

9/16/09

“Developing a Christian Mind: How to Get One and Keep It”

Bob Bullock

Course Outline

Session I

The Great Commission or the Great Omission?

Session II

Responding to the CALL to Live a Focused Life
Problem Question: How do we put things in focus?

Session III

Out of Our Christian Minds
Defining a “Christian Mind”

Session IV

Getting Wisdom

Do you ever feel as though you have all of the wisdom you need in making decisions and living life? How does one become ‘a wise person’? What does the Bible say about Wisdom?

Session V

*What does the “knowledge of God” have to do with it?
How can Knowledge can be both intellectual and experiential?*

Session VI

*Pilate’s famous question: “What is Truth?”
What is Truth? How do we know the Truth when we see and hear it?
How do I know what truth really is in an age of skepticism?*

Session VII

*What does it mean when people say that ‘Jesus is Lord of all of life’?
What does it mean to (and how can I) ... Love God with all of my heart, mind, soul, and strength?*

Session VIII

*Developing a Christian Mind: Learning to Think Christianly & Biblically
The Problem of Evil
The Problem of Pain and Suffering
How Can We Accept Miracles*

Session XI

*Developing a Christian Mind: Understanding The Particularity of Christianity
How am I to trust in Christ in a time in which many people believe Christianity may be only one way to God?*

Session X

What would it look like if the church today really did intentional spiritual formation? Am I really interested in becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ?

“Developing a Christian Mind, How to Get One and Keep It.”
Bob Bullock

Session I

The Great Commission or the Great Omission?

Most everyone who attends church regularly is aware that Jesus gave the Great Commission to his disciples following his resurrection, shortly before he ascended to heaven. We often hear a pastor repeat his words in Matthew 28:18-20 just before a baptism:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

When Jesus said that he had received ***“all authority in heaven and on earth”*** it is clear that it was none other than God the Father who had conferred unique and far reaching power upon him. As Lord of the resurrection, Jesus was “Lord of all of life.” That means that he is the Lord of all creation, Lord of universe, Lord of human history, Lord of the Church, and Lord of my life and yours. Jesus speaks without equivocation, without exception. The fact of his Lordship is beyond question and without dispute. We need look to no other for he is indeed ***“the Alpha and the Omega. I am the Living One. I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”*** (Revelation 1: 17-18). His statement here, as he begins to speak the words of the Revelation to John, are a direct parallel to Revelation 1:8 where God speaks and says of himself, ***“I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”***

The alpha and omega is the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. The Lord God is the beginning and the end. In other words, God the Father is the eternal Lord and Ruler of the past, the present, and the future. Without him, nothing is eternal. He is the beginning of all existence, wisdom, and power, the Lord of time and human history, and through the resurrection of his Son, he has acknowledged him as the Lord of all of life... ***“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...”*** (Matthew 28:18).

No wonder then that the Apostle John fell at his feet when he saw Jesus, the Lord and Ruler of all that is. There is no place in all the universe where his power does not reach and his sovereignty does not command. Everything and everyone belongs to him...

“Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is

above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.” (Philippians 2:6-11)

The Lordship and supremacy of Jesus are so important to the Apostle Paul who first met him on the Damascus road and spent years in prayerful meditation on the significance of his Lordship that he explains to the Colossian Church:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the ¹firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”
(Colossians 1:15-20)

Now we understand that Jesus is Lord not only of the physical world through his resurrection, but that all of creation (ourselves included) were created by and under his authority. But Paul goes further still by saying that all rulers, powers, thrones, and authorities of both the physical and the spiritual world are under the authority of Christ himself. Then still further, we are told that a part of his Lordship is that he is Sustainer of all creation and that in him everything holds together and because of him, it does not disintegrate into chaos. Now we come to see and understand that because he is the Sustainer of all of life, that none of us are independent from him. We are his servants and must daily trust him for protecting us, caring for us, and sustaining us.

As ***“the firstborn from among the dead”*** Jesus was raised from death and his resurrection proves that his dominion includes the material world as well. What confidence he gives us as we face death itself, knowing that he is the Conqueror of death and in him we too shall overcome death.

How then, did the Church at large miss taking the Great Commission seriously? What part about Jesus having ***“All authority in heaven and on earth”*** did we fail to understand? Or could it be that in all actuality, we have become selective of what we choose to understand and put into practice. Could it be, that Jesus is asking just a little too much of us as mere mortals here? Granted, there have been those in the Church’s history that have taken him at his word with no “Omission.” We think of the Apostles for instance who as tradition has it, all were martyred for their Lord with the exception of John who is said to have been the youngest of the Twelve disciples and lived to guide the Church in his old age. Yet Dallas Willard is right to ask, ***“Who among us today, is a disciple of Jesus, in any substantive sense of the word ‘disciple’?”*** He writes, ***“A disciple is a learner, a student, an apprentice—a practitioner,***

¹ See note on Colossians 1:17 in *The Application Study Bible*

even if only a beginner. The New Testament literature, which must be allowed to define our terms if we are going to get our bearings in the Way with Christ, makes this clear. Disciples of Jesus are people who do not just profess certain views as their own but apply their growing understanding of life in the Kingdom of the Heavens to every aspect of their life on earth."

In contrast, the governing assumption today, among professing Christians, is that we can be "Christians" forever and never become disciples. Not even in heaven, it seems, for who would need it there? That is the accepted teaching now. Check it out wherever you are. And this (with its various consequences) is the Great Omission to the Great Commission in which the Great Disparity is firmly rooted. As long as the Great Omission is permitted or sustained, the Great Disparity will flourish—in individual lives as well as in Christian groups and movements. Conversely, if we cut the root in the Great Omission, the Great Disparity will wither, as it has repeatedly done in times past. No need to fight it. Just stop feeding it."²

In answering a question at a *Renovare* Conference earlier this year, Willard said, "In the last two hundred years, the Church has done a good job of making "Christians" rather than making disciples."³ The problem seems to be that it is easier to make "Christians" who are such nice people when the real mission of the church is "to make disciples." In fact, the word disciple is used in the New Testament 269 times and the word, "Christian only three times. Realistically, it is easier to make "Christians" than it is "Disciples."

Simon Peter once reminded Jesus, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." (Mark 10:28) "In contrast", writes Willard,

"...the non-disciple, whether inside or outside the church, has something 'more important' to do or to undertake than to become like Jesus Christ... A mind cluttered by excuses may make a mystery of discipleship, or it may see it as something to be dreaded. But there is no mystery about desiring and intending to be like someone—that is a very common thing. And if we really intend to be like Christ that will be obvious to every thoughtful person around us, as well as to ourselves."⁴

In 1937, Lutheran pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned the world of the "cost of non-discipleship" in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. He made a masterful attack on what he called, "easy Christianity" or "cheap grace," writing in the contest of twentieth-century Europe and America. Bonhoeffer defined "cheap grace" in part, in saying:

² Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2006) xi.

³ Dallas Willard, *Conversations with Dallas Willard, Renovare Conference*, San Antonio, TX, June 21-24, 2006.

⁴ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 8.

“Let the Christian rest content with his worldliness and with this renunciation of any higher standard than the world. He is doing it for the sake of the world rather than for the sake of grace. Let him be comforted and rest assured in the possession of this grace—for grace alone does everything. Instead of following Christ, let the Christian enjoy the consolations of his grace! That is what we mean by cheap grace, the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs. Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness from sin that frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow upon ourselves.”

“Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”

“Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.”

“Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son.”⁵

Jesus said to his disciples, ***“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”*** (Matthew 16:24-26)

Obviously the cost of non-discipleship is high. What we must remember is that spiritual formation or “discipleship is a life long process of learning to cooperate with the Holy Spirit’s work in us, renovating, remodeling, renewing, remaking, and transforming us in ways great and small. It is listening to God through daily prayer and the reading and study of the Scriptures. It is learning to listen and respect Jesus’ authority as Lord in every area of our lives. It is dedicating the time to grow in our personal relationship with him. It means hearing his call and following him as he invites us to join him in his ministry and mission in and through the church and into the world. If those kinds of things are going on in our lives, then we are closer to the path of discipleship than we may realize. As the Apostle Paul says to the Philippian Christians, ***“...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”*** (Philippians 1:6)

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (a 1959 reprint of a 1937 book)(USA:Macmillian Company 1959). 46-48. Pastor Bonhoeffer was imprisoned in Flossenbergl Concentration Camp after participating in a plot to assassinate Adolph Hitler and executed by the Nazis just before the arrival of the Allies.