

## Preface

- **Individual renewal** is indissolubly connected to the **renewal of the whole church**. We cannot attain the fullness of the Spirit without being turned inside out so that our focus is no longer our growth, but the glory of God and the growth of Christ's kingdom (10).
- **Faith is the main root of spiritual growth**. Spiritual disciplines strengthen faith by leading us to prayer and by regularly exposing us to truth, as a solar battery is charged through exposure to light ... [individual renewal] ... needs to be balanced by the awareness we are spiritually renewed as we are refreshed by the gifts of other believers in community and as the Holy Spirit is poured out in answer to corporate prayer (10).
- Spiritual growth is not produced by the transfer of information but by responses of faith (11).

## Chapter 1

### Spiritual Self-Centeredness

- Society isn't changed, crime rate still high, drug use rampant—where is our impact?
- "It is difficult to get people steadily involved in anything but their own spiritual life" (17).
- Me-generation—so wrapped up in tapes, courses, and methods on how to be a better Christian—becomes the end and not the means (18).

### The Goal of Authentic Spirituality

- "To become absorbed in the love of God and other persons" (18)
- "The essence of spiritual renewal is the love of God poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5) (18)
- The substance of real spirituality is love. It is not our love but God's "that moves into our consciousness, warmly affirming that He values and cares for us with infinite concern . . . and sweeps us away from self-preoccupation into a delight in His unlimited beauty and transcendent glory. It moves us to obey Him and leads us to cherish the gifts and graces of others" (18).
- Paul tells us that love is a far more reliable measure of spirituality than our gifts or works or theological acuity, and it is one of the few things that last forever (1 Cor. 13:8, 13). And Jesus says that the highest fulfillment of the will of God in our lives is to love God with heart and soul and mind and strength, and to care for others as we care for ourselves (Mk. 12:30-31).

### God at the Center

- Calvin's knowledge of God & self—"realistic self-examination leads to an awareness of limits, which also drives us to consider God ... only by fixing our attention on God can we accurately know ourselves—both the graces he has given us and the depth of our needs" (19).
  - Without Knowledge of Self, There Is No Knowledge of God: "Our poverty conduces to a clearer display of the infinite fullness of God ... Thus a sense of our ignorance, vanity, poverty, infirmity, depravity, and corruption, leads us to perceive and acknowledge that in the Lord alone are to be found true wisdom, solid strength, perfect goodness, and unspotted righteousness... Nor can we really aspire toward him, till we have begun to be displeased with ourselves"
  - Without Knowledge of God, There Is No Knowledge of Self: "Again, it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize self... Suppose we but once begin to raise our thoughts to God, and to ponder his nature, and how completely perfect are his righteousness, wisdom, and power—the straightedge to which we must be shaped. Then, what masquerading earlier as righteousness was pleasing in us will soon grow filthy in its consummate wickedness. What wonderfully impressed us under the name of wisdom will stink in its very foolishness. What wore the face of power will prove itself the most miserable weakness. That is, what in us seems perfection itself corresponds ill to the purity of God"
- "But a more direct vision of his glory produces a holy fear, an awe not so much of his power as of his purity" (20).
- (Job 42:5-6, NLT) I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes. I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance.
- (Isa 6:5) Woe to me! I cried. I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.
- "The pathway to God lies across the track of [our] own nothingness (Tauler, as cited p.20).

## The Fear of the Lord

- "Awareness of God's holiness and the depth of our sin is the precondition of personal renewal" (20). *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding* (Prov. 9:10)
- "The mighty acts of God combined with exposure to his law were designed to produce a humble awareness of human sin and divine goodness. The spiritual goal of the OT is called "the fear of the Lord" (21-21).
- Figure 1—Dynamics of Spiritual Life (21).
  - Awareness of God's holiness—his holy justice & holy love
  - Awareness of Our Depth of Sin—in self & world
- God's holiness = His "differentness" = "separate or distinct" (21)
  - His nature—3 in 1: "But the mystery of God's nature is that individuality and the loving society of the family are both mirrored in his identity"
  - His glory is the goal for which everything else exists—(Rom. 11:36)—*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*
  - His attributes are the infinite standard against which all other limited perfections are measured:
    - God is not beautiful. He is beauty.
    - God is not loving. He is love.
- "The NT, though it takes for granted that God is just, says "God is love," not "God is justice" (22).
- "The maternal side of God's nature—the impulse which cherishes the potential in children when the paternal impulse of exact justice might disinherit them—is evident in Jesus' lament over the flawed leaders of the Old Covenant" [Matt. 23:37] (23).
- "The maternal image of patience and mercy is strongly present in the OT portrait of God (Hosea 11:1, 3, 8-9) ... Even the paternal side of God's nature in the OT is softer than the common image (Ps 103:8, 10-11, 13)" (23-24).
- The major and minor prophets ... are an amazing revelation of the mixed emotions in the heart of God—holy love towards human beings, and the holy anger against their destructive sin and injustice" (24-25).
- "Jesus' persistent warnings of divine judgment of unrepentant sinners, not merely within time but for eternity, are echoed by all the NT writers—even by John, the apostle of love. Although the New Covenant accents God's grace, it retains the OT emphasis on justice. The letter to the Hebrews makes clear that his character has not changed and that the clearer disclosure of his grace requires all the more serious obedience to his righteousness:

*30For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.... 14Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.... 25See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?... 28Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29for our "God is a consuming fire." (Heb. 10:30-31; 12:14, 25, 28-29).*

- "NT spirituality is still based on the fear of the Lord" (26).
- God's justice is always controlled and directed by his love (Rom. 8:28)... even sorrow and tragedy are not "accidents" or meaningless evils. They are strokes of discipline his love has designed to conform us more fully to the image of his Son (Phil. 3:10; Heb. 12:5-11)" (26).
- "God's judgment, as Luther says, is always his "strange work," a work alien to his essential nature of love. But when properly understood it is always consistent with that nature" (26).
- The cross = the perfect harmony of God's love & justice, which reveals ... (26-27)
  - Strictness of God's Justice—requires a propitiation for all of our sins
  - Depths of God's Love—offers his Son as the required sacrifice
  - Jesus is both the Lion and the Lamb (Rev. 5:5; 13:8)
- "Jesus, the Messiah is . . . "the face of God," the fullest revelation of his love and justice. As we focus on this revelation of God's character, we are **spiritually renewed**. God increasingly comes to dominate the center of **our consciousness**. Our **minds** will turn toward him as automatically as the compass needle seeks north. We will want our **thoughts** to be informed by his wisdom until they approximate the mind of Christ. We will want our **emotions** to respond to events as he responds, and our **actions** to embody his will" (27).
- "**This is normal and renewed spirituality**. But it does not always come easily. The human heart, even the redeemed heart, has an allergy to God. At times we want to avoid God, not only

because we want to evade doing his will, but because we retain a slavish fear of him, springing from unbelief” (27).

### Love for God

- “Beyond the presence of a healthy reverence for God and a heart set to imitate his holiness in thought, will, and emotional response, there is something more that characterizes fully **renewed spirituality**” a strong love for God kindled by an inner vision of the heart” (cf. Eph. 1:17-20).
- “This is not an experience which can be worked up by human initiative. It is a gift of sovereign grace, produced by the illuminating presence of the Spirit of God.... Every Christian should experience in measure needed to overcome sin and nourish faith, hope, and love” (28).
- **Jonathan Edwards** (28-30)—impacted through 1 Tim. 1:17—see quotes: “a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from any thing I ever experienced before.... (28); “The appearance of everything was altered .... Prayer seemed natural to me as breath by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent” (29a); “Often ... I have had very affecting views of my own sinfulness and vileness ... loud weeping ... I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to be, than by heaping infinite upon infinite, and multiplying infinite by infinite (29b); Edward’s description of his wife’s experience ... suggests a paradigm of the God-centered life ... ‘the strength was very often taken away with longings that others might love God more, and serve God better, and have more of his comfortable presence” (30).
- Augustine (30-33)
  - **“Human action is motivated by desire, by love.** “The whole life of a good Christian is a holy desire,” that is, a desire for God. ‘Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they rest in thee” (30).
  - **“But the life not centered on God is also driven by desire,** by a displaced love centered on lesser goods” (31).
  - “Alas, it is easy to want things from God and not to want God himself; as though the gift could ever be preferable to the giver.... The soul cannot rest save in that which it loves. But eternal rest is given to it only in the love of God, who alone is eternal” (31).
  - “Augustine’s spirituality is not based on the denigration of material things.... But we cannot fully appreciate created good unless our deepest love is fixed on the Good behind them. We are to use created beauty as a ladder to climb to the Creator” (31-32)
  - “Leave, then, all other desires. He who made heaven and earth is more beautiful than all things. . . . Learn, then, to love the Creator in the creature. . . . Never permit what was made by him to take such a hold upon you that you lose him by whom you yourself were made” (32).
- “The **God-centered life is spirituality** as it is meant to be. It is how we are made to live. It is how we will soon be living for eternity, freed from all our present inward restraints. If God is the **central reality** of our lives, and if our **main purpose** in living is “to glorify Him and to enjoy Him for ever,” then it is only realistic for us to live our lives increasingly with God at the center” (33).
- [RKC]—the above quote helps us to understand Hebrews 11:6-- *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

### Some Reflection Questions:

1. Share an example that illustrates the gospel truth that individual renewal is indissolubly connected to the renewal of the whole church (10).
2. What do you think about the goal of authentic spirituality is “to become absorbed in the love of God and other persons” (18)?
3. Share about your own practical experience in knowledge of God being tied to knowledge of self, and vice versa (19).
4. Reread the highlights of God’s holiness, his separateness, and his difference from us (21).
5. Reflect on Lovelace’s explanation of spiritual renewal as it relates to our God—minds, thoughts, emotions, actions (27).
6. Share your thoughts regarding Augustine’s point that human action is motivated by desire, by love (of God) (30).

7. Read and comment on John Piper's explanation of the love of God and God-centered views of sin, God's righteousness, the cross, and love:

**Therefore what is the love of God? It is the preservation and the exaltation of his own holiness for your enjoyment forever.** And what is it then to be loved by this God? It is not to be made much of, but to be given the ability, by the death and resurrection of Jesus, to enjoy making much of him forever. God loves me when he helps me be satisfied in God and not in me. God loves me when he helps me forget about me and be thrilled with Christ. God loves me when he dies in my place that I might know him and be satisfied with all that he is for me in Jesus. God loves me when he makes me passionate for his holiness. God's love for me is holy love. Therefore it exalts the infinite worth of God. It is radically God-centered.

*Don't make the mistake we made. Don't put yourself at the center of the Gospel. Put God at the center and make his holiness your passion.*

#### **A God-Centered View of Sin**

It will make all the difference in the way you view sin. Sin would not be seen first as damaging man but dishonoring God. And sin would not be seen as the choice of pleasure, but the loss of pleasure. Jeremiah 2:13: "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water."

#### **A God's-Centered View of God's Righteousness**

It will make all the difference in the way you view the righteousness of God. God would do right to the degree that he maintained an unwavering allegiance to his own infinite worth and did everything to magnify the beauty of his holiness.

#### **A God-Centered View of the Cross**

It will make all the difference in the way you see the cross of Christ. The cross will be most importantly the vindication of the righteousness of God in justifying the ungodly by faith alone. It would not be demonstration of my value, but of the dreadfulness of demeaning God's value. The cross is the revelation of God's terrible holiness and gracious protection from its wrath. The cross is the place where God's holiness changes from a fearful blast to a thing of beauty.

#### **A God-Centered View of Love**

It will make all the difference in the way you love people as God has loved you. You would not make it your aim to make much of people. You would make it your aim to help them enjoy making much of God. You would not spruce them up and give them a mirror. You would pick them up and, by the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, put them on the glorious Himalayas of God's holiness for their everlasting and ever-increasing joy. Love leads people to the holiness of God for their joy and his glory.

8. What passages move your affections for God, reminding you how good and great he is?