

## Cultivating the Soul, Part 4b

### By James Moreland

On the tape list to take to tape sets that cover some of what we've done in the course here are "Christianity and the crisis of American culture" and "Evangelism and the case for Christianity". And so there are others if you're interested in that. I was asked a question at the break about if I'm interested in say business or literature what do I read as a Christian that works on that. I think what I'm going to say is that. What I did in "Love your God with all your mind" was to try to write a fairly very popular book on the importance of the intellectual life and how to develop your mind as a disciple. It's coming out with nav press. I have an appendix in the back of that book where I list I forget the number twenty or twenty five different vocations/college majors and under each college major/vocation I list important books or magazines and sometimes there are professional societies. For example there is a Christian literary society for Christians who are in literature and I list the email address and phone number to get in touch if you wanted to join that there's a Christian Legal Society and things like that. Just if you're interested or if you have a nephew or a grandson or a son or friend in college that you'd like to put in touch with that reading list that might be something you could do.

OK. Yes [inaudible audience comment] it's in the appendix of this love your God with all your mind that it'll be out in the middle of June. It should be coming to bookstores then somewhere around there. In fact I'm going to Colorado Springs in the morning just for a couple of days to talk about that but.

OK. This this for me gives me some hooks to understand the culture we live in and what's going on. And it helps me it has helped me kind of know how to spend my time the rest of my life - for me. I don't know how you spend your time but it's helped me understand what I should be about given my own talents and interests. But you have to understand that ideas are among the most important things we have. They really do change your life. And so now what I want to do is I want to talk for the rest of my time this evening a little bit about the beginnings of a solution to this.

And the bottom line is that the church has got to recapture its intellectual life. It's not that we're not doing anything and I do believe there are good things happening but we really have to be more intentional about encouraging one another to become studiers and readers and thinkers as part of our discipleship. I had a sister in the class here just about 10 minutes ago say that she was thinking about going to school and as many of us do she was grappling with the decision and not you know not sure what she ought to do and thinking Well I think it would be okay for me to go.

My view is - I don't know whether she should go or not of course - but my view is that when a person takes a class whether it's for college credit somewhere or it's an adult enrichment class of some kind that one ought to take those classes as disciples of Jesus Christ and whatever you're studying in your course of study you ought to constantly ask the question: How do I integrate

this with my biblical Christianity. What has to go. What do I accept. What do I readjust. And if you can't do it alone which you can you try to find other people you can talk to about this but your Christianity doesn't begin the prayer meeting and when you walk into class is this the important thing. And I'm praying for a renaissance of adult education in the church. I don't mean just in the church but more people going back and taking college courses on things or just community courses. And I don't I don't just mean courses for personal enrichment but I mean courses that deal with ideas and that you do it as a disciple. Now I want to lay a framework for this and I'd like you if you would to turn to Romans Chapter Twelve Romans.

You had a comment. I'm sorry. What I was going to say. All right. Are you OK. Jump in. Yes.

[inaudible audience comment]

It's no substitute for an argument. Right. Well and I boy I wish you'd said that in about 10 minutes from now because I'm going to be in a passage where this is a perfect we'll remember this when I get to this text because this is a perfect illustration of what I'm saying. Thank you. Romans. Well I think you've heard this many times. This passage is quite clearly the key text in all the polls writings on the spiritual life. He had much to say of course about spiritual formation and spiritual discipleship but I think you'd be hard pressed to find a more central text in all of his writings on how one grows as a believer in Romans twelve one and two.

Now what I'm curious about in this text is not only what he included but what he admitted. And I find that to be interesting. He obviously says to present your bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable, which is your spiritual service of worship the word spiritual there probably means your logical service reasonable service. I think the idea is the only reasonable thing for you to do with your life in light of everything God has done for you. The most sensible logical thing to do is to give God your body and let him use it. I think it's his idea and I'll say more probably the last night of our course on how to give your body to Christ.

I don't mean your body parts like you know your eyes when you're hit by a car or whatever but something different in that - wasn't very funny [audience laughter]. OK. They just kind of start [speaker makes splattering sound]. They really don't do well after about eight-thirty. They just fall sort of flat. I kind of lose - OK.

He says instead don't be conformed to the world. Now look folks I want to tell you something very important about this idea of not being conformed to the world. This is very difficult stuff. And if you think it's easy if you think it's easy not to be conformed to the world then then you've got another thought coming. It is very very difficult. And here's why. Because the world in the Bible doesn't mean extra-biblical culture world is not the same thing [writing on chalkboard]. World isn't everything that's out there. That's the problem. Any culture in the world. Let's just

stick with our culture for a minute has a lot of things in it that are good and wonderful and true and right and helpful. OK.

There are a lot of things that atheistic psychologists have written on child raising that are pretty doggone good and helpful and could be quite useful as in appropriating - putting in your bag of tricks trying to be a good mom or dad. A lot of stuff. OK. And the same thing with all manner of things. There are unfortunately and there are parts of culture are kind of neutral they're neither good or bad they're just there. There are other parts of culture that are quite hostile to Christianity and that's what the world is the world is that part of the unbelieving world that is hostile to the gospel and hostile to Christianity.

And it's not in keeping with it OK. Now the difficulty is: How can we keep ourselves from not being conformed to the world without and B in the world but not of it. How to keep from jettisoning or distancing or abandoning God's good gifts to us and common grace in the world in which we live. But not being taken captive through inappropriate degrading unhelpful modes of thought. This is a very difficult thing to do Now Paul has an idea of how this is to be done. And he says Don't don't be conformed to the world. Not easy. It really isn't very difficult. But instead be transformed by the renewing of your [inaudible word] your mental faculty your mind your intellect. Now what I find odd is that he did not say to be renewed by prayer or worship or praise songs all of which of course are important or even classic hymn singing. And needless to say a

prayer and worship and hymns are central to the religious life. And I don't have any question - I practice all of them.

But when Paul wanted to put his finger on what was central and foundational to the process of spiritual transformation he placed his finger on the faculty of mind not emotion or will there anything else. Now there's a reason for this and I surface this question for you about three nights three times ago when I asked you about why why would Paul do this sort of thing. What I'd like to do now is to tease that out for you a bit and to try to elaborate on it.

The first thing I want you to recognize is that you almost always act on what you believe [writing on chalkboard]. Now not always. We do have weakness of will. We do have free choice and we can act inconsistent with what we believe occasionally. By and large though we our behavior is in keeping with our beliefs. It is very seldom that a person acts against his or her beliefs. Now we may act against our for affirmations or and we may act against what we want to believe but we almost never act according - out of step with our beliefs. Now I'll say something later about what a belief is. In terms of of it real relevant to this. But for right now I just want to call your attention to the fact that your life really and mine really are governed by our beliefs. See you carry around inside of you a map and that map allows you to navigate your life and that map consists in your beliefs they provide the tracks on which you run your life. Ladies and gentlemen no kidding. They really do.

Your beliefs about an automobile determine. How you plan on spending your day. If you feel like it will get you across town then you don't feel like you have to be in a hurry to get home until a certain time. Now that's a simple example but we really do run our lives on our beliefs. Now follow me.

If our beliefs end up shaping virtually everything about us there's another thing that's that's important here and that is we do not have direct control what we believe [writing on chalkboard]. To say this a little differently your beliefs are not under the control of your will, under the direct control of the faculty of volition. You're not able. This is one of the - there is a lot of misunderstanding about this. This is one of the reasons why it is almost always harmful to try to believe something it won't. For one thing it won't work. Secondly it will make you feel guilty and feel like a failure. It is almost always a bad idea to try to will to believe something or try to believe something you will almost always fail.

Now how do your book you do. But yet we are responsible for our beliefs. While the solution to this is that we are under the control of our beliefs indirectly. We can change our beliefs but not directly. Let me get - I'll give anybody in here. I've got about twenty five dollars here. It's yours. Well that's true. You want to pay the airport parking so you got to go to L.A. X and I've gotta do close parking.

But anyway I'll give anybody this money right now I really will. If you will believe right now there's a pink elephant flying above my head and I don't mean say you believe me but honestly believe it now. Now I What if I said I'll give anybody twenty five dollars if you'll raise your arm right now. OK. [Inaudible words in another language]: Scribe - Pharisee - Hypocrite. OK. No just kidding.

But obviously your arm is under the control of your will. You can will to raise your arm. You can't will to believe something. You just can't do it. Well we're stuck because if our beliefs are what largely shape our character and if we're supposed to - that means we've got to change our beliefs we want to change our character. But if we can't will that change our beliefs what do we do? Study. That's what you do it is through that it's the transformation of the mind and the mind is transformed by a proper approach to the issue in question.

Now let me just. Let's think about this. If you want to change what you believe about a subject what you've got to do is learn to see it in a new way and to come to see that there are reasons supporting the side of the issue you want to come down on you follow me on that. You may choose to notice certain things and not notice other things so you may choose to study certain things and refrain from studying certain things. You can choose what you think about and what you'll study and ponder.

You can choose that. You do have freedom over your thoughts not your beliefs. You say you can choose what you will think about most of the time in any case. So beliefs are the result of study. Now I would add to study then experience because once one comes to study something then you try it and try to work with it a bit and live in light of it. And it's the combination of reflection and experience that changes belief. You understand what I'm saying to you now.

This is why the mental faculty is central to transformation. OK. This is why Christianity has always been a religion of reason. Listen it is the Lord God of Israel that sends his prophets and evangelists into the world and tells them to persuade and to give a reason to those who ask for hope that is within them the Lord God of Israel doesn't ask his ministers to give people cones which is which are irrational mantras that people ponder so they can escape the rational faculty like the sound of a hand clapping one hand clapping in the forest the Buddhists do that.

Yeah but yeah but I don't think that's the try half of it. My students you - I get this all day long. You know I've gotta be precise and they cut me down. OK but he's clapping one hand back there. OK. All right. OK. Well anyway you understand then that that that that Biblical religion has always been a religion where teaching and study you know Paul says to study fish to present thyself approved to God. Now of course holy scripture is the first object of our study but it is not the only object you have to understand that all throughout the Old Testament the prophets in the end the proverbs and the wise sages say that there is profitable knowledge in the wisdom of the

Babylonians and the Egyptians and other cultures and they have helpful knowledge about morality and things of that sort.

And in Daniel you remember Daniel's friends that were positioned to minister and and who did the king pick that the King picked to Minister those Hebrews that were highly educated in Babylonian art and literature and mathematics and customs and ideology and they were well-educated and it was because they were well-educated that they were in a position to minister. Now I was in a meeting with Dr. Bill Bright when Ron Ronald Reagan was made president. That's a long time ago I know Dr. Bright had received a phone call from the Reagan Cabinet. Excuse me.

An assistant of Reagan saying that he was looking for evangelicals to place on his cabinet and that two or three Christian leaders had tried to get their heads together and they could not think of any. Very many Christian leaders that were well-trained enough to function at that high level of competence. The only thing they could think of was C. Everett Koop. And they recommended Koop to Reagan and he got appointed surgeon general. Now where were the Daniels you see what you see the difference in - Can you imagine what might have happened if if we had been emphasizing to young people here on a yearly basis if we had scholars Sunday and on Sunday morning we had the grad students before they went to college come up in the front of the church and we had the elders lay hands on them and to say we dedicate your intellectual exploration for the great commission and we charge you in the presence of Jesus Christ and His witnesses that

you be faithful to his word in your graduate studies and we were we we're hoping to hear a good report next summer as to what you've learned and how you're integrating it with your commitment to Jesus Christ and his cause and the parents come up and they send these graduate students off to graduate school for the cause of Christ and that we have scholars Sunday where we take university professors around the country that are making an impact for Jesus Christ and we place their names on the bulletin board in the Bulletin and we pray for them.

And there are professors in the congregation were high school teachers. We we we hold them as role models for teenagers and say some of you need to go to college and become university professors for the Gospel cause you understand what I'm saying to you. And then we say and I did this I asked many people and I don't answer the question because it's embarrassing. How much of your time do you give to support Christian scholarship and intellectual activities. The answer is zippo. And that's a problem. And we've got to start giving money to support faithful trustworthy Christian centers of intellectual activity for the Great Commission.

You understand you know the Jesus Seminar that's undermining the gospel. There was a wealthy businessman that gave them several million dollars so that they wouldn't have to teach and they could write and spread their ideas and he's financing their endeavors and having a tremendous impact because they were given the funds to do that. Now you understand I'm suggesting that we've got the place the intellectual life as a life as a legitimate alternative for

discipleship for our teenagers and others and say this is a lifestyle that some of you should shoot for but it's not the only one you understand. Now some of you may feel like it's too late for me.

Maybe you feel that way. I want to say first of all no it's not because you don't have to place yourself to compare yourself to somebody else. We can all grow intellectually given our own inabilities or abilities or our past or how much blown opportunities we've had that's forget it. That's water over the bridge that's been the past. We can all grow a little bit but we're not all called to be scholars. You understand that.

But we ought to be holding scholars up before the congregation as part of who we are! Part of who we are are intellectuals and we ought to be we ought to be presenting a distinctive children to life to this cotton-pickin pagan culture. We ought to be saying this is who Christians are. If you want or if you want to get into a reasoning contest don't fool with these evangelicals. They're smart. Dare I say a great learning has driven them mad. When was the last time you heard that said about one of us. You know the apostle. It was no accident God chose Moses who had Egyptian university training that he used in writing the five books of Moses I will tell you, and that the apostle Paul and Luke who were highly educated. Listen I'm from a blue collar family and I'm not a cultural elitist. I could care two cents for a person's degrees. I care a lot about their education. And if you if a degree helps you get educated fine. That's not what I'm talking about necessarily here.

So I'm saying to begin with that Paul is saying that the cultivation of a razor sharp mind - a mind that's careful that is that is that he's got concepts in it and that is well-formed is not something that you're permitted to do. Is it okay if I do this? This is central to who we are. This is a part of following Jesus Christ every bit as much as having a revival of your passion. We are not simply islands of passion on a sea of nothingness as Jo, I think it was Saad that said it. We are cognitive beings as well as feeling beings and our cognitive lives are to be claimed for Jesus Christ every bit as much as the rest of our personalities. That's this is New Testament religion and this is what we need to be holding up as our values. And we've got to find a way to make these values stick here better better than we've done in the past.

Again things are happening but this is a point this is part of our heritage we've lost I fear. All right. So the apostle Paul suggests that we do this. Now in Second Corinthians. He also says there's another reason that he suggests in versus three through five. I'm sorry. I was just testing you. Yes ma'am it's in the New Testament. Second Corinthians is in the New Testament. Sorry just kidding. I knew you knew that I was just joking with you. OK second Corinthians chapter 10 verse versus 3-5 now.

Well like it or not we are in a war. I mean that's just that's just a fact. It's not attempt to vilify anybody but we are in a fight and that's just that's just all there is to it. And Paul addresses the fight now. He says even though we walk in the flesh we do not war according to the flesh. Now

forever he condemns having a Christian army. He's not condemning here being a soldier in the state. A Christian can go to war for the state. But there should never be such a thing as a Christian army or a Christian militia or anything any of that sort of thing of that sort. It is not the church that wields the power of death. It is the state and the state has the right to put to death. OK. Both in capital punishment and in warfare the state has been given the right by God to take life and the Christian can take life on behalf of the state but not on behalf of the church.

Now we do not war holding to the flesh. But then he says for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh they are divinely powerful what is divinely powerful. The weapons that we have in the war they are divinely powerful for destroying fortresses. So we've been given weapons and those weapons are powerful for destroying fortresses. Now what are the fortresses and what are the weapons? The fortresses he says in verse 5 "we are destroying" and here are the fortresses "speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. And we take every thought captive to obedience to Christ".

If you've got to his son or a daughter that's majoring in history or literature. This ought to be implanted across there for him. When you walk in the class you take every thought captive to the Holy Scriptures into the Lordship of Christ. And may I suggest to you those of you and call that some of you in here I know are. If it's not in the scriptures you ask Jesus Christ to help you work through the issues you're studying and he can speak to you about it. He can talk to you and you

might not hear a sound but he can guide your thoughts if you ask him to do it and he'll see you through it.

But now. What are the fortresses that we are destroying? They're ideas - they're systems of thought. You understand that in cultures you get whole systems of thought. Marxism is a system of thought situation. Ethics is a system of thought. OK. There are certain views scientific naturalism is a system of thought and these are the things against which we fight. Now you see people tend to think spiritual warfare is about fighting the devil and demons. It is. But how do people manipulate one another? It's with it's with ideas and thoughts. I admit it significantly and when I'm wanting to suggest to you is that thoughts or spiritual realities they're invisible. They're not physical. I've already tried to prove that to you. Thoughts are part of spiritual reality part of spiritual warfare is distinctively intellectual. Ladies and gentlemen. It is not simply prayer and that sort of thing. Though I've grown in prayer in the last three years by more than any time in my life. I believe in prayer more now than I have ever. So I'm not by any means bad mouthing prayer believe me but I will tell you that prayer is one part of spiritual warfare. Intellectual struggle and training is another.

And what this means is the church has got to learn to out-argue her critics and I don't mean be argumentative but I mean to dismantle and to show wrong where their ideas are faults. Now do we see this in the scriptures? You better believe we do. You cannot read, for example, the book of Colossians or the book of Galatians without recognizing that the Apostle Paul was thoroughly

conversant with alternative systems of thought. In the book of Colossians the apostle Paul is taking on something called pre-Christian Gnosticism and much of the teaching of the book of Colossians shows a thorough knowledge of Gnostic ideas that Paul had studied and he's taking big shots at gnosticism all throughout his epistle. May I say to you that God did not reveal Gnosticism to him in a dream. He had to study it and he reflected on it. You understand what I mean. So spiritual warfare involves training our minds. It involves the training of the mind. It goes beyond that I'm not disputing that but it involves a boot camp of the intellect.

Now now what I want what do I mean by training the mind. I mean studying reading having times where adults come together for serious debate and dialogue and discussion and things of that sort. I mean having in the Bulletin on a regular basis a lengthy review of an important book et. cetera. This is what I mean. And I have a lot of other ideas about about this sort of thing. But if the mind is a part of the soul and if the mind matters to our transformation then we must care for the mind as a part of not being conformed to the world. If spiritual warfare includes destroying speculations that means we've got to know what the speculation is.

We need a whole army of people to go into history and to go into psychology and to go into literature and philosophy and biology with this passion in mind; wanting to learn the systems of thought that are out there take what is good but learn to critique in a distinctively Christian way what is evil and harmful and hostile to biblical Christianity and to persuade our critics by reason and by sound argumentation that their views are faulty and an unreasonable and are not worthy

of belief. Now that's not all we do. You pray and you keep your powder dry. You have to pray and you have to be dedicated to other things. But this is a part of spiritual warfare.

Now we've got about five minutes left and I want to just leave it here. And before I don't have time to jump into some other text because I want to I want to leave that for next time but we have time for just a comment or two is there. This is I don't know this hasn't been real thought provoking in one since tonight but maybe. But but but certainly it's been and it may be that you don't entirely agree and that's fine but at least maybe you agree 20 percent what I've said. If I if you will take that. That's good. Let's talk.

[inaudible comment]

I don't think Keith is right about that bless his heart. I love him. I don't think he's right about that. I do not think that. That sermons are very by and large are very intellectually stimulating or challenging. I don't know how else to put it. I think that you can and again this is so risky because I have no I don't want to cause any problems please and don't don't go around quoting me and throwing this in anybody's face that you want to get at. Yeah I know, listen I am simply suggesting that that that we we we have a problem here.

Now I think what Keith is right about is that the affective domain is every bit as central to being open to learning as just addressing the mind. And I'm not denying that. But I don't think actually that we are that we are really causing people to learn their faith and think very significantly. I really don't. Well thank you for coming this evening and I'll be here next week and we'll go for round five.

[End of Recording].