

# ***DELUSIONS OF DALLAS WILLARD***

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

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*“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” ([Matthew 11:29-30](#))*

## **Itching Ears Caused By The Disease Me-No-Wanna-See-I-Tis**

This article is a bit of a companion to the [Apprising Ministries](#) post [Apostasy, Contemplative Spirituality/Mysticism \(CSM\) in the SBC and Disease in the Church](#) we also discussed the epidemic of me-no-wanna-see-i-tis. As a teaching illustration within that post I discussed some comments about AM in the thread [Contemplative Spirituality & Prayer](#) over at a Website called the [Baptist Board](#) (BB). In similar fashion this time I am going to turn your attention to some thoughts expressed by another commenter on that same thread at BB, and which relate specifically to an article here at AM called [Dallas Willard: An Emergent Conspirator](#) (DWEC).

Taking exception to the article in question he begins:

I do know quite a bit about Dallas Willard, his writings, his lectures, and personal conversations with him over the past few years. This “ministry’s” Web site has worked very hard to take his words out of context and out of the larger body of his teaching and try to make them mean something they do not mean. For instance, their [foundational article on Willard](#) completely misrepresents his emphasis and ignores the massive biblical foundation of his teaching on spiritual formation.

Instead of having respect for Willard’s calling to minister to students in secular universities, this “ministry” misrepresents Walter Martin’s position on higher education to try to make it sound like a bad thing that Willard is living and teaching the gospel in pagan centers of learning. Then for some reason the Web site finds fault with Willard’s belief that Jesus calls the lost to be disciples (that’s kind of a big thing in the gospels!). Then, the Web site tries to make Willard sound like he is opposed to the atonement, when he simply wants the Western church to consider all of the different ways that the atonement is explained in the New Testament, not just the substitutionary model.

That Web site is not worth anyone’s time or consideration.  
([Online source](#))

Well, I’ll be more than happy to let my Master decide whether or not AM is “worth” someone’s “time and consideration,” especially since He literally gave it to me without my asking. Instead we’ll correct a few judgments...oops, make that misconceptions

\*wink\* that this obviously erudite individual has put forth—and, but of course, \*ahem\* in Christian love. Note that he emphatically states:

This “ministry’s” Web site has worked very hard to take his words out of context and out of the larger body of his teaching and try to make them mean something they do not mean.

Well, the obvious mockery of one of the Lord’s works aside, how does he know I’ve “worked very hard” to do as he suggests? Answer: He doesn’t. You see, the fact is I took nothing out of context concerning the issues to which I was actually speaking. I began DWEC by mentioning an issue of *Christianity Today*, which ran an article called [A Divine Conspirator](#). In it we’re told that Southern Baptist minister Dallas Willard “is on a quiet quest to subvert nominal Christianity.”

But the problem lies within the kind of corrupt [Contemplative Spirituality/Mysticism](#) (CSM) also called [Spiritual Formation](#) espoused by Willard and his co-conspirator the [Living Spiritual Teacher](#) and [Quaker](#) mystic [Richard Foster](#)—which through [Contemplative/Centering Prayer](#) always, among other things, eventually leads its practioners to a denial of the Reformation and the acceptance of the apostate [Roman Catholicism](#) as a viable form of Christianity. Because the truth is that through their CSM in actuality Willard and Foster have ended up on a not so quiet quest to subvert the historic orthodox Biblical Christian faith itself.

Then begging the question the BB commenter next says that AM, “ignores the massive biblical foundation of his teaching on spiritual formation.” His point would be that now we are to believe Willard’s teachings about spiritual formation are quite sound because supposedly there’s this “massive amount of “biblical foundation” for them. And just who would it be who says there’s this “massive amount” of support in Holy Scripture for these so-called “spiritual disciplines” advanced by Dallas Willard and his close friend and associate Richard Foster?

Well actually, you see, that would be this particular commenter himself. Sorry about that Chief; try as you may, you will not find any actual Biblical record of Jesus Himself practicing and/or teaching these alleged disciplines. I’ll be coming back to Dallas Willard and his delusions of disciplines another time; however, for now I also point out that neither will you find these practices of CSM within the *Apostle’s doctrine*, which is now contained within the New Testament.

### **Looking For Disciplines In All The Wrong Places**

For our purposes here, suffice to say that [Bob DeWaay](#) has already quite capably dismantled these disciplines Biblically in his scholarly expose [The Dangers of Spiritual Formation and Spiritual Disciplines: A Critique of Dallas Willard and The Spirit of the Disciplines](#). In fact DeWaay even shows us that Willard “bases his entire spiritual disciplines book on his understanding of [Matthew 11:29, 30](#),” and what is more, DeWaay is exactly right when he says:

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.

Willard claims that Paul understood the need for such practices but that they were lost: "Paul's teaching, especially when added to his practices, strongly suggest that he understood and practiced something vital about the Christian life that we have lost—and that we must do our best to recover."<sup>17</sup> Of course, had Paul bothered to write about these "lost" disciplines in his epistles, they would not have been lost...

To hear evangelicals like Dallas Willard and Richard Foster tell us that we need practices that were never spelled out in the Bible to become more like Christ or to get closer to God is astonishing... The ideas of total depravity, the wrath of God against sin, the blood atonement, and the cross are either absent or distorted in Willard's theology. What replaces these truths is the hope that we will realize our potential through tapping into the spiritual kingdom of God. This is to be done by the use of spiritual disciplines to obtain the necessary power to transform the world. The terminology that Willard uses is strange and unbiblical...

[His] ideas are more akin to Eastern Religion than Biblical Christianity... The spiritual disciplines that are supposedly necessary for spiritual formation are not defined in the Bible. If they were, there would be a clear description of them and concrete list...  
([Online source](#))

### **“Spiritual Formation” Is A Recent Invention Rooted In Ancient Rome**

And try as you might, you simply will not find “Spiritual Formation” (SF) as such within Protestantism until the “Christian” Rishi Richard Foster shows up circa 1978 with *Celebration of Discipline* (COD). If you don't believe me, then listen to Foster's own words below from the article [SPIRITUAL FORMATION: A Pastoral Letter by Richard J. Foster](#) at the Emergent Website *The Ooze*:

By now enough water has gone under the Christian Spiritual Formation bridge that we can give some assessment of where we have come and what yet needs to be done. When I first began writing in the field in the late 70s and early 80s the term “Spiritual Formation” was hardly known, except for highly specialized references in relation to the Catholic orders. Today it is a rare person who has not heard the term. Seminary courses in Spiritual Formation proliferate like baby rabbits. Huge numbers are seeking to become certified as Spiritual Directors to answer the cry of multiplied thousands for spiritual direction.  
([Online source](#))

And then we have the article [Spiritual Formation in Christ: A Perspective on What it is and How it Might be Done](#) at Willard's Website. There he tells us in a footnote about the

importance of the very book which DeWaay reviews in the piece I cited above, “For further discussion of the matters discussed in this article, see my *The Spirit of the Disciplines*,” where incidentally the backcover refers to Willard as “A Southern Baptist Minister.” But specifically as it concerns SF, even Dallas Willard himself admits that:

“Spiritual formation” is a phrase that has recently rocketed onto the lips and into the ears of Protestant Christians with an abruptness that is bound to make a thoughtful person uneasy. If it is really so important, not to mention essential, then why is it so recent? It must be just another passing fad in Protestant religiosity, increasingly self-conscious and threatened about “not meeting the needs of the people.” And, really, isn’t spiritual formation just a little too Catholic to be quite right...

The reason for the recent abrupt emergence of the terminology into religious life is, I believe, a growing suspicion or realization that we have not done well with the reality and the need. We have counted on preaching, teaching, and knowledge or information to form faith in the hearer, and have counted on faith to form the inner life and outward behavior of the Christian. ([Online source](#))

Well yes, and no. Yes, we are to follow God’s instructions in the Bible to preach and teach His Word; but no, we don’t rely on “faith” in and of itself to do anything. Faith must be in Someone with the power to change people so the obedient Christian is trusting by faith that God the Holy Spirit in them is forming Christ within us. O, let me make a quick note in passing concerning Willard’s promulgating of [The Cult of Guru Richard Foster](#). Here below is what Dr. Gary Gilley says about Foster’s book COD in his excellent series on [Mysticism](#):

*Celebration of Discipline* alone, not even referencing Foster’s other writings and teachings and ministries, is a virtual encyclopedia of theological error. We would be hard pressed to find in one so-called evangelical volume such a composite of false teaching. These include faulty views on the subjective leading of God (pp. 10, 16-17, 18, 50, 95, 98, 108-109, 128, 139-140, 149-150, 162, 167, 182); approval of New Age teachers (see Thomas Merton below); occultic use of imagination (pp. 25-26, 40-43, 163, 198); open theism (p. 35); misunderstanding of the will of God in prayer (p. 37); promotion of visions, revelations and charismatic gifts (pp. 108, 165, 168-169, 171, 193); endorsement of rosary and prayer wheel use (p. 64); misunderstanding of the Old Testament Law for today (pp. 82, 87); mystical journaling (p. 108); embracing pop-psychology (pp. 113-120); promoting Roman Catholic practices such as use of “spiritual directors,” confession and penance (pp. 146-150, 156, 185); and affirming of aberrant charismatic practices (pp. 158-174, 198).

([Online source](#))

### **But What Are We Molding Young Minds With?**

Returning now to our friend at BB, he pontificates that I have no “respect for Willard’s calling to minister to students in secular universities.” Nope; sorry about that Chief, wrong again because I happen to think this would indeed be an admirable call.

Ministering to students is actually something for which I have great respect for, and especially so due to its inherent difficulties. As a matter of fact for years I was a substitute teacher in the local secular high school. Later I became its Study Hall Supervisor in addition to being the school's head football coach for the express reason that I might better "minister to students." However, the heart of the matter would be: What exactly is it that we are going to be ministering *to* these students.

Then the commenter says, "this 'ministry' misrepresents Walter Martin's position on higher education." However, you'll notice that in my piece I really didn't say anything at all about Dr. Martin's views on higher education per se. All I did was simply quote Martin by way of illustration concerning the methodology of what he called the "Cult of Liberal Theology." His thesis is that they used the important, and vital, forum of institutes of higher education in order to shape the minds of people thereby conditioning them believe their version of counterfeit Christianity, which is what I also believe men like Dallas Willard are doing today. Said Martin:

And finally they had emptied the Gospel of all its content; they were simply using the outward shell so that they go on collecting money from the people and the churches; because they knew that if the people in the pew knew that they were apostate, they'd throw them out. So the strategy was hang on to the trust funds; hang on to the money we've got; hang on the properties we control, and **we will gradually educate the laymen into this new approach to theology.**

And then finally we will take control of everything. The gradual process of **feeding you theological poison until you become immunized enough so that you don't know what's happening to you.** And when you wake up to what's happening to you, it's too late they've got everything.

But back at BB the commenter says of AM, "Then for some reason the Web site finds fault with Willard's belief that Jesus calls the lost to be disciples (that's kind of a big thing in the gospels!)." Well sarcasm aside; actually no, Jesus doesn't call "the lost to be disciples". That fact is, the Master first calls the lost to repent and believe the Gospel of salvation through God's grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone. Only by their being regenerated (i.e. born gain) by God the Holy Spirit can they ever even hope to be disciples, which is why I don't have to try "to make Willard sound like he is opposed to the atonement." I don't think he has the correct understanding of the Atonement.

For you see, Willard's gospel of the human potential itself reveals that he is opposed to a proper Biblical view of soteriology (salvation). And all one needs to do in order to understand this for themselves is to make the time to read DeWaay's critique of Willard's message referenced earlier. Because within you'll quite readily see Willard's rejection of the true nature of man, which then corrupts his view of what Christ did on the Cross. So the commenter is only telling part of the story when he says that Willard, "simply wants the Western church to consider all of the different ways that the atonement is explained in the New Testament, not just the substitutionary model."

Men and women, don't be fooled by this common postevangelical ploy because there have been scores of textbooks written about the various views of the atonement and they have already been considered ad infinitum ad nauseum. Let me cut to the chase: This whole Emerging Church rebellion against the Bible is semi-pelagian (at best) in its teachings concerning the nature of man. Further CSM was itself a core doctrine from its inception, and the truth is that this so-called "Christian" mysticism always leads those who indulge in it to the delusion of a distorted love for mankind, i.e. the self (see—[2 Timothy 3:2](#)), above God.

### **An Unbiblical Approach And Delusion Of Innate Human Potential**

I will close for now with the following from DeWaay's article where he rightly points out how Dallas 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. So he sees Jesus' "yoke" as an offer to take up a life-style that will make us better people, rather than an offer of true Sabbath rest through Christ's finished work on the cross...

As with most unbiblical approaches, the spiritual disciplines are based on the idea of innate human powers that can be harnessed for good. Holding a false concept of sin as a "disruption of that higher [spiritual] life," Willard looks for a solution through finding our true potential, individually and corporately, through spiritual disciplines that will enable us to reconstruct the rule of God now. Willard says, "The evil that we do in our present condition is a reflection of a weakness caused by spiritual starvation." Rather than wicked rebels abiding under God's wrath, humans are bundles of huge potential who have lost their way through "disruption of the higher powers"...

So how do we tap into this great human potential? He says we must tap into the spiritual dimension using spiritual disciplines. Willard shares his definition of "spirit": "If the missing element in the present human order is that of the spirit, what then is spirit? Very simply, *spirit is unembodied* personal power." His idea is that "spirit" is the missing nutrient that we need to realize our full potential. The ideas of total depravity, the wrath of God against sin, the blood atonement, and the cross are either absent or distorted in Willard's theology. What replaces these truths is the hope that we will realize our potential through tapping into the spiritual kingdom of God. This is to be done by the use of spiritual disciplines to obtain the necessary power to transform the world. The terminology that Willard uses is strange and unbiblical. ([Online source](#))

In the end, those of us who adhere to the historic orthodox Christian faith recovered by the Protestant Reformers must reject these man-centered delusions of Dallas Willard. And what is more, we also agree with DeWaay as he shares the following conclusion regarding Willard and Foster's spurious spiritual formation:

These ideas are more akin to Eastern Religion than Biblical Christianity. Our problem is not the need to suck in more “unembodied personal power” by techniques to contact God. We are dead sinners facing God’s wrath unless we repent and believe the gospel. Willard’s concepts are foreign to the Bible. (ibid)