

## THE PROBLEM LIES WITHIN



Jesus Christ made it clear that our HEART is the problem with our behavior.

“For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, filthiness, envy, slander, pride, foolish. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man.”

It is frustrating in the EXTREME to attempt to follow Christ by continual thought-out choices from our will, so many of which battle against the pull of the Flesh.

Is it possible for our heart to change to the point where obeying Jesus comes “naturally” and easily?

Before I answer, let me ask you this. How hard was it for Jesus to act like Jesus? Not hard at all, was it?

Yes, our hearts can be made Christ-like as Jesus himself abides in and with us. Transformation does not happen instantly, but increasingly so.

Jesus taught, “Make the tree good – the fruit will then be good.” We can learn ways to open ourselves to the operations of grace such that the inner springs of our life come from God himself.

In other words, the tree can be made good.

Yes, we activate our will and make choices of trust and obedience. However, as the SOURCE of our action, namely our heart, becomes increasingly changed, then the whole process becomes instinctive and much easier.

After all, Jesus’ great invitation to take his yoke upon ourselves and learn from him, held his promise “for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

HOW, THEN?

It begins with the new birth – Biblically, the birth “from above” – theologically known as regeneration. This is not something we do. It is a sheer gift of grace. God makes us alive to him, whereas before we were dead to him.

Prior to the new birth, we avoided righteousness and preferred sin. Having been born again, the central impulse of our changed heart is now to love God, trust him, and obey him. We are inclined toward righteousness.

The process of spiritual re-formation can now begin to “make the tree good.”

FIRST. The sovereign action of the Holy Spirit inspires, empowers, makes tender, and enlivens our hearts – progressively renewing us.

SECOND. The trials of life test and train our faith, through which we learn our great need for grace. We learn how to give and receive forgiveness. A lot. We learn to cry out for God’s help. A lot.

THIRD. Regular, planned, diligent use of the “means of grace.” We open ourselves to the influence of the Holy Spirit and the actions of grace as we practice the centuries-old, time-proven disciplines of the spiritual life.

Disciplines such as solitude, contemplation, prayer, Scripture memorization, meditative study of Scripture, fasting, worship, small group fellowship, ministry actions (especially when no one is looking), and so on.

For many, a 12-step recovery group will be an essential part of this process as well.

These practices are not meritorious. In other words, they earn nothing with the Lord God. But they are ways God has chosen (consider the example of Jesus and his apostles themselves) as ways to draw close to God.

Frankly, showing up in church once a week **WILL NOT RE-FORM OUR HEARTS**. That should be pretty evident by the state of Christianity in our nation.

Are you tired of putting-on a religious show? Tired of outward righteous behavior when inside, you know it is something else entirely? Me too.

I am completely indebted to my spiritual mentor, Dr. Dallas Willard, for help understanding this process. His book **THE SPIRIT OF THE DISCIPLINES** is especially helpful for those interested in learning more.