

***CMC Affirmation Two: The Need for Continual Repentance and Sanctification.***

*#2. We acknowledge the brokenness of our world today, the moral decay, the idolatry of power, prosperity and distorted sexuality that often endanger the Lord's church. As people of God, we realize that we cannot be part of the solution while we are entangled in sin consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, we challenge one another to recommit to the daily spiritual disciplines of devotion, prayer, repentance and personal holiness. We aspire to develop Gospel-centered values and characters, as reflected in our lifestyles and priorities in a fallen world.*

American culture is at serious danger. Spiritually, a godless secularism is wide-spreading in public and private life. At the same time we are witnessing a proliferation of cults, new age spirituality, non-Christian religions and churches that have forsaken true Christianity. (As G.K Chesterton once observed, "When a man stops believing in God he doesn't then believe in nothing, he believes anything.") Morally, we see a growing obsession with money, sex, power, pleasure, fame, sports, violence and the bizarre and freakish in arts and culture. It seems we are becoming more and more like the first century AD and this is discouraging to many and arouses fear. But this is the world in which we must live and move on a daily basis. Its influences are all around us. We cannot escape them, and it is easy to become ensnared.

What are we to do? How shall we live? The first thing we can do is step back for a moment and get perspective. Believers in the early church lived in times much more challenging than ours, yet far from being overcome, they made a profound impact on the world for Christ. Like them, we must resist the demoralizing effects of pessimism, discouragement and fear, and with courage and hope set our hearts to faithfully follow Jesus Christ, "seeking to be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation,

among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15). When he wrote these words, Paul may well have had in mind what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: “you are the salt of the earth....you are the light of the world....let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Mt. 5:13-16).

Next, we should take to heart the advice of the Apostle Paul to the believers in the city of Corinth, a moral cesspool in the ancient world: “let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1). This exhortation is just as needed today as it was then. Like a clean white sponge immersed in a bucket of dirty water, we are tainted by the influences of the world and the flesh. We need cleansing, deep cleansing, not just from sins of the body, but from the deeper, root sins that effect our hearts. This cleansing begins with conviction of sin. But many of us today do not know our sins - at least not very well. In some cases, it is because we don't know the Bible, or at least we don't know it very well. In others, it is because we excuse, minimize and rationalize away our sins. For still others, we repeat the same sins so often that we become insensitive to them. Whatever the reasons might be, we need conviction of our sins in order to come to repentance. King David recognized his need for conviction of unrecognized sins and prayed: “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24). We can do the same and God will answer.

Whenever we recognize sin in our lives, we need to repent and return to the Lord. Some people think that we repent when we first come to faith in Christ and do not need to repent thereafter. But the words “believe” and “repent” (Mk. 1:15) are both continuous action verbs in the Greek text. Thus, Martin Luther could say in the first of his famous 95 Theses, “When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ said ‘Repent’, he called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”

To repent means to awaken to our sin, be sorry for it and turn from it with God's help. We need the help of the Holy Spirit to repent and should earnestly pray for it. Indeed, we should welcome it! Repentance is sometimes thought of as a grim business: looking at one's sin is a hard and depressing thing to do, we say. But though it can be hard to acknowledge our sin, to do so leads to the joy of forgiveness (Psalms 32 and 51) and restored fellowship with God.

The need for fresh exercises of repentance and faith meet us again and again as we seek to grow and mature in the kind of life God has called us to in this world - a life of holiness that pleases and glorifies him. Peter urges believers just like us "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also must be holy in all your conduct, since it is written 'You shall be holy because I am holy'" (1 Pe. 1:14-16). To be holy means to be set apart for God and God's use, set apart *from* sin, self-centeredness, the world's values and anything else that offends the morally pure God who loves us; set apart *to* a grateful obedience to God's will, centered on loving him wholeheartedly and our neighbor as ourselves, and giving up ourselves to his service. Through pursuing this holiness we take on the family likeness - the image of God - and bring glory to him.

In a very real sense, we are set apart unto God when we come to saving faith in Christ. But this is only the beginning of a lifelong process in which, through the Spirit's help, we put out of our lives all that is offensive to God and are molded into his likeness. Pursuing holiness is not optional, as some think, for we are told by the writer to the Hebrews to "strive for...the holiness *without which no one shall see the Lord*" (Heb. 12:14). Pursuing holiness does not earn us salvation but is simply the outworking of the salvation already freely given to us through God's grace. Pursuing holiness does not consign us to a dreary life of joyless, unremitting struggle. Just the opposite! Though it is challenging and difficult at times, it is a life of joy, satisfaction and fruitfulness in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It also puts us in a position for God to use us: “Now in great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work” (2 Tim. 2:20-21). And best of all, pursuing holiness brings us into increasing intimacy with God and fulfillment of his purposes for our lives.

Let us then seek the Holy Spirit’s ministry of conviction, cleansing, and empowerment that we may daily grow into the person God has called us to be and do the good works he has appointed us to do. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph.2:10). In so doing, we will glorify him and enjoy him forever (Westminster Short Catechism).

### **Personal Reflection and further reading:**

1. Would you prayerfully read through Psalm 51 in your devotion time, ask God to show you the pattern and roots of sins that have been troubling you?

Remember man-centered guilt and shame may only push us toward admittance of sins, but God’s grace and the reconciliation work through Christ enable us to approach the throne of grace without fear. It is in light of this comparison, Apostle Paul says “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.(2 Cor 7:10)”

2. Make time in the beginning and end of each day for personal quiet time and reflection. Cultivate a personal habit of reflecting, praying, journaling, accountability partners whom you can share vulnerably about your life.

3. Further reading books include: “Holiness” by J. C. Ryle, “Hot Tub Religion” and “Rediscover Holiness” by J. I. Packer.

## **關於作者 About the author:**

Tom Tarrants博士自從1978年起就居住在華府地區。他曾于1998 - 2010年間擔任C.S.Lewis學會的會長一職，在門徒訓練、領導力培育及護教學方面裝備動員信徒。Tarrants博士擁有道學碩士及教牧學博士的學位，同時也是福音教會聯盟中的按牧牧師。他目前擔任使者協會的特約講員，推動華人教會的門訓事工。

Dr. Tom Tarrants has lived in the Washington, D.C. area since 1978 and served as President of the C.S. Lewis Institute from 1998 to April 2010. He is a published author, regularly consults with churches and organizations seeking to develop discipleship programs to strengthen the local church. Tom holds a M.Div, as well as a D.Min Degree in Christian Spirituality. He is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Church Alliance. Tom has been invited to join AFC as minister-at-large, to develop discipleship programs that are uniquely for the Chinese churches.