

Intro:

For our message this afternoon I want to spend some time talking about spiritual living.

That's another way of saying 'sanctification' or 'discipleship'.

I was moved to discuss this topic again by some of my reading this week. I am reading a book called *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*. It is a pretty good book, short biographies of various Baptist preachers with an emphasis on their theology. It is put together by a group of Southern Baptists, so it is heavy on Southern Baptists and, in light of current trends, Calvinists. I think the average person could enjoy this book, but you might be stretched a bit in some of the theological discussion.

The chapter I finished this week was on Charles Spurgeon, of course *not* a Southern Baptist, but definitely a Calvinist. However, he was what I would call a Calvinist of the right sort. He didn't let his theology get in the way of his evangelistic zeal.

There was a very intriguing section in this chapter that began with the header: "Puritan Spirituality". By 'spirituality', the authors mean something like the words I mentioned at the beginning: 'spiritual living', 'sanctification', or 'discipleship'.

They use the term to describe where Spurgeon got his ideas about the Christian life and how he applied them. I would have to say that his approach, as it is described in this book, is very similar to what I believe about how the ordinary Christian should live out his spiritual life.

So I have entitled our message this afternoon:

Lessons on Spiritual Living from Spurgeon

I think we should have a text from the Bible and the one that came immediately to mind was the famous passage from Psalm 119, vv. 9-11.

Read Ps 119.9-16

Proposition: The way a believer should order his life in the Spirit is by taking heed to God's Word.

The life in the Spirit through the Word:

I. Begins with Bible study

A. Taking heed to the word the way to purity

1. The written word
2. The Living Word

“It would be best to say that the source of Spurgeon’s spirituality rested objectively in the Bible, and experientially in the Christ of the Bible. Thus he combined the objective Scriptures with the existential experience of the living Christ as the sole source of true spirituality.”¹

- Define: “objective spirituality”
- Define: “existential experience”

B. Taking heed to the word begins with personal Bible study

“First of all, spirituality demanded Bible study.”²

1. You must know the Word (content)
2. You must understand the Word (interpretation/discernment)

The author of the article on Spurgeon recounts an incident the week after Spurgeon’s conversion. Spurgeon struggled for some time to understand salvation by faith alone. One Sunday, he visited a small Methodist chapel where he was challenged to just look to Christ and see in Christ all he needed for salvation.

Spurgeon’s conversion is a pretty well-known story. But what is less well known is what happened one week later.

He went back to the same Methodist chapel. Here is the story in Spurgeon’s own words:

“I went to that same chapel, as it was very natural that I should, but I never went afterwards, and for this reason, that during my first week as a Christian, the new life that was in me had been compelled to fight for its existence. And the conflict with the old nature had been vigorously carried on. Now, I knew this fight within to be a special token of the indwelling grace within my soul. But in that same chapel, I heard a sermon on the text ‘Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?’ And the preacher declared that Paul was not a Christian when he had that experience. Babe as I was, I knew better than to believe so absurd a statement.”³

¹ Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds., *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 130.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

- You must learn to read *and* understand the Bible to be able to make spiritual judgements like this.
- That's what 'taking heed to the Word' means, first of all.

The life in the Spirit through the Word:

II. Maintained by Bible application

A. Application means not just knowing the Word but living the Word

1. You read the Word
2. You hear the Word (in sermons, etc)
3. You keep the Word – in daily practice

Spurgeon told a story of being in a service somewhere and hearing a plain working man preach. He was very moved by a message about Christ. He said, "When I was preaching the same things to others, I was wondering whether this truth was mine. But while I was hearing it for myself, I knew it was mine."⁴

Spurgeon went up to thank the preacher for the message. The preacher asked who he was, then was very embarrassed when he found out. He said, "Why, Sir, that was your own sermon!" Spurgeon said he knew it, but that it was good of the Lord to give him food that he himself had prepared for others.

B. Applying the Word means that you take it to heart and make it your own: it's not just information, it's in your heart

The life in the Spirit through the Word:

III. Developed by Biblical meditation

A. Applying the heart to greater insight and understanding

1. With all my heart I have sought you (10)
2. Your word have I treasured in my heart (11)

"Spurgeon maintained that if the Bible is to make an effective impact in human life and experience, listening quietly and sensitively and prayerfully to its message becomes a necessary spiritual discipline."⁵

⁴ Ibid., 131.

⁵ Ibid.

- B. Bible study is not mean to be mere gathering of information for the purpose of repeating it to others

Spurgeon said to other preachers: "The Spirit has taught us in meditation to ponder its message, to put aside, if we will, the responsibility of preparing the message we've got to give. Just trust God for that. But first, meditate on it, quietly ponder it, let it sink deep into our souls. Have you not often been surprised and overcome with delight as Holy Scripture is opened up as if the gates of the Golden City have been set back for you to enter? A few minutes silent openness of soul before the Lord has brought us more treasure of truth than hours of learned research."⁶

The life in the Spirit through the Word:

IV. Kept in good order by Biblical focus (that is, keep your eyes on Christ)

- A. The Bible is not Christ
- B. The point of spiritual living is a relationship with Christ
- C. The two must not be confused – one leads to the other, but the two are not the same.

Conclusion:

My last quote from Spurgeon for this message:

"Nobody ever grew holy without consenting, desiring, agonizing to be holy. Sin will grow without sowing, but holiness needs cultivation. Follow it, it will not run after you."⁷

⁶ Ibid., 132.

⁷ Ibid., 133.