

The Uncompartmentalized Life

by Brett Weeks

A false dichotomy has arisen in the ranks of Christianity, the division of the secular and sacred. As 21st Century believers, our educational process has taught us that there is a difference between academia and religious practice. One is necessary for life and one is necessary for worship. One is physical, the other spiritual, and the two do not intersect. Thus, we lead compartmentalized lives. But the question must be asked, is this compartmentalization realistic or have we fallen for an illegitimate theory passed as factual?

In order to answer this question, one must have a proper understanding of the nature of mankind. A careful look at the Creation narrative of Scripture reveals much concerning this subject. First of all, the earth was created by God. The very first verse of the Bible says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."¹ Secondly, the climax of Creation was found in man. For six days, God begins bringing form and life to the earth with the climax of Creation being day six: "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."² Thirdly, man is distinct from all other created things. God gave mankind a unique quality of being made "in the image" of Himself. While there is no clear definition of exactly what this means, it is evident that there are stark differences between mankind and the other animals created. One such difference is that there is some part of human beings that lasts forever. This is evident in the prescribed rewards and punishments for mankind, eternal life and eternal punishment.³ Also, at death there is said to be a separation of

¹ Gen. 1.1.

² Gen. 1.27.

³ I Jn. 5.11; Rom. 6.23.

what is eternal from the physical body.⁴ In line with James, this eternal aspect seems best termed as “the spirit.”⁵ So, the spirit is the unseen, non-physical, eternal part of human beings. Humanity is, then, a combination of both spirit and body which is only temporarily separated by death, but is again unified at the final resurrection.⁶ But, if these are inseparable qualities while on earth, then mankind must always be both physical and spiritual. If mankind is both physical and spiritual, then can any aspect of life be considered a non-physical or non-spiritual event? If not, then it would seem that every act would have some form of spiritual significance and thus be sacred. But what does the Word of God have to say regarding this?

To the Corinthian Church, Paul exhorted: “glorify God in your body.”⁷ Here, Paul seems to link the physical body with a spiritual act. If the compartmentalization theory is correct and God is a spiritual being and glorification is considered an act of worship, then the physical should have no affect on the spiritual; However, Paul clearly sees the body as an instrument of glorification, thereby linking the physical and spiritual realms. Paul also links the, supposedly, academic exercises of reading the Word of God and meditating on it with spiritual renewal in Romans 12:2 and Ephesians 4:23. If compartmentalization is true, why does a supposedly academic exercise have any bearing whatsoever on the spiritual condition of the believer? He does not stop there, though, he even ties the simple and seemingly unspiritual acts of eating and drinking to the spiritual realm: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the

⁴ II Cor. 5.8.

⁵ Jam. 2.26.

⁶ I Cor. 15.42; Rev. 20.5.

⁷ I Cor. 6.20.

glory of God."⁸ In fact, this passage seems to link every activity of the believer to the spiritual act of glorification.

So, can the compartmentalization of life into secular and sacred activities be justified by Scripture? No. It is clear from Scripture that man is at all times a physical and spiritual being and that every act in life has spiritual significance. Further, everything which the believer does is to bring glory to God. Therefore, no act can be purely secular or sacred, for every act is to be an act of worship.

⁸ I Cor. 10.31.