

## **Befriending the Soul to Live the Good Life**

### **Part 3**

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## Chapter 5: Cultural Analysis

### How Did We Get Where We Are? The Abandonment of the Soul by the Church

There are few dangers threatening the religious future more serious than the shallowing of the religious mind.... our safety is in the deep. The lazy cry for simplicity is a great danger. It indicates a frame of mind which is only appalled at the great things of God, and a senility of faith which fears that which is high. Men complain that they are jaded and cannot rise to such matters. That may mean that the matters of the world absorb all the energies of the great side of the *soul*, that Divine things are no more than a comfort. And, if so, it means much for the future of religion, and much which is ominous. And the poverty of our worship amid its very refinements, its lack of solemnity....is the fatal index of peril.<sup>97</sup>

Today the soul is under tremendous stress to simply survive, let alone thrive. The loss of truth, lack of direction, hollowness of responsibility and the unrelenting invasion of technology have made serious demands on the health and welfare of the soul.<sup>98</sup> This is not a new condition for humanity but it is a “new”<sup>99</sup> condition for the soul. Until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the soul could find a place for restoration and fortification in the church, but the enlightenment propagated ideas that the internal, immaterial world was less than significant. Wells captures this transition:

The anchorage that the internal world of the spirit had found in the supernatural order disappeared in the blaze of enlightened attitudes, and the self, now left completely to itself, cut off from god and from the outside world, began to disappear. Once severed from the larger frameworks of meaning, people became increasingly introspective, and what they gazed upon looked increasingly weightless.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> P.T. Forsyth cited in David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 118.

<sup>98</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church At The End Of The Twentieth Century*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 1970), 80-85.

<sup>99</sup> I am using the word “new” here in the sense of the past one hundred fifty years to the present day. While some may scoff at this that is precisely part of the problem with the modern and postmodern mindset as anything older than yesterdays news is passé. There is no sense of continuity with the past because the past is irrelevant to present experience and present experience is the epistemological standard.

<sup>100</sup> David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 62.

The church allowed itself to be swept along by the cultural forces of the enlightenment by taking on its ideals in order to have a voice in the culture which expressed their thoughts regarding the arts and sciences and more importantly their theology. This yielded a dogmatic commitment to objective truth and a critical approach to the Bible. As a result of affirming the enlightenment assumptions, the church had left itself open to intellectual bankruptcy. With no one in the church asking why the American project of the late nineteenth century seemed to fit so well with Christianity, no explanation could be offered when the American project began to fall apart. The rise of industrialization, post Civil War social injustice, a rising population, the advent and influence of Darwinism and the rise of liberal theology and higher criticism called for a fit intellectual response from the church, but all the church had to offer was proof texts and Biblicism.

With the church intellectually bankrupt, its control and influence of higher learning began to collapse and, by the late nineteenth century, the transition of the University as an ecclesial intellectual force to a secular and unorthodox bastion of research scholarship was complete.<sup>101</sup> Internally, a change in the academic disciplines was characterized by an alteration in ideology and philosophy. The dynamic yielded a change in perspective within the humanities and sciences. The previous scientific presuppositions of natural causes in an open system were consistent with Biblical thought, but the modern view of natural causes in a closed system left no room for God and therefore no room for theology. With the churches' impoverished theological vision, it was susceptible to the heterodoxy of liberal theology.<sup>102</sup> This resulted in a fracture of the evangelical church as it either adapted to the culture and society around it or it withdrew altogether into fundamentalism.<sup>103</sup> Either option let the soul out of sight.

As one part of the church adapted to the culture, it capitulated its confessional core in an attempt to refrain from the modern sin of being too narrow.<sup>104</sup> It lost the

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<sup>101</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 83-107, 110-111.

<sup>102</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church Before The Watching World*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 1970), 110-111. Also, David Wells makes the following point for further clarification, "The Protestant liberalism...unabashedly sought a synthesis between Christian faith and modern culture. The liberals held that culture was flawed but that it was not estranged from the life of God. Because God is to be found immanently within all human beings, they said, the meaning and morality by which America should live is to be found in religious consciousness. This is the means by which God mediates his presence to America. D. Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 20.

<sup>103</sup> Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 43.

<sup>104</sup> David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*, 128-129.

appetite to contemplate the deep things of God, it lost its appetite for theology,<sup>105</sup> and the well from which the soul drinks, dried up. As a result, the soul has been lost for the sake of finding the self. This has been characterized by a shift from an interest in human nature to an interest in personality.

One of the most obvious changes signaling this shift was the way in which human identity came to be discussed after the 1950s. Before this time, identity was discussed in terms of what did not change, in terms of the thread of continuity that persisted through all of the changing circumstances of a person's life. Identity was a matter of what made a person distinct from other people over time. It was, in other words, what described that person's nature. After the 1950's, however, identity came to be associated with consciousness, with what was shifting and elusive. By the 1970s, it was increasingly being associated not with the narrative of one's inner life but with the projection of one's public image. Image and inner life were thus disengaged from each other.... For while it may seem shocking that Sartre should be so confident a believer in all unbelief, he is not much different from the modern secular person for whom God and the supernatural are absent from the private space in which they live. And both, interestingly enough, believe that the self can be manipulated to fill this empty place.<sup>106</sup>

As another part of the church steeled its resolve against the culture in an attempt not to compromise its orthodoxy, it sacrificed the soul at the expense of the mind by providing a pervasive environment to anti-intellectualism. As a result, it exalted spiritual experience as the defining characteristic of Christian maturity over consistent and faithful "fruit bearing" and applied spiritual blinders to its theological worldview which resulted in exalting dogmatism over doctrine. It was also marked by a general lack of critical thought and naïveté toward the sciences.<sup>107</sup> There is an aspect to this rejection of the mind and compromise of the soul which may be considered sinful. Os Guinness notes:

Evangelicals have been deeply sinful in being anti-intellectual ever since the 1820s and 1830s. For the longest time we didn't pay the cultural price for that because we had the numbers, the social zeal, and the spiritual passion for the gospel. But today we are beginning to pay the cultural price. And you can see that most evangelicals simply don't think. For example, there has been no serious evangelical public philosophy in this century....It has always been a sin not to love the Lord our God with our minds as well as our hearts and souls.... We have excused this with a degree of pietism

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 301. Also see *God in the Wasteland*, 24.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 152, 152-154.

<sup>107</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 116-127.

and pretend[ing] that this is something other than what it is – that is, sin... Evangelicals need to repent of their refusal to think Christianly and to develop the mind of Christ.<sup>108</sup>

### We're Here – Our Postmodern Position

Today, the soul is besieged by the perils of the postmodern age.<sup>109</sup> However, few in the church have recognized the pervasive influence of our time. That is a credit to the subtle invasion of postmodernism and its quiet transformation of our lives from wholeness to a nervous fracturing of our existence. The *zeitgeist* of this age has (as mentioned by Wells previously) encouraged emphasis on the external while allowing the elements of pluralism and the distaste for absolutes to promote a diaphanous reckoning of the transcendent. While we have been looking on the outside, the framework of our lives has slowly become undone.

This change has in the profoundest sense been *spiritual*. It is not just the outer fabric of our life that has been assaulted by change but its inner sanctum as well. Change has intruded on the core of our being, the place where values are wrought, appetites emerge, expectations arise, and meaning is construed.... it has contributed to the breakdown of the family, robbed our children of their innocence, diluted our ethical values, and blinded us to the reality of God. It has made us shallow. It has made us empty.... While we now bask in relative plenty, the very means of amassing that plenty – the reorganization of our world by the processes of modernization – has diminished our soul.”<sup>110</sup>

I am not suggesting that the culture of our day has completely ruined humanity. We have been ruined since the fall. The very fact that I am able to write this paper using a computer, in a heated house, in good health and security prohibits me from recommending such a bleak view. However, this progress has not come without sacrifice. The church has been influenced by the culture to such a degree that it is no longer a harbor against the storms of our present day ethos which besiege the internal landscape of our lives.<sup>111</sup> If the church assumes that the sciences and the academy will provide this structure, then it testifies against

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>109</sup> Wells defines post modernity as modernity stripped of the false hopes that were once supported by the straw pillars of Enlightenment ideology, the illusions that once rendered modernity at least tolerable for many people. *God in the Wasteland*, 216.

<sup>110</sup> D. Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 6-13.

<sup>111</sup> J.P. Moreland points out one of the reasons for writing *Body & Soul* was due to the lack of this dialogue in the church today as witnessed by its absence in the vocabulary of Christian thinking about psychology, theology, ethics, science and philosophy. [www.ivpress.com/spotlight/1557.php](http://www.ivpress.com/spotlight/1557.php)

itself. No universal body of ethical and religious knowledge in the universities or other academic institutions exists. This is due to the rise of scientism. The implications of this situation have been disastrous. The Christian worldview has been marginalized and Christian theology has been revised by the dictates of science while lowering the cognitive justification of biblical claims that are pertinent to the hard sciences (much like what happened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>112</sup> A view of this detrimental impact is articulated in a haunting way by Allan Bloom,

But where natural science ends, trouble begins. It ends at man, the one being outside of its purview, or to be exact, it ends at that part or aspect of man that is not body, whatever that may be. Scientists as scientists can be grasped only under that aspect, as is the case with politicians, artists and prophets. All that is human, all that is of concern to us, lies outside of natural science. That should be a problem for natural science, but it is not. It is certainly a problem for us that we do not know what this thing is, that we cannot even agree on a name for this irreducible bit of man that is not body. Somehow this fugitive thing or aspect is the cause of science and society and culture and politics and economics and poetry and music. We know what these latter are. But can we really, if we do not know their cause, know what its status is, whether it even exists?<sup>113</sup>

The church has not been faithful in its responsibility to encourage and equip Christ's followers to be friends to their souls.<sup>114</sup> The culture is not going to promote this friendship, it cannot. For God's people to reveal His glory, they must be guided to an awareness that the internal fortification of their lives is important if they are to set themselves apart within the context of being in this world. However, they must also be instructed in how to strengthen and invigorate their inner life so that their entire existence echoes the harmony, balance and focus of devotion to Christ. What does this look like? How can we make this a reality today? Will the church be able to regain its role in offering a place for the soul's refreshment and reinforcement?

The good news is that it can. God is faithful to complete the work he has begun (Philippians 1:6, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9), and we may find some cases where His

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<sup>112</sup> Moreland, *Body & Soul*, 7.

<sup>113</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 356-357.

<sup>114</sup> "When the church abandons the biblical worldview, when it fails to confront its culture with this worldview in a cogent fashion, it has lost its nerve, its soul, and its *raison d'être*. It becomes like an English teacher who goes to China but makes only a feeble attempt to teach the language and then, out a desperate sense of loneliness, learns Cantonese so that no one will have to speak English again. Wells, *God In The Wasteland*, 223.

work may already be in the process of equipping the church to recapture its vital responsibility.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### Practical and Pastoral

Modern experience has the capacity to shape the inner terrain of our lives because it engages us in ways that are intense and unremitting.... The islands of solitude have long since been submerged in the noise, urgency, and clamor of the modern world. We now experience directly the tidal surge of too much information, too many responsibilities, too much change, too many choices, and too many situations over which control has now slipped through from our hands almost entirely, all the way from the coldness of the workplace to the pain of broken families. This turbulent surf crashes unremittingly into psyches too small and too fragile to withstand it.<sup>115</sup>

This project would be in vain if I did not have in mind a view to bridge this academic exercise with our life. Our time finds the working (whether at home or in the office) mother, with two kids and a third on the way, struggling to find a quiet place for ten minutes just to clear her head. Our time dictates to the young executive that his work must be all-consuming. He finds the oppressive demands of his job leave little extra time, outside family obligations and responsibilities, for the health of his own life. Our time applauds the wealthy businessman who has everything on the surface of life in its proper place but never wonders if there is any deeper meaning to reality or if he does, questions what reality is and comes to the conclusion it is arbitrary. The common thread these people share is the tension between having an inward life, that compels them privately, and its irrelevancy to their public life.<sup>116</sup> Our recovery and discovery must be made within the context of our actual lives not within some ideal utopia of how things could be.<sup>117</sup>

The temptation is to offer a “soul help” step-by-step guide to recovery and spiritual formation. This is what many people in the church are looking for. This is

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<sup>115</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*, 287.

<sup>116</sup> Wells, *God In the Wasteland*, 226.

<sup>117</sup> “More than any other single thing, in any case, *the practical irrelevance of actual obedience to Christ* accounts for the weakened effect of Christianity in the world today, with its increasing tendency to emphasize political and social action as the primary way to serve God. It also accounts for the practical irrelevance of Christian faith to individual character development and overall personal sanity and well being.” Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, XV.

what they want: a formula or even better, a program. This is another example of the influence of modernity on the evangelical mindset.<sup>118</sup> This is not to say that practical solutions will not be offered as it would be most difficult to construct a bridge from the world of ideas to the real-life world of the Christian (and as a result the church), without offering ideas for practice in that life and world. However, these practical applications are not the ends to that life but an expression of that life.

It would also be much easier to offer a prescription or spiritual diet that would transform the entire life by changing the inner life. We can attest that many books have been written in that vein and some may have even been helpful while others only constitute a new crutch or create a new sub-culture for living the “perfect” life.

God has offered us one way to recapture the lost grace of a friendship with our souls. He has offered the Person of Jesus Christ.

#### **The Reality of Union with Christ**

Some may be disappointed in this outcome as they are unable to see any relevance between the life of Christ and their own, or even that He would even be capable of accomplishing such a task from such a perceived historical distance. Dallas Willard is aware of this bias when he writes:

Very few people today find Jesus interesting as a person or of vital relevance to the course of their actual lives. He is not generally regarded as a real-life personality who deals with real-life issues but is thought to be concerned with some feathery realm other than the one we must *deal* with, and must deal with *now*. And frankly, he is not taken to be a person of much ability. He is automatically seen as more or less a magical figure – a pawn, or possibly a knight or bishop, in some religious game – who fits only within the categories of dogma and of law. Dogma is what you have to believe, whether you believe it or not. And law is what you must do, whether it is good for you or not. What we have to believe or do *now*, by contrast is real life, bursting with interesting, frightening and relevant things and people. Now, in fact Jesus and his words have never belonged to the categories of dogma or law, and to read them as if they did is simply to miss them. They are essentially subversive of established arrangements and ways of thinking. That is clear from the way the first entered the world, their initial effects, and how they are preserved in the New Testament writings and live on in his

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<sup>118</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*, 209.

people....they invade our “real” world with a reality even more real  
that it is...<sup>119</sup>

Others may dismiss this outcome as simplistic and, since the answer is perceived this way, it could not possibly shape the complex nature of the soul. However, let us remember that the soul manifests itself through the inner life of our spirit and, through this faculty, we relate to God who is Spirit (John 4:24) by the power of the Holy Spirit which resides in us as the presence of Jesus Christ who in turn rules and reigns in our lives (John 14:25-26; 1 Corinthians 6:19, Galatians 5). This union with Christ is already a present reality for the believer [and the Church], (Romans 6:1-12; Ephesians 4:15; Philippians 2:1; Colossians 1:15-20, 2:6-7)!<sup>120</sup> Therefore, our inner life is already transformed by the indwelling presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit so that our entire life becomes a reflection of who we are in Him. We must walk in the certainty that an inner and immaterial relationship is taking place between our soul and Jesus Christ.<sup>121</sup> We must regard our soul to Him as He reveals the life of a new creation in us (1 Corinthians 5:17). As the church encourages, affirms and reminds us of our new identity [in Jesus the Christ], it encourages a friendship with our soul because our Friend is found there. As the church reminds us to be who we are (Romans 6:9-13), and provides avenues for that expression, it builds into us for the building out of our faith (Philippians 2:12–13).<sup>122</sup>

### **The Reality of Already**

Jesus announced the arrival of His kingdom (Matthew 4:17, 10:7; Mark 1:15, Luke 10:9, 11) as a reality to enter now (Matthew 5:20, 18:3; John 3:3, 5). His first coming, crucifixion and resurrection introduces a cosmic split in the Universe as the dual age of His kingdom and this earthly age are now in simultaneous existence (Romans 1–5). The reality of our union and resulting identity in Christ reveals that we now live in between two worlds (Romans 6–8). This Pauline eschatology is noted well by Geerhardus Vos, as cited by Wells:

The frequent reiterated distinction between “this age” and “the age to come” was hardly original to the authors of the Gospels and

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<sup>119</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, XIII.

<sup>120</sup> The Gospels paint a picture that Jesus Christ lived in the recognition that His life and power came from God in a living union (John 17). Therefore, we can rest in that sense of abiding without the anxiety that it must take our efforts to garner such a relationship. As a result the focus will be on Jesus and not on our religious duty as He is the one satisfying the life of our soul through the power of His Spirit. In this our lives reveal more and more of His character.

<sup>121</sup> With expression outwardly in our lives (Ephesians 2:10).

<sup>122</sup> It is of utmost importance to keep in mind that the reality of our union with Christ is the most intimate connection with that person who created the soul and all of its faculties as mentioned in the previous chapters.

Epistles but its use in the New Testament does constitute a radical reordering of the older Jewish distinction between the ages around the incarnation, resurrection, ascension, and return of Christ, through whom the “age to come” has been inaugurated and is now, even at the present time, intruding on the “present age.” The key point here is that the New Testament writers no longer speak of “this age” ending when the “age to come” began. Rather, they indicate that “this age,” with all its corruption and rebellion against God, exists coextensively even with those in who “the age to come” has already begun with their union with Christ. From the apostolic perspective, all of history is centered in this intrusion, in the coming of the reign of God, the finale to which will be the return of Christ and the triumph of his kingdom over all that has asserted itself against the centrality and rule of God....And if it is the case that by spiritual resurrection we are transferred from “this age” to the “age to come” through Christ, it is also the case that by the same divine work we are torn loose from this “world” in order that we might know and serve him.<sup>123</sup>

Our present life on earth is to be lived according to the reality that we belong to another life not yet fulfilled. Therefore, the reality that our soul is not ultimately at its satisfaction should encourage our reliance on the life it can now have in the Spirit (John 10:10, Romans 8). As the church continues to embrace this perspective, it will embrace the souls of those in it by holding on to its historic confessional core while maintaining the centrality of orthodox doctrine.<sup>124</sup> This, in turn, will lead to orthopraxy in the totality of life, and that will result in a unified doxology<sup>125</sup> of those who have their souls stirred by the mystery, awe and wonder of knowing whose they are and where they belong. It is in this eschatological union with Christ where the provision for holy living and discipleship finds its context. If you are united with Christ and experiencing the eternal life now it is folly to think that another kind of life [one that excludes

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<sup>123</sup> Wells, *God In The Wasteland*, 43-44.

<sup>124</sup> “Many churches have not learned the lessons that most parents stumble over sooner or later. Churches imagine that the less they ask or expect of believers, the more popular they will become and the more contended worshippers will be. The reverse is true. Those who ask little find that the little they ask is resented or resisted; those who ask much find that they are given much and strengthened by the giving. For it is only as lives begin to intersect in sacrificial ways that the church starts to develop its own internal culture, and it is only in this context that the reality of God will both weigh heavily on the church and be preserved in its life.” *Ibid*, 226.

<sup>125</sup> I wish to thank Dr. J.V. Fesko for the designation and movement of orthodoxy – orthopraxy – doxology.

befriending the soul] is possible or even appealing.<sup>126</sup>

### The Reality of Training

If we are ever to develop a spiritual life that gives contentment, it will be because we approach spiritual living as a discipline, much as the athlete trains his body for competition.<sup>127</sup>

Just the word “discipline”<sup>128</sup> turns many in the church off to a life emphasized by growing in grace. In this same way, spiritual “habits” turn those of us “off” who have the goal of authentic living, contra some pre-programmed regimen of duties or chores. But, we must find that discipline is a dispense of grace.<sup>129</sup> It establishes boundaries which, in turn, provide security, stability and *freedom* let alone strength and endurance. These are all qualities we can appreciate (and use) in life not to mention qualities that serve us well if they are developed in our inner life.<sup>130</sup> As we remain faithful to our union with Christ, we will be able to see His will and purposes made manifest in our lives.<sup>131</sup> We will become like Jesus (Philippians 1:6). While this union has accomplished and continues to accomplish much for us, it also makes a request of us in that we grow in our discipleship to Jesus. This is the best thing for our soul as it will blossom every area of our lives. The marks of this kind of relationship to Christ may be summarized as follows: 1) abiding in Jesus’ word, 2) loving the brethren, 3) bearing fruit. It is interesting to note that Jesus’ teaching on discipleship is practically synonymous with the remaining New Testament witness on sanctification. It is the only life available for the flourishing of the human soul as it retains the ability to connect with the

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<sup>126</sup> Willard, *The Great Omission*, 13-17.

<sup>127</sup> Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 117.

<sup>128</sup> Dallas Willard defines discipline as any activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot be direct effort alone....spiritual disciplines are designed to help us be effective in the spiritual realm of our own heart, now spiritually alive by grace, in relation to God and His kingdom. They are designed to help us withdraw from total dependence on the merely human or natural and to depend also on the ultimate reality, which is God in His kingdom. *The Divine Conspiracy*, 353.

<sup>129</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Holiness By Grace*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 161.

<sup>130</sup> As outlined in Richard Foster’s, *Celebration of Discipline*, the disciplines of grace are listed as: meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. Richard J. Foster, *Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline*, (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1983), vii – viii.

<sup>131</sup> Jean-Pierre De Caussade, *Self Abandonment to Divine Providence or The Sacrament of The Present Moment*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1966), 42.

complexity of the soul through the multidimensional phenomena characterized by it.<sup>132</sup>

Gordon MacDonald portrays the place, where the works of the disciplines occur, as a garden. It is the central inner spiritual territory where we encounter the life of discipleship first. It is where God walks and God works. It is to our advantage to walk and work with Him. If not, we lose the capacity to have our lives filled and completed. We will be unable to enjoy, even learn to enjoy, the eternal and infinite perspective on reality we were created to have. Our friendship with Jesus will suffer and our perspective as stewards of His blessings will be lost. Last, the distinction between God as Creator and we His creatures will vanish, and with it, our ability to see ourselves as His special and valued children. Once we lose that identity, our ability to withstand the storms of life fades away.<sup>133</sup>

It is important to note, at this point, that growth is different for each individual. No one, while on this earth, has come to complete spiritual maturity. However, this is not an excuse for a life of spiritual insanity.<sup>134</sup> We must account for where people are in the life of their soul, and continue to hold them accountable in seeking the fullness of Christ's reign and rule to be made increasingly manifest in their soul.

The task of this paper is not to provide an exhaustive treatment of discipleship or even a basic plan for establishing that life for the believer but to show, by the soul's own essence, that this is the life that the church needs to nurture in the souls of its body. The disciplines of grace are effective only as they bring our union with Christ into a fuller, more complete expression for our lives today. As the church becomes that entity embracing, experiencing and encouraging the "grace full" life in and to its body, it will provide a visible representation of heaven coming down and glory filling our souls.

Keep in mind the people mentioned at the beginning of this chapter who need the church to speak life into their lives. Once they (and we) realize who they are in Christ and how that identity is nourished, then circumstances will lose their power to dictate the expectations of their lives. Now, we can move towards some practical suggestions for those who want to begin the process of a life worth<sup>135</sup> living and, as a result, befriend their soul in light (and in spite) of the world we currently experience.

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<sup>132</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *Following The Master*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 134 – 135.

<sup>133</sup> Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World*, 119-120.

<sup>134</sup> Practical, not clinical, insanity defined here as continuing to do the same things over and over again while expecting different results.

<sup>135</sup> Worth is used in the sense of the exchanged life with and in Christ. Where our old life is exchanged with His new, eternal life and His presence is manifested in us and through our distinct personalities which results in the only life worth living.

## The Hard and Easy Things To Do

The introduction of television into our daily lives exposes our inner lives and our souls to the cliché of our culture and its stream of consciousness. It does not require much effort to process the images, but the demand to complete them wears on our lives. It is this subtle maneuvering that allows it access to our consciousness and, as a result, to our inner life. This would not be a problem if television promoted a set of values or allowed interaction at this internal level, but it does not. It uses drama rather than argument to deliver information that appeals solely to the emotions. This is how it measures value. I am not making an ascetic appeal to withdraw from watching television, but I am asking if it would be wise to reconsider our worship and investment in television toward the betterment of our total life. Wells puts the issue front and center:

...Television presents so many images, so many shifts and changes without any grounding in time, place, or logic, that it overloads the other-directed viewer. It is one thing to emulate a father or mother in the context of the home, with its dependable routines and stable beliefs. It is an entirely different matter to try to emulate fashions and fads that change overnight and that have no charm beyond the claim to be new or scandalous. And so, for a generation that has turned for guidance to television rather than family, church, and place, the failure of the medium to offer a simple or consistent reading of the diverse external world has slowly led to the realization that the inner directed journey is ultimately unfulfilling, the self is really an illusion.<sup>136</sup>

If we are careful to consider how this particular technology (and, for that matter, any technology) impacts the soul, then we would do well to steward it in a way that honors the union we have and the life we are called to lead...but what will we do with the extra time not spent on the tube?

Our time has led us to easy access of information and easy access to the necessities of life (this is a blessing) but instead of allowing this convenience to free our minds we have allowed our intellect to park in idle while allowing others to do our thinking for us. When we turn off our television, let us ensure that our minds are turned on; we must begin to think again. Our minds must once again think in a critical way towards the world we live in. They must be available to learn, know and apply the truths of Scripture in a way that compels creativity and imagination.<sup>137</sup> The best thinking and thinkers should be in the church. We have

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<sup>136</sup> Wells, No Place for Truth, 163-164.

<sup>137</sup> Christians have been given the Word of God in epic narrative, poetry and in letters. It is easy and often perplexing to understand but regardless we must apply our minds to it in order to shape a proper reverence and awe for God which in turn will lead us to wisdom (Proverbs 1:7).

been given a renewed mind and we should employ it (Romans 12:2) to the service of our souls and to the glory of God. If we are perplexed at how to begin the cultivation of our intellect, then we need to look to Paul, for in his writings we are shown how Christians should think.<sup>138</sup> This is not knowledge for the sake of knowledge but a development of the mind that allows us to love and serve God and others more (Ephesians 3:14-21). If we continue to allow this drift of the mind then the indictment of Charles Malik will continue to attest to our weakened intellectual exertion:

The mind as to its greatest and deepest reaches is not cared for enough. This cannot take place apart from profound immersion for a period of years in the history of thought and spirit. People are in a hurry to get out of the university and start earning money or serving the church or preaching the Gospel. They have no idea of the infinite value of spending years of leisure in conversing with the greatest minds and souls of the past, and thereby ripening and sharpening and enlarging their powers of thinking. The result is that the arena of creative thinking is abdicated and vacated to the enemy. ...For the sake of greater effectiveness in witnessing to Jesus Christ himself, as well as for their own sakes, the Evangelicals cannot afford to keep on living on the periphery or responsible intellectual existence.<sup>139</sup>

This is not thinking for the sake of rationality, or a view that reason holds all the answers to life. This is an attempt to encourage us to ask “why” more consistently and to process our motives and actions against our values and priorities. This is critical reflection in order to bring a maturity to our thoughts that begin to understand the nuances of simple and true devotion to Christ apart from those things that only provide entertainment value. It is applying our minds in order to reveal the glory of God through intellectual rigor.

This revival of thought life will allow us to recover truth and this, in turn, will bring a freedom and depth to the soul of which the world is in desperate need and the church is in short supply.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> I am indebted to Bruce Lowe for his presentation of this idea in his course on “Acts and the Pauline Epistles.”

<sup>139</sup> Charles Malik, *The Two Tasks* (Westchester, IL: Cornerstone, 1980), 29-34.

<sup>140</sup> In my research for this project I have come across what appears to be a resurgence in Christian thinking. While it is still limited to academic circles for the most part pastors like John Piper, Tim Keller and Mark Driscoll are leading Christians into a growing epistemological awareness. I also reviewed an email exchange between members of Hugh Ross’ *Reasons To Believe* Chapters regarding the soul, mind and body problem (materialism and substance dualism) and was encouraged by the level of debate taking place within the church in preparation for an argument outside the church.

## The Reality of Grace

As noted in the previous section, it is important to develop our mental capabilities and abilities for the life of the soul to flourish, but we must not fall prey to the belief that on the basis of a cognitive understanding of our union with Christ, we will be able to resist sin through mental resolve alone. However, we must be convinced, that in Christ, a power otherwise unavailable is present to transform our lives.<sup>141</sup> Buchanan makes it plain:

The consideration of the continued presence and constant operation of the Spirit of God in the soul of every true believer is fitted at once to encourage and animate him in the path of holy obedience, and to impress him with an awful sense of reverence and godly fear. It is a strong consolation and a cheering ground of confidence and hope, that amidst all the corruptions with which he is called to contend, and the innumerable temptations by which he is assailed, he is not left to depend on his own wisdom and strength, but may ask, in believing prayer, the supplies of the Spirit of grace, and rest on the promise, “My grace is sufficient for thee; I will perfect my strength in weakness.”<sup>142</sup>

This is what Paul encourages Titus with in 2:11-12, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age..” We are trained by grace through the presence of His Spirit. Grace then becomes more than the unmerited favor of God. It becomes the influence and means by which the soul experiences true kinship with Jesus Christ. The fullness of Christ in our life empowers our soul for holy living.<sup>143</sup>

## Final Words

It is my hope that we are convinced of the certainty of the soul and the real way in which we must pay attention to it now. Its redeemed nature may be our present nurture in this life. When the church challenges us to be more aware of the present reality of our own eschatological union with Christ, through the stern mercy and grace of God, then the church will be the organism conducive to the life of the soul and, as a result, regain its own.

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<sup>141</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Holiness By Grace*, 60.

<sup>142</sup> James Buchanan, *The Office and Work of The Holy Spirit* (1843; reprint, Carlisle, Pa., Banner of Truth, 1966), 244.

<sup>143</sup> Walter Marshall, “How to Live a holy Life by the Power of the Gospel” a new version of his book *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*. Trans. Bruce H. McRae, (Atlanta: Bruce H. McRae, 2001), 28.

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