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Class Notes

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Conforming to Christ

Week 3: Faith and Character

Maturing Christians Develop:

Knowledge:

- a wide-ranging and deep knowledge of the Bible
- a wealth of rich spiritual experience

Faith:

- a strong sense of the reality of invisible, spiritual truths-past, present, and future
- a vibrant hope in a bright future based on the promises of God
- a deep and detailed conviction of personal sin
- a firm and consistent reliance on Christ
- a consistent sense of practical guidance by the Holy Spirit

Character:

- a heart that loves what Christ loves and hates what Christ hates
- an array of passionate, godly desires that direct daily life
- a will consistently submissive to the will of God, regardless of the cost
- a thought-life that is pure and excellent
- a healthy emotional life patterned after Christ's
- a consistent display of virtues appropriate to the moment

Action:

- a habit of constantly presenting the body to God in holy obedience
- a lifestyle pure from sin in sex, speech, relationship, and pleasures
- a consistent habit of personal and corporate worship
- a life of daily habit in prayer, Bible intake, and confession of sin
- a pattern of biblical faithfulness in marriage and parenting
- a habit of blessing other Christians with spiritual gift and general ministry
- a regular habit of bold witness to lost people

- a track record of faithful stewardship of money and generosity to others
- a habit of diligent labor for the glory of God

I. Faith

- Certainty that Invisible Spiritual Realities—Past, Present, and Future—are True
- Assurance of That Good Things Promised in the Bible Will Come True
- Conviction of Personal Sin—Both Generally and Specifically
- **Reliance on Christ as All-Sufficient Savior, Refuge, Provider, Shield**
- **Reception of Spiritual Guidance**

A. Reliance on Christ as All-Sufficient Savior, Refuge, Provider, Shield

1. Faith involves a sense of reliance... as a support or buttress, the source of confidence
2. How you console yourself when you consider obstacles, dangers, threats, adverse circumstances

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Isaiah 31:1 Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD.

Ezekiel 29:6-7 Then all who live in Egypt will know that I am the LORD. "You [Pharaoh, Egypt] have been a staff of reed for the house of Israel. ⁷ When they grasped you with their hands, you splintered and you tore open their shoulders; when they leaned on you, you broke and their backs were wrenched.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD

3. The man and woman of faith rests peacefully in the Lord

Psalm 4:8 "I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety"

Psalm 27:3 Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.

4. God works to teach his people to trust him

When Israel was trapped by Pharaoh's army against the Red Sea with no possible escape, Israel cried out to the Lord, who spoke through Moses saying, *"The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still"* (Ex. 14:14). After Israel safely crossed the Red Sea with the water like a great wall to the left and the right, and the mighty Egyptian army was subsequently drowned, then the nation had a solid basis for trusting in the Lord forever: *"And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and **put their trust in him** and in Moses his servant"* (Ex. 14:31).

5. The Greatest Enemy of Faith: Self-reliance

Moses sent out twelve spies to explore the land of Canaan which God had promised to give them. The land they saw was delightfully rich. However, the spies also brought a disease back from their exploration: the virus of unbelief. Ten of the twelve spies spread a bad report about the land. They spoke of the giant warriors in the land and shrank in their own estimation: *"We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them"* (Num. 13:33). This drained courage from the hearts of the Israelites, who murmured against God and wanted to go back to Egypt. Their focus was completely on their own military prowess, and they rightly came up short in that assessment. But they sinned in both this self-focus and the resultant despair. God judged their faithlessness: *"In spite of this, **you did not trust in the Lord your God, who went ahead of you on your journey"*** (Deut. 1:32-33). God punished Israel for this unbelief by commanding them to turn around and wander in the desert for forty years.

But then the people rebelled again. Stunned by God's declaration of their punishment, they looked inward again at their own military prowess and this time put on their armor, *"thinking it easy to go up to into the hill country"* (Deut.1:41). This was the same sin of self-reliance, with an opposite conclusion. Self-reliance that looks inward and fails to find the necessary resources results in **despair**. But self-reliance that looks inward and actually finds the necessary resources results in **arrogance**. Israel clearly displayed both of the results of self-reliance. Despair and arrogance are merely two sides of the same coin: **self-reliance**. For the rest of Israel's history, God fought their self-reliance. And for the rest of our lives on earth, God will fight our self-reliance as well.

6. Paul's insight into God's purpose in his great suffering

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹ Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Why are we weak when we are strong? Because we stop relying on ourselves, knowing we do not have the resources to meet the trial.

7. Christ the All-Sufficient Savior and Source of Life

- a. The Japanese vine bridge
- b. "Venture on him"

"Come Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy"

Lo, the incarnate God, ascended,
Pleads the merit of his blood:
**Venture on him, venture wholly,
Let no other trust intrude!**

I will arise and go to Jesus,
He will embrace me in his arms;
In the arms of my dear Savior,
O there are ten thousand charms

Saving faith involves "venturing out" onto Christ, venturing "wholly," entrusting our eternal well-being in his trustworthy hands. It also involves a certain jealous protectiveness over that venturing: "Let no other trust intrude." We must trust in nothing else, especially not our own righteousness earned by good works.

8. Christ Constantly Supplies Our Faith

God gave us our faith to begin with, and only God through Christ can keep it alive. As Jesus told Peter: "*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.*"

And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32). So Jesus is at the right hand of God and is continually praying for all Christians that their faith will not fail, no matter how great are the trials they are facing (Heb. 7:25).

In his allegory of the Christian life, Pilgrim’s Progress, John Bunyan did a masterful job of portraying our ongoing reliance on Christ’s ministry for the maintenance of the work of grace in our soul. “Christian,” the allegorical pilgrim who is making his way to the Celestial City, stops at Interpreter’s house, where he is trained and prepared for his journey. Interpreter uses living parables to teach many vital spiritual lessons. The “Fire Burning Against the Wall” was one of the most potent

Christ feeds the oil of his Spirit secretly into our souls to sustain our faith

9. Christ the All-Sufficient Source of Life

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Spiritual maturity means an ever-increasing sense of reliance on Christ for everything. He IS our life!!

B. Reception of Spiritual Guidance

1. The Holy Spirit continually guides us in the internal journey of holiness

“And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it” (Isa. 35:8).

“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’” (Isa. 30:21)

2. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, constantly guides his sheep

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27)

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Psalm 23:1-3)

3. How God guides us

a. Most clearly by scripture

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

b. Increasingly by our obedience

“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him” (John 14:21)

c. By providence

d. By counselors

e. By the “still small voice”

f. In general, by his Holy Spirit

II. Character

Christianity is a heart religion... not merely an external show. God wants truth in the inmost nature, not a whitewashed tomb.

Inner Nature (Heart) Conformed to Christ:

- Affection: What you love and what you hate
- Desire: What you seek
- Will: What you choose and what you reject
- Thought: What you think
- Emotion: What you feel
- Virtues: What you are in any and every situation.

A. Affection: What you love and what you hate

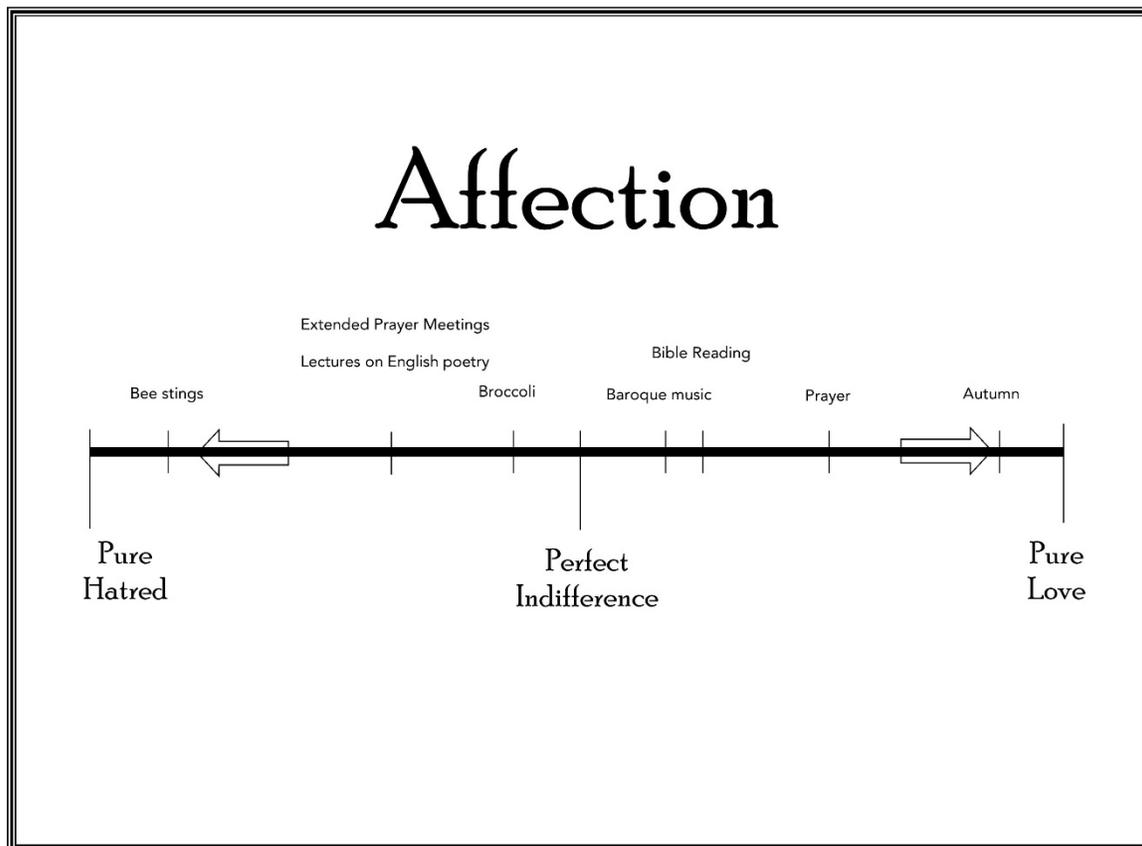
1. The greatest commandment

Of all the hundreds of commandments given by God, Jesus chose this one as the first and greatest: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”* (Matt. 22:37). According to Jesus, love is the greatest measure of a soul, its truest indicator.

2. Number Line of Affection:

The central thesis of Jonathan Edwards’s *Treatise on Religious Affections* is that true religion in great part consists in holy affections. According to Edwards, affections are the sensible exercises of the soul toward anything in the universe, either in approving or disapproving of that thing, to a

greater or lesser degree. It is like a magnet – the heart is either attracted to (likes/loves) or repulsed from (dislikes/hates) everything it knows. I see Edwards’s insight most clearly in terms of a number line, from negative infinity through zero to positive infinity. Suppose I chose a bunch of random topics and assigned values to them on a number line of affection:



3. Where is God in your affections???

Again, what does God command us above all other things? To love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. That means that God should be the farthest right on our number line of affections. Each Christian should love God more than anything else in the universe. But do you? Do I? This is the question that stands over us every day of our lives.

Anything in the universe that we love more than God is by definition an idol:

Romans 1:25 ... they worshiped and served created things more than the Creator.

4. Massive Rearrangement at Regeneration

The miracle of the New Birth is that a huge number of items of the number line of affection get instantly rearranged – things we used to love, we now hate, and things we used to hate, we now love.

Jesus Christ: The greatest focus of a Christian's new affections will always be Christ Jesus as he reveals the Father to us. The one who was "despised and rejected" (Isa. 53:3) and repulsive on the cross now melts our hearts into intense levels of devotion by the power of the Spirit. We love Jesus in ways we can scarcely put into words, the very one we used to hate or be indifferent to.

Many other good things:

Other Christians, Bible reading, public worship, prayer, missions, etc.

New Hatreds As Well: Evil things we used to love we now hate... especially specific sin patterns.

5. Constant Movement in Sanctification:

The work of sanctification is to continue to rearrange it until we love more and more what Christ loves and hate more and more what Christ hates with the proper level of intensity. Certainly we love the Bible now, but we do not love it as much as we should, with the intensity that Jesus does. Yes, we love other Christians now, but we are not quite ready to lay down our lives for them as Christ did (John 15:13). Conversely, we certainly hate sin now, but we still dally with it and do it. As Paul said, "The very thing I hate, I do." (Rom. 7:15)

Sanctification involves a dynamic movement of loving more and more what Christ loves, and hating more and more what Christ hates.

B. Desire: What You Seek

1. Deep Longings

The Christian life on earth is a life of deep longing, since so many of the promises of God are as yet unfulfilled. Paul says, "*if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently*" (Rom. 8:25). Yes, a Christian waits patiently. But also a Christian waits with intense longing, with deep desire. Strong desire for God and for his gifts characterizes a spiritually mature heart.

2. Desire Describes the Soul

Henry Scougal: "The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love."

John Piper: "The heart is a desire factory. The human heart produces desires as fire produces heat. As surely as sparks fly upward, the heart pumps out desire after desire for a happier future. The condition of the heart is appraised by the kinds of desires that hold sway. Or, to put it another

way, the state of the heart is shown by the things that satisfy its desires. If it is satisfied with mean and ugly things, it is a mean and ugly heart. If it is satisfied with God, it is a godly heart."

3. Diagnostic Question of Desires:

So the question before us now is simply this: what do you want?

4. Constantly Battling Evil Desires:

Before conversion, our hearts were set on unholy desires. We lived daily life feeding *"the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life"* (1 John 2:16). James tells us that these desires are the origin of sin, a yearning for something not granted by God: *"Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death"* (James 1:14-15). Therefore, a Christian is constantly battling to root out not only bad actions, but also the bad desires that gave them birth. This internal warfare will continue the rest of our earthly lives (Gal. 5:16-17).

5. Desiring God Above All Things

"Whom have I in heaven but you, and earth has nothing I desire besides you" (Psalm 73:25)

"One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple" (Psalm 27:4)

Especially desiring to know Christ:

I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:7-11)

6. Other Godly Desires

- a. The advance of Christ's Kingdom
- b. Growth in personal holiness
- c. Closeness and intimacy with God and with Christ in daily devotions

d. Blessings for loved ones

e. On and on and on and on... many things the godly desire!!!

7. Prayer: Desire Stoked White Hot

In all of these areas, our desires are far too weak. Hence the gift of prayer. One of the greatest purposes of prayer is the intensification of our own desires after the things of God.

Prayer!!!



C. Will: What You Choose and What You Reject

1. The will is the capacity of the human heart to make real choices
2. The will is the servant of the heart

The idea of a “free” will, as though it were a loose cannon untethered to anything in the soul but tossed back and forth in some random, irrational pattern by the waves of circumstances is false and unbiblical. Rather, the will takes the affections and desires of the heart and translates them by choices into the actions of the body. What the heart loves and what the heart hates play the central role in the will, because in the end the will chooses what the heart most delights in and desires, avoids what it most hates

3. The New Birth Gives Us a New Will:

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezek. 36:26-27)

4. Constant Battle for Control

But sadly, it is not always so clear as this, is it? Sometimes insanity sets in and we chose death rather than life. In Romans 7, Paul reveals the bitter struggle for control going on constantly in the Christian between the flesh and the Spirit. Indwelling sin loves what God hates and sometimes hijacks the will through deception to achieve actions that the new nature knows are evil and will result in suffering and sadness. These dual centers of control within the Christian use the will to achieve very different types of actions. For this reason, the infinite journey of sanctification is a constant warfare, not a leisurely stroll.

5. Imitating Christ in Gethsemane:

Throughout his life, Christ’s food was to do the will of the Father (John 4:34), but this commitment came to a head in Gethsemane. Christ’s willful act of denying himself for the glory of God and the salvation of his sheep was the most courageous act in history, and the ultimate paradigm for the proper exercise of the human will at any moment.

God the Father revealed to Christ how vast would be his suffering on the cross and effectively asked him, “Will you do it?” In the most courageous act of willing obedience in history, Christ answered ***“Not my will but yours be done!” (Matt. 26:39)***. This act of willing obedience is the pattern for the healthy use of our wills for the rest of our lives. Where God’s commands cross our natural inclinations, we must subordinate ourselves to the will

of God and obey by faith. "Not my will, but yours be done!" is the consistent cry of every mature Christian.

D. Thought: What You Think About

1. Our Previously Darkened Minds

Ephesians 4:17-19 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

2. Continual Repentance

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed Ninety-five Theses for debate on the door of the Wittenberg Castle. The first of these theses addressed the issue of repentance:

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent," he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

Repentance is a constant transformation of thinking from old to new by the ministry of the Holy Spirit using his Word:

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

As you learn more and more of the word, you will see more and more sin in you. This is essential to sanctification. The renewed mind is to think new thoughts about all these areas.

3. Thought control:

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things.

E. Emotion: What you feel

1. God is emotional

The God of the Bible is an intensely passionate being. He delights in his creation and in his works; he rejoices, he mourns, he gets angry, he pours out his wrath, he is jealous, he laughs, and above all these, he is compassionate toward his people, feeling what they feel. Many Scriptures testify to this,

for in the Bible, God expresses joy (Zeph.3:17), compassion (Psalm 103:13), wrath (Psalm 7:11), and grief (Gen. 6:6). He is not a dispassionate thinking machine like the Greek Stoics thought, but rather is very emotional.

2. The Emotional Life of Christ:

By far, the most common emotion he displayed was compassion for suffering people: a leper (Mark 1:40-41); hungry, harassed, helpless crowds (Matt. 9:36, 15:32); a widow burying her only son (Luke 7:11-13). Jesus also displayed a wide range of other emotions: love (Mark 10:21); joy over the success of the gospel mission (Luke 10:21); pure, holy anger over the abuse of the temple (John 2:15-16). Clearly Jesus had a rich, full emotional life, and his emotions are a pattern for the healthy emotions of all Christian people.

3. Christian can and must control their emotions!

Our emotional life is not as pure as was Jesus', and our emotions frequently lead us astray. Our emotions are frequently connected to our sin nature, reacting directly out of habit and through faithlessness. Part of spiritual maturity is to recognize how frequently our emotions are out of step with spiritual reality as revealed in Scripture, and to use the truth to bring them back in line.

4. Five Key Emotions: Joy, Sorrow, Fear, Compassion, and Zeal

a. Joy

Our abiding joy comes from knowing God through Christ, and from knowing that God is going to give us infinitely of himself for eternity. Since, we have such a foundation for joy in this present world that cannot be shaken, Paul commands us repeatedly to rejoice in the Lord (Phil. 2:18, 3:1, 4:4)

b. Sorrow

Christians grow in spiritual sorrow in the pattern of Christ—he was a *“man of sorrows and familiar with suffering”* (Isa. 53:3). Our sorrow will come from the damage of sin, primarily in our own hearts and lives, but also in the lives of others and in the world generally. James 4:9 commands us to grieve deeply over our sins. Psalm 119:136 commands us to grieve over the sins of others. Paul grieved deeply over the lostness of Israel (Rom. 9:1-4); if the general condition of lost sinners all around the world does not break our hearts, we are far from Christ

c. Fear

A Christian should have no fear of men (Isa. 51:7), or of any earthly consequences of faithfulness to God. But if we sin, we have reason to fear God, for God is a “consuming fire” (Deut. 4:24). The fear of the Lord is an abiding part of the healthy Christian life, for it is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10)

d. Compassion

Compassion is love’s commitment to feel what someone else is feeling, whatever it may be. It is commanded of Christians for one another in several places: *“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Rom. 12:15)*. It is displayed invariably in physical actions, depending on the circumstances: weeping, laughter, an arm around someone’s shoulders, jumping up and down and clapping, visiting someone in prison or in the hospital, and the like.

e. Zeal

Christ’s zeal came forth when he cleansed the temple: *“Zeal for your house will consume me” (John 2:17)*. In the same way, Christians are to be filled with zeal for God’s glory and for God’s people (Rom. 12:11). God deliver us all from spiritual lethargy, spiritual deadness! O that we would not be like the lukewarm Laodicean church, neither hot nor cold, whom the Lord desired to spew from his mouth (Rev. 3:16)!