TRANSFORMATION & INNERMAN/SANFORD

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Inner Vows

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that." But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin. (James 4:13-17)

Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord." But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, "Yes, yes" or "No, no"; and anything beyond these is of evil. (Matt. 5:33-37)

A woman came to us who could not bear a male child. Several times she had become pregnant, and had miscarried boys about the third or fourth month. Gynecologists could find no physical cause. She wanted fervently to give her husband a son. We asked concerning her life with her father, and could

find some hurts, but her reactions did not seem great enough to create such a destructive, obviously psychosomatic condition. Her brother, however, was not like the usual sibling who teases because he loves. This brother was vicious, continually embarrassing and physically hurting her. Her father failed to protect her. She remembered then, at about nine or ten, walking beside a river, picking up stones, hurling them into the water, crying out, "I'll never carry a boy child. I'll never carry a boy child." That was an inner vow, a directive sent through the heart and mind to the body. Though the conscious mind had long forgotten, the inner being had not. Though she now wanted to give birth, the earlier programing was still intact and functioning.

We took up authority in Christ, knowing that whatever we loose is loosed (Matt. 16:19; 18:18). Having pronounced forgiveness for her hatred of her brother, and induced her to forgive, we spoke directly to her body, even as Jesus rebuked the fever (Luke 4:39). We commanded the body to forget that hateful order and to return to the original command of God, to subdue and fill the earth (Gen. 1:28). Mentioning "subdue" was a polite way of reminding the body as part of nature, to obey the voice of the Lord even as Jesus commanded the waves and the winds, and they obeyed Him (Matt. 8:23-27). We prayed comfort and healing for her heart and spirit, and for her body. In the prayer, we visualized her being able to produce a healthy, normal baby boy. She did conceive and carry to full term a normal healthy son.

An inner vow is a determination set by the mind and heart into all the being in early life. Vows we make currently also affect us, but an *inner* vow is one set into us as children, usually forgotten. Our inner being persistently retains such programing no matter what changes of mind and heart may later pertain. The distinctive mark of an inner vow is that it resists the normal maturation process. "When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11). We may have many childish peculiarities, but we

mature and leave them behind, reminded only by friends, relatives, and family reminiscenses. Normal childish proclivities do not harm us other than to embarrass or prevent us as children, goading us to mature, until we "do away with them"; i.e., shyness, awkwardness, absentmindedness, insensitivity towards others' feelings, etc. But inner vows resist change. We do not grow out of them.

Inner vows may not become manifest immediately in behavior. Like the programing of a clock on an electric range, they may not kick on until the time set by the vow. They may rest totally forgotten and dormant, until triggered by the right persons or situations. Having forgotten them, we are unaware they exist or could have any effect.

We all have made many inner vows, of varying intensity and tenacity. Inner vows are as common to children as peanut butter in America. There are good and helpful vows as well as destructive ones. Even the good vows need to be released, so that we are not impelled by the flesh, but by the Spirit in freedom. Vows do need to be seen, for their nature is to prevent departure from them. They affect us like a railroad track affects a train. The conscious mind may be a very good engine, but it can run only on the track of the inner vow set for it in childhood. No matter which way the engineer may desire to go, the train will not change direction unless someone switches tracks. Inner vows, being lodged in the heart like an engram, respond not at all to the fleshly will of the inhabited. The person cannot, unaided, uproot or change that track. Such vows require authority. Only one who knows his authority in the Lord Jesus Christ can break a vow and reset the inner being to another way of acting.

Many marriages resemble a rail yard. Many tracks lead in. But the engine is not on the track leading to marital bliss. It runs on the track of hidden inner vows far from happiness. Unless someone switches the track, the train to marital bliss will never arrive. Though perhaps a person alone, with Jesus, could reset his own tracks, he should prefer not to. It is much easier, humbler, and better to let another in the Body of Christ

do it for us. Pride is best humbled by the Body of Christ ministering to us.

A young wife came to us who could not conceive. She greatly wanted to bear children for her husband. Tests revealed no physical reasons for barrenness, either in her or her husband, according to her gynecologist. She should normally have conceived easily long before. Questioning revealed that she had been the eldest of nine children born to a Catholic woman who became ill early on in each pregnancy and remained so until long after delivery. It took little imagination to see what happened each time her mother conceived. Feelings of imposition increased yearly, as she had to take over and run the household. Anger mounted day by day, pregnancy after pregnancy, at her mother for continuing to become pregnant, at her father for causing it, at the church for its rules, and at all the babies who caused commotion and labor. Ultimately she cried out over and over again, "I'll never be like my mother; I'll never act like that." The inner being easily interpreted such vows as orders not ever to allow pregnancy. Who can say how much power our determinations have to influence the functions of the body? Her later healthy, natural instincts and desires, even her love for her husband, could not overcome that earlier directive. I (John) pronounced forgiveness for her disrespect of her father and mother and the church, and by authority in the name of Jesus, broke that vow and directed the inner being and her body to receive and nurture life. At this writing, she is about to deliver her second baby. Would she have conceived in due time anyway or did her inner vow in fact prevent this from happening until the vow was broken? Who can say? We have seen this and similar inner vows broken so many times in prayer, with immediate beneficial results, that to us the revelation is confirmed.

Many wives have discovered the trouble is that their husbands were raised by mothers! We don't mean that critically, however facetiously. Boys soon learn that mothers have elephantine memories. They discover that "whatever you

say can and will be used against you in a court of law." Often whatever emotion that hangs out noticeably, good or bad, will be used by mama to control. So boys learn to hide from their mothers. The less she knows the better. Whatever she knows may be hauled up for criticism or scolding—weeks, months, or years later. Though all this is normal, sometimes the situation is so tense or the reaction so vehement, the lad forms a most obstinate inner vow: "Never share what you really feel with a woman. It's not safe."

Later on, when chromosomes and hormones change a boy's aversion to girls, he may want to share, and find himself unable. Most likely he may find it easy to communicate with girls, until he marries. Marriage puts the woman in position to trigger in him inner vows made relative to such primary females as mothers, grandmothers, and sisters. Frequently couples have come for counseling, perplexed by the fact that they had good communication until the honeymoon. Now her complaint is:

"He won't tell me anything any more."

Evening conversations sound something like the following:

"Hi, honey, how was your day?"

"Fine, just fine."

"Tell me about it."

"What do you want to know?"

"How did it go? What happened today?"

"Just great. Went just great."

"Like what?"

"What what?"

"You know, tell me some incidents. Tell me about your day."

"Oh, I don't know. Just like any other day I suppose."

"Well, what happened?"

"Whaddaya mean, what happened?"

"Tell me some incidents. How did your day go?"

"I just told you, just like any other day. You know how the office goes."

In no way does he know that his inner being has no intention to share what is really on his heart. Unknown to him or her, an earlier programing has kicked into action. Even if he hears his wife and is wounded and perplexed about his inability to be vulnerable to her, he may not be able to change his heart to open and share. He may repent a dozen times, only to return automatically to the pattern. The problem is that his repentances in the present concerning his wife cannot overcome the earlier programing of the vow concerning his mother. The repentance is true, but for the wrong sin. Like an arrow shot into the center of the bull's eye—at the wrong target. The repentance and prayer needed is for childhood resentments towards his mother (or other primary females) and for the breaking of that inner vow he set into his being. Present surface repentances alone cannot touch such deeply set directives.

Such inner vows are among the most common problems men and women face. Many a husband, unaware perhaps that he isn't sharing, gradually becomes more and more estranged from his wife. Lacking him, she may be emotionally wilting and dying and may eventually find other places, like the church or bridge clubs to find sharing and fulfillment. The husband meanwhile becomes lonelier and lonelier. Now he ripens for the almost inevitable affair. He has no way of knowing that if he divorces his wife and marries this woman who, "thank God, understands me," the moment he marries her, she will then be in the identical "ruled out" position his wife presently occupies. That inner vow confines him to isolation from any wife and exposes him to vulnerability (limited but more than with his wife) to anyone who does not trigger the action of the vow. He is doomed to loneliness and possible superficial affairs until the vow is seen and broken.

Unlike the two former examples, merely seeing and breaking the inner vow will not by itself set him free. In the former two, I (John) could speak to the body, which was eagerly willing to return to the original command of God to produce life. The body leaped, unimpeded, to fulfill its

purpose in creation. Few structures in the soul remained to block. But in the case of vows not to share, many other character structures remain after the original inner vow is broken. Those who have seen the movie, "Star Trek," know that when Voyager VI returned, a "planet of machines" had built a vast complex sub-planet of mechanisms around the original small probe—which was still seeking to fulfill its original mission! Just so, inner vows of this type have built huge surrounding complexes in the character structure, and all are still seeking to fulfill that original purpose, to hide the person from hurt. There may be, for example, a heart of stone, or unconscious, evasive and defensive habitual flight mechanisms, automatically triggered angers, many bitter-root expectancies, key words, phrases or actions that stimulate automatic reactions, deep anxieties and fears, incapabilities to trust, etc. After all these negatives are overcome, there will still exist the need to create totally new habit structures to replace the old. Extended counsel may be required, as one by one all the auxiliary structures are dismantled or transformed. Patience by all—wife, counselor, and husband—will be necessary, plus forbearance, compassion, and continuous forgiveness. It may take a long time to overcome the many complex "machines" of one little vow.

In women, the most common malformation we encounter is likewise an inability to share who they are with the man of their life. Not, however, usually in the area of talking. On the surface, in communication, women almost invariably are more desirous of sharing than men are. So much so that sometimes that fact itself is part of the problem, "Your desire shall be for your husband" (Gen. 3:16). Eve's desire was already by creation for Adam. The Lord meant that her desire would become inordinate, made so by insecurity. "A sandy ascent for the feet of the aged, such is a garrulous wife to a quiet husband" (Ecclesiasticus 25:20, Apocrypha RSV). God created woman to desire to please her husband, but right there is the entrance to trouble, for women were likewise raised with their fathers.

Little girls want to be the apple of their daddies' eyes. They come into earth innately knowing they are God's gift to ravish their daddies' hearts, to comfort, delight, and please. Being received by an appreciative father builds confidence in what it is to be a woman. A wife fulfills her husband from her own sense of beauty and desirability. If she knows she is a precious gift of God to him, she can bless him restfully with her. If she doesn't, and therefore requires constant stated approval and reaffirmation, she becomes a wearisome burden to her man; he always has to prove to her anew that she is desirable to him. That wears him out. He becomes vulnerable to some "siren" who is confident of her desirability.

Unfortunately, all too many fathers are unaware of their value. Less are dead enough to self-centeredness to be aware for their girls' sake rather than their own. Too many times little girls have bounded joyfully into their daddy's presence, only to be ignored or pushed away. New dresses were not noticed, or dad only said, "Yeah, it's okay," or to mama, "What did it cost?" School papers may not have been rewarded with compliments. Worse, the little girl, who lived from a romantically emotional world her father had long since forgotten, may have seen mother's heart crushed again and again mostly by what daddy failed to notice. Men, to her, eventually became regarded as "dumb," "off-base," not noticing or knowing where life really is. For this reason, God in His Word almost never has to remind the woman to love the man, she would have already; but "Let the wife see to it that she *respect* her husband" (Eph. 5:33, italics mine). "Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear" (1 Pet. 3:6). The "fear" is not usually of physical abuse, but of anxiety born of distrust—"The man will not see and do what will make me feel secure."

From constantly repeated neglects and slights as a little girl originates a subtle inner vow. A man's childish vow is not as subtle. It's simply, "Don't share." But a woman retains a hunger to meet and fulfill her man. Hidden to the grown one,

the most common forgotten inner vow of little girls has been, "Don't let him really have or know all of you." Sharing means from then on, first that the wife wants to share *his* life, to know *him* and talk about *him*, not the other way around. And second, her inner vow makes a clever game of what she does share with her husband. She may share enough of her, and give enough to him, to convince herself that she is the open and sharing one, unaware that she has unconsciously, carefully controlled how much she is sharing. He does not really have all of her, in the very moments of sharing in which her surface life protests otherwise.

How often have little girls clenched their fists in frustration when daddy didn't notice them? How often have daddy's words revealed he never really understood her at all? From reactions to such experiences grow distrust and disrespect, which strengthen the inner vow not to be vulnerable, not to really risk who she is with a man. "See if I ever. . . ." As in a boy, by the time natural desire reverses childhood aversion, the earlier directives are not only forgotten, most often they would be vehemently denied.

For one out of five women in America that inner vow is only the tip of the iceberg, for beneath it lies molestation by some trusted man—father, grandfather, stepfather, brother, uncle, or cousin.* When little girls broadcast their desire to be seen and held, many men receive the signals but interpret them bestially. They fail to honor the call to be fathers and honorable men who can love a girl to life as a desirable woman. They respond sexually, and thus violate not only the girl's body but her precious ability to trust herself openly to be her own lovely person with the right man. From the moment of molestation she may fear to let the beauty of what she is shine for fear the result will be nastiness. A most passionate inner vow screams through her being—"Shut down!" From then on,

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* This was written in 1980. Rachel Johnson reports (August, 1981) that statistics now reveal that one in every four women has been molested by a family member.

though she may become either frigid or promiscuous, behind both clings the same root, an inability to give herself fully to the man of her life. She may appear sexy, and have intercourse often, righteously or unrighteously. She may enjoy sex or detest it. But behind all is a covert inability to be all she is to the man. She cannot meet her man unreservedly with all her heart and spirit through her body. Sex is confined to physical stimulation, because her spirit is not free to flow out and nestle into the man. Her man may find himself bemused, confused by something intangible he senses is lacking. He cannot understand why, with a willing wife (if that is her case), he still hungers for others. The truth is that he has never yet had her. Loneliness is most poignant when there seems no reason for it.

The first difficulty for a counselor is to see the problem. All apparent clues may indicate that she gives, but the husband doesn't, and that he can't or won't receive her. A lack of clarity may be compounded by the fact that in truth he can't open or receive, both in communication and in their sex life. We have found it a wise principle that problems in marriages are never one-sided. Whatever problem appears in one mate, in the other is something either counter-balancing or identical, usually equally disturbing or destructive. This is especially important to remember when the sight of the eyes celebrates a beautiful saintly woman with a callous, uncouth man. We suggest reading 1 John 2:16 in this context, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and *the lust of the eyes* and the *boastful pride of life*, is not from the Father, but is from the world." Again, we must not judge by what our eyes see.

The first task of the counselor is to help such a woman see. Once she sees, to help her come to a real hatred, not of any person or thing outside herself, but of that practice in her old nature which blocks her from real life. She must come to hatred of that inner vow which caused the blocking practice. Such hatred is not automatic, and should not be taken for granted, no matter what the counselee protests. Fruits, not words, reveal truth. It takes time before fruits are steadfastly

manifest. Prayer should be immediate, for the parental dishonorings to be forgiven, for the vows to be broken, and the new life of freedom to emerge, but it may take awhile for proper hatred of the old nature and consequent death of self to arrive.

Again, the fullness of transformation can not be achieved without resurrection. A woman whose father never loved her to life may come to know herself outwardly as beautiful and desirable, and even flaunt it while inwardly feeling ugly and undesirable. A truly confident person does not need to flaunt, preen or brag. Flirting, or any hint of making use of sexual allurement, is usually a dead giveaway to inner arid deserts and distress. No matter how many things come to death on the cross, lasting results cannot happen without resurrection. Resurrection happens only by love. A person cannot come to life without being loved to life (1 John 4:19). The little girl needs a father.

Paula and I have acted as father and mother in Christ to many such women. But all too many times we have seen ministers and other counselors caught in transferences and being seduced. We warn every counselor stringently to keep the cross between the counselee and himself, to guard his own heart and feelings carefully, to be secure in his own mate (or in the watchful counsel of others if unmarried), to be girded surely in the moral law of God's Word, and to be regular in devotion and worship. The attempt to love others to life must be kept by the counselor, not by the counselee, in most secure, safe relationships. Counselors must know themselves to be fathers and mothers in Christ—and nothing else.

Fruits are not hard to detect. They cannot be hidden. "You are the light of the world. *A city set on a hill cannot be hidden*" (Matt. 5:14, italics mine). Whatever degree of physical glamour a woman may have naturally, when she also becomes beautiful from within, nothing can hide it. Beauty suffuses from inside and settles about her, without attracting wrong attention. Men treat her as the lady she has become. Quiet inner joy now radiates, no matter whether for the moment she

is sad or happy. She is free to give to her husband without demanding tit-for-tat reciprocation. Because he is free from demand, he usually begins to respond. One lady reported with delight, "He can't keep his hands off me. He's always patting me and telling me he loves me." Because she has become free, many talents long bound (Luke 13:16), begin to be discovered and soon flower. Counselors need to stand back, and let her happen.

Inner vows are as multifarious as people are. Some are simple, like a boy who swears he will never sing (because of early embarrassments or a demanding parent) only years later to discover a rich voice released. Some are complex, like a girl who refuses to put her head under water in swimming, but counsel discovers it has nothing to do with early swimming experiences and everything to do with a vow never to be risked beyond her control. In Paula's case, that vow had started in the water in the womb and had been strengthened by performance demands before she was able to answer them. Only now, years after the infilling of the Holy Spirit, and more years of seeing and praying over root causes, is she beginning to be free in the water!

People can make vows never to speak in public, or never to develop breasts, or never to grow up. Never to give not only of self but also of simple things like clothes, or to allow personal space to be invaded, or to wear hand-me-downs. Many inner vows have to do with ambitions, or rebellions against them—"I'll never fail again," "I'll be the best ever," or conversely, "I'll never try again."

The most vitiating are those concerning personal relationships. Children can make other powerful determinations against parents than we have discussed earlier, which also destroy marital relationships. "I'll get even with her" (the mother or sister), later projecting a consequent unconscious need to take vengeance on all women, specifically on the wife and children. "I'll never let him (brother or sister) get the best of me again" (either in reaction to teasing or in sibling rivalry), which results in automatic hidden competitive

and/or evasive mechanisms with a mate and close friends.

Some inner vows set the being upon untenable courses that lead to breakdowns or explosions. "I'll never let my temper go again; see what resulted when I did." Such a person thereafter may store up repressed angers until a merest spark sets off a holocaust. "Never again will I be unprepared when people ask me a question." Such a person may be tense in every group until he has figured out how to respond to every possible question. When he is put into too many situations involving too many quick adjustments, his inner vow becomes a major contributing factor to a breakdown.

Good inner vows need to be released lest they block normal healthy interchanges. I (John) turned each of my parents' good teachings into a strong inner vow: "Never hit a woman," "Never raise your voice to a woman," "Keep your temper," "Treat every woman as a lady." Such vows might seem good, but they are of the flesh, and binding, not of the spirit in freedom. Those and others of their ilk made me unreal with Paula. Rejecting them did not release a boomerang to violence. Never yet have I hit Paula or tried to wound by insulting, and the fact that I am free to lose my temper and raise my voice has never resulted in my becoming a loud or angry person. Conversely, I am probably less likely to become so for the fact that the Lord, rather than my fleshly determination, has me in those areas. My vows, not released to the Lord, would have locked me into reactions which later would have had to find some form of outlet. Perhaps more importantly, our righteousness must become His, by the flow of His Holy Spirit in us, not by the strivings and consequent prides of fleshly determinations.

How do we find inner vows? By asking. Counselors should look for inner vows behind stubborn practices in the old nature. Compulsive behavior may (or may not) indicate inner vows at their root; other factors may be at work. We must discern in each case whether a vow is in fact at the root of trouble. Where inner vows do lie at the root, seldom are they the sole factor even if major. They work in tandem with bitter

roots, hidden resentments and fears, etc. The crucial factor concerning inner vows is that if they are at the root, they are often the key. Their stubborn resistance to change, until seen and repented of, may be what blocks release from all other areas, seen or unseen. Especially whenever counselors find themselves puzzled by continuing lack of change in a counselee, most specifically when many factors have already been discerned and repentance should already have accomplished freedom, inner vows ought to be suspected and ferreted out.

Again, power (*dunamis*) such as would be needed to heal the physical body is not needed, but only the power (*exousia*) of authority. The least Christian who understands his authority (*exousia*) in Christ can break any inner vow. The prayer should not be merely hortatory, not "Help him, Lord, to overcome this inner vow," nor petitionary, "Please take away this inner vow, dear Lord." These will accomplish little if anything. The situation requires prayer in first-person authority: "In Jesus' name, I break this inner vow." It cannot be said as a magic ritual, by one who does not truly know the Lord nor believe his own authority in the Lord. Though demons are not usually involved directly (an inner vow being a structure in the flesh) the same impotence would result if we pray in unfaith, merely copying the ideas given here, as the seven sons of Sceva discovered when they tried to apply the name of Jesus in an unbelieving manner (Acts 19:13-16). No one likes to run naked and defeated. A counselee is set free only if his counselor has his own personal faith in the power and will of the Lord to act.

The prayer should be voiced fully, expressed several ways for the sake of the inner child of the other. "I break this inner vow of withdrawal. I speak directly to the inner child and I say in Jesus' name I release you from this habit of withdrawal. I restore you to the original delight of your soul to share you with your brothers and sisters in Christ. I release you to open your heart and be *with* others. Thank you, Jesus, I see (name of counselee) talking and laughing, no longer afraid to make a mistake, giggling in freedom rather than embarrassment. I

praise you, Lord, that you will continue until (the person's name) realizes one day with an exclamation of joy, 'Hey, it's true, I'm free, even as we prayed that day.' Thank you, Jesus, Amen."