

Series: Ruin to Renovation	Reference: Various Passages	Title: The Emperor's New Clothes	Date: 06.03.18
Website Writeup: This week we look at how the surrendered will develops the Character of Christ in us!			

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Thanks to Dallas Willard, this series is born out of his book, *Renovation of the Heart*. Many of his thoughts & words make it into these sermons; read the book as you follow along.

Many years ago there was an Emperor so fond of new clothes, he spent all his money & time on being well dressed. One day two swindlers came to town claiming to be weavers who could weave the most magnificent fabrics imaginable. Not only were their colors & patterns uncommonly fine, but clothes made of their cloth would become invisible to anyone unfit for their office, or unusually stupid. "Those would be just the clothes for me. If I wore them I could tell wise men from fools," thought the Emperor. He paid the two swindlers a large sum of money to make him an outfit.

They set up two looms & pretended to weave, although there was nothing on the looms. The Emperor sent advisors to check progress & although they saw nothing, they couldn't admit it for fear of being seen as stupid, or unfit for office. So they all brought back glowing reports. "Oh it's wonderful, such patterns & the most attractive colors - you'll certainly be pleased, your majesty."

When it seemed they'd taken long enough they pretended to take the cloth off the loom. Made cuts in the air with scissors & said, "The Emperor's clothes are ready." The Emperor came with noblemen. The swindlers raised their arms as if to be holding something, "These are the trousers, the coat & the mantle. Light as spider web. One would almost think he had nothing on, but that's what makes them so fine." The noblemen agreed, although they actually saw nothing. "If Your Majesty will disrobe, we'll help with your new clothes in front of the mirror."

He of course saw nothing, but couldn't admit it. He disrobed; they pretended to put the garments on. He looked at himself nervously, knowing he'd have to go before the city. Which he did. All his subjects gathered that day knew of the claims, that if you couldn't see the clothing it meant you're stupid, or unsuitable. So, everyone feigned wonder at the sight of the clothes as the Emperor stepped out stark naked in front of the crowd....all except, one child who said, "But the Emperor's not wearing any clothes!" The parents tried to silence the child, but damage was done, everyone had to agree, the Emperor had no clothes...

John Calvin once said, "The only haven of safety is to have no other will, no other wisdom, than to follow the Lord wherever he leads. Let this, then, be the first step, to abandon ourselves, and devote the whole energy of our minds to the service of God."

Jesus reflects this in John 8:29, ²⁹ *The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.* Jesus was the epitome of devotion & obedience

to God the Father. Every bit of His Person; character, will, actions, thought, feeling, etc., directed towards the Father's Will.

Paul, following Jesus into that obedience wrote in Galatians 2:20, *²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

According to Paul, this isn't pop-psychology, or self-help; it's a statement of spiritual reality - something's been done in Paul & also in us who've come under Christ's reign. Jumping to Galatians 5:24-25 he reiterates this idea, *²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.* So, due to this new spiritual reality in Christ, Paul claims we now have the power to turn away from destructive sinful patterns (to crucify them), and walk in the will of Christ.

Today we begin to look at the Will (Heart/Spirit) & Character. We're beginning to see, the person reflecting Christ-likeness has a thought-life centered on God, with thoughts focused on & guided by His revealed Truth & Spirit. Their feelings in line with living under the conditions of love, peace, joy, faith & hope - with the emotions associated with these conditions being dominant in them.

They can say what Paul said, I've been crucified with Christ, now my will & everything else about me is directed towards Christ's life within me. In the journey of faith, we realize the Will is dependent on the content of the Mind; the thoughts & feelings which govern it. What we think & feel are very much a matter of what we allow ourselves to think & feel. Our life's direction is very much a matter of the direction of our Will which can be instrumental in giving direction to the future thoughts & feelings of our minds. In the redeemed person the Will becomes a creative agent of change. We can use our will to *envision* a changed life in Christ, to foster an *intent* to see that change happen, and set our will on the *means* to get there.

This is why Colossians 2:8 warns us to, *⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.* Be careful of what you give your mind to, leading to what you do. Think about how you think. Take all thoughts captive to the revealed Word of God, and the message of Christ.

We're not alone in this, Jesus promised an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, in Jn 14:15-17, *¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*

This isn't just self-help; the spiritual reality is, we have God's own divine Spirit living within us, testifying constantly to the message of Christ, leading us into Truth. *It's why 2 Corinthians 10:5 tells us, ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.* Visioning what is good, right & of God, with the intention to follow him in that & utilizing the means to get there (Word, Prayer, Holy Spirit, Body of Christ, etc).

In speaking of Character, we only have to look as far credit reports, resumes, security deposits & mortgage contracts. Character's why we have contracts. Documents, such as these, typically reveal character, or guard against unknown character. Character's the inner Self as seen through the lens of longterm patterns of behavior. Do you pay your bills, keep your promises, show commitment, or have addiction issues, etc. Character will reveal itself in the long run, always does. It's why we can look back on a persons life & pretty much guess how they will react in future situations. Not soothsaying, but pattern recognition.

It's why we said last week, you can't cut corners in spiritual formation; you can't fake true change for long. A person who's not truly grown in the fruit of goodness will be found not to be good, even if they've tried desperately to look good on the outside. Character's like steam building in a pot, eventually it finds its way out through the weakest point. Revealing itself in the trauma of life to be either good or bad, nurtured or neglected, Christ-like or not.

The good news is, Character can be changed, although it has much to do with surrendering negative thoughts & feelings which control us; a process we refer to as repentance. Repentance is defined as a turning away from one thing, and turning to another. Turning away from sin & disobedience, turning towards Jesus in obedience. The process of crucifying the old self is why just using will power doesn't work - this isn't just self-help, or behavioral negotiation, but a literal work of the Spirit & God's Word on our hearts. It's God cutting the cancerous material out of our spiritual lives to bring health & vitality back where there was once deadness & atrophy.

We must do a little more internal work than just willing something to happen; or maybe better said, allowing the Spirit & the Word of God to do their work in us - spiritual heart surgery. We must recognize the wrongly directed thoughts & feelings of our hearts which lead to wrong behavior & surrender them at the cross. Allowing them to be crucified there - which is to live by the Spirit & revealed Word of God. It's confessing the sin of Adam, that I thought I knew best how to live, but don't. Allowing God to show me the way of true life as he reveals it by his Word & leads by his Spirit. The Word is like our roadmap & the Spirit is like the Trip Navigator sitting beside us as we drive. Our job is to listen well & turn the body in the directions in which they guide us.

That is to live out of Galatians 5:24-25, ²⁴ *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* ²⁵ *Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.* To have a single-minded devotion towards God's will, brings with it a commitment to the good of others, creating in us Christ-likeness. **Producing that** which is reflective of what Jesus said when asked, "What's the greatest commandment?" His answer, to love God & love neighbor (Mt 22:34-40). In other words, in spiritual formation we're shooting for the life of Christ produced in us which all of the Law & Prophets hang upon - it's that intense, important & profound of a change done in us by the Spirit & Living Word.

Paul says it like this in Romans 13:14, ¹⁴ *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.* When our will's

governed by the healthy life-giving thoughts & feelings in line with God's will, we're putting on the character of Christ & will naturally react in ways Jesus did; **doing things pleasing to the Father; fulfilling Romans 12:1-2 where we're called to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God.** These concepts line directly up with our church's mission, vision & purpose statements; *to follow Jesus, to live as Jesus did, and to manifest Jesus to others.* Since love & devotion are revealed in emulation & obedience - which means to follow & imitate Jesus in all ways. And to truly believe something, you naturally reveal it to others. So we can't help but manifest Jesus to others!

This stands in stark contrast to the world's way of character development which is marked usually by indifference, confusion, duplicity, or darkness at best. Character growing out of, and feeding upon pride & fear, leading to destructive habits - bad character, as opposed to good. Character enslaved to desire, not Truth.

Our will, heart, or spirit is that which is uniquely us & sets us apart, making us different than all other things in the world. Our will brings things into existence, and is tied to our imagination & the creative nature of God. We were created in God's image, created to be creators of good ourselves, therefore, the will is something special. It's our ability to consent, or not, to the things of this world - it's the core of our nonphysical being, our spirit, our heart. It's the power to select what we think on & how intently we do it. From the will/heart/spirit the whole self's directed & organized. It's the core of us.

Character develops from the Will since certain things will become habitual & automatic, and therefore, a part of character. Character's revealed in what we feel & do without thinking. If my will consents to thinking the worst of everyone, I'll operate out of habitual distrust, fear & anger. I'll grow into habitual outbursts & cutting words. If the will consents to repentance however, Jesus has the freedom to crucify these things, breaking the cycle & bringing change for a more loving helpful demeanor.

The will is so unique, God doesn't force it - since to do so would lose precisely that which God intended it to bring about - a freely chosen character. We must surrender our will. Because freely chosen character is the essence of love & devotion. When I willingly set my will to follow Him, I'm being loving of him, which in turn drives me to love others. Surrender communicates trust, a trust in his love, because perfect love drives out fear. It's the killing off of pride in me, bringing a humility which says the Created needs the Creator.

Our will gives us dignity. Someone once said we're all *deserving* of death (in our sin), but *worthy* of grace at the same time - true. Christ died paying the necessary penalty for sin, but he did that since, being created in his image, we're worthy of his grace. We're worth the effort, God loves us. He's given us dignity, remembering the lengths he went in order to show us our worth seen in **Hebrews 12:2b, *For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.***

Will is seen, expressed & vehemently guarded in personal choice. Americans like freedom of choice. We guard it strongly. It's why governments & systems which take away human choice, squashing the will, we regard as dehumanizing, since they take

away the very essence of what it means to be human. The creative will to choose. But human will unredeemed, undirected, or unguided, in that which humanity regards as loving or good brings about conflict between wills too & births great evil as well.

Dallas Willard says, *“What we call civilization is a smoldering heap of violence constantly on the verge of bursting into flame. That is the true picture of the fallen human will.”* This is why worldly justice without the kingdom reign of God isn’t truly loving, there’s always requirement to hate another for your ‘justice’ to take shape.

When the human will is unhinged from the Divine, as it was in The Fall, it’s destructive to self & others even in the things it tries to do which, on the outside, are considered ‘good’. It’s governing condition is one of pride, fear, malice or indifference. As we said last week, God is love & to will to be like God, is to grow into true divine love. **But we must remember love without truth lies & truth without love kills. Or, as Timothy Keller put it, “Truth without love is imperious self-righteousness. Love without truth is cowardly self-indulgence. Both are selfish.”**

God gets to define what being loving is, as He reveals it to us firstly by his Word & then allowing that Word to come to life through his Spirit as we walk through life’s situations & relationships. Godly love has it’s will set on the character of Christ from which truth & love originate, and are found.

As it says in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, *⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸Love never fails.* But that’s not just romantic poetry to be read at weddings. Love has teeth in the Scriptures. Love respectfully & kindly tells the truth even when it doesn’t feel good. True love doesn’t let another go down a destructive path without proper warning & gentle caring redirection. True love doesn’t just give freedom to do whatever a person wants, it’s directed to the character of Christ & emulates & follows him in love - it allows God to define what’s healthy & good for all in life.

When our will surrenders to God’s love, our character’s formed into the likeness of Christ. Christ’s transforming love challenges the attitudes of the heart, crucifying that which is not of Him, and replacing it with that which is. It’s not that I lose my uniqueness, or identity, rather I’m found in Christ to be what I was truly formed to be!

The problem is, for so long we’ve believed lies about ourselves; our character & will. That the ways in which we’ve thought, regarded situations, ourselves & others, is simply the way it is - no changing it. When in reality, the sinful self has been lying to us the whole time. Had hold of us. We need to shout clearly, “The Emperor has no clothes!” To see the naked visage of Satan standing before us & feeding us lies. God created us for greater things, better things & put us together as one body, the Church, to reflect his glory in the world. And the sooner we stop going along with cultural groupthink, claiming the Emperor looks so grand in his nakedness, the sooner we can as individuals & the Church start to reflect Jesus more grandly ourselves!

As John Calvin said, “The only haven of safety is to have no other will, no other wisdom, than to follow the Lord wherever he leads. Let this, then, be the first step, to abandon ourselves, and devote the whole energy of our minds to the service of God.”

Let us abandon all false kings & follow Jesus, the one true king! Jeremiah 17:9 says, ⁹*The heart is deceitful above all things & beyond cure. Who can understand it? But he follows with v10 which says, ¹⁰ “I the Lord search the heart & examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.”* Evangelicals have long been too afraid of the word ‘deed’, not wanting to be caught in a works based righteousness. But the truth is, God didn’t go through all this to have us just know more, he meant for our hearts to be changed, leading to loving action.

¹ John 3:16-24 says, ¹⁶*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers & sisters. ¹⁷If anyone has material possessions & sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions & in truth.* This is Christ-like character originating from the changed heart - an active powerful divine love originating from the person of God who has already been changed by Christ! It continues...

¹⁹*This is how we know that we belong to the truth & how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: ²⁰If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.* So, if we stand before him & feel the conviction that our will has not bent before his as of yet - the promise is that he’s greater than our will!

²¹*Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²²and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands & do what pleases him. ²³And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴The one who keeps God’s commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.*

That’s a good place to end, the person who’s will has been surrendered to Christ, allowing him to regenerate their dead heart, is being realigned with the heart of God! Action always follows a changed heart - behavior then becomes glorifying to God instead of duplicitous, secret, shameful, or confused at best. It’s the person who walks with God by keeping in step with the Spirit. Surrendered will, leading to Christ-like character.

Let me pray for us now.