

8 B MORE ON DUALISM (DUALISM AND ITS DANGERS)

Introduction

1 Cor. 10:31 tells us, “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

This is an amazing command. It says that the most mundane actions in life (eating and drinking to keep ourselves alive) can be done in a way that gives glory to Almighty God. Unfortunately, too often we split life apart and think we should only do “spiritual” things for God. As a result, humanistic thinking and less than high quality effort may go into work, family, leisure, and the environment.

Roots of Dualistic Thinking

Dualistic thinking in Christian circles traces back to the Greek philosopher Plato (429-347 B.C.). Greek thought was highly dualistic. Plato’s ideas went like this:

Since nothing on earth is perfect (agreed), there must be another world somewhere where everything is ideal, a non-material realm where the ideas or “forms” of everything on earth reside. What we see here are shadows of the perfect world. Plato didn’t think in terms of a fallen world.

Plato also emphasized a separation between soul and body, suggesting that the pure soul is somehow imprisoned inside the body. Only at death would the soul be free. This concept is not consistent with the Bible’s teaching on the resurrection of the body.

At the time of Christ the Gnostic cult held that matter was basically evil and only spirit was good. The book of Colossians is largely a refutation of Gnostic thought.

With the understanding that mankind was fallen and the earth had been cursed, these ideas got woven into Christian thinking. Since everything on earth is corrupt, we need to escape the material reality and enter the spiritual realm. Thomas Aquinas made several philosophical advances but wrote about a distinction between “Nature” (everything on earth) and “Grace” (everything spiritual). Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) distinguished between the “phenomenal” realm that can be experienced and the “noumenal” realm of values and ideas.

Values, ideas

Noumenal

Physical reality

Phenomenal

Christian philosopher Francis Schaeffer called this split “lower story” and “upper story” thinking, requiring an irrational “leap” to associate meaning with anything physical.

Causes of Christian Dualism

Somehow it's easy for Christians to adopt a dualistic mindset, probably because it seems "spiritual."

My chief question is, "Why are so many Christians methodological religious Dualists?" For the sake of time, I will merely list these six causes (and the reasoning behind them), which support Religious Dualism.

- 1. Anthropological Dualism – If there is a strong body/soul dualism, maybe life is composed similarly.*
- 2. Metaphysical Dualism – If there is a strong temporal/eternal dualism, maybe life is composed similarly.*
- 3. Social Pressures of Pluralism and Tolerance – In a multicultural society I can't be expected to invoke my beliefs all of the time. If everyone did that, life would just get too messy. It's best if we all just try to remain neutral, especially when it comes to the "Public Square."*
- 4. Personal Lack of Faith – Look, you believe whatever helps you get through life, and I will believe what helps me. I don't want to be thinking about my faith all of the time. Be practical.*
- 5. A Gross Misunderstanding of Holiness – Holiness always means spatial separation. I'm not supposed to have anything to do with the world. Extraction from the world is the "essence" of holiness.*
- 6. A Misguided Understanding of the Biblical Meta-narrative – Jesus died to save souls from a collapsing and sin-wrecked creation. The highest calling I can have in life is being a full-time soul-winner, helping others to get suited-up before this plane comes crashing down. Jesus only wants to redeem a part of the Creation. You can't really do everything to the glory of God.*

This last cause, "A Misguided Understanding of the Biblical Meta-narrative", is beyond question a major contributing factor to forming Christian Religious Dualism. [1]

Dangers of Christian Dualism

If we split life apart we wind up with-

- A God who cares ONLY about souls and salvation
- Christians whose ONLY focus is a single hour on Sunday morning
- Worship and glorifying God that only can occur within the walls of a church building
- Playing by a different set of rules Monday through Friday (or Saturday)
- Surrendering all the rest of life to the media or the state

In the Bible we actually find that God cares about families, work, government, law, art, health, the poor and oppressed, animals, nature, and many other parts of life. Particularly in the Old Testament we find directions for dealing with much of daily life.

Bill Peel sees these dangers: [2]

1. Faith becomes a private matter
2. Daily work is seen as insignificant
3. Ordinary people see themselves as insignificant to God
4. Christians miss opportunities for influence

Danger of false spirituality

At various times in history, in an effort to be spiritual, Christians have taught or thought that it's wrong

- To examine evidence for faith
- To ask questions about faith
- To associate with nonbelievers
- To put effort into our work
- To enjoy anything in the culture
- To own anything but the absolute minimum
- To read anything but Christian literature
- To participate in higher education
- To plan for the future
- To use modern technology

Where dualism can lead:

- In homes- neglect repairs and maintenance, neglect landscaping and decorating
- In friendships- keeping friendships only with prospective converts
- In social settings- having no "common ground" with others
- In learning-reading only spiritual literature
- In dealing with the environment: willing to "trash the planet" for expedient gain
- On the mission field- caring only for souls and neglecting bodies (food, medicine)

Michael Wittmer [3] writes that many distinctions we make are unbiblical. There is no sacred/secular. There is no spiritual/material. There is only supernatural vs. natural and righteous vs. sinful. Only God Himself is uncreated, and only God deserves our worship.

Veith adds:

It may seem strange to think that such mundane activities as spending time with your spouse and children, going to work, and taking part in your community are part of your "holy" calling, and that the daily grind can be a "spiritual sacrifice."

It is not as strange, though, as what currently tears many Christians apart: a "spiritual" life that has little to do with their families, their work, and their cultural life. Many Christians treat other people horribly, including their spouses and children, while cultivating their own personal piety. Many well-intentioned Christians lose themselves in church work and church activities, while neglecting their marriages, their children, and their other callings.

But ordinary life is where God has placed us. The family, the workplace, the local church, the culture, and the public square are where he has called us. Vocation is where sanctification takes place. [4]

Dualism and Compartmentalism

David Naugle writes that extreme dualism becomes compartmentalism and actually plays into the Enemy's hands. Ultimately, dualistic thinking splits all of life apart, with the "spiritual" overcoming the "secular" and making life on earth a second-class existence: [5]

- Soul (good)/body(bad) –Plato
- Spirit (good)/matter(bad) -Gnostics
- Heaven (good)/earth(bad)
- Eternal (good)/temporal (bad)
- Spiritual (good)/physical(bad)
- Grace (good)/nature (bad)
- Faith(good)/reason (bad)
- Sacred (good)/secular(bad)

Though applauded as super-spiritual, this false, fragmented approach to Christianity hands huge chunks of life over to the kingdom of darkness. It results in serious psychological disintegration and personal fragmentation in the lives of believers. It is an unbiblical perspective on Christian living and borders on heresy. In fact, it is! [6]

Naugle imagines a Screwtape-inspired discussion by demonic personalities about such a ploy, including this exchange:

(O)ur crowning achievement has been in the churches. Under the well-intended influence of their hoodwinked leaders, they actually believe our lies are the truth! They think they come out of the Bible. The silly, little Christians have confused creation with sin, and now they can hardly wait to evacuate the planet and head off to heaven where they think they really belong!... They think that Christianity is its own distinct realm of life rather than a way of life for every realm. They separate their faith from the bulk of their lives, and even oppose Christ to their cultures. How proud they are of their resulting superspirituality, nicely ensconced in their cozy, well-fortified Christian ghettos!... As a result — and how delicious this is! — they put down all

vocations except church-related vocations. They think Christians who become professors are backsliders! They have denied the goodness and value of the Enemy's creation. They despise their own bodies. They have abandoned cultural life and essentially turned it over to our control. [7]

In place of this sinister dualism, a Biblically-based worldview offers a fresh, motivating vision of wholeness. ..Christianity is concerned about the whole person, the whole of life, and the whole world! For God is not a God of dualism, but of unity, integrity, and completeness. This is exactly what a truly Biblical view of life teaches! We must learn to just say NO! to dualism through a Christian worldview! [8]

Life becomes compartmentalized (or departmentalized) according to Tozer:

"This (dualism) tends to divide our total life into two departments. We come unconsciously to recognize two sets of actions. The first are performed with a feeling of satisfaction and a firm assurance because they are pleasing to God. These are the sacred acts"

"Over against these sacred acts are the secular ones. They include all of the ordinary activities of life which we share with sons and daughters of Adam: eating, sleeping, working, looking after the needs of the body and performing our dull and prosaic duties here on earth. These we often do reluctantly and with many misgivings, often apologizing to God for what we consider a waste of time and strength." [9]

Dorothy Sayers wrote this: " (The church) has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as result, the secular work of the world is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that the greater part of the world's intelligent workers have become irreligious, or at least, uninterested in religion." [10]

By default, the "secular" parts of life overwhelm and eat up any "sacred parts."

"Secularism, however, elevates the secular to the point where it is believed that nothing exists beyond that which we can see. Accordingly, secularism says there is nothing beyond this life. It denies the church a voice in society, and even if God is not denied explicitly, the secularized culture operates as if He does not exist. There is nothing transcendent to which the secular is accountable." [11]

We have often seen in the political realm that many believe that the state should have precedence over the church.

(Biblically,) the church is not to bear the sword, and the state is not to govern matters of worship and evangelism. The church is to do the job of the church, and the state is to do the job of the state. This does not mean, however, that the church cannot speak to the state, and it does not mean the state must be wholly indifferent to the plight of believers. Moreover, it does not mean

that God is concerned only with church matters or that His law only addresses narrowly religious issues such as worship and doctrine. Instead, the Word of God addresses all of life. There is no area of life that does not fall under the governance of divine revelation. [12]

Getting Beyond the Sacred-Secular Divide

Once we recognize the sacred-secular wall, how do we move beyond it? Mike Baer suggests the following: [13]

1. Recognize False Concepts for What They Are

(T)he idea (sacred-secular) stands contrary to Scripture. Calling a lie a lie is the first step in overcoming it.

2. Be Clear in Biblical vs. Unbiblical Distinctions

There is no such thing as sacred or secular. However, there clearly is right and wrong, moral and immoral, obedience and disobedience, righteousness and sin.

3. Focus on the Holy ONE Instead of Holy PLACES

4. Recover and Teach the Priesthood of All Believers

To be sure there are different callings and giftings and offices, but these are in function not standing, purpose not status. Let us honor the true egalitarian nature of the Gospel and respect the place each member of the Body holds.

5. Celebrate the Lordship of Christ In and Over All Things

The Great Commission begins with these powerful words: And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...” (Matthew 28:18 ESV)

Re-orienting our thinking

1. We must offer every action up to God as an act of worship. See every action as sacred

Every act of [the Christian's] life is or can be as truly sacred as prayer or baptism or the Lord's Supper. To say this is not to bring all acts down to one dead level; it is rather to lift every act up into a living kingdom and turn the whole life into a sacrament. If a sacrament is an external expression of an inward grace, then we need not hesitate to accept the above thesis

It is not what a man does that determines whether his work is sacred or secular, it is why he does it. The motive is everything. Let a man sanctify the Lord God in his heart and he can thereafter do no common act. [14]

2. We must avoid degrading man-made objects

Only God is eternal. Only God should be worshipped. Nothing on earth is guaranteed to endure forever except for the people God created.

However, man-made objects are useful to us, part of the life God intends for us, and are not outside of God's interest. Engineering is a legitimate, God-honoring profession.

3. We must avoid over-spiritualization

Are airplanes valuable *only because* they can transport missionaries to unreached lands?

Airplanes are valuable because they allow for travel as a part of modern life, bring families together, enable interstate and global commerce, use creativity and science in their design (and transport missionaries).

Sacred-Secular in the Bible

The Old Testament does make a distinction between what is dedicated to God (holy) and that which is not. God, however, still owns it all. He commands us to be holy people, separated not from the earth but from all that is sinful. (Rom. 12:1-2)

By making a false distinction we open up the possibility of actually placing the "sacred" out of bounds and of expanding the "secular" to all the rest of life (true secularism).

The Old Testament

It may seem at this point like the concepts of sacred and secular originated in the Old Testament, since the Law introduced the Sabbath as a day set apart, the tabernacle (and later, the temple) as a holy place, clean and unclean foods, and the Levitical priesthood. A key point to be noted, however, is that God Himself defined these things as holy, rather than any man making the categories. The Old Testament system did not diminish the value of earthly things or suggest that they were not of interest to the Lord.

God showed Himself to be set apart from His created order through such events as Moses being told to remove his shoes before the burning bush because he was standing on holy ground (Ex. 3:5)...The word holy was applied to other things that were separated by God, such as the nation of Israel (Ex. 19:6; Lev. 20:26), the Sabbath (Ex. 16:23), the tabernacle with both the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (Ex. 26:33), and the various feasts and special observations, such as the Day of Atonement (Ex. 30:10). This even extended to objects used for worship. For example, there was special incense that was too holy to be used by people for themselves (Ex. 30:37). In the Old Testament, then, we find God using things and events to teach His people about His holy nature. [15]

The priests were special, but were other “occupations” not valuable?

This implies that service outside of the priesthood is not full-time Christian service. It implies that all callings besides that of the ordained priest-minister are somehow not expressly Christian, or at best, less deeply Christian.

Biblically speaking, these are unquestionably common callings, i.e., they are not sacramental. But almost nothing in life has ever been sacramental. Even in the Garden of Eden, only two trees were sacramental. Everything else in the garden and on earth was common. All of the creation was religious, however. Administering the creation involved full-time, covenant-keeping service. All of life was under God's covenant. In this sense, nothing fundamental has changed since the garden; only the boundaries have shifted. [16]

In our zeal to eliminate the sacred-secular divide, suggests Rick Wade, we have too often pulled the sacred down to the level of the secular, rather than lifting all of life up to the sacred. [17] We need to see God as truly holy Christ as Creator and Lord of all of life.

The New Testament

Wait...doesn't the New Testament always elevate the spiritual?

I think such an approach is a misreading of Scripture.

Matthew 6:33 – “Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you.”

The context is the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus is teaching on not worrying about all the details of life, since God even cares for the birds and the grass of the field. We are not told here to seek only “spiritual” things, but rather to seek God's Kingdom.

- To seek God's way instead of what worries us
- To commit every day to the Lord at the start
- To seek to bring every area of life under God's rule
- To seek righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, which are manifestations of God's Kingdom (ref)
- To expect that God will provide what we need

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 – “The outer decays, but the inward is renewed... We fix our eyes on what is unseen, because what is seen is temporal, but what is unseen is eternal.”

The context here is the suffering of the believer. It does not speak of soul vs. body, but contrasts the flesh (the “earthen vessel” mentioned earlier in the passage), which is decaying, dying, and experiencing the suffering, with the “new creation,” the “inner man,” which is alive and being renewed. We don’t give up in the midst of suffering because we know that suffering produces character and hope (Rom. 5:3-5), and that the future glory is eternal.

Colossians 3:1-2 – “Since you then have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on earthly things.”

The rest of the chapter goes on to expand the distinction:

Put to death what is earthly: immorality, impurity, anger, covetousness, slander, falsehood...

Put on what is holy, what is from above: compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness, love...

False Separations

It is easy to classify actions and items as sacred/secular, but Scripture makes a different separation:

Upbuilding/sinful

As humans, we tend to categorize and make separations, particularly concerning other people:

- Rich/poor
- Strong/ weak
- My race/other races
- My political party/other political parties

Scripture tears down these separations but shows a more serious division:

Those who are Christ’s (forgiven and anticipating heaven)/ those who need Christ

Conclusions

What this means-

Not only are there no sacred callings as opposed to other callings-

There are no sacred people (other than every person being valuable and every believer being a saint). There is no clergy-laity division. Certainly elders should be held in high esteem and

supported, according to 2 Peter---. We recognize that pastors have extensive Bible training and a strong focus on discipleship, but they aren't a special class of unusually holy people.

There are no sacred spaces. Church buildings should be well-maintained and treated with respect, but they aren't the only places where we can experience God. The church building is special because of what happens there -when the people of God gather for worship and fellowship.

It is only when we offer up everything we do in worship to God that we finally experience His power coursing through every fiber of our being. The God of the Bible is not only the God of the human spirit but also the God of nature and history. We serve Him not only in worship but also in obedience to the Cultural Mandate. If Christian churches are serious about discipleship, they must teach believers how to keep living for God after they walk out the church doors on Sunday. [18]

As Jesus Himself said to His disciples in the great commission, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." ...as the apologist and evangelist Francis Schaeffer said, "The Lordship of Christ applies to all of life and to all of life equally." Or as we "read" in the words to the Christmas carol "Joy to the World," "He comes to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found." And that curse and those healing blessings are coextensive with creation itself and all aspects of life. [19]

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