

## Introduction

God's love for man is unconditional. He loves him as is, under any circumstances and any situations. Because of this tremendous love, God would not leave us in our downfall, marred in the mud of sin, but like a gentle father would not tolerate seeing his son in such a condition without running to hold him and hastening to free him from all the injury inflicted on him. Returning back to His likeness is God's aspiration behind saving us from our downfall. Restoring our first state of sanctity and purity does not come by just saying verbally "I believe in God. Therefore I am saved." Faith has to be proven through actions. A workout exercise machine remains ineffective in itself until it is made use of. Similarly faith remains static until it is manifested in dynamic actions. These actions have a lot to do with our spiritual growth.

## Spirituality & Personality Types

St. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2:14, lists three types of personalities:

- a. Carnal: led by the flesh and his fleshly desires. "For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Corinthians 3:3). *"But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is,*

*those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"* (Hebrews 5:14).

b. Natural: led by the mind which is liable to go astray. *"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Corinthians 2:14). The natural man is a step higher than the carnal man.

c. Spiritual: led by the Spirit of God. This type is the type everybody should aspire to possess. *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God"* (Romans 8:14).

## **Spiritualization**

Spiritual growth is an ongoing daily developing process. *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord"* (2 Corinthians 3:18). This growth does not happen from void. It is the result of our encounter with God, coming in union with Him. Spiritual practices are

the agent that bring about this transformation. St. Paul emphasizes the importance of living in the spirit because it will make us grow in the spirit (Galatians 5:16). He also distinguishes between walking in the spirit and living in the spirit (Galatians 5:25). Which comes first: the walking or the living? Consider the following processes that take place at both the physical and spiritual level:

a. Physical: Think of the body. We must eat in order to live. So, eating → fullness → energy  
This energy is the ultimate aim behind the nutrition the body receives with which it can function and carry out all kinds of activities.

b. Spiritual: Think of the spirit. We must be filled with the spirit in order to be sanctified. So, living in the spirit → become filled with the spirit → bearing the fruit of the spirit → walking in the spirit ( becomes worthy of the gifts of the Spirit.

## **Spiritual Practices**

The process of spiritualization that starts with living in the Spirit and ends with the fruits and gifts of the Spirit comes through practicing all the means of Grace, as well as prayers, and Holy Bible reading. Spiritual practices are divided into more than one way. One of them is:

- a. Monastic Practices: retreats, fasting, giving
- b. Communal Practices: improving relationships with God, the people, worship, prayer life in and outside the church, service in or outside the church.

The aim behind such dichotomy (or any other) is to find means whereby the individual grows in spirituality.

## **Spiritual Practices & Counseling**

A counselor, as well as a person counseled, need to practice spiritual exercises in order to grow spiritually. One cannot preach what he does not live nor can a cup start to overflow before it is filled.

Spiritual exercises:

1. Set up the stage for the Holy Spirit to play His role as teacher, counselor, comforter, rebuke and a lot more. A successful counseling operation is one dictated and directed by the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, some counselors, in their eagerness to solve problems, overlook and undermine the role of the Holy Spirit. Quick fixes waste an excellent opportunity for helping the counseled to grow and mature spiritually.

2. Teach effective communication with God. God from His heaven above, communicates with us all the time. God can communicate through:

- Silence

Between the last verse of Genesis 16 and the first verse in Genesis 17 thirteen years had passed without communication between God and His best friend, Abraham. Through that silence, which was louder than words, God communicated His disappointment at Abraham's lack of faith, resorting to human quick solutions, listening to Sara's suggestion to get himself a baby by Hagar while ignoring the son of promise. The first words the Lord uttered after that long silence were "*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.'*" (Genesis 17:1). Those thirteen years were years of growth and maturity for Abraham. At the age of ninety-nine Abraham heard God's words "*And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly*" (Genesis 17:2). The subject of communication offers a principal that says "we cannot not communicate". Even

when communication ceases it communicates silence and the implication thereof.

- Whispering

*"So he said, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.' Then He said, 'Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.' And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" (1 Kings 19:10-13). That was Elijah's encounter with God after he had fled away from Isabel who had threatened to kill him just as he had killed her prophets. God conveyed to Elijah and all the generations thereafter that He may be found in a roaring mountain as well*

as in a whisper. It could also be interpreted as an invitation from God to remove ourselves from the hustle and bustle of the world into the inner room of ourselves.

- A Loud Shout

Hard hearted, dull-of-hearing people require an earth shaking, mountain moving experiences in order to wake up and shape up. Samson's experience is an example. God's Spirit had to depart, Samson had to be given over to his enemies who gauged his eyes and bound him up with chains. However, God's mercies did not abandon him completely but granted him forgiveness and restoration.

- Circumstances

God spoke to Jonah through a worm, a gourd, a whale, the marines and the storm.

- Other Means

God can talk through the church, the confession father, the church fathers, the person's conscience and people.

## **Spiritual Maturity & Counseling**

The aim of a counselor should not be to solve the counseled problems. Rather, his concern should be

with shaping a spiritually mature personality that can deal with his problems and solve them following the secular truth of showing a person how to fish instead of fishing for him. The top spiritual exercise is Worship. It is considered the highest response to God's love and the only way to reciprocate God's love. Worshipping is the strongest source for happiness and growth because it provides peace and consolation to the tormented soul. Worship can be individual (in one's room) or communal (in church) encouraging the counseled person to worship with joy and gladness. "*Serve the Lord with gladness, come before His presence with singing*" (Psalm 100:2). A counselor has to teach his patient true worship. Worship is not just mere spending time in prayers and Holy Bible readings. True worship is entering into a relationship with God. Praying and reading the Holy Bible will be outward manifestations of an inward existing relationship. "*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*" (John 4:24). The road to growing and changing starts at the encounter and union with the Spirit of God transforming into a spiritual person. This is the aim and target and purpose from running the race. If a person with a problem cannot worship, then he is far away from an essential part of his psychological treatment. He needs the counselor to sit with him and discern why



he is unable to worship. Is it fear, distancing, doubt, sin, etc? Prayers and intercessions are important in counseling. By prayer we come closer to the throne of God. We then receive mercy and find grace which makes us happy and confident in time of need. God taught us to pray always and to pray for each other as well. God promised "*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you*" (Matthew 7:7).

## **Conclusion**

This lecture addressed the spiritual practices required to carry out a successful Counseling based on Christian Orthodox Theology. It is essential that the counselor show the person counseled God's unconditional love for him and how should this person reciprocate this love through worship. Entering into a personal relationship with God is the core of true worship and the healing to all ailments. The counselor must assist his patients to establish this relationship before he proceeds to help them solve their problems.

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