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## 6 RESOURCES

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A key factor in the ethical and moral performance of the Christian is proper utilization of resources. The situation is comparable, for example, to educational performance. In order to do well in college, a student needs not only a good mind and self-discipline, but also good advice in selecting a college and a course of study, guidance in obtaining financial aid, competent instructors, access to library materials, the stimulus and example of other good students, encouragement from home, and perhaps help from the study skills center. By employing such resources a student of only moderate ability may do well. On the other hand, a more gifted student who is not aware of these resources or neglects to take advantage of them may do poorly. Similarly, the Christian who hopes to improve ethically and morally needs to be aware of the available resources and to make the most of them.

### I. DIVINE HELP

Once reason has done the preliminary analytical and interpretive work described in the previous chapter, we need two basic

types of assistance. First, we need *direction*—help in knowing specifically what we ought to do; clarification and definition of principles, rules, and our goals. In the second place, we need *power*—the desire and strength to do what we have come to believe is right. Both kinds of help come from God. He is our resource. Whatever aids us significantly in this endeavor is either God Himself or one of His gifts.

### A. Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God as He reaches out to us with help. He is that person of the Holy Trinity who links us to the entire Godhead. All that the Father and the Son do for us, and all their contacts and blessings, are through the Holy Spirit. As we make hard decisions about right and wrong and then struggle to live by them, we can draw on the personal presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit lives within each Christian, nurturing thoughts, insights, feelings, and values which conform to the will of God. He also builds and reinforces the determination that enables us to live by our convictions. Jesus refers to Him as the Counselor, who will lead His followers into all truth. This includes not only the full revelation of Christ and His redemptive work, but also perception of His will and obedience to it (John 14 and 16).

No help which the Spirit gives is more important than love, God's own love which He pours into our hearts. By the experience of His love we can learn the kind of love that we should be expressing in our lives. By loving us, the Holy Spirit enables and motivates us to love, which finally is the summary of all that God expects of us.

### B. New Person

That the Holy Spirit gives me Himself is, of course, most important. He is my principal resource. However, it is also true that He does something significant to me: He gives me a new self. Not only does He put Himself at my disposal so that I have someone else to depend on, but he also changes me and equips me so that, in a certain sense, I can depend on myself. Because He is creating and strengthening a new person within me, I can

be sure that something *in* me, something *of* me, also knows and desires the good.

Direction and motivation for the Christian life are built right into the character of the new person. To the extent that I am still in the grip of the old person, I have to be suspicious of my moral ideas and inclinations. To the extent that I am under the sway of the new person, I can trust my moral insights and impulses. The new person is a vital moral resource on which I can and should rely. Though it is located in the self, this resource has its origin and power in God, for it is the work and gift of the Holy Spirit.

### C. Fellow Christians

God also helps us through each other, through our fellow Christians. The Spirit works in and through each Christian for the other Christians with whom he is in contact. He equips individual Christians with special interests and aptitudes which enable them to be of maximum usefulness to one another spiritually, physically, and morally. For guidance and encouragement in ethical decisions and moral action, we can draw on one another. Ethical reflection is usually done most effectively in consultation with the Christian community of which we are a part. Moral strength is reinforced by interaction with conscientious and obedient believers. Wisdom, good example, support, as well as admonition when we stumble and fall are offered to us by God through our association with fellow Christians. Just as evil peer pressures erode and debilitate our morals, wholesome Christian influences strengthen and stimulate our morals.

## II. MEDIA OF DIVINE HELP

Evangelical ethics is, above all, an ethics of the Holy Spirit. As has been emphasized above, He is our supreme and central resource. Only He can provide the ethical direction and motivation that we require. At this point we address ourselves to the question, How and where do we contact the Holy Spirit for assistance in the ethical task?

In view of the explanation above, these questions may appear to be irrelevant. The Spirit already dwells within us Christians. He is producing a new person there. In addition, He reaches out



to us through other Christians. Contact with the Spirit appears to be securely and permanently established. What else is needed?

The key to the answer is found in the nature of the bond between the Holy Spirit and the Christian: it is a *personal* relationship. It is more like the living tie that exists between friends or loved ones than a mechanical connection between an electric appliance and a power outlet. Personal relationships of all kinds, including the one between the Christian and the Spirit, need to be nurtured by communication and other kinds of interaction. I need to be kept aware of the Spirit's presence and power within. I need concrete expressions of His love, power, and will. I need continuous input from Him. I need to be re-energized and re-activated by conscious exposure to His testimony. I need to present my questions, doubts, temptations, and confusion to Him and work through them with Him. Not because He is absent or unavailable, but because He is present and accessible, I need conscious and deliberate contact with the Holy Spirit.

God has provided special media, special channels through which we can have this informative and strengthening contact. He does not ordinarily contact us directly. Nor does He leave it up to us to devise means by which we can communicate with Him. He has established ways by which He gets through to us and offers us the help that we need.

#### A. Word of God

Verbal communication is the standard medium by which the spirit extends His aid to us. Through the Word of God, written in Scripture and expounded and applied in the community of believers, He gives us moral guidance and motivation. Evangelical Christians stress the fact that the Holy Spirit inspired those who wrote the Bible. What is not always sufficiently emphasized is the fact that He also inspires those who hear and read it. As we receive the message of the Bible we are confronted not only by information about God or from God but also by the living God Himself, the Holy Spirit.

The Word of God is a uniquely living word. It conveys Him to us in person. As the words and ideas pass through our eyes and ears into our minds, God the Holy Spirit goes with them into our inner being, there to do His vital work. No one else's word has

this capability. Very good biographical and autobiographical works make the subject "live," seem very real. However, no words by or about another person actually produce that person's presence or convey that person into the reader's inner being. The Word of God does, and this makes it a remarkable spiritual and moral resource.

Obviously, we cannot explore everything that God does for us in and through His Word. Rather, we concentrate here on that which is related most directly to the ethical and moral enterprise. Three elements in the Word of God are particularly essential in this regard.

Through that element of His Word designated as *law*, the Holy Spirit reveals and condemns our corruption. Reference was made to this in chapter 1. Not only the unconverted person, but also the Christian, needs continuous and repeated exposure to God's law. For although the guilt of sin is forgiven in the Christian, some of its power remains to confuse, mislead, and tempt. No matter how strong we may be in faith or how serious in purpose, we continue to misunderstand and to disobey the will of God.

Through the message of the law the Holy Spirit alerts us to these evidences of our continuing sinfulness. He makes us aware of our desperate need for His help. Moral strength and improvement cannot take place until and unless we face up to our weakness and failure. Our problem in this respect is so serious that we cannot adequately recognize it on our own or with mere human resources. We need the help of the Holy Spirit in the Word, specifically, the diagnostic work of the law.

Once the law has done its work in us, once we have come to realize what is wrong with us morally and recognize the danger that this poses, we are ready for the application of the *gospel*. This is the Spirit's chief and favorite work—to assure the penitent sinner that he is forgiven because of Christ's atoning work. For our own good the Spirit must tell us about our sins, but His greatest delight is to tell us about our Savior.

The main subject of the Spirit's testimony in the Word is Jesus Christ. In fact, the Spirit is far more interested in telling us about Christ than He is even in telling us about Himself. His consuming purpose is to keep us aware and appreciative of the Father's love for us as manifest in the obedience and sacrifice of His Son. Not only at the beginning of our relationship with God, but



throughout our earthly life, we need the Good News that because of Jesus' death and resurrection we are reconciled to God.

Through this message the spirit stimulates and reinforces two basic responses in the Christian. One is faith. That is to say, He enables us to accept God's offer of pardon and the other promises which go with it. This demonstration of God's love evokes love for and trust in God. The second basic response is the desire to please God by loving obedience to His expressed will. Maintenance of a close faith relationship with God and a strong desire for obedience are vital to moral health and strength. The gospel is the resource for both.

In addition to the law and the gospel there is a third element in God's Word of great moral significance—*norms*. Since these have been covered at length in previous chapters, we will confine the presentation here to a discussion of *norms as a resource* for ethical decisions and moral action.

One of the most difficult and frightening tasks that Christians face today is trying to determine God's will in the many issues not referred to directly in the Bible. To work through these issues responsibly we must be thoroughly informed and fully aware of everything in the Bible that speaks even indirectly to these issues. We must proceed from the known to the unknown.

Even to apply to modern life those commands that are explicit in the Bible requires extensive scriptural knowledge and intensive penetration into its meaning. Continuous refreshment and reassessment of biblical norms is essential to ethical and moral maturation. The Bible is not a computer which grinds out ethical norms on demand. It is the revelation of God's will in a form that requires faithful, patient, and diligent study. In this respect it is more like a gold mine than a computer. To discover the treasure and be able to use it, we have to be willing to search and toil. Although it is an invaluable source of guidance for the Christian life, it is not always an easy source to tap.

Finally, what the Spirit provides in the biblical ethical norms is not so much a moral code as a model of Christian personhood. It is a vision and a sense of how He wants us to feel and act. For this reason, too, it is extremely important that we investigate thoroughly and review repeatedly all that Scripture says about Christian attitudes and behavior. Only in this way will our perception of the model be as clear and complete as possible.

## B. Sacraments

The evangelical community is divided on the doctrines of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Some do not regard them as God's actions by which He conveys His grace, presence, and power. Rather, they regard baptism and the Lord's Supper as actions of believers, testimony of their acceptance and commitment to the Savior who was presented to them in the gospel. There are further disagreements over the manner of administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, eligibility for participation, and the nature of Christ's presence, to mention only a few. One of the great tragedies of Christendom is that these ordinances of the Savior, designed to express and foster unity among His followers, have been the source of such dissension and division.

In what follows I express and confess a sacramental view with which some evangelicals will not be able to identify. However, I will attempt to do this in a way that highlights what all evangelicals hold dear, namely, the evangel, the gospel of Jesus Christ. If baptism and the Lord's Supper are viewed as forms of the gospel, their value as an ethical and moral resource is readily evident.

Paul describes baptism as a transforming union with the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6). Although this is a one-time event, it has a dramatic and lasting effect. It is a powerful resource in the Christian's ongoing struggle against sin and toward righteousness. The reason for this is that baptism is a process by which the individual is liberated from slavery to the power of sin as well as from condemnation by its guilt.

Furthermore, baptism effects the crucifixion of the old self. The word *crucifixion* is, perhaps, significant in this connection. Crucifixion is a lingering death. The dying of the old self initiated by baptism is a long, drawn-out ordeal. The baptized believer still has an old self, squirming in rage and pain, fighting for life, even for release from the cross and return to control. As he experiences the influence and pressure of the old self, the Christian has a tremendous source of encouragement and confidence in baptism.

The new person does not have to be pushed around by his old self. The old self is defeated, crucified, dying as a result of the Christian's union with the crucified and risen Savior in baptism.



Nor does the Christian have to be intimidated or manipulated by sin and Satan, because he is baptized. The new person is liberated from them. This does not mean that he is free from their attacks or immune to their temptations. However, it does mean that he is free from their enslaving control, free to fight against them. Most important, baptism means that the Christian is free to enter the joyful service of his Lord and free to grow into His likeness through the power of His Spirit. For the Christian to remain aware of his baptism is to remember that he is free, which makes baptism a splendid moral resource.

When He instituted His Supper, Jesus referred to the bread and wine as His body and His blood offered for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:26-29). Paul describes the elements of the Eucharist as *participation* in the body and blood of Christ (I Cor. 10:16). Clearly, through partaking of this meal, the Christian is put in touch with the elements of Christ's atoning sacrifice. Even those who do not hold to the doctrine of the real presence generally recognize the Lord's Supper to be a *remembrance* of Christ's sacrifice and the *proclamation* of His death (I Cor. 11:25-26). Like baptism, the Lord Supper's is a form of the gospel, a vivid presentation of Christ's self-giving, a reenactment of the drama of Calvary which offers the benefits of that event to the recipients.

The fundamental benefit of the Lord's Supper from which all others issue is the forgiveness of sins. Whenever and however the Lord's death is communicated to a person, it is with the purpose that he recognize and accept the pardon for which Christ died. Through His Supper the Lord wants to remind and reassure the Christian that He loves him despite his sin, that He has dealt with the consequences of his sin, that His relationship to him is still intact or can be restored. Along with forgiveness, then, comes a renewal of the Christian's union with his Lord, from whom he is alienated by sinfulness and moral lapses.

The moral significance of the Lord's Supper is profound. Its potential as a resource for ethical and moral progress is tremendous. In the Lord's Supper the Christian can find the fresh start that he needs when he is dogged by awareness of his moral weakness and defeats. In it the believer encounters the love of God, which is both the motivation and the model of the Christian life. Like the other expressions of God's forgiving love, the Lord's Supper reactivates and revitalizes the power of the Holy

Spirit within the believer. It is a refreshing, encouraging, strengthening interlude in the tough, ongoing battle of the Christian life.

### C. Prayer

Strictly speaking, prayer is man's address to God, man's response to His loving words and actions. And yet it is also a work of the Holy Spirit. He both prompts the Christian to pray and helps him to pray (Rom. 8:26-27). Through prayer the Spirit sensitizes us to His presence and opens us to His influence. The purposes of prayer are numerous and its benefits are diverse. We will focus only on those aspects of prayer which relate most directly to the Christian as he functions ethically and morally.

To a large extent, Christian ethics is an attempt to understand what the will of God is in difficult and confusing issues which are not discussed clearly and completely in Scripture. Perceiving God's will in such cases and then carrying it out in sensitive and practical ways requires an abundance of wisdom. But this wisdom is ours for the asking (James 1:5, 3:13-17). As we analyze ambiguous moral issues and deal with cases in which divinely revealed norms and values appear to conflict, we actually have the opportunity to consult with God about them in prayer.

Rational analysis and study of God's Word can and should be combined with prayerful reflection and review of the matter at hand. Item by item, in personal conversation with God, we can go over every aspect of the case. In prayer we expose our analysis, interpretation, motives, and judgments to His scrutiny and seek His reaction. In prayer we reach out confidently for the Holy Spirit's aid in formulating the decision. Our rational analysis and interpretation of Scripture must be confirmed or redirected by the wisdom which only the Holy Spirit can provide.

Sometimes even more difficult than knowing what is right is doing what is right. Here, too, prayer is a powerful resource. When great courage, generosity, or patience are required in order to live by our ethical convictions, we can cry out for them to God in prayer. He will hear and help. God often waits until we have prayed before giving us the aid that we need. He does this, not because He is unwilling, but because He wants us to recognize unmistakably the fact that this help comes from Him. Not



only the clear teaching of Scripture but the experience of Christians throughout the ages substantiates this. Some of the most inspiring chapters of Christian history, current as well as ancient, are those which describe the steadfastness of Christian martyrs. Supported by the Holy Spirit in answer to prayer, they have endured deprivation, torture, and death rather than deny their Lord. Few, before facing these frightening choices and ordeals, displayed heroic qualities. However, in their extremity they prayed for moral strength, and they received it in a measure which exceeded their highest expectations. For moral strength in all situations we have the great resource of prayer.

There is indeed no shortage of resources for our moral guidance and strength. In the free world, at least, we are faced with a superabundance of them. (Even in most anti-Christian societies they are available, although at a risk and a price which are often considerable.) The Bible is published in hundreds of different languages and translations—it is more widely circulated than any other book. Christian literature and music flood the market, and Christian programs are broadcast extensively. Christian congregations and fellowships eagerly invite participation and membership. Baptism and the Lord's Supper can be obtained virtually everywhere. Prayer, a direct line to God, is open at all times to anyone who calls in Jesus' name. We have all the help that we need or can possibly use. We are, in fact, faced with an embarrassment of riches.

Furthermore, we can be confident of the complete adequacy of these resources. If we take advantage of them, we can experience significant ethical and moral success. They are powerful resources that can make a profound difference in our hearts and lives. Although perfection is not attainable in this life, great improvement is.

By drawing on these resources many Christians have demonstrated rapid and radical transformation for the better. For others progress may appear less dramatic and slower. But though the pace and form of the change may vary, the adequacy of the resources is constant. By utilizing them we can very definitely develop a clearer and stronger sense of what God wants us to do and what we are to avoid. We can stand vigorously against corrupt influences in and around us. We can move ahead in Christian obedience with confidence and consistency. God's help of-

fered through these resources makes such obedience possible. From this we are led to a rather sobering conclusion. Our ethical and moral failures are largely the result of our not employing the marvelous resources which God has put at our disposal. We cannot truthfully plead helplessness. We are without excuse.

A very crucial ethical decision which every Christian makes, knowingly or unknowingly, is whether or not he will use the resources which God provides to be morally strong. The alternative is to neglect them and become morally weak, or even die. God offers His help. He invites, urges, and enables us to accept, but He does not force Himself on us. We are always free to say no to Him.

Other factors also account for our moral failures, but many can be traced back to this single simple cause: we do not make sufficient use of the help that God gives.