

I. Read II Corinthians 4:18

- A. In verse 18, Paul makes a distinction between the material world and the spiritual realm. *Materialist philosophy* (sometimes called *naturalism*) presupposes that there is no spiritual realm. This is the philosophic basis of Darwinian evolution. How is *materialism* reflected in our contemporary culture's approach to the problems of poverty, crime, education, etc.? (hint: consider *behaviorialism*)

What is the fundamental problem with the *materialistic* approach to dealing with the various social problems? (hint: consider its view of man)

The points above may seem like *pie in the sky* theory, until it is realized that many of America's most influential men (especially since the mid to late 19th century) have been heavily influenced by *materialistic philosophy*. Prominent jurist and Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said:

“When one thinks coldly, I can see no reason for attributing to man a significance different in kind from that which belongs to a baboon or to a grain of sand....I wonder if cosmically an idea is any more important than the bowels.”

How do you suppose this man's ideas might continue to influence the legal community of our day—particularly the Supreme Court?

- B. There is another error that is made with regard to the distinction between the eternal and the temporal. That error is sometimes referred to as *pietism*. *Pietism* is common in contemporary evangelical circles. *Pietism* began as a legitimate response to empty formalism and dead orthodoxy. Initially it was simply a reorientation toward the personal and relational aspects of the Christian faith. Over the years, it deteriorated into a sub-biblical approach to living out the Christian faith. It relegated the physical or material world to a place of unimportance and elevated the *spiritual* world. *Pietism* leads to compartmentalizing life and elevating the supposed *spiritual* things like prayer, witnessing, etc., to the detriment of work, art, literature, human relationships, etc. The *pietist* would say these worldly things have value only when they can be made into a tool for evangelism or some other *spiritual* endeavor. In other words, Christians justify their vocation (work) as merely presenting them with opportunities for witnessing, rather than seeing their vocation as a true calling of God.
- Paul's explanation in verse 18 can be distorted into supporting a *pietistic* point of view. Here it becomes important to understand what Paul is saying in the context of the totality of Scripture. Read the following verses and tell what they explain about the physical world and Creation.

Genesis 1:29-31

Genesis 2:18-25

Song of Solomon 4:1-11

Col. 3:22-24

Romans 8:18-25

- C. What truth helps restore a balanced perspective toward the physical world, including our bodies? (read Romans 8:18-19; I Corinthians 15:35-54)
- D. Classic Dispensationalism (usually associated with Scofield) tends to compartmentalize Scripture, emphasizing the particulars of the New Testament over the Old. The Scripture was not intended to be read and studied that way. The result is often a one-dimensional caricature of Christianity rather than a fully-orbed, red blooded understanding of what it means to be human and to live as a believer.

The great men of the Old Testament are described honestly and with a realistic portrayal of their humanity (failings and passions). In the New Testament, God's narrative is changed to an emphasis on how the Covenant was fulfilled in Christ and how that is to be applied to the work of the expanding Church. Both Testaments are intended to be read and studied as a whole, which results in a better understanding of God, man, and the Christian faith. Can you cite a few examples of great men or women of faith in the Old Testament being described with very human flaws and passions?

How might Classic Dispensationalism create fertile ground for a sub-biblical *pietism* to take root in the life of a genuine believer?