afternoon it's, it's very, very exciting that all of you can be here for the whole conference I especially want to welcome those of you who do not go to Biola and welcome to our campus and I know that has been an invitation has been warmly extended to you. I want to do my, my best to do that as well.

Before I introduce Dr. Willard I would like to make a comment after the after the session. We would like for you to give us a little bit of your feedback on the conference so enclosed in your brochure is three different pieces of paper. One of them is a conference evaluation form. Afterwards this is just this is just a way for us to get to know what was effective in the conference that you believed in and what we will do better next year as we are excited the first annual Journey conference so if afterward we'll have people going around as soon as Dr. Willard finish go ahead and pass them to the outside and we'll have people going to pick him up. So, two years ago I found that it was with my me even with my strong self I found that I cannot will my own behavior. Too many of my responses. To other people or situations were reflexive. They were automatic acts that I lashed out or responded to them in a in a reflex type action. Unfortunately. Not all of them were Christ like reflexes. These included anger, lust, desire for power ext... as a strong personality and as a human being to begin with. It was very, very frustrating that I couldn't collect all of my ugliness and throw it away at times that I really desired to, and wanted to in order to make a good impression or just to be more like God. What I didn't realize is that for 20 years living deeply immersed in the Christian subculture I including

to Biola I hadn't ever been exposed truly to the spiritual disciplines, until two years ago a good friend of mine told me about a book called spirit of the disciplines and this made a radical change in my life seeing as it was no longer my duty to change myself but to act and carry through these disciplines in order to let God make a change through me. I just like to thank Doc Dels and Dr. Willard for, for that insight and the incredible insight you've given us this conference and the floor is yours.

[Applause]

Dallas Willard:

Well certainly. Thank you very much for those gracious words of some official person tell me what time we have to walk out the door as they are. 14.

That clock back there right. Hope.

[Laughter]

I had great hope though for a moment.

[Laughter]

What, what time is it. Yes. Good would you. If I lose track of this would you say something to me too.

Well bless your hearts thank you for coming. I want to just pretty well go on from where I was. To show you a picture drawn from the early experience of Christ that's taken from a second Peter 1, just ask you to look at it with me and I hope again that this will be a very hopeful thing for you and that you feel your, your mind and your heart swelling with hope that this is really for you. Peter says here lovely preamble which I can't really go into. So let me just begin

with verse 4 of Chapter 1 second Peter, "For by these he has granted to us his precious and magnificent promises in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature." Now folks that is a description of being born again. It's to become a partaker of the divine nature and now then, the next clause follows; having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust or desire. I'm hoping that as we go on here you will have carried over the idea that desire incorporates itself in a twisted way in a world fallen away from God so that a person who is raised in that world. By the time they go out of the block, as it were the starting block on their own, they are already crippled and twisted, they hardly know which way to run. You know it's like blasting off in one of these rockets like they did this morning but not being put in control until you're off the pad for several minutes, and you're already gone which way. I think this is one of the reasons why Jesus had such compassion on children. You know some of the sternest things he said he said about those who hurt children. And he let it be very clearly known that it is always observed. Matthew 18:10 says, "For I say to you that there are angels to always be whole the face of my father which is in Heaven." See that's God's care for these little children and he knew the damage that was done to them before they ever so much as had an opportunity to make a choice and how their choices were constantly swayed and twisted by everything around them. The corruption that is in the world through lost the lust of the flesh the last of the eyes and the pride of life. How many, many twisted things? How many children have been told that they should not reveal something in the family? That is already laying a rather wild and chaotic man, but he's written wonderfully on schizophrenia I think and he says we learn schizophrenia in the family and in the church and elsewhere where we see things and we are told not to see them, and we try to salvage the situation by not seeing that we're not seeing what we see and we know how that goes on. Many of the ministries in recent years, that have fallen into great distress, everyone

knew what was going on. Everyone knew, and they came to work every day and did not see what they saw. And you see that corruption that just sits there around the last of the eyes and the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. But when you become a partaker of the divine nature you are given the key So that you can walk out of that. You have been released from the corruption that is in the world through lust. You've been released from it, you're not done with it, but you're no longer nailed to the ground by it. Now you've got some where to go. You've got a way of breaking out of all of the evil that just tears at the heart of humanity. And now then, look at the progression. For this very reason applying all diligence. Applying all diligence, that means give it your best shot, Put your heart into it.

We have a hard time of that because the teaching of grace has been perverted and we have somehow come to associate grace with passivity, but grace is not opposed to effort, it's opposed to earning. Grace is not opposed to effort. Please hear it. That's liberation to know it. You can try hard, you can put yourself out. You can strive as Jesus said to enter the straight gate. You can strive. And oh how we have to say that and now we need to recover our Christian past and learn from it. With all of the legal lipstick body hating things that we see in it we do see also the earnest effort to stir oneself up and lay hold of God. See, if you've gone through what Luther has gone through, you may well suggest some degree of temperament in your exertions, but that's not what folks need to hear today right? They are not in bondage to exertions today. And they're in bondage in fact to passivity. Hey we can go for it. It's all right and we don't have to fall into legalism because it isn't legalism as a matter of justification with others more often than with God frankly. And you often find legalism running deepest in churches which say most about grace.

We don't need to be caught into that trap. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross, is the great crack in the wall that says, "Everybody out everybody out." Even went down and preached to those that have died already and send everybody out. Everybody you step out into the world through the cross and they open an empty tomb. Now you know that everything you had hope for about God is true.

So you don't need to worry as humanity has constantly worried about trying to please God manage him and manipulating. He doesn't need that, he needs for you to engage with him. Now look at how this goes. And again we have some trouble with the getting this into ordinary language but adding to your faith, moral excellence. You start out with faith. Faith is confidence, just try reading confidence in your Bible when you, when you re-see the word faith. Confidence in God, confidence in Christ. Now add to that virtue. Virtue is responsibility. It is the ability to respond. It's the capacity to do what needs to be done. Responsibility, we do, simply do, the right thing.

Add that to your faith. Doing the right thing. That will still leave room for growth as we shall see, but we just simply do the right thing. We don't go into reasoning's about it, we just do the right. What is the right thing? Well it's what Jesus said to do. We may need to have some trouble understanding that, but basically we know.

The main moral problem in human life is not knowing what to do, and if we would do what we know to do probably the rest of it would come along fairly soon. Let's just do what we know to do. Then knowledge, we understand why and how to do it. We have to have knowledge. We can't just blindly by force of will alone move along. Faith, moral excellence or virtue, knowledge and then to your knowledge self-control. You wonder, how are we just getting to this now? Self-control.

You know to have self-control. You have to have pretty well pulled yourself together by the grace of God. You have to be pretty largely healed and reintegrated before you have genuine self-control. How many times we see folks that have really perhaps progressed well on in the way of the Lord and, and perhaps have accomplished a number of significant things that then they're out of control.

You see it wasn't all together. Really sad and tragic thing to me because of course I have experience with this side of life as well. The really sad and tragic thing to me when we hear of another well-known minister who has flipped out sexually is not the event, but my knowledge of what has been there for years. What that person has been carrying inside themselves. Ready to come out. To self-control, is the point at which we are achieving, and integration which enables us to accomplish our good intentions because we choose them and then perseverance means consistently not just now and then. Self-control, perseverance, godliness refers to an adequacy and attitude and adequacy from God to whatever occurs. It's a matter of knowing where the supplies are and knowing how to access them into our lives. Godliness, and then, how rather strange it may be that we would just now come to brotherly kindness or kindness, family kindness. Which see, kindness is really tremendous achievement. It's one of the, it's one of the supreme fruits of spiritual growth the ability to become kind. You see, kindness is not something you can contrive. Kindness is something that oozes out of you. It, I wish we had time to spend in hour on kindness, but it involves such things as really being aware of other people, really being aware them, and of course in order to be there you have to be liberated from your self obsession, because if yourself if you have that obsession with yourself you can't be observant. You can't be sensitive and aware of others. It just does it, it means among other things that you're not running a whole set of agendas. You just very simply minded present where you are, you're just there.

I think this was one of the great things that must have been true of Jesus was his ability to be kind and now kind with family kindness to everyone. That kind of family kindness to everyone. And then of course on top of it all of us agape. And agape is, as Paul says in one place, "the bond of perfectness." This is constant intelligent will for the good of others, your neighbors. Constant intelligence will for the good. This is God's love. God who is as Luke 6:35 I believe it is says, "Kind to the evil into the ungrateful." That's what's given to us. This is for us. Now as those who are under the edict of the great commission to teach. We have to understand how that works. We have to understand how we come to that position and how we keep it. And there are so many dimensions of it. We grow so slowly in our spiritual life partly because we could not stand.

We could not stand or perhaps others could not stand much progress in us as long as we remain so arrogant and self-centered and only time can bring us to the point where we are utterly devoid of confidence in ourselves. We give you one of the most touching passages on this from First Corinthians 9 and here we have our old friend Paul, way down the line. Here's what he's saying. Second First Corinthians 9 sorry, verse 24, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run they all run but they don't all win. Run in such a way that you may win and everyone who competes in the games exercise is self-control in all things." Now I want you to see here a picture of the disciplined life. This is a person who exercises self-control over all things. And you know it's so hard for us to see this from our point of view where we're kind of looking at it and wondering whether or not we really want to do this, because it looks like a life of great rigor and perhaps pain and self-reflection and self-doubt maybe and all of that. I assure you it isn't. Paul here is if you want to see what he's talking about at a human level you have to observe the discipline of a great athlete or great artist. Someone who can step onto the operatic stage and just

beautifully and effortlessly produce the role of the notes. How did that person get their? That person got there by exercising self-control in all things. They organized their lives around it. Do they feel that this is a great loss? Not at all.

It isn't a loss it's their life. It's a wonderful thing. They do it he says, to receive perishable wreaths, but we are an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way as not without aim, I box in such a way as not beating the air. In other word, he's realistic about his life and he observes every part of it in relationship to his goal. And verse 27, you have to think about how this might apply to you and me. You have to think is there something for me or is it only for Paul. Look what he said, "I buffet my body. I buffet my body and make it my slave. Lest possibly after I have preached to others I myself should be disqualified" you're talking about losing his salvation. Let me just cut through all the discussion and say not in the least. Not in the least. He's not talking about salvation here. He's talking about living the life that he aspires to in Christ. You know the only issue is not whether or not you're going to make the cut. That isn't the only issue. Going to be a lot of people surprised about that. They're going to be a lot of Mormons who didn't have any more sense to trust Christ instead of trusting their system and they're going to be sitting there and they're going to be a lot of Baptist who didn't make it, because they trusted their system and not Christ.

The big issue is our focus on Christ. Filling our life with him. That's what Paul is talking about. Paul says, "I look at all of it in the light of that. I consider everything I do in the light" and you see he is concerned and lives in a guarded condition. There are many other passages that we could look at in terms of this, but as we go along in this progression we must always remember that at no point are we able to say now I've got it. Sanctification is not a position, it is not an attainment. Sanctification is a day by day relationship. It's a day by day relationship I choose it

every day. I choose it every day. Or I don't. That's what Sanctification is. In so far as I have holiness indeed I have it because I'm walking in step with Jesus Christ. I have it because he he's living in me through the vivid interaction that we have as we move through the days. It is not a position. It is not entertainment. It is a relationship.

Now we can have all that. Now I want to move to some excuse me I'm sorry about my nose. I would have scheduled it differently.

[Laughter]

If I had had any choice. In fact I would have chosen not to have it, but I want now for us to look at some of the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. And if you look at Matthew. 5, 6 and 7 and I hope to use the rest of my time today to just, I hope and I pray that the Lord will help us to see the teaching of Jesus about our ordinary lives and then we'll be talking some about spiritual disciplines as a way of dealing with the replacements of habit.

The Sermon on the Mount is hard to replace. I have a book, recently I picked up, that says on one page that the Sermon on the Mount is the heart of the Christian faith and three pages later it says, no one understands the Sermon on the Mount.

[Laughter]

And I thought, well maybe they're on to something. One of the main problem is that Sermon on the Mount is presented so often as a recipe book for blessedness. The Beatitudes are treated as if they were Jesus is telling you to do something and that if you did it you'd be blessed. And then the other passages very often no consistent treatment of the remaining teaching. And it's just extremely difficult sometimes we're even told that. The commands of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are for another age and that really bails us out fast. They know that, but

then we have to come back to the verse which I gave you last evening where Jesus Himself said, "I will show you the wise person." The wise person is the one who hears what I say and does it, and the unwise person is the one who hears what I say and does not do it, does not do. It's very clear I believe from that teaching that Jesus meant this for us. And our problem is to have an understanding of what's being done in the Sermon on the Mount and bring it to bear on ordinary life.

I think it has a very simple structure. There are two questions that Jesus addresses in the Sermon on the Mount and they are both addressed in the context. Excuse me, in the context of the basic message of the availability of the Kingdom of God. If you pull that out, nothing makes sense and that is why the sermon does not make sense to so many people.

The basic message of the Kingdom of God is you are now offered a position in the rule of God from which you can live and that all you have to do to accept that position is to trust Jesus Christ, and I repeat again not trust him for the forgiveness of your sins only but just to trust him. The gospel is, you can trust Jesus Christ. You can trust Jesus Christ. And now on the basis of that fundamental message about the availability of the rule of God so you no longer have anything to fear, all provisions are made for you, purpose in life is established eternally, you're put here on an eternal mission, God has had you in mind all along, it's now your time, like a great cosmic conductor who is conducting the orchestra of history along, and now all of a sudden you come along and he brings you in and now it's your time and you have this little time here in space in history, it's your day. You have the opportunity to serve God in this generation. Everyone else has moved out. No one else is here yet. It's your time, it's your time to be the light of the world and in the light of that message now Jesus gives us answers to two basic questions. And the first basic question is who is well-off. Who is well off, and the second basic question is who is really

right. Who has genuine righteousness? Those are two questions that human beings have tried to been trying to answer ever since they've been here. Jesus addresses them in the context of the kingdom of heaven, and it begins with the most shocking of statements. You have them in Matthew and you have them in Luke. In Luke he gives us not only blessed but what I call the *woe-bes*. *Woe-be* unto you. So you have the *woe-bes* and the blessed. The Lucan version is much more stark and clean in many respects but I think the Matthew version of the blessed are really much more profound. "Blessed are you" he says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. For theirs is the kingdom of the heavens." Now I don't have time to do all of this work that needs to be done here and I'm basically just presenting my view in the hope that you might find it useful and attractive to develop, but you will understand please that these people are not blessed because they are poor in spirit. They don't have the kingdom of God because they are poor in spirit. Rather, they are blessed because even though poor in spirit they are in the kingdom of the heavens. That's why they're blessed. Now, the poor in Spirit here really means the spiritually bankrupt. It means the spiritually poverty stricken. If you want to see examples of them all you have to do is look at Jesus's own apostles. They were nearly all poor in spiritual things. Fisherman, tax collectors, harlots, close friends with harlots, and crooks. You see what Jesus is doing is he's taking a list of those regarded as unblessable from the human point of view, and he's saying, some of these are blessed. Some of these are blessed. Blessed are they that mourn.

Ever mourned? Normally if you if you've really mourned you wouldn't think of citing that as a condition of blessedness if you really mourned, and Jesus was looking right at that because you know what he had before him was a group of people that were hopeless. If you look at the mass that had gathered around it these were hopeless people. These were people that had been shut out and left out and because some of them had come in contact with them in the depth

of their poverty and the depth of their distress he could easily bring them out and stand them in front of that crowd and point to them and said and say blessed are they that mourn, for in the kingdom of the heavens they shall be comforted. Every one of the Beatitudes is taken within the kingdom of the heavens. This is a part of the great inversion story of the two kingdoms. If you want to see more of it go back and read the Song of Moses, or the wonderful song of Hannah, read the thirty fourth the 37 Psalm, Read Mary's Magnificat, listen to Jesus as He says, "the first shall be last and the last shall be first." Now we with our engineering mentality are bound to make a mistake. We have we are going say well I see that if I'm going to be first I must be last so I shall be last. I've recommended this principle to a number of people who were starting Baptist churches and I've recommended to them that they should name their church, "The last Baptist Church", but I haven't been able to get anyone to take me up on that. I've gone from first to second and down to third. I know one third Baptist Church and some of you may know a fourth, but I think at that point the pickings get a little thin. As far as numbers are concerned. You see, we mustn't approach it in that way. Jesus doesn't teach in that way. He's not going to tell you that everyone who's poor in spirit is blessed, they aren't, because they are poor in spirit who are full of evil and I'm often amazed my colleagues in university in the academic world think there's something special. About being poor. Some of the meanest people I've ever known in my life were poor as dirt. They never met a poor person, they've just seen him on front line reports. See Jesus isn't telling us, do it this way and you'll get that. He's saying contrary to the way the world sets up the picture a lot of those folks that are on the world's view are left out are on the front row in the Kingdom of God.

It was shocking. It was so shocking look at Verse 17, "Do not think that I am come to abolish the law and the prophets." Why do you think he would say that? He would say that

because that's what they were thinking. Right? That's what they were saying. Why were they thinking that? Because they understood that radicalness of the message. He not only speaks of blessing of the poor and so forth in the third person he turns to them now and he says, "You, are the salt of the earth." You are the salt of the earth. You're the light of the world. No you not somebody else. You're the salt of the earth. You're the light of the world. Look at what he says, "You are the light of the world, a city set on a hill can't be hidden, nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a lamps stand. God is the one who likes your light. He's the one who brought you here." Now it's your turn. You're on the lamps. You're the light of the world. See where you are no one else will ever be. No one. God himself will not be where you are. You are put here for a unique mission and is primarily in relation to those who are going through space and time with you that you are here for a unique mission. You were put here to allow the rule of God to be present in your personality and for you to flourish and make a unique contribution to God's redemptive plan in history. You are the paintbrush and Gods hand to paint that little part of history. You are the light of the world. You see that's why they said they were thinking huh.

We've got a revolutionary here. This guy is going to really turn things upside down. Well he was but not the way they thought. That I didn't come to destroy the law and the prophets. They were thinking that you see. We have to have that clearly in our vision, because if we don't we will not understand the significance of the gospel for us. You go down the street and you look at everyone you meet and they are all discounting themselves, except a few who are asserting themselves out of an agonizing sense of deficiency, and you can tell from the braggadocio. You can tell from the hostility in them that they don't believe in their calling because they have to protest too much and the others simply, well they're among the meek. Blessed are the meek, the shy, the non-pushy. That's what that's about. You know people that when anything goes wrong

they get embarrassed. They can't stand for things to go around because they feel responsible. If they always get off the sidewalk if someone else is coming down the street, they can't assert themselves. See that's the meek and painful. And Jesus wants us to understand that there is no condition that is not blessable in the kingdom of God. That's the gospel folks. You can take it to anyone and when you go to them pronounce the beatitude on. Blessed are the aged, blessed or those with cancer, blessed are you if your daughter has just gotten pregnant out of wedlock, or tried to commit suicide and so forth and so. There's no limit, that's the gospel, not blessed because of the condition, but blessed because of the kingdom and that is the gospel of the Beat. When you read the Beatitudes remember they're explaining the Gospel that's why they're there. We are not authorized to just sort of throw them up in the air and reach around for something for them to mean. We have to read them in the context of the story. They are an explication of the meaning of the kingdom. They are the basis of the state but we all love Romans 8:28. Nearly all of us can quote it. All things work together for good. Even the things that are not good work together for good to those that love God and are called according to his purposes see, that's the Beatitudes. That's the basis of safety and confidence no matter what's happened to you. No matter what, or what hasn't happened to you, it's what often it's what hasn't happened matters the most. No matter what's true of your family, your body, of your mind, or anything else when you step by faith into the Kingdom of the heavens you begin to see the opening of blessing on you, and by faith you can take that now, and you take it in your moment by moment steps as you go through the days of your life.

That's who's blessed, who's blessed? The one who lives in the kingdom of the heavens. That's who has got it made. Now who is the person who is really right? Who is the person who is really right? You can't capture that in commandments and as you go on out look at Jesus's

teachings, I just want to help you recognize what he's addressing and something about the way we can move toward it. In Matthew 5:21 and following you find a set of characteristic situations and I want to tell you what these are. Because the way that we come at this often when we seem not to understand what is really being dealt with. Most specifically, he is not dealing with whether or not we should go to court or call someone a fool or not. You have to understand the specific things he's talking about as illustrations of the condition of heart that constitutes true righteousness. Look first at Matthew 5:21 through 26, now this is why we're here dealing concretely with spiritual formation in its specific form. Matthew 5:21 through 26. What we have here is freedom from anger and contempt of others. So the person who has, shall we say Kingdom righteousness, is the person who lives free from anger and contempt with others. How many of you would, how many of you would miss it?

[Laughter]

Of human life you've transformed it. Contempt is worse than anger. Contempt is a way of looking down on people as if they were trivial really trivial. What about Jesus says some of this teaching is taken from the rabbis as you know and I take comfort in the fact that many of you or most of you are close Bible students. Look at what he said. The old law said don't kill anyone, don't. Don't commit murder, somebody says that whoever commits murder is liable to the court. Jesus is teaching all of us by contrast and so he contrasts true righteousness in this area of contempt and anger with the old law. Where does murder come from? Anger and contempt. People with contempt of life we are treated now in our own society to people who kill merely out of indifference and contempt. They kill because they can't find any reason not to. Old fashioned days like, when I was a kid, you supposed to have some reason to kill people. Now you just don't have a reason not to. Why not?

So he's teaching by contrast he says, "Now I say to you everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty or angry with that cause he'll be guilty before the court." This is anger that does not necessarily express itself in language or perhaps it moves on and it says whoever shall say to his brother Rocka, it's impossible to translate this empty headed good for nothing, I like to use the word twit or twerp, or perhaps if you follow sports news so-called Chris.

[Laughter]

And whoever shall say you fool, shall be guilty enough to go into the hell of fire [inaudible]. See, this is really the root of the matter folks. This is not some little thing. The big deal in this passage is not what follows. He goes on to talk about how if you come to do your worship and you find that you have something between you and your brother. Just lay down your hymn book and go make it right and then come back and finish, that's not the big deal. He says if you are getting involved in a disagreement and you're about to go to court. See if you can't work it out before you go. That's not the big deal folks. The big deal is not thinking others are fools. That's the big deal, and Jesus such a masterful teacher, always knows just how to go right to the root of things and he begins their and moves out to what it implies, see. Now you could come in and say, "Well Jesus said, I had to lay down my hymnbook and go and make it right. So I'm going to do that." You could do that in a fit of self-righteousness. That wouldn't do the least that a good, but if you are thinking I love my brother or my sister so much that I can stand I have another moment of violation between us I must make this right now. That's Kingdom righteousness in the heart. That's Kingdom righteousness in the heart. Jesus is not telling us how to have a bunch of laws so that we will be right. He's telling us what kind of people to be and he's offering that to us. Now if you have that in mind you go back to the Key verse here of this whole passage which is actually the 20th verse of chapter 5. I say to you unless your righteousness goes

beyond that with the scribes and the verses you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. The three things that Jesus tells us in the Gospels three things about entering the Kingdom of Heaven, one is to be born again, the other is to repent and become like a little child, the other is to go beyond the righteousness of describes in the Pharisees. Now when he says go beyond the righteous, scribes and the Pharisees he's not suggesting that we should in fact do more of the same thing, just become a more deeply frantic Pharisee. No he's saying, there is a level of yourself that is deeper than anything the scribe and the Pharisee get to and that is the level where you touch God's rule, and if you don't touch that level, you will not become the kind of person that is capable of loving others. You'll be locked into your contempt and your anger and that will seal your soul into a capsule that can't be broken even by God or will be broken by God, but if you go beyond and you begin to step into this, see, as you think about this, please don't respond but just think about how many of you would like to not be ever again contemptuous of any person.

I know that your heart rises to that and you say yes, I would like never again to be contemptuous of any person. I know that about you. That's what you want. The good news is you can have it. You can have it if you want it. You can have it. I mean you say well, what about anger? I don't even want never to be angry again. Well that's harder in our culture. Anger has almost become associated with self-righteousness. You're not mad about something you must be a freak. Notice how often politicians and public leaders talk about how outraged they are. Anger is not helpful. People say to me is it a sin to be angry? Well no, perhaps in some cases it's not. Paul seems to suggest it's not, it's not a sin if you don't allow yourself to be overcome by it, which would be more in the category of wrath, and if you don't hold on to it. Don't let the sun go down on your wrath. Now back in Missouri, they used to tell us kids that snapping turtles would

turn loose when the sun went down and I never had occasion to verify that, but it certainly, certainly gave me a lot to think about, snapping turtles and where I was swimming.

[Laughter]

Well maybe we should just follow the rule then of the snapping turtle and turn loose when the sun goes down. Anger in general is not a sin but who needs it? See, human culture has brought us to the point where often we feel like that it requires anger to do the right thing, to stand up, to speak the truth, to resist. You don't have to be angry to do that. I know people who feel like that they cannot punish their children unless they're angry. I've heard them say, "Well, you mean I'm just supposed to do it in cold blood?"

[Laughter]

It's a novel idea isn't it? You see it when we look at Jesus's teaching, now you begin to get a sense of how deeply he's probing, how deeply his probing. But it's the probing which will help us understand what is possible, and if we don't go deeply here we never get over the things that often dominate our lives. So I know folks who will not give up on the things they're angry about because they feel it would be so unfaithful to their past self. That if they didn't stay angry about what happened to them, that this would be some kind of betrayal of themselves, but to be able to simply step free, not to say dumb things like, it didn't matter, it did matter. I'm wounded for life. It did matter, but in God's kingdom there is provision and I can go on and not spend the rest of my life grappling with that octopus from the past. I can just lay it down and walk off from it.

Well I wish I had time to go and more on that, but I want to just give you the categories. The next is the category of being the kind of person who would not use others sexually. This is a

matter of sexual lust and disgust it covers what we sometimes call, adultery in the heart, and divorce, which nearly always involves disgust. First thing I say to you now, notice how much things are changed here if we've already entered into a life without contempt and anger. How much of the evil in the sexual area arises from anger and contempt? I don't want to go into the garish details of this, but if you look at the dimensions the many dimensions of sexual wrong and if you think out freeing them from anger and contempt of persons, I think you'll see that nearly all of it would disappear just on that ground alone. And yet sexual anger, lust, disgust, contempt, is so it's such a great part of our lives that many people can't imagine what it would be like to live with a life free of that, a life free of it. Of course there have been terrible, terrible things taught and practiced in the past in the name of Christianity about sex that are wrong and harmful.

Basically what we're talking about here is how to love one another in the context of sexual relations. Jesus's first teaching is about the heart. Again he says the old law says, "If you commit the overt act you are wrong. But I say to you that if you use another person to stimulate your lusts then you already have something badly wrong in your heart." And what is that? It is the readiness to do evil, it is the willingness to do evil, it is the delight and the evil that allows our hearts and minds to be absorbed in it, so that if the condition is right then we would do it.

See what Jesus is pointing out is how we are really what we are on the inside, not what we do on the outside. What we do on the outside is important, but that's not all that is important. Now, there's a tremendous amount of misunderstanding about this, this passage does not say that it is wrong to be tempted sexually. This is not talking about being tempted sexually. This is talking about a willing engagement in a lustful process. They didn't have Playboy magazine's then, but it was only a matter of technique and the use of another person to stimulate one's own sexual lust, Jesus says, shows, that you could not possibly be loving that individual. Conversely

loving that person will be a certain ground for you not doing that. When it comes to divorce, my own feeling here is that we've severely misread these divorce messages. Jesus was addressing what was certainly true in that day, that you could not, in a loving way, divorce someone. And it's always wrong to divorce in the midst of hatred and anger. All was wrong. Jesus way of putting it was to say that you force the other to commit adultery and that was largely true in the sense that you put them in a degraded position. So, what we have to learn to do now is to be the kind of person who does not think about abusing others, being disgusted with them and operating on that base. I rarely see a divorce that doesn't involve a lot of disgust and anger and it makes a hell out of it. It's not a good thing in any case whether or not it may be justified is another, is another issue. What Jesus is saying is, you can live with people on a different basis, you can live with people in such a way that you don't need to do that.

Look at the next passage quickly and I'm just trying to illustrate freedom from manipulation through swearing. Verse 33 and 37, this isn't about cussing, saying naughty things, or anything of that sort. This is about trying to overrule people's judgment by overwhelming them with language.

Look at what he says here now, verse 33.

"The old law says you will not make false vows but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord. I say to you make no oath at all. Either by heaven or has the throne of God or the earth for it is the footstool of his feet or Jerusalem for it is the city of the great king. See these are all." Why did people swear by those things? They wanted to bring them back of their statement. So they invoked God, they invoke Jerusalem, they invoke whatever is the biggest thing on the horizon. Now he says, "don't make an oath by your head." You ever hear anyone say, "I'll bet the devil my head that this car won't blow up piston for the next five hundred thousand miles."

You cannot make one hair white or black. Let your statement be yes, yes or no, no. See just say how things are. Don't try to manipulate people into things, even good things, because he says, "anything more than this comes from an evil."

This is an entirely new basis for human relations. If this were practiced the advertising industry would simply disappear and a great deal of what we call public relations among Christians, but each of us must apply to ourselves. Do we live in this spirit where we are quite content for others to reach their decisions and do what they're going to do? So we've looked at contempt and anger. We've looked at the sexual area. Jesus is teaching here, how to be free from lust and disgust. Now he's teaching us we can be free from the manipulation of others trying to overwhelm them, finagle them, manage them. Many times in our family relationships we come to the place where we can't communicate at all because there's such mistrust over this past experience that everything we say is automatically undercut by the suspicion that this is just another one of dad's attempts to make an end run and get what he wants. We come to the point where you can no longer say I love you and it means simply that, because of the corruption of communication that has come from the will to manipulate and manage.

I don't mean to take a position on this issue and I do feel sorry for Bill Clinton today because one of the things he's facing is the fact that the public has been so mistreated by the statements of political and governmental figures that you cannot stand up and simply say something today and have it be accepted. The next question is always instead of. Perhaps why should I accept this, next statement is what is he trying to do? We call these, putting spin or we have spin, spin people you know? That is he puts out a statement and then there are people who come around to put the spin on it. Right?

See this is a context that Jesus is talking about. So what you want to understand is that Jesus is addressing the main issues we deal with every moment every day. The next one is I like simply call it payback issues non payback. Get out of the mode of payback. Don't live in payback. Evil. Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. Whoever slaps you on the right cheek turned him the other also if anyone wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forced you to go one mile, go with him too and so forth. I'm going to just skip on because I want to say something about discipline now in a moment.

Chapter 6:1 through 18 very important. It all has to do with performing for human credit. That whole passage is about performing, doing your good deeds to be seen of men, praying so that others and you pray, fasting so that others will know your fasting. It's not about anyone of those folks. It's about performing. Jesus is teaching about performing. Now how much of that is a part of our lives? For me, it's not just about religious things about all of life. And what Jesus is teaching us to do is to trust God sufficiently that we can step out of the mode of performance. See our churches today are sick on performance. They perform, perform, perform. The question is how good was the performance? Who's got the best performance? So, you see we're totally out of line here. We know there to perform. That isn't the name of the game in the kingdom. We're there actually to move out of performance and be people in the kingdom of God. See the church is absolutely essential on this earth. It is here to bear witness to the truth, but if the whole style of action undermines the, we can never overcome it by the content of what we say. You know? The style of the communication if it is one performance we can never overcome that by the content of what we say. We have to move off that basis. Now, there are many reasons that go into that there are individual reasons. Why do people do their good deeds to be seen of human beings? Why do they pray the way they do and so on? To be seen of men fasting all of that. We have to come to

the recognition that we are accepted by God independently of our performances. Not trusting in physical substance that's 6:19 through 31 34. Lay of tracer in heaven. What's in heaven? Gods in heaven. When I lay up of my treasure in Heaven is not future credit, my treasure in Heaven is current cash, my treasure and heaven is God. It's my working relationship with him. It's not future, it's present or better it's present and also future. It's my security in God's hand right now. It's my access to his power to work with me to accomplish his purpose. That's my treasure in him.

Well I wish I had time to go and I don't. I must just very quickly say this. What we're looking at here is a massive transfer of habit and if you have been locked into performance righteousness you will find it extremely hard to break the hold of that, but you can do it. If you have been locked into the habit of sexual lust. You will find it hard to break the habit of that but you can do it and you can do that by taking the simple devices that you see in the life of Christ himself and learning to practice those as a way of meeting and being with him and he will teach you how for example, to live without contempt of others. He will give you a different vision of them which comes through our sense of the Kingdom of God that allows us to see, that in the kingdom of God, there is no one contemptible. No one contemptible. Allows us to see that we need not be afraid because we live in the kingdom of God. Our anger at others is largely a response of pain and fear that we receive from them or expect to receive from. In that vision you see, as we learn to live in that vision, anger and fear agapo.

When I come to see the preciousness of another person sexually, I will not abuse them. I will not think about them in that way because I am thinking about them in a different way and I may need to utilize other practices of community and fellowship, of confession appropriately handled, and these all can help me change my habits. Habits, briefly put, is changed as the result

of spiritual disciplines. Here's what a discipline is now. A discipline is something I do to help me accomplish what I cannot do by direct effort. Discipline is something I do to help me accomplish what I cannot do by direct effort. Now because we had to talk about habit and I wanted to be very specific about which habits we're dealing with. I can't say much about spiritual discipline as such. But I will say simply this, that if you learn to follow Christ into his practices, if you learn from the church as a whole about the kinds of things you can do to help you change your habits, you will find that there is a rich store of practical advice which will work.

Just one case. I so delight in introducing people to silence and I do that because I have seen people's lives transformed. I've seen atheists come to solid belief in God by being told in the midst of their troubled existence. To simply go into silence and be quiet. See God will not compete for our attention by and large. We have to make the choice of spiritual discipline if we want to see our habits changed. It will be made appropriate to us. We are not all the same the disciplines are not acts of righteousness. If you don't need them, thank God you don't need them and go and do what you do need. There are not laws. They are practices by which we interface with God in such a way that our habits are changed.

Now think of it if you're troubled by lust I will tell you that you can learn to see lust as a foolish activity. You can learn to see it as inappropriate and it's when we begin to see sin as stupid that it begins to really drop off. But that's what it is, it's stupid. to uda to use the other to use a woman, another person as a means for exciting my lust, if you were able to put that on a cartoon and look at it you would laugh at it. Because it's so stupid. Especially when you see that you have here to immortal spiritual beings. It's stupid. Now caught up in the way the world does it. We can't see it in that way. So you say you have to go through the training, which you choose by entering the disciplines with a spiritual life that will allow you to see things the way they are.

It is finally vision that changes us, vision. It is finally vision that changes us and the spiritual disciplines are a place in which we can have the vision of God learn to live face to face with that vision. And when we do that, we will find that we have become slaves of righteousness. And so thankful to be a slave of righteousness and to be done with all that other stuff. No hearts will ache to give the same thing to those around us. So, we know the solution to the deepest problems of life. That's why Biola exists. It's because it has this precious word holding forth the word of life, and when we experience it and we know the reality of it then we're ready to give it just naturally to let it come out. Because the deeper levels of our whole person bear witness to the truth.

Is not what we say by speaking what we say without saying anything at all that provides the basis for the word to be given to change the soul. I think the amount of time.

Dear Lord Jesus Christ, we're so glad that you came. We're so glad that you came. We're glad that you have let us know who we are. Help us to overcome the impositions of an illusory and misleading world, fill our bodies with righteousness that we may glorify you in our bodies and in our spirits. That your incarnational reality will be extended, that your eternal purposes will be accomplished. Lord we can't see around the bend. We don't know what you have next in store for your people, but we don't want to miss it. Keep us on the edge. Even if we don't know what it means. Keep us there because you know our heart is for you. Everyone here, let us know the pulsing of eternal life, in the name of your son Jesus, we ask it. Amen.

[Applause]