

The Release of the Spirit

Book Notes by Brian Hofmeister

Watchman Nee, *The Release of the Spirit*, Sure Foundation Publisher, 1965.

BH Review: This is one of the 10 best books I have read to date. Amazing insights on what it means to abide in Christ - a take on spiritual life that does not revolve around disciplining one's self. It resonates with what my spirit has been touching on and searching for more of.

Introduction

Nee's terminology is clarified: inner man = spirit, outer man = soul, outermost man = body.

Chapter 1: The Importance of Brokenness

All believers receive the Holy Spirit at the time their spirit was regenerated. We do not need to find the Spirit, just release it. Our spirit will not be released until our outer man is broken. Release of the spiritual requires a personal breach with our connection to the physical.

Chapter 2: Before and After Brokenness

Engaging God via spiritual practices (memory recollection activities) assumes that God resides in the mind; that we only connected with him when we remember him, and therefore we need activities that produce remembrance. This denies the fact that God resides with our spirit, not our mind.

Practicing the presence of God comes from dividing soul and spirit. Activity based presence will never maintain presence because we cannot maintain activity. We can up the frequency of activities, but never sustain them. The answer is to reside in the presence of God via spirit regardless of our activities. Prayer retreats and washing your floor therefore become equally spiritual. "No matter how noisy it is outside, the inside does not need to respond." Deal with outside stuff on the outside, leaving your spirit unaffected within the presence of God.

"The ability to use our spirit depends upon the two-fold work of God: the breaking of the outward man and the dividing of spirit and soul," (29).

Chapter 3

Being preoccupied keeps you from responding to God when he calls. You don't follow God's leading on your spirit if you are doing things with your outer man. Nee pushes us to separate/exclude the outer man. I do not agree with Nee at this point and I feel like this chapter contradicts the prior. For example, do we need to call in sick when the Holy Spirit calls us to love someone? Can't we love regardless of what our tasks are for that day?

Chapter 4, How to Know Man

To serve/minister to another you must first diagnose their spiritual condition. Too often we try to cure before diagnosing; we proscribe the same cure for all spiritual ailments. Note that Jesus always gave the right word to the right people – he did not tell the woman at the well to be born again, nor did he tell Nicodemus about living water. Prayer helps us diagnose, yet we also must acknowledge that our own spirits serve as a diagnostic thermometer. Spirit diagnoses spirit; not mind; not emotion. You can only diagnose and cure spirit issues that the Holy Spirit has disciplined and broken your spirit with. This serves as another plea from Nee to separate soul and spirit – you cannot serve spiritual issues until you have separated that issue from your soul.

Chapter 5, The Church

“The basic teaching of the Gospels is the presence of God in one Man, while that of the Epistles is God in the church. May our eyes be opened to the glorious fact: God formerly dwelt in the Man Jesus Christ, but now God is only in the church, not in any other thing,” (50). God only works through broken people. Delaying brokenness by preserving the soul only delays the church’s ministry to the world. Nee spends a good time talking about breaking our minds through God’s word.

Chapter 6, Brokenness and Discipline

God will create physical circumstances that draw you into spiritual brokenness. Expect this; embrace it; value it in retrospect.

Chapter 7

We must receive conviction of the spirit, not just the soul. A soul can repent of the effects sin has on life and still speak lightly of it; yet the spirit repents under the conviction of sin as a man that falls dead before his maker. Zeal of the soul sets you on a course to release your power in full; yet only zeal of the spirit releases the power of God’s spirit in you. All of God’s power is there, but it will not be released until the power of your soul steps aside and is forfeited. I have distinct impressions of these two zeals in Seminary – vivid prayers that wondered if I was an advocate for God simply because he was the best thing for this world; maybe I would be as passionate for world peace or karner butterflies if that was deemed best for the world. I craved the power of God to come out me – zeal of the spirit that does not seem to have proper footing until I set aside zeal of the soul.

Chapter 8

After our spirits have been enlightened, they must be slayed. Enlightenment shows us sin – how even our most holy intentions were mixed with sin. We make great first impressions by displaying our soul, but the soul is always from self and for self. Do not preach by your knowledge or lead by your charisma. Let the Holy Spirit show and slay your sin and soul so that you can live in spirit. Only in brokenness do we truly minister.

Chapter 9

Brokenness makes you sensitive to the correction and edification of the Holy Spirit and the Church.

Chapter 10

Nee’s concept of Christian community is “fellowship of the Spirit.” Dialog is not the issue, one spirit touching another’s spirit is.

Nee’s final remarks encourage us not to fake anything through the outward man. Do not discipline yourself to act, for example, gentle. Accept the discipline (brokenness) of the Holy Spirit and you will be gentle. The Christian life is not about striving; it is about letting come out of you that which already is within.