

Spiritual Formation Versus The Life of Christ—Which One Will You Choose?

Spiritual formation is sweeping quickly throughout Christianity today. It's no wonder, when the majority of Christian leaders have either endorsed the movement or given it a silent pass. For instance, in Chuck Swindoll's book *So You Want to Be Like Christ: 8 Essential Disciplines to Get Your There*, Swindoll favorably quotes Richard Foster and Dallas Willard. Swindoll calls *Celebration of Discipline* a "meaningful work"¹ and Willard's book *The Spirit of the Disciplines* "excellent work."² In chapter three, "Silence and Solitude," Swindoll talks about "digging for secrets . . . that will deepen our intimacy with God."³ Quoting the contemplative poster-verse Psalm 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God," Swindoll says the verse is a call to the "discipline of silence."⁴ As other contemplative proponents have done, he has taken this verse very much out of context.

Roger Oakland explains:

The Spiritual Formation movement . . . teaches people that this is how they can become more intimate with God and truly hear His voice. Even Christian leaders with longstanding reputations of teaching God's word seem to be succumbing. . . .

We are reconciled to God only through his "death" (the atonement for sin), and we are presented "holy and unblameable and unproveable" when we belong to Him through rebirth. **It has nothing to do with works, rituals, or mystical experiences. It is Christ's life in the converted believer that transforms him.**⁵

What Christians need is not a method or program or ritual or practice that will supposedly connect them to God. **What we need is to be "in Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:30) and Christ in us. And He has promised His Spirit "will guide [us] into all truth" (John 16:13).**

In Colossians 1:9, the apostle Paul tells the saints that he was praying for them that they "might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." He was praying that they would have discernment ("*spiritual understanding*"). He said that God, the Father, has made us "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (vs 12) and had "*delivered us from the power of darkness [i.e., power of deception]*" (vs. 13). But what was the key to having this wisdom and spiritual understanding and being delivered from the power of darkness? Paul tells us in that same chapter. He calls it "*the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints*" (vs. 26). What is that mystery? Verse 27 says: "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

For those wanting to get involved with the *Spiritual Formation movement* (i.e., *contemplative, spiritual direction*), consider the "**direction**" you will actually be going.

And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in his sight: ***If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.*** (Colossians 1:21-23)

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power. (Colossians 2: 8-10)

Endnotes:

1. Chuck Swindoll, *So You Want to Be Like Christ: 8 Essential Disciplines to Get You There* (Nashville, TN:W Publishing Group, a div. of Thomas Nelson, 2005), p. 15.
2. Ibid., p. 13.
3. Ibid., p. 55.
4. Ibid.
5. Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails, 2007), pp. 91-92.