

DESIRE FOR GOD

By

Curtis Dickinson

Something is to be learned by comparing modern church programs with the teachings of Christ. When the woman taken in adultery was brought before Him, he spent no time in rehearsing all the sordid things that messed up her life. No group therapy was recommended, nor was she told to analyze herself and join a singles' class. "Go and sin no more," He said.

Nicodemus was scolded for his ignorance and instructed in being begotten from above, but there was no lecture on personality development. He was not left to concentrate upon himself, but upon the Lord. The result was that he finally became a believer.

The rich young ruler seemed to have the right ambition, and he could have realized it, had he not been so preoccupied with himself and his things. The solution was simple: just forget it all and follow Jesus. Instead he went away in sorrow. Had he only focused his attention upon Jesus, his possessions would have appeared at their true worth and he would have had power to turn his life to the Master's use.

Christ did not solve problems by trying to unravel all the complicated strands of sin and injustice that prevailed and the many things that might have contributed to their condition. Rather, He had people focus their faith and desires upon God that they might learn and do his will. "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me..." He went even farther when He said that one would find life by losing it for His sake. What is this but to cease reaching for all the solutions of men, and just reach for God what He offers. It is summed up by Jesus Himself: "Seek you first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

RISKY TECHNIQUE. Some of the programs promoted in churches as self-improvement opportunities not only fail to accomplish the goal, but often have the very opposite effect to what the church desires. Many of these programs are closely akin to sensitivity training. This technique was originated by the Russian genius, Pavlov, and was developed for the purpose of conditioning Russian citizens for communism. Originally it was called "conditioned reflex." Later it was adopted by the communist Chinese and successfully used to realign loyalties and break down former moral and social attitudes. Critics labeled it "brainwashing." For several years it has been used in the .S.A. under the title "sensitivity training" and more recently called "group criticism" and other less sinister names, but it amounts to the same thing.

The technique involves self-criticism, confessions, accusations, and general criticism before a group, usually in sessions that last for hours and hours with no let-up, so that fatigue helps to break down inhibitions and normal conscious defense systems. After being in a group where all one's mistakes, faults, sins and thoughts are exposed and attacked from every angle, a person no longer trusts himself or anyone else. He is ready for converting to whatever ideology his leaders present. Often the group is directed to act out situations, some of which might be offensive under ordinary circumstances. This is

called “role playing” and may involve bodily contact between the sexes, with everyone encouraged to “touch” and “feel.”

Well-meaning but wrong-directed church leaders have adopted some of the techniques and applied them in work shops and seminars attended by those hoping to be helped with marriage problems, personal problems and problems of leadership. People are easily lured to such sessions in hopes of finding a quick and easy solution to some of the most complex problems of living, with a minimum of sacrifice and suffering.

But all such efforts are wrong-ended. They focus on people and the more one is made to fix attention on himself and the chaotic condition of the world, the less orientated to God he becomes.

Studies, sermons and group activities which are designed to change personalities and give satisfying and exciting experiences often succeed in inflating egos rather than glorifying Christ and drawing people to Him.

GOD THE CENTER. We are created to be in the image of God, to live in a mind-to-mind relationship with Him. All other aims and efforts work against this purpose and lead man farther away from his proper and natural place. God is the center of His creation and as man wanders farther from God, he also widens the gap between himself and others, as the spokes of a wheel are wider apart the greater the distance they are from the hub. The more we engage in the complexities of the world, which is predominantly alienated from God, the less we are able to keep our attention and our desires fixed on the Creator. The frantic effort being exerted through lectures, books, and training sessions to enable people to find peace, fellowship, and success in relationships continues to leave people alienated and lonely. The problem would be solved by these people following the Lord’s direction to fix their attention on Him and bring their lives into close fellowship with Him. Those who are drawn close to the Lord are drawn close to one another.

It is a strange twist of logic that says we can do best the will of God while studying all the ambitions and impulses of man. To focus upon people is to be influenced by people. The right way for every person is the way the Lord has revealed through Christ; therefore, Christ ought to be the subject of our studies and not man. The process of attaining perfection as a human being is to concentrate on the Creator, to adore him and submit oneself continually and totally to His will, seeking ever to be filled more and more with His mind and His purpose. To Abraham God said, “Walk before me and be you perfect” (Gen. 17:1). Perfection is to walk before God, to listen to God, to love God and to desire His will above all else.

In no way is this to be interpreted to mean that the Christian is to become a recluse, sealed off from people and their needs, while he spends his life in meditation and prayer. What it says is that if one is to reflect the light of Christ he first must come to that light and be bathed in it until he is absorbed in it and by it. Only then will he dispense that light because it permeates his thoughts, desires and actions. Too often the process is turned around, with teachers and leaders so concentrating on the people, their psychological make-up and the contributing factors to their problems that they lose sight of the glory of God to which all are to aspire.

Our sympathies are sharpened and our understanding of other peoples’ needs is deepened as we look to Jesus, and in being drawn closer to Him are enabled to see things from his point of view.

ANSWERING OR DILEMMAS. When David was hiding in the wilderness with King Saul in hot pursuit trying to kill him, with the future of the kingdom in the balance, David's foremost desire was not power over Saul nor relief from his hard circumstances, but that he might have a greater realization of the presence of God. "O God, thou art my God; earnestly will I seek thee: my soul thirsts for thee, my flesh longs for thee...so have I looked upon thee in the sanctuary to see thy power and thy glory...my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night-watches" (Psa. 63:1, 5-6). David understood that all the mighty army of Saul was nothing to God and that his own safety and success did not depend upon the power and strategy of his own guerilla force of 600 men, but upon God. He knew that God is sovereign and that no one can defeat His purpose. "The horse is prepared against the day of battle, but victory is of the Lord" (Prov. 21:31).

This fact still applies. No matter how great our military power, the safety of our nation will still depend upon the Lord. Instead of debate in congress over defense appropriations, the effort would be better spent in considering means of bringing our nation to repentance and faith in God. But whether or not the nation ever turns to God, and there is no evidence of this probability, any individual may still do so, and find victory. Malcolm Muggeridge wrote, "Even though, as may very well prove to be the case, our civilization, like others before it, soon finally flickers out, and institutional Christianity with it, the light Christ shed shines as brightly as ever for those who seek an escape from the darkness. The truth he spoke will answer their dilemmas and assuage their fears, bringing hope to the hopeless, zest to the despairing, and love to the loveless, precisely as happened two thousand years ago, and through all the intervening centuries."

Answers are not found in a consensus of the group nor a poll of the people, but in the One, Christ.

DEPENDING ON GRACE. To every Christian Paul writes, "Your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). To be hid with Christ is to humble oneself, to recognize himself as totally dependent upon the lord and to exalt Him above all that he knows. It is to follow the example of Paul, who said that he counted as less than worthless all his worldly position and accomplishments and was deliberately forgetting the past and "pressing on the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14).

His view was diametrically opposed to the prevailing one of looking to human authority (either church or government) for security and freedom. To live in dependence upon the state or in fear of the state's collapse is a mark of idolatry. It is the Lord Himself who judges nations and promises ultimate destruction of all who are alienated from him. Peace and freedom are properties of the Creator. Only those who are in fellowship with Him have an guarantee to safety.

Our first duty and privilege is to draw close to Him, and be so bound to Him that to live at all is to live for God, "looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). Power to live for God is drawn from God as we draw near to Him.

We were created to be in His image, and ultimately God will accomplish His purpose. Having fallen so far from the original holy perfection of God, in our marred, mortal and finite nature, we live only by His grace, and have no Savior and no hope but the Lord. If we have sense enough to realize this we will fly to him as fast as possible and seek, at any cost, to be joined to him by every command and every cord of love, that we

may draw closer and closer until at last we are made to be “like Him” and are brought face to face into His presence for eternity.

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