

## **Spiritual Formation**

### **Lecture 1 Study Notes – August 19, 2008**

1. What is Christian Spirituality?

Spirituality is one of the most misunderstood and misused words in the English language. Unfortunately to most people, it is a vague term that people use to include anything they want. Therefore, before we can talk about Spiritual formation, we have to define what we mean by spirituality.

2. What does it mean for someone to be called “spiritual” or a church to be thought of as being a “spiritual church”?

3. We have a yearning for something that is truly spiritual in our world, but there is no real agreement on what is spiritual. Consequently, folks are really grasping for an understanding of the word in secular as well as religious thinking.

4. For example, I picked up a copy of a book written by Sharon Janis<sup>1</sup> entitled *Spirituality for Dummies*. She writes the book more from the eastern philosophy of spirituality and tries to make it “accessible to the seeker from all walks of life and from all faith—including those with no religious orientation at all” (page xxv). In it, she makes it clear that she wants her understanding of spirituality to quote “resonate with all doctrines and paths” (page xxv). I mention her and her book because her understanding of spirituality (and its desire to be all things to all people) is the modern day approach to spirituality.

5. In fact, the following are words as she attempts to define and differentiate between spirituality and religion:

Spirituality is the wellspring of divinity that pulsates, dances, and flows as the source and essence of every soul. Spirituality relates more to your personal search, to finding greater meaning and purpose in your existence. Some elements of spirituality include:

- Looking beyond outer appearance to the deeper significance and soul of everything.
- Love and respect for God.
- Love and respect for yourself.
- Love and respect for everybody.

Religion is most often used to describe an organized group or culture that has generally been sparked by the fire of a spiritual or divine soul. Religions usually act with a mission and intention of presenting specific teachings and doctrines while nurturing and propagating a particular way of life (*Spirituality For Dummies*, page 17).

To her, spirituality is the essence of religion, but void of the particulars and doctrines that gives each faith its particular claims, and therefore, its own identity. Secular spirituality is very careful to embrace all, not excluding any except maybe those it feels are narrow minded and exclusive (Conservative Christianity).

6. Question to ponder: Does everyone have a spiritual life of some sort whether they acknowledge it or not? Could it be that every one of us, whether Christian or not, has a capacity for the “something more,” and we sometimes come to points in our lives when we particularly yearn for that something. Saint Augustine’s comment made in his Confessions is often quoted because it is so true: “Thou has made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee.” The restlessness itself tells us that we are spiritual beings

---

<sup>1</sup> Sharon Janis, author; *Spirituality for Dummies* For Dummies Press, 2000, ISBN 0-7645-5298-8

(Discover your Spiritual Type: A guide to individual and Congregational Growth by Corinne Ware<sup>2</sup>, page 10).

7. This restlessness expresses itself in people and in “spiritualities” as a deep hunger or deep thirst for something that is nonphysical, and at times, unrecognizable in their lives. Even successful and well to do people, people who seem to have everything, come seeking spiritual answers to what is missing in their lives. The trick is getting them to realize and admit that Christian Spirituality is the answer to the void and the thirst that is inside of them.
8. But what is Christian spirituality and how does it differ from what we see and hear in the world around us? To me Christian spirituality is the spirituality of God that is centered around the claims and doctrines of Jesus Christ.
9. According Marjorie J. Thompson<sup>3</sup> in her book, *Soul Feast: An Invitation of the Christian Spiritual Life*, she sees: “the spiritual life scripturally speaking, (as)... simply the increasing vitality and sway of God’s Spirit in us.” The scripture that comes to mind is Galatians 5: 25, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” Living the spiritual life is learning to live by and in step with the Spirit of God as seen by the Christian faith.
10. So, according Thompson, Christian spirituality “is simply the capacity to receive, reflect, and respond to the Spirit of God and the way we realize this spiritual potential. Spirituality points to a path, to choices of belief, value commitments, patterns of life, and practices of faith that allow Christ to be formed in us.”
11. Yet, as Christians, we are often in disagreement with one another as to what this actually means to our faith. With definitions formal and informal, general and detail, there is no consensus even in the same local congregation what spirituality truly means.
12. In our textbook, *Conformed to His Image*, the writer (Kenneth D. Boa<sup>4</sup>) gives a more general definition of biblical spirituality. He writes: “Biblical Spirituality is a Christ-centered orientation to every component of life through the mediating power of the indwelling Holy Spirit” (page 19). His definition is similar to Marjorie Thompson in that he continues by saying the, “Spiritual life is an all-encompassing, lifelong response to God’s gracious initiatives in the lives of those whose trust is centered in the person and work of Jesus Christ.” Even though his definition is nowhere as general and all encompassing as the secular understanding of spirituality, he does intend on keeping the definition general so that it fits within his understanding of the twelve facets of spiritual formation.

---

<sup>2</sup> Corinne Ware, author; *Discover Your Spiritual Type: A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1995, ISBN-13: 9781566991490

<sup>3</sup> Marjorie J. Thompson, author; *Soul Feast: An Invitation of the Christian Spiritual Life*. Westminster / John Knox, ISBN-13: 9780664229474

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth D. Boa, author; *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*. Zondervan, ISBN-13: 9780310238485