

Just Avoid It

(May 23, 2023)

I've got a lot to cover this week. It's funny but sometimes I think I'll run out of things to discuss, but then I take a quick look at what's happening in the world and I realize there's actually TOO much to discuss and like some other sites, I'd be posting daily, sometimes two to three times daily. I just don't have that kind of time.

This week, I'm hoping to cover the following topics:

- Pfizer's lies
- Revisiting the Ravi sex scandal
- Spiritual Formation
- Racial Reconciliation
- Social Justice
- Love Thy Neighborhood Non-Profit
- Tim Keller's Death and Legacy
- Wokeness Increasingly Found within Christendom
- Made to Be Replaced
- AI, AGI and What It Might Mean for Society
- Revelation 18, Part 1

The above is mainly what I plan on writing about this week, including the final bullet, which includes video teaching on the first 8 or so verses of **Revelation 18**. I'd like to get as much written as possible so with that in mind, I'm going to try to keep things shorter so that readers are not overwhelmed, though I cannot guarantee that.

I will have the **Revelation 18**, Part 1 lesson up later today, hopefully. In this article, I'd like to broach the subject of Spiritual Formation; what is it and whether or not it's Scriptural. It's important to know because increasingly, Spiritual Formation (along with social justice and racial reconciliation), are finding their way into Christendom.

Spiritual formation is often defined as a type of discipline that the practioner/Christian involves themselves in for the purpose of attaining higher working knowledge of God, which then transform the person's life for the better, where the rubber meets the road.

Portland Seminary has this definition:

Christian spiritual formation is the process of being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ for the glory of God and for the sake of others (II Corinthians 3:17-18).

The focus of spiritual formation is the Holy Spirit, who guides the ongoing journey towards union with God.

The response is submission. Formation is an organic, life-long, and holistic process involving right thinking (orthodoxy), right behaviors (orthopraxy), and right feelings (orthopathy) of individuals and communities. [1]

Again, this is merely their definition, which they summarize as, "**Spiritual formation** focuses on the *deepening of one's relationship with God*." This is accomplished through various *disciplines* adopted and utilized by the follower of Jesus. Portland Seminary further breaks it down by explaining tools often used in the spiritual formation process.

Spiritual disciplines are the tools and pathways of spiritual formation. Practices such as labyrinth walking, contemplative prayer and Lectio Divina – the traditional monastic practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer – are good, but they do not necessarily result in formation. Only the Spirit can bring about spiritual formation and our invitation is to consent to the journey. [2]

In their second sentence, note the words or phrases, "labyrinth walking, contemplative prayer and Lectio Divina." The last phrase is connected to monastic life, where the ritual (my word), of reading Scripture, meditation and prayer are put into deliberate practice. Notice they say it's "good" but only the Spirit working in the life of the believer will result in true spiritual formation and an "invitation" to continue the journey.

Another group - Berean Research provides this definition of Spiritual Formation:

Spiritual formation is the process of apparent spiritual development through engaging in a set of behaviors, termed *disciplines*. Advocates believe these disciplines help shape the character of the practitioner into the likeness of Christ. [3]

For those who adopt the practices and beliefs associated with Spiritual Formation, it is believed that without the disciplines associated with it, true growth cannot occur within the life of the believer. It contains an element of *works*. Richard Foster ("Celebration of Discipline"), is a strong proponent of Spiritual Formation and has spent years pushing the subject. So much of what is Spiritual Formation *sounds* wonderfully spiritual and uplifting. But is it?

The main problem with Spiritual Formation - whether anyone wants to agree with this or not - is the idea that our spirituality is achieved through a process of techniques administered in union with the indwelling Holy Spirit and verified by our *feelings*. Please refer to the second quote above and please note specifically where Portland Seminary states that "...*the traditional practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer - are good...*", which implies that there is something that is *better* than just reading the Word and praying to God. This is completely absurd to think that reading the Bible is only "good" but not really good enough! This de-emphasis on God's Word is telling.

How in the world would we know about God if He did not take the time to reveal Himself to us through His written Word? Yes, there was a time historically where God revealed Himself through dreams and words spoken by His appointed/anointed prophets before His Word was written down. Today, there is a

growing group of people within Christendom who yearn to know God better (a good thing), and unfortunately, tend to relegate His written Word as less important than "dreams and visions" (and emotions conjured up), that they believe God uses to inform His followers (a bad thing).

As someone who spent a number of years within the Charismatic Movement during the 1970's, I can attest to the fact that today's spiritual formation is nothing more than the excesses of the Charismatic Movement with a new name and slight twist. The Charismatic Movement itself has morphed into the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), which teaches that God has raised up 500 or so authentic apostles today (with the same authority as the original apostles, with Paul replacing Judas), and plenty of true prophets.

The Charismatic Movement always went beyond God's written Word, emphasizing what God was "saying" in the present tense. I vividly recall some of the things taught within that movement and more often than not, it involved a "new thing" that God was getting ready to do that would result in global revival. I lost count how many times I heard that and yet, the Scriptures seem to point out that as the end of the age approaches, not only will there *not* be global revival, but there will be the exact opposite - a nearly completely global *rejection* of God. This will climax during the coming seven year Tribulation where hatred of God and His authentic believers, will be persecuted to the extreme, resulting in multitudes of executions because they believe in and truly follow the Lord in obedience to His Word.

The Charismatic Movement, NAR and whatever it evolves into always caters to how a person *feels*. This is the subtlety of the error. This is exactly how Satan got Eve to sin, because without her realizing it, Satan caused her to look to the way she *felt* about the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (**Genesis 3**). Eve changed God's Word into a lie with her *feelings*. Whenever we resort to using our feelings to judge something, we often fail and fail miserably. For more on this, I highly recommend Dr. Harry Ironside's book, "*Holiness: The False & the True, A Biographical and Biblical Explanation.*"

Spiritual Formation relies heavily on how a person *feels* about their relationship with God. If they have genuinely *good* feelings, they will judge that they are on the correct path and will push forward. *Bad* feelings tells them to avoid. The disciplines used within Spiritual Formation are geared to our feelings and therefore, our *flesh*.

Four or five years ago, my wife and I deliberately chose to begin reading the Bible through from **Genesis 1** to **Revelation 22**. When we began, I will admit the process seemed tedious and even somewhat boring. Over the years, I've noticed that as I've gained more knowledge of His Word and therefore of God Himself, I have greater understanding, which translates to (hopefully!), how I live my life.

Because I am becoming more familiar with God's Word, the Holy Spirit has more to work with in me to correct, to guide, and to grant greater discernment. This occurs in the background but (I hope), is evidenced by others. It doesn't come by walking a labyrinth, or by doing what the Catholic monks do. It comes through the very pedestrian habit of reading His Word, which over time gains more of a foothold within the person and allows the Holy Spirit to work to create more of the image of God the Son within us. Satan prefers we avoid God's Word because it is truth.

I don't see in Scripture God pointing His followers to *practices* that are taken from monastic life or from the realm of emotionalism. What I see instead are constant reminders to read and know His Word and to learn what He expects from us. Then we are to choose to deliberately obey His Word. As we move out in faith to obey His Word, we gain more of Him, we become more solid in our faith and we - I believe - become more confident in who He is and how He guides us. This is *not* an accident.

Satan tries to trick us into believing that our feelings need to corroborate or confirm our Christian life so that we can "feel" that we are in fact, growing closer to Him and being a better Christian. Satan knows how easy it is to trick fallen human beings into judging right or wrong by what they *feel*. It is a complete trap because Satan is a master at pitting our feelings against us without our even realizing it. This is not to say that we should not have and express feelings. It simply means that actual truth, not the way we feel about it, should guide our lives.

Over the years, I've heard all sorts of things from other Christians about how they came to an important decision. The fact that many have told me they had a "dream" or experienced an emotional urge or something else, reminds me of my days in the Charismatic Movement. That's how I lived and it's embarrassing to remember and a constant warning.

Yet we look at the books of **Nehemiah** and **Ezra**. Those two men did not go by how they felt at all. They read the Scriptures and wept because they knew neither they nor the people of Judah had followed God's Law. They "felt" remorse for not having done so and through repentance, immediately sought a way to correct that problem. If you'll take the time to read **Nehemiah**, you'll see what he went through to obey God's Law. It's incredible and at times, he got so angry at the people for their careless attitude about God's Law that he went around pulling out the men's beards! (**Nehemiah 13:25**) We are *not* talking about "legalism." We are talking about the fact that all Christians are to love God proving it by obeying His truth/law from the heart, because we *want* to, not because we "have to."

So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, *saying*, 'You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves.'

I'm not recommending we take Nehemiah's approach, but he was so concerned about people *not* following God's Law that he wanted to shake them out of their complacency. The men had intermarried with women from outside of Israel, which was forbidden. I can appreciate Nehemiah's frustration.

It's so obvious but often so hard to see truth because people spend so much time trying to wade through how they feel about something. If it's based on feelings, we do not need God's Word. Spiritual Formation encourages that. Avoid Spiritual Formation at all costs.

[1] <https://www.georgefox.edu/seminary/about/formation.html>

[2] Ibid

[3] <https://bereanresearch.org/spiritual-formation/>