

SO YOU WANT TO BE LIKE CHRIST... DITCH THE DISCIPLINES OF DALLAS WILLARD

By Rev. Ken Silva, Southern Baptist pastor-teacher,

Oct 12, 2008

As I checked my online traffic report today for [Apprising Ministries](#) I noticed someone had been reading [Charles Swindoll: What Are You Thinking?](#), a post that I had written back in September of 2006. You may recall this is about the time Swindoll came out with his book *So You Want To Be Like Christ*. When I followed one of the links within that piece back I was reminded of the following:

“Apologetics in Action” From Dallas Willard.org:

We asked Dallas to role-play an evangelistic conversation with a 20 year old girl who grew up in a Christian home, but finds her worldview challenged when she goes to college... [She says] “But I still struggle with how I should view those who have other beliefs. I’m not sure I am ready to condemn them as wrong. I know some very good Buddhists. What is their destiny?”

I would take her to [Romans 2:6-10](#): “God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.”

What Paul is clearly saying is that if anyone is worthy of being saved, they will be saved. At that point many Christians get very anxious, saying that absolutely no one is worthy of being saved. The implication of that is that a person can be almost totally good, but miss the message about Jesus, and be sent to hell. What kind of a God would do that? I am not going to stand in the way of anyone whom God wants to save. I am not going to say “he can’t save them.” I am happy for God to save anyone he wants in any way he can. **It is possible for someone who does not know Jesus to be saved.** But anyone who is going to be saved is going to be saved by Jesus: “There is no other name given under heaven by which men can be saved.” ([Online source](#))

If one happens to be familiar with the character one just can’t help hearing comedian Dana Carvey in a whiny, nasal voice as “the Church Lady” saying, “How conveeeeeenient.” Now because Swindoll, Willard and me are all Southern Baptist ministers, and because of my concerns about the ecumenical drift within the [Southern Baptist Convention](#) — fueled as it is by this current lust affair with corrupt CSM (see below)—I’ve updated this prior post and republish it here for the many new readers God has graciously given to one as undeserving as I am.

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. (2Timothy 3:1-5, KJV)

Protestants Praising The Proponents Of The New Counter-Reformation

On page 13 of his book *So, You Want To Be Like Christ? Eight Essentials to Get You There* (SYW) Chuck Swindoll, the chancellor of *Dallas Theological Seminary*, heartily endorses the work of [Dallas Willard](#). It's important to note that it's Willard, along with his friend [Living Spiritual Teacher](#) and [Quaker](#) mystic "Roshi" [Richard Foster](#), who are key proponents of corrupt [Contemplative Spirituality/Mysticism](#) through their brand of spurious [Spiritual Formation](#). In reality it's a neo-pietism which germinated in the asceticism of so-called "Desert Fathers" and then later flowered through the antibiblical monastic tradition of the apostate [Roman Catholicism](#).

In SYW Swindoll informs us:

While rummaging through an old bookstore some time ago, I came across Dallas Willard's excellent work *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. Bedside reading, it is not. This convicting piece of literature is not something you plop down on the sofa and read alongside *People* magazine. Willard's words require you think like him.

Pastor Bob DeWaay has done a great job in Biblically dismantling these disciplines of Willard considered "excellent" by Swindoll in his article "The Dangers of Spiritual Formation and Spiritual Disciplines: A Critique of Dallas Willard and The Spirit of the Disciplines." Leaving aside Willard's embrace of the Roman Catholic Church as a legitimate expression of Christianity, more importantly DeWaay points out the flawed premise as:

Dallas Willard bases his entire spiritual disciplines book on his understanding of [Matthew 11:29, 30](#), which says, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light"... Willard is very critical of traditional Protestant doctrine and practice, declaring it a massive failure. His remedy for this failure is to see the body and certain ascetic practices using the body as the means of change... our conclusion is that in Matthew 11 Jesus was offering salvation to all who come to Him. Now let us examine Willard's claim that Jesus was telling people to try to emulate His life-style. Willard claims that we are failing to practice the disciplines that would make us able to live better lives and that most Christians are failing to live lives pleasing to God. He further states that the solution is that we practice spiritual disciplines that are based on Jesus' lifestyle and supplemented by practices of the Medieval Catholic Church...

Willard offers no exegetical analysis of the passage in Matthew to defend his interpretation. In my opinion, his position is not defensible... The spiritual disciplines are not taught in [Matthew 11:29, 30](#) (Willard's primary proof test), and even Willard admits they cannot be found elsewhere in scripture... But he is nevertheless enthusiastic about the recent rediscovery of the disciplines. Dallas Willard is excited to tell us that finally, through the lead of people like Richard Foster, we are having a revival of the use of spiritual disciplines. ([Online source](#))

This is what Swindoll tells us is an "excellent work" and here's something else that "Willard's words" should make one think about. On his own website [Dallas Willard](#) also informs us that people who don't know Jesus can still be saved, as we saw above in the opening of this article:

What Paul is clearly saying is that if anyone is worthy of being saved, they will be saved. At that point many Christians get very anxious, saying that absolutely no one is worthy of being saved. The implication of that is that a person can be almost totally good, but miss the message about Jesus, and be sent to hell.

What kind of a God would do that? I am not going to stand in the way of anyone whom God wants to save. I am not going to say 'he can't save them.' I am happy for God to save anyone he wants in any way he can. **It is possible for someone who does not know Jesus to be saved.** ([Online source](#), emphasis mine)

So this is the kind of thinking we get from "Protestant" SBC philosopher Dallas Willard; "if anyone is *worthy* of being saved"? His comment above shows Willard is performing a preventive strike upon the following from the Lord — *as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one"* ([Romans 3:10-12](#)).

Guilt By Association Or Contemplative Road To Apostasy?

But instead of taking what God has said at face value Willard will express his very wrong, and highly subjective, "feelings" gleaned from his neo-Gnostic CSM when he speculates what he'd want God to say, "At that point many Christians get very anxious, saying that absolutely no one is worthy of being saved. The implication of that is that a person can be almost totally good, but miss the message about Jesus, and be sent to hell."

No, the clear teaching of Scripture is that *no* human being in their natural fallen state *can* ever be "good" as defined by the Creator — *those who are in the flesh cannot please God* ([Romans 8:8, NASB](#)). This is what Jesus means when He says — "*I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again*" ([John 3:3](#)). As an SBC minister Willard really ought to know better than to muse that by missing "the message about Jesus, [they will] be sent to hell." This is because Jesus warns us that without the Gospel being preached to them unregenerate mankind stands *condemned already* to Hell (see— [John 3:18](#)).

So rather than whining, “What kind of God would do that”; Willard needs to man up and ask the better question: What kind of a God would even choose to save undeserving rebels in the first place? Our loving and merciful, yet holy and just LORD God Almighty of the Bible Who became man Himself to go to the Cross and make a way for people who hated Him to be saved. What Willard conveniently leaves out is that it is our Creator God Himself Who stated what His Gospel would be; and the actual issue is not that He couldn’t save someone another way, it’s that the Lord has said He would not save anyone apart from Christ.

But men and women, this kind of foolishness with Swindoll recommending people teaching unbiblical nonsense is precisely what happens when evangelical leaders attempt to jump on a popular bandwagon without knowing where the doomed caravan is actually heading. In fact on page 15 of SYW Southern Baptist pastor Swindoll even refers to *Celebration of Discipline*, the foundational text book of spurious CSM as a “meaningful work.” For a proper Christian assessment, from Dr. Gary Gilley, I refer you to [“Celebration of Discipline” by Richard Foster an Encyclopedia of Theological Error](#).

What I’ve been trying to tell you here at AM is that everyone who practices these so-called “spiritual disciplines” of CSM long enough—as have Foster and Willard—eventually falls in love with mankind. Remember from our text above; it is written that in last days *men will be lovers of their own selves*. And as this delusion sets in their theology becomes more and more inclusive with many mystic fools finally ending up even preaching universal salvation of all of mankind.

Take for example, in SYW, that Swindoll quotes favorably from the book *The Way of the Heart* (TWOH) by the late Roman Catholic monk and mystic [Henri Nouwen](#). Nouwen’s own practice of the transcendental-lite meditation they call [Contemplative/Centering Prayer](#), which is exactly what advocates of CSM are talking about by “silence and solitude,” ultimately led him to teach universalism in his book *Sabbatical Journey*. Nouwen says:

Today I personally believe that while Jesus came to open the door to God’s house, **all human beings can walk through that door, whether they know about Jesus or not**. Today I see it as my call to help every person claim **his or her own way to God** (51)

O, and let us not get the idea that Swindoll wasn’t that familiar with Nouwen’s book because a full four years earlier in his article “The Depths Of God” Swindoll writes: “In his book *The Way of the Heart* Henri Nouwen does a splendid job of analyzing the downside of what he calls ‘our wordy world’ ” ([Online source](#)). And in fact Swindoll goes on to use a part of this same quote from Nouwen’s TWOH, which then appears on page 10 of SWY just a bit before Swindoll’s glowing praise of the spiritually warped Willard mentioned earlier.

Dallas Willard, who personally practices these alleged spiritual disciplines of Contemplative Spirituality/Mysiticism, and Nouwen who did as well, both end up saying virtually the same antibiblical things regarding the salvation of mankind. Guilt by

association or the broad contemplative road of apostasy? Well, I'll let you decide; but, if I were you Charles Swindoll I'd get myself off the path you're on post haste!