

Renovation series	5. Renovation of the Soul	4/9/2006
A Proper 10	Romans 8.3-4	(Preach date)
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Thesis: The death and resurrection of Jesus offer us a current life in which we can easily and routinely live as Jesus would live if he were in our place.

(This sermon is part of the series: Renovation, based on Dallas Willard's book Renovation of the Heart. I strongly recommend that you read the book.)

Windshield wiper repair story

In the fall of 1968, I was in my senior year studying electrical engineering. Robin and I were married; it was a rainy day, and the windshield wipers on my car died. The wiper motor simply would not run. I told Robin not to worry; I was almost an electrical engineer and would fix it. So I opened the hood to look at the wiper motor. It looked similar to the ones I'd seen in my textbooks, so I started fixing.

Eventually realized the problem wasn't visible from the outside. Figuring it must be inside the housing, I noticed there was one through-bolt that appeared to hold everything together. I very carefully unscrewed the thru-bolt, removed it, but I still couldn't see the problem, and I wasn't sure I could remember where all the pieces went.

So I called a repair shop. The first question he asked was: "Did you see the bolt going through the center of the housing?" "Yes." "Did you remove it?" "Yes." "Well, when the rain stops, bring your car in, and we'll sell you a new wiper motor. We'll install it. Once you take out that thru-bolt, the motor is not worth repairing."

I never did know exactly what died inside that motor, but I realized it wasn't on the surface. It was something deep in the center of the motor.

Our lives are something like that.

Eventually, we realize something is malfunctioning, and we think we can fix it ourselves. It can't be that hard. Besides, it's embarrassing to ask for help. So we try to fix it ourselves, and we fail at first. But we don't give up, we keep tinkering. Eventually, God gets our attention, and we realize that the problem is deep inside, and we can't fix it.

If we are ever to function as we were designed, someone else will need to overhaul our souls. And there's nobody better suited for the job than the one who created it. In the case of our soul, there's no repair shop; we'll need to take it back to the designer.

Do you know what our lives were intended to look like?

Around here, we believe it is meant for everyone who puts their confidence in Jesus to walk routinely and easily in the power of Christ.

This means we are designed to respond instinctively to challenges as Jesus would if he were in our place, facing the same challenge.

What would you give to have that kind of life?

Read Matt 13.45-46 (A Proper 12).

Well, we can have this life, but it will take everything we have. Actually, it will take more. Fortunately, God promises to give us the “more” ... it's called grace.

Wish I could tell you this renovation of our lives happens quickly, but usually not. Usually, it's a process.

To build this kind of life, we must give ourselves to a process of renovation in all 6 dimensions. We've covered all but body and soul. We're not going to get around to the body in this series, but after a bit of review, we'll cover the soul.

Renovation of Our Minds, our thoughts & feelings

Thoughts

Our Ideas & Images are both strongholds of evil in us!

This is where we battle with temptation.

The thought of sin is not sin; it's not even temptation.

Temptation is the thought plus the inclination. Linger over a thought and seeking it out is the inclination.

Sin is when we inwardly say “yes” to temptation, whether or not we act on it.

The way forward regarding the renovation of our thoughts:

- Memorize passages of scripture.
- Choose what we feed our minds – good images, good stories.
- Get near others who are serious about reforming their minds in Jesus' image.
Hint: You will find them in an authentic Christian church.

Feelings

We cannot master these head-on; we must start by choosing what we think about.

We must distinguish our feelings from underlying conditions. I've learned that when I feel angry, the underlying condition is fear, frustration, or hurt. The way to deal with the feelings is to identify the underlying condition and address it.

Godly feelings of a reformed mind are love, joy, and peace.

The way forward:

- Receive love, joy, peace from God AND from others already living in him.
- Identify our feelings; give feelings up to God and address underlying conditions.
- Confer with a wise Christian friend or counselor.

Renovation of Our Will

This is the aspect of us in which we are most like God, so it's not surprising that God cares most about how we use our will. Our will's primary job is to select what we think about and how intently we focus on it. It's our executive center.

In its natural state, our will is splintered. I want to lose 15 pounds; I also want a Krispy Kreme.

Al K wanted to work at a startup, live in Hollister, and get home in time for quality time with 4 kids and a wife every night. He had a splintered will, and it caused him anxiety.

A splintered will says, "How can I get my way?" Manipulation replaces transparency and goodwill.

God has a will, too. But chooses not to use it to force us to do what he wants. The consequence of ignoring God's will: addiction to our own self-conflicted will.

The way forward

- Acknowledge our splintered will.
- Learn what God's will is for us (in scripture); it's the only safe point of reference.
- Get in community with apprentices to Jesus; you'll find them in authentic Christian churches.

Renovation of Our Body

Nothing captures this better than Romans 12.1.

The Way Forward

- Release our bodies to God.
- Take good care of them.
- But do not idolize them.

Renovation of Our Social Life

Our social lives are especially contaminated by assault and withdrawal

Assault is acting against what is good for another person, even with their consent. Assault comes in many forms: physical, verbal, body language, seduction, etc.

Withdrawal occurs when we regard another's well-being and goodness with indifference. Some of us are so smooth at withdrawal that we use it to assault.

A renovated life does not use these - and has learned to disarm those who do.

The way forward

- See ourselves as God sees us: as his Beloved.
- Abandon all defensiveness. A defensive person invariably uses assault and/or withdrawal in an attempt to be personally "okay" all the time. It doesn't work.

- Abandon all pretense, all “posing.”
- Learn to bless others.

Renovation of Our Soul - today's “value-added.”

Our soul integrates and enlivens everything that is happening in the other 5 dimensions – and interfaces us with the world outside of us.

People experience our soul through:

- Our character and how we follow through on our intentions. Most people have good intentions but struggle to follow them because of underlying conflicts between thoughts, feelings, choices, bodily behaviors, and social relations.
- The meaning they observe in our lives. Meaning is one of the greatest needs of life; it's one of our deepest hungers. We can handle almost anything if our life as a whole is meaningful. Where life lacks meaning, performance is at a premium. For fleeting moments, great performance feels transcendent, but the feeling fades quickly – in sports, politics, parenting, even religion. Lives without deep meaning become obsessed with performance.

The call of an apprentice to Jesus is to become a Psalm 1 person (read it)

- Ps 1 people do not determine their steps by what those without God are saying – even their latest brilliant ideas.
- Ps 1 people know God exists in the present world. More than that: Ps 1 people know God is active in their everyday lives.
- Ps 1 people delight in the Law of God. They think the Law is beautiful, wise, and an incredible gift - not because Ps 1 people want to please God, but because God's Law genuinely pleases them.

The result is a flourishing life, like a tree planted by a stream. Surface conditions don't kill it; it bears fruit every season regardless of the conditions above ground. Apprentices to Jesus do all they can to keep their souls rooted in God, recognizing that they can do so only with God's help.

The Way Forward

Regularly plant our souls in God's soil.

- We do this rather than planting our souls in the soil of our culture!
- Read and reflect on scripture every day. It doesn't have to be a lot, but it has to be every day.
- Pray every day, committing daily to Trust God In Everything.
- Become a full player in a local church.
- Serve the weak and under-resourced.

Practice abandoning outcomes to God.

Listen to Ps 147.10-11 (no slide). We simply must rest our lives in his life; when we do, God gives us new life.

Accept that the Law of the Lord is perfect

The Law offers a picture of the reality of how things are supposed to be in God's Kingdom. It is NOT our oppressor; it is NOT one of God's ideas that failed and had to be replaced. The Old Testament is NOT a book of Law replaced by the New Testament book of grace.

Trust in the saving merits of Christ does NOT abolish the obligation to the moral law, the 10 Commandments, and the teachings of Christ in the gospels. Do NOT fall for the popular foolishness of discounting the Law; do NOT teach others to do the same.

Grace does not set aside the law, but enables us to conform to God's Law from an inwardly renovated life. After some time of living as an apprentice to Jesus, walking according to the law naturally follows.

The law is the shape of an ordinary life in the Kingdom of God...

- Made possible by Jesus' journey on Palm Sunday to Jerusalem to die for our sin,
- And the power of the resurrection makes possible our new life in Christ, a life where we routinely and easily walk in the power of Christ, a life characterized by love, joy, and peace...
- A life that looks naturally like the Law.

Tell the Greathouse story about the wife whose legalistic husband dies.

A lady was married to a very harsh, demanding husband. He gave her a list of rules specifying all the duties that she was to obey every day. Every evening, he held an inspection to point out her shortcomings of that day. Over time, her love for him grew cold and died. She was a slave, not a wife, and she lived each day in the bitter fulfillment of duties.

Perhaps providentially, her husband died. After some years, she remarried to a new husband, who was just the opposite. He was kind and tender. His primary interest in their relationship was bringing joy and fulfillment to her. Quickly, she responded in a similar fashion. One day, while cleaning out some old files, she ran upon the list of rules her first husband had given her. To her amazement, she discovered that she was fulfilling every single rule and more for her new husband.

The problem was not in the duties or rules. The problem was with the rules administrator. With her new husband, the rules had become written on her heart. In fact, she was free from the rules. The bondage was gone; the rules were simply part of a whole life expressing love to her husband.

The Spirit-administered law does not set us free from God's Law. Rather, the righteous requirements of the law are simply small parts of a whole life of love dedicated to the Lord we love.

Read Romans 8.3-4, then use Willard's interpretation of this passage as in Renovation of the Heart, p214.

The presence of the Spirit and of grace is not meant to set the law aside, but to enable conformity to it from an inwardly transformed personality. We walk in the spirit of the law, and the letter naturally follows as is appropriate. You cannot separate spirit from the law,

though you must separate spirit and law from legalism – righteousness in terms of actions...

That's it: the Renovated Life

It is made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Have you given yourself as a fully devoted apprentice to Jesus?

Sure, the death and resurrection of Christ offer us an afterlife. But more than that, they offer us a current life where we can easily and routinely live as Jesus would live if he were in our place. That is precisely the invitation God offers to every one of us.