

Words of Encouragement, Sept 8th 2015

Food for Thought: *Liturgy puts a brake on narcissism and protects us from simply making worship into a self-pleasing act.*

Without Divine Illumination, Theology Is Dead: *'I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God.'* 1 Corinthians 2:5

A. W. Tozer says ('Renewed Day by Day' excerpts from *The Divine Conquest* reading for September 9) 'Surely God has something to say to the pure in heart which he cannot say to the person of sinful life. But what he has to say is not theological, it is spiritual, and spiritual truths cannot be received in the ordinary way of nature!' (*This is particularly important today because we have a tendency to hide behind what we regard as safe fixed historical theology. Our motivation in doing so may be good and honourable but it can have the unfortunate result of making us unwilling, or unable, to hear what God is saying today. Bill*)

'The natural person does not receive the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto them; neither can they know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' So wrote the Apostle Paul to the believers in Christ at Corinth. Jesus referred to this kind of Spirit-enlightened knowledge many times. To him it was the fruit of a divine illumination, not contrary to, but altogether beyond mere intellectual light. The necessity for spiritual illumination before we can grasp spiritual truth is taught throughout the entire New Testament and is altogether in accord with the teaching of the Psalms, the Proverbs and the Prophets. The New Testament draws a sharp line between the natural mind and the mind that has been touched by divine fire. When Peter made good his confession, *'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,'* Jesus replied, *'Blessed are thou, Simon Bar-jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.'*

What I am saying is that there is an illumination [of the mind], divinely bestowed, without which theological truth is information and nothing more. While this illumination is never given apart from theology, it is entirely possible to have theology without the illumination! We can see this in looking back through history and identifying theology influenced by historical cultural factors in contradiction to the spiritual. So! How much does our fear of 'losing control' hinder our spiritual growth and block our ability to hear the voice of God today?

We don't have to run away to go prodigal; we just have to believe that intimacy with God is based on rule keeping.

NO MORE FAKING IT - Get off the performance treadmill and focus on Jesus.

'Bounded-set/centred-set' are anthropological terms coined in the 1970's by Dr. Paul Hiebert, a missiologist and anthropologist, to describe types of culture a missionary may encounter. A 'bounded-set' is rigid, often blocking people's acceptance. i.e. There are specific things that must never be done and specific things that must always be done in order for a person to fit in. The 'centred-set' culture is much more relational, more fluid, making it easier to enter.

How do such things impact the Christian church today? Most of us born in the 1940's and 1950's grew up trying to do spirituality in a bounded-set, and all it did was to frustrate us and drive many of us away from Jesus, not to him, and to the edges of the Christian church, or beyond. I believe in transformation, sanctification, and the deeper life - but am convinced that a 'bounded-set' will never create that. I do not propose cheap grace or 'easy believe-ism'. I want radical disciples who, in contrast to the rich young ruler, are willing to sell it all for Jesus. But I don't think we get those radical disciples the way we used to think we did; we need a new perspective on how that happens.

Author Robert Mulholland in *Invitation to a Journey*, wrote: 'Spiritual formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ' (i.e. growing in Christlikeness). This implies outside pressure, but I think spiritual formation happens from the inside out, and not just for ourselves but for those around us. Therefore, my modification is: **'Spiritual formation is a process of being transformed into the image of Christ for the sake of others.'**

Transformation is a relational process. Our transformation - sanctification - was never meant to be accomplished through a set of principles and regulations. The apostle Paul traded the bounded-set of Old Testament Judaism for a relationship with Jesus. In Philippians 3:7 Paul wrote: ***'I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.'***

Paul did not find in Jesus the self-righteousness that comes from doing the right things and avoiding the wrong. The only thing law does is show us how broken we are and drive us to a person, Jesus. Transformation comes *'through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God is by faith.'* Paul wrote, *'Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!'* Phil. 3:8-11.

Radical disciples are sold out for Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul again contrasts the New Covenant with the Old Covenant, which caused adherents to cover their faces

with a veil. But in the New Covenant, the veil comes off. Believers come into the presence of God **just as they are, not as they should be.** *'For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord - who is the Spirit - makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.'*

[growth in 'Christlikeness' again!]

The secret of transformation is coming into God's presence, sin and all. In the New Covenant we don't run away from God; we run to him, walking in the light. No, we are not perfect; we just don't fake it anymore.

Yes, centred-set relational transformation is not as tidy as a bounded-set series of regulations. In a bounded-set we begin to believe that if we follow the rules we are OK. As Christians, there are things we want to embrace or avoid, but in bounded-set, the list develops: go to church, tithe, read the Bible, pray every day, etc. Certainly these are good things, but sadly, people's discipleship model revolves around checking off both sides of that list, thereby including or excluding other believers. Behavioural expectations become norms for the group. In a bounded-set culture, image is everything. **But when the way things appear is all important, the way things really are never gets dealt with.** The by-word for the bounded-set is 'behave.' By following the rules, people think they're OK - but nothing is further from the truth, the reality.

[More to follow] The above comes from 'Alliance Life' Volume 150 No.02 March/April 2015 by Dr. Ron Walborn, Dean of Alliance Theological Seminary and the College of Bible and Christian Ministries at Nyack (New York) College. The remainder of this very valuable article will be included in the weekly Encouragement emails for 20th Sept. and 11th Oct. It will be well worth the effort to make this article available to the widest possible readership. Bill

"Paul did not find in Jesus the self-righteousness that comes from doing the right things and avoiding the wrong.

The only thing the law does is show us how broken we are and drive us to a person - Jesus."

'Frequently in a journey of the soul, the most precious moments are the mistakes. They bring us to a place which we would otherwise have always avoided. We should bring a compassionate mindfulness to our mistakes and wounds. If we visit this configuration of our soul with forgiveness in our heart, it will fall into place its self. When we forgive our self, the inner wounds begin to heal. We come out of the exile of hurt into the joy of inner belonging. John O'Donohue 'Anam Cara' p.225

Racism in any form, and gender discrimination in any form, are serious wounds in the perpetrators that inflict deep wounds on others. Both need healing! They very often are present together in the one person. And sadly not nearly enough Christians have the conviction and the courage to call them both what they are - evil! Bill

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you: wherever he may send you; may he guide you through the wilderness: protect you through the storm; may he bring you home rejoicing: at the wonders he has shown you; may he be bring you home rejoicing: once again into our doors.

The 'Blessing' from the Daily Office: Morning Prayer of the Northumbria Community [the music this blessing is set to is beautiful! Bill]

Isn't it clear that Christians ought to be radical, revolutionary, counter-cultural people?

Please consider who you might be able to forward all or any of the above to as an encouragement. In addition think of those who you feel might find it challenging rather than comforting! Now, please send it to everyone you have thought of regardless of your feelings about their understanding or acceptance - trust God. Bill