



The Beginning of Wisdom: An Introduction to Christian Thought and Life

Chapter 12: The Way of Life and Peace

By Rich Holland

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” —Psalm 16:11 (English Standard Version)

Essential Questions

- What is the difference between understanding the Christian worldview and being a Christian?
- What is keeping you from experiencing true peace and fulfillment in your life?
- What difference would it make in your life if you followed Jesus with everything that you are?

Introduction

The previous chapters introduced the Christian worldview and the practical life implications of one's worldview. This chapter begins a new section in the text that takes a deliberate turn toward personal application and asks you to think carefully about how you might apply the concepts to your life. This chapter and those that follow encourage you to personally consider what it might mean for you to be Christian and adopt the Christian worldview as your own. The main focus of this section of the book is to present the tools necessary to equip a person to live out the Christian worldview in every aspect of life. Within the lived Christian life is where one will discover the peace and fulfillment that everyone truly desires. The authors of this book truly hope that you personally come to see that Jesus Christ is the true and only source of a fulfilling life.

Christ Is the Source of Life

There was a special word used in ancient Greek philosophy that refers to a fulfilling, satisfying life. That word is **eudaimonia**, and philosophers still use the word today to refer to the same concept. Sometimes this word is translated as "happiness," sometimes as "flourishing," and sometimes as "excellence of life," but none of these words is comprehensive enough to capture what the ancient Greeks had in mind. Eudaimonia refers to something much deeper than happiness. It refers to a kind of life that is both complete and excellent, encompassing the intellectual, moral, emotional, and spiritual aspects of a person. It touches on beliefs, commitments, habits, lifestyle, relationships, and vocation. It is the kind of life that is characterized by a confident peace, in good times and hard times. It is life in the truest sense of the word.

The ancient Greeks certainly were not the only people to think of this concept. From the height of their culture thousands of years ago to the present, people have been searching for a life of eudaimonia, and there are many different opinions about how to live an excellent life. Some say that one's career is the source of ultimate fulfillment. This is one of the reasons why so much time, energy, and money is invested in college education. Students go through degree programs in order to enter a career field and become successful. Others might say that it is not so much the career that is the source of fulfillment in life but, rather, the wealth that the career can help a person gain. Money, they say, can solve our problems and get us the things we need to be happy. Then too, in the modern era of social-media stars, others think that fame and popularity are keys to a good life. Still, others say that these kinds of things are selfish, and that true happiness is found in a life of self-sacrifice, public service, or in helping those in need. Everyone seems to have an opinion about this, yet few people seem to have found eudaimonia. There are many obstacles that prevent a person from finding a truly satisfying life, and the Christian worldview holds that it can be found only in Jesus Christ.

Obstacles to Life

Even though there are many opinions about how to have a happy, flourishing life, a look around the culture indicates that many people are unhappy and not flourishing. Many people seem to be sad, anxious, and dissatisfied with life, and some mental health statistics seem to show this. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d.), suicide is the second-leading cause of death among people ages 10–34. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (n.d.), 18.1% of the U.S. population suffers from some kind of anxiety disorder every year. Beyond this, relational conflict also abounds at every level of society and in every sphere of life—from

family strife to international conflict and everything in between. Even among people who have an abundance of material resources and live lives of relative safety and security, chaos seems to be a better description of life than eudaimonia.

A well-known idea in philosophy related to this is called the paradox of happiness. The idea behind this phrase is that if a person fixates only on trying to find happiness in life, that person will inevitably be disappointed and will never be happy. The idea is that if a person is focused intently on trying to find happiness in life, that person will do everything he or she can to achieve it; however, whenever the person does something to find happiness, it is inevitable that it will fall short in some way of providing true and perfect happiness. Because the person is fixated on happiness, what will be most noticeable is the imperfection and that true happiness has not yet been achieved. This inevitably leads to further disappointment and, eventually, despair.

Atheism's Influence

Atheism is a category of viewpoints that have one main idea in common: there is no God. With this definition, most people in America would probably not identify as atheist in their worldview or life outlook. The religious landscape is diverse and nuanced, so it would be somewhat inappropriate to suggest that the main competitors in the marketplace of ideas are Christianity and atheism. Many people would simply consider themselves to be nonreligious, open to the idea that God might exist, or that there is some kind of higher power. Traditionally, the word used for this kind of mindset is **agnosticism**. The word *agnostic* comes from Greek words meaning "no knowledge." An agnostic is a person who simply does not know whether there is a God and, therefore, would not clearly identify with Christianity or any other theistic worldview. Despite the fact that there are few self-identified atheists today, the core ideas of atheism are extraordinarily influential in America. There are at least three ways that atheism continues to exercise its dominance on our culture: The first is an extreme version of empiricism (see Chapter 7) known as *scientism*. This is the view that the only way anything can be known is through the hard sciences. This arises from the atheistic idea that the physical, material world is all that exists. Because only physical things exist, then the only way to know anything is through physical observation. The second way atheism maintains dominance is through moral relativism. Because atheism cannot account for objective moral values, and moral values cannot be proven scientifically, then it must be that moral values are subjective (i.e., just a matter of personal preference and opinion). In atheism, there simply is no objective value or meaning in the world. Finally, the influence of atheism has caused many people to think that religious beliefs are simply a matter of personal preference and, therefore, cannot be proven true. Obviously, there is no physical way to prove that God exists, for example, so it must just be a matter of personal preference. So, while few people would identify as atheists, many people do hold to these basic atheistic viewpoints: extreme empiricism, moral relativism, religious subjectivism. While different people will hold unique perspectives on these issues, the influence of atheism looms large, and even those who would not call themselves atheists are still living the practical implications of atheism in their lives. (See also the discussion of secularism in Chapter 16).

When people stop to consider how a worldview influences people within a culture, it should be no surprise that there is so much unhappiness in the world. One of the most influential worldviews today, especially in America, is atheism. The implications of atheism can have a profound negative impact on life, because if God does not exist, then there is no objective basis for value in life. If atheism is true, then the physical universe is all there is, and the way we live our lives, ultimately, does not matter. If God does not exist, then it does not really matter what kind of vocation a person has, or what kinds of relationships a person has with others. It does not matter whether a person lives a life of service toward others or a life of doing harm to others because the end result of both lives is the same: death.

Many atheist philosophers actually agree with this bleak assessment of the atheistic worldview. Bertrand Russell (1903) concluded that because human beings are the accidental product of nature and are destined to nothing but death, then there is nothing left but despair. Russell (1903) said that,

Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; ... his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms ... [A]ll the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins ... Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built. (p. 416)

In other words, Russell's atheistic worldview leads him directly to the conclusion that there is no meaning and no purpose to our existence and that all we have left is despair. Contemporary atheist Richard Dawkins (1995) echoed the same sentiments. Commenting on the implications of atheism, he said, "The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference" (Dawkins, 1995, p. 133). So, if people take the atheistic worldview seriously and see its implications, it is no wonder that so much anxiety and depression exists among people today. If their worldview leads them to believe that there is no ultimate purpose to either the universe or their individual lives, it is only natural to expect them to be anxious and depressed.

Finding Life in Christ

Despite how influential the atheistic worldview is today, most people do not live their lives according to the logical implications of atheism regarding meaning and value. Most people live their lives as if there is some meaning to be found in life and happiness really is possible. People search for fulfillment in their careers, wealth, or fame. Others search for meaning and purpose in serving other people. But from the Christian perspective, God offers us the only meaning that exists. Everything else we might turn to for fulfillment is just a poor approximation of a meaningful life. Of course, career, wealth, fame, relationships with others, or a life of service are not bad in and of themselves. People focus on these things because they do give some measure of satisfaction, but focusing on these things as if they are the ultimate source of life, happiness, and fulfillment will always result in disappointment.

Longing and striving for happiness, and the persistence of disappointment and despair is nothing new. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, the human heart has always been anxious and unsatisfied, striving to discover the source of a good life but finding that nothing on Earth can bring true gratification and fulfillment. The 17th century mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal (1670/1966) once commented on this in a way that captures the fundamental problem:

What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself. (p. 74)

Pascal pointed out that most people look at their lives and recognize that true happiness is missing—there is an “abyss,” an emptiness that they sense. They work hard, striving to find something that will fill up the empty place and bring fulfillment of the cravings and desires of the human heart. But, Pascal said, only God can fill the empty place in our heart and bring this kind of fulfillment. Only God can bring eudaimonia.

While it is true that only God can bring fulfillment, God’s purpose for humans and his work in their lives in this world is about much more than eudaimonia. He is not up in heaven thinking of ways to make us happy. For those who have read the previous chapters in this book, it is already clear that the Christian worldview is not about achieving superficial happiness in life; however, it is true that when a person is living a life focused on God, which is how God intended life to be lived, true happiness is one of the positive benefits that a life with God produces. While humans striving after eudaimonia on its own will always find disappointment, striving after God will result in the deepest fulfillment and satisfaction that is possible for humans to have. In Jesus Christ, God provided a way for us to be rightly related to him, which, ultimately, will bring us the peace that we long for and the satisfaction for our souls.

Christ Is the Source of Peace and Fulfillment

It is essential to recognize that God is offering us the only true peace and fulfillment that there is in the entire universe. The first humans were tempted to think that God was holding something back. Genesis 3 tells a grim story of how Adam and Eve ignored the provision that God had made for them to enjoy a fulfilling life and believed the lie that there was something better in the forbidden fruit. The tragedy is that God had gone to great lengths to provide for them in every conceivable way, and ever since this tragic event, God has continued to work among human beings to provide salvation and a return to life. In Jesus Christ, God has brought to fulfillment his plan to rescue the descendants of Adam and Even from this broken world. This highlights for us the deep tragedy of Adam and Eve: They had a perfect life, but instead of resting in the life that God had provided for them, they rebelled against God, and the results were devastating. As described in earlier chapters of this book, the fall had far-reaching consequences that we still experience today. The consequences of sin from the fall, as well as the continuation of sin, are the main obstacles to humans experiencing life and peace today as God intended it.

Obstacles to Peace and Fulfillment

One of the most obvious obstacles that can keep a person from experiencing peace in life is continued, deliberate rebellion against God. Continuing to live in sin and disregarding God's moral law will always lead to negative consequences in life and, ultimately, to disappointment, isolation, and despair, even if there are temporary pleasures (physical, mental, emotional) that accompany the sin. When people realize their sin, or when they experience various consequences from sinful behavior, they can sometimes be overcome by a deep sense of guilt and shame. When a person fixates upon this guilt and shame, this too can become a significant obstacle to experiencing God's peace. It is also often the case that a distorted sense of self-worth can keep someone from experiencing peace, such as the mistaken belief that the value of a person is contingent upon a successful career, physical beauty, or excellence in athletics. When someone has this false belief, anything short of perfection in his or her performance can lead to despair and hopelessness.

In addition to these, religion can also be an obstacle to life and peace, although it may seem counterintuitive to say so. When people recognize the consequences of sin, it is not uncommon for them to try to overcome sin by living a religious life. It is also quite common for people to turn to religion as a way to seek overall improvement in their lives. It is always good to try to live a good life, and it is good when religion motivates people to do good in their lives, but a religious lifestyle can also be an obstacle to finding true peace and fulfillment. Trouble arises quickly when people attempt to reach God through their religious efforts, or when they seek religion as if it can be a path to solve all their immediate problems. If we try to appease God and earn his favor by attending church, giving to the poor, or serving those in need, we may accomplish some good in the world and find some measure of happiness, but, ultimately, we will fail to meet our deepest needs with this kind of approach to religion. It is only through living in and through Jesus Christ that humans can have their deepest needs met.

Finding Peace and Fulfillment in Christ

Trying to reach God through religious efforts will continue to lead people to disappointment. Recall Matthew 11:25–30, the passage quoted at the start of this chapter. In the original context of that passage, Jesus was speaking to religious people who were confident in their own righteousness and that they were the people of God. It turns out, however, that this was false confidence based on the mistaken belief that they could be righteous before God through their own diligent religious efforts. Earlier in the passage, Jesus prayed, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children" (Matthew 11:25). Here Jesus used the term wise in a sarcastic way: Those who were self-righteous were wise only in their eyes. Jesus suggested that God gives favor to those who, like children, recognize their inability to live up to God's perfect standard.

It is clear from Jesus's teaching that no one can ever attain righteousness through their religious efforts. God is perfect, and his standard of righteousness is nothing short of perfection, so religious effort results in a heavy burden that none can bear because no one can ever achieve perfection. This is why the Bible teaches that salvation is by God's grace—favor from God that we cannot possibly earn that he gives freely to all who ask. As Ephesians 2:8–9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." God favors the humble over the proud and strong because it takes humility to recognize that we cannot save ourselves. A life of religion creates a burden of effort that always falls short of perfection, but following Jesus results in rest. This does not mean that it is easy to follow Jesus, but it does mean that it is the only way to true peace and fulfillment.

Responding to Jesus's Personal Call

Each of us was designed by God to be in a right relationship with him, so it is in the context of a right relationship with God that we can find life and peace to a degree even greater than the ancient Greeks could have imagined when they talked about eudaimonia. In Jesus Christ, God issues an invitation—a call to follow Jesus, and if a person answers that call, it will lead to the discovery of a way of life and peace. This call is not merely a general announcement that gives us facts about God's plan of salvation, but, rather, it is a call to each individual person that requires a personal response. In order to be rightly related to God, each of us must respond to Jesus.

One passage in the New Testament that highlights this is John 1:11–12. Speaking about Jesus, John wrote, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." In other words, when someone responds to the call and receives Jesus personally, that person becomes one of God's children. The father/child language communicates the personal, intimate, and individual nature of the new relationship that results from responding to Jesus's call. Thinking of God as the perfect Father is an aspect of the Christian worldview that sometimes goes unnoticed or underemphasized, but it is central to our conception of God and our relationship to him through Jesus. Personally receiving Jesus restores a person's relationship with God and brings people to a place where they receive the perfect love of God the Father; this is the heart of the Christian worldview.

The Christian worldview is not just a way of understanding and interpreting the information in the world. Instead, it is a totally new perspective on the world that begins with a person's response to Jesus's invitation to believe in and follow him, recognizing that he is the one who can provide salvation, exchanging the old life of isolation, despair, lack of meaning, and death for an entirely new life of purpose, meaning, and fulfillment. The kind of response necessary is a spiritual response, a response of faith and trust in Jesus Christ. This response does involve the intellect, as it is important to have correct beliefs about God, the world, humans in general, and about ourselves in particular; it also involves the emotions, as responding to Jesus can be emotionally motivated and have emotional results. Ultimately, responding to Jesus is a spiritual act in which a person trusts God fully through Jesus in response to the good news of salvation.

The Good News Is Good News for You

The word *gospel* simply means "good news," so when people refer to the gospel of Jesus Christ, they are referring to the good news of salvation that God has made available through Jesus. We can imagine that whenever an announcement of good news is made, it can be good news even though it does not have any impact at all on our lives. When we hear that a lost child has been found, we can say that it is good news because the child was rescued and is no longer in danger, even if we do not personally know the child or the family involved. If a radio announcer tells us that a tornado in the Midwest missed a small town, it is good news that the town was spared the devastation, even if we do not personally live in that small town. We can imagine all kinds of examples like this: announcements that are genuinely good news, even though they might not impact us personally. The good news of Jesus is not like that. The reason that salvation through Jesus is good news is that it does indeed have an impact on each and every person in the world.

Even though Jesus came to Earth more than 2,000 years ago and lived a life geographically distant from where most readers of this book are located, it is essential to understand that the message of salvation through Jesus is good news for us today. Previous chapters of this book taught that sin separates us from God, and this is ultimately why our lives fall short of true satisfaction and fulfillment. Previous chapters also stated that God's judgment awaits all those who remain in their rebellion against God, but God does not want us to continue to suffer. Jesus Christ came so that we can have eternal life. In one of the most well-known passages of the New Testament, Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). When we realize that we are perishing, it becomes clear that the message of Jesus Christ is good news for us.

When people realize that they need to be saved, that is when the message of salvation is most clearly seen and appreciated as genuinely good news. Think of how a drowning person might think about the lifeguard diving in to save him or her. Think of how someone who is trapped in a burning building might respond to the firemen who arrive on the scene. Think of how a person who has a life-threatening disease would respond to the news that a cure has been found. When people recognize that they are perishing without Jesus, it is then that they have a full appreciation for how the message of salvation through Jesus can impact their lives. This is not just a story about events far away and a long time ago, it is right here and right now: Jesus is calling everyone to believe in him and to receive the gift of eternal life from God. When people do that, God begins the process of transforming their lives.

New Identity in Christ

Personally receiving Jesus means to surrender to Jesus as the center of one's life, to begin a new life of serving and following him instead of seeking to lead and serve oneself. God works in the life of the person who has received Jesus in this way and immediately begins a process of transformation. In one of his letters to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul spoke very clearly about God's work to transform the person who has received Jesus. He wrote, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17–18). Part of the point of this passage is to make it clear that following Jesus is not limited to a simple change in certain religious beliefs or practices in a person's life. On the contrary, it is something that impacts the person's focus, thinking, worship, time, efforts, and relationships—indeed, every aspect of life. When someone receives the gift of eternal life, there is a whole-person transformation that takes place, and this transformation is so radical that we can say that the person is a "new creation" and that the person's old identity "has passed away" (2 Corinthians 5:17–18).

In his letter to the Ephesian church, Paul described this change as being from death to life. Before having placed their faith in Jesus, Paul said people

were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, ... carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:1–3)

Then Paul went on to describe the transformation that God brings about, saying,

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4–6)

When we compare these passages with John 1:11–12 (quoted above), we see that a person who places faith in Jesus Christ goes from being a child of wrath and dead in sins, like the rest of mankind, to being a child of God, alive in Jesus Christ.

Resurrected to Live a New Life

Passing from death to life is a common theme in the New Testament that is used to describe what happens to a person who receives Jesus. One prominent passage that addresses this is Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. In Romans 6:4–5, Paul described salvation as union with Christ, and he indicated that just as Christ died, was buried, and was resurrected, so too are those who are united with Christ in salvation. Paul wrote,

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:4–5)

The person who has placed her or his faith in Jesus Christ for salvation has “died” to the old way of living and has been “raised” by God to live an entirely new kind of life in this present world. Paul went on to describe the nature of the **resurrected life**. He said that a person living this new life has been set free from the power of sin, and is enabled by God to live a holy, righteous life of obedience to Christ.

This does not mean, of course, that a Christian will suddenly stop sinning and do only good works. Instead, this metaphorical language about death and resurrection is designed to highlight the real and radical change that takes place in a person who lives this new life following Jesus. The resurrected life is not merely the absence of individual sins or bad behaviors, nor is it just the addition of good behavior or righteous works to a person's life. This new life will be seen in a person's lifestyle and behaviors, but these will just be the outward signs of the internal change. The resurrected life is the fundamental reorientation of the entire self toward God.

Following Jesus With My Whole Life

The Bible tells of a time when a person asked Jesus to tell him what the greatest commandment is, and Jesus's answer emphasized the need for a person to orient themselves toward God. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment” (Matthew 22:37–38). When Jesus used the terms *heart*, *soul*, and *mind*, he was not talking about three distinct aspects of a person. Instead, Jesus used these words as a way to refer to everything about a person. Jesus was saying that the greatest commandment is for us to love God with every aspect of our being, including all our emotions, beliefs, actions, attitudes, habits, and commitments. Jesus was presenting the resurrected life as a holistic, all-encompassing vision for life—a vision for a life that is entirely focused on God in every area.

The Secular/Sacred Divide

It is widely assumed today that people are supposed to keep their religious opinions to themselves. This forces people who have religious beliefs to attempt to live two entirely separate lives: one secular and the other sacred. The word *secular* simply refers to nonreligious aspects of life, while the word *sacred* refers to those aspects of life that are set apart for God. Out in public and when interacting with others, the religious person is supposed to live a nonreligious lifestyle; only in private or when in the company of others who share the same beliefs can the religious person live a religious life. The obvious problem is that this is impossible to achieve. Think about your own life: Can you divide up your beliefs into different categories and then live entirely different kinds of lives at different parts of the day. First of all, everyone has religious beliefs, as even atheists hold the religious belief that God does not exist. Second, people cannot create divisions in their beliefs that would allow them to live some parts of the day as if some of those beliefs are true and other parts of the day as if those beliefs are false. Finally, if a person actually tries to divide his or her life in this way, it will result in nothing but emotional and mental turmoil and stress, as the person would need to constantly struggle to try to suppress some beliefs in some contexts and then others in other contexts. Because this is impossible to do, it is sure to result in mental anguish and anxiety. Because the secular/sacred divide is widely assumed, it is essential to point out that the Christian worldview requires a person to live a holistic, Christ-centered life. After all, the main beliefs of the Christian worldview simply are not the kind that can be ignored or suppressed when one is in public or interacting with others. Indeed, Christian beliefs are precisely the kind that require followers to take those beliefs into every aspect of their lives and to every interaction they have with another person. For the Christian, there can be no secular/sacred divide (see also the discussion of secularism in Chapter 16).

The practical implication of this is that, as a follower of Jesus, one must resist the temptation to compartmentalize life and confine Christianity to just one segment of it. Many people are tempted to do this. Just as Clark Kent lives his life as a mild-mannered reporter who becomes Superman in a time of need, there are some people who think that they can live “regular” lives, and just become a Christian each Sunday when going to church. But if we take Jesus seriously and take seriously the Bible’s statement that the Christian is someone who has died and then been raised to new life in Christ, then we must reject the idea that Christianity can fit into just one compartment of our lives. Rather than accept the “Christianity on Sunday” approach, it is essential to embrace a holistic, all-encompassing vision for the Christian life. The Christian life is to be an integrated life, with each of the various parts fitting together. If we are following Jesus, in the way that the Bible describes, then all aspects of life—relationships, hobbies, commitments, habits, career, money—must be incorporated into Christian life.

United With Christ’s Body

One of the essential aspects of the Christian life—and one of the most common aspects that Christians mistakenly confine to Sunday—is the church. The essential nature of the church is easily overlooked in the contemporary context of individualism. As people tend to focus on private religious experience, they also tend to minimize the importance of

the church. It is important to understand that the Bible places the church as the centerpiece of Christian life. The overwhelming majority of New Testament instruction on how to live as a Christian is guidance on how to be a good church member. In discussing the Bible's description of this concept, Joseph Hellerman (2009) wrote,

In the New Testament era a person was not saved for the sole purpose of enjoying a personal relationship with God. Indeed, the phrase "personal relationship with God" is found nowhere in the Bible. According to the New Testament, a person is saved to community. ... when we get a new Father we also get a new set of brothers and sisters. In Scripture salvation is a community-creating event. (p. 124)

Hellerman's point is that all throughout the New Testament, becoming a follower of Jesus and becoming a part of the church are the same event. Indeed, the common metaphor in the Bible to describe the church as the body of Christ. This makes the point clear: Just as hands, feet, eyes, and ears perform their function only as they are vitally connected to a human body, so too are individual Christians actually Christians because they are joined to other Christians in the body of Christ.

Paul's letter to the Ephesian church used another metaphor to make the same point. Paul taught that being made alive in Christ results in a person being joined to other Christ-followers. Then, discussing the concept of growth toward spiritual maturity, he used the metaphor of a building to represent the church. He wrote that each person is like a single stone and the church is like the whole building, which is

built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:20–22)

Paul had in mind the individual Christians who were a part of that one local church in Ephesus, and the concept applies equally to all Christians.

The same ideas are repeated throughout the New Testament. The local church is the context for teaching and learning about God, for prayer, for worship, and for spiritual growth. Of course, people can do some of this on their own, but the point is that the primary context for each of these activities—and indeed every kind of Christian activity—is the local church. Being united to Christ, by definition, means being united to Christ's people. History tells us that this is exactly how the earliest Christians lived. Acts 2, for example, tells that the first small community of believers met together every day, gathering in various houses to share meals and material resources, worship together, and pray. So if we relegate church to one day a week or just one small aspect of our lives, we are ignoring most of what the New Testament has to say about the Christian life. Christ's body—the church—is the context within which Christ's people receive his life and peace. When we truly understand Christ's vision for the connection between the individual Christian and the church, we quickly see that church cannot possibly be limited to the one day of the week that an entire local congregation gathers.

Catching Christ's Vision for Human Life

Another essential aspect of the Christian life is how we see value in human life. Genesis 1 tells us that God made human beings in his image. While we can draw out many implications from reflecting on this concept, one of the most important implications is that all human persons are intrinsically valuable. This means that everyone is valuable just for being a human person. Our value is based on being made in God's image, not based on things such as intelligence, success, or being productive for the benefit of society. When we have Christ's understanding of the value of human life, it will result in specific implications for how we see ourselves, how we view and treat other people, and how we engage in various activities in the world.

One important implication for this is how we view ourselves. There are two key mistakes pertaining to self-understanding that are easy to make—mistakes that you might be tempted to make in your own life. First, it is easy to think too highly of ourselves. James 4:6 gives warning about this: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Being proud, arrogant, and self-centered is a fairly common mistake that will be corrected by having Christ's vision for human life. Another, less common but equally serious mistake is to have too low a view of oneself. A proper understanding of self takes into consideration the inherent value that each of us has as a creature made in God's image, so self-care and self-protection are important. Another common mistake is thinking that our value comes from some source other than God, such as career or talents. This is especially tempting for college students, who are often under pressure to perform by getting high grades or a high-paying job after graduation. The Christian worldview insists that our value as humans is not based on these kinds of things but, instead, comes from God.

Another important implication is that we have a moral obligation to treat others in ways that are consistent with the value that they have as creatures made in God's image. In the passage from Matthew 22 (quoted above) Jesus went on to discuss the second-greatest commandment. He said, "And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). In offering this commandment, Jesus emphasized that loving other people is essential. When we think about these two ideas—the value that we have based on being made in God's image, and the command to love others—we can easily conclude that we are supposed to love everyone, with no exceptions. Every interaction we have with another human person matters very much to God, and having a Christian perspective on these things means we are motivated to care for and love everyone we meet.

Recognizing this implication will shape how we act toward each other in day-to-day situations, both in the church and in the world. The New Testament is clear that Christians are to reject selfishness and continuously seek to serve others. In fact, Jesus said that one of the key indicators that a person is following him is that person's love for other Christians (John 13:35). The same holds true for those outside the church. Jesus's story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) makes the point quite clear: When an opportunity presents itself to help someone in need, a person of Christ-like love will work hard to meet that need. In everyday life, a person who has Christ's vision for human life will devote time and labor to help those who are in need. Christ's followers will be marked by efforts to protect those who are weak or to rescue those in danger, and their love for other people will be seen in the more mundane interactions with others at the grocery store, restaurants, in the workplace, and in the neighborhood.

A third implication of Christ's vision for human life relates to how we engage in various activities in the world. Consider these important questions: What difference does Christianity make in what a person does for entertainment? How should a Christian make choices about vacation destinations and activities, or whether to take a vacation at all? What about sporting events? What values does a Christian use when deciding which car to purchase? What size house

should a Christian live in? Are there certain kinds of restaurants that Christians shouldn't go to? What does a Christian monthly budget look like? What is the Christian perspective on recycling and greenhouse-gas emissions? Because contemporary life tends to be so compartmentalized, at first glance, this can appear to be a random collection of unrelated questions, but when we truly capture Christ's vision for life, we quickly realize that each of these questions is really just a version of the same question: What does a Christian life look like? For a person who truly has Christ's vision for human life, that vision will be the primary factor that shapes how he or she spends time, money, and talents on various activities in the world.

Vocation and God's Mission in the World

In addition to having a clear grasp of Christ's vision for human life, it is also essential to have a clear understanding of God's mission in the world and how that mission impacts our lives and vocations. Many are familiar with the charge that Jesus gave to his earliest followers, in what is now known as the *great commission*. Jesus said,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:18–20)

God's primary mission in the world is gathering for himself followers who worship him and work to bring about the vision of his kingdom.

Previous chapters have discussed that God is a missionary God, who does not wait for people to come to him. Instead, God takes the initiative and goes to the world because that is who he is by nature. God sent Jesus Christ to bring salvation to the world, and he sends out the church to carry forth God's mission of salvation and restoration to the broken world. When Christians understand God's mission in the world, this will shape their view of their vocation. For example, choosing a career field should be shaped by God's mission in the world, not on factors such as how much money can be earned in that field. Vocation should be seen as a subset of a person's overall life orientation toward God's mission in the world. Christians will see themselves primarily as missionaries, working with God to bring restoration to the world, and everything else, including vocation, will be seen as one aspect of living out that mission.

It is important to note that the relationship between vocation and God's kingdom cannot be superficial. For example, a business might put a Bible verse on their business cards, hold a Bible study for employees every morning, or give 10% of its profits to a Christian charity. Those things are certainly commendable, but doing those things does not suddenly make the business a Christian business. Instead, a Christian business will be one that seeks to locate every aspect of its vision, values, and practices within God's kingdom—Jesus's vision for human life, Jesus's values, Jesus's mission in the world. Most people will not be in a position to influence their employer's vision, values, and practices in this way; therefore, important consideration must be given to what a Christian employee is.

In contemporary society, it is common to find identity and purpose in one's vocation. This can be seen easily when two strangers meet for the first time. In such situations, we routinely expect one of the first questions to be, "What do you do?" The fundamental presupposition behind this seemingly innocent question is that vocation or career is

fundamental to identity and purpose in life, but from the perspective of the Christian worldview, the fundamental source of identity and purpose is Jesus Christ. This means that every aspect of a Christian's life should be built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and his mission in the world.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced you to some of the basic and most important ideas related to how to live out the Christian life. It began by encouraging you to respond personally to Jesus's call on your life to follow him and suggested that this is the only way possible to experience true fulfillment and happiness in life. The latter parts of the chapter attempted to give practical implications for life that come from following Jesus. The following chapters will go into more detail about several key ideas raised in this chapter, and they will provide additional practical advice for how you can live out the Christian life. In Chapter 13, the concept of spiritual formation is discussed, and you will learn about using three theological principles to help you apply the concepts from this chapter and the rest of the book: the Kingship Principle, the Relationship Principle, and the Kingdom Principle. Each subsequent chapter will also include some comments on these principles so that they can function as tools to help you apply the content to living an integrated, holistic Christian life.

Chapter Review

Main Ideas

- Jesus Christ is the true source of life, peace, fulfillment, and happiness. Many people strive for fulfillment apart from Christ, but this has commonly lead to despair. Atheism has been highly influential in our culture, but atheism is not able to provide a ground for true meaning and value. Humans are made in God's image; therefore, only God can offer the deepest fulfillment and satisfaction that is possible for humans to have.
- In Jesus Christ, God offers all people true peace and fulfillment. One of the most obvious obstacles that can keep a person from experiencing peace in life is continued, deliberate rebellion against God; however, people cannot earn salvation through effort. Rather, salvation is a free gift of God's grace.
- Each of us was designed by God to be in a right relationship with him, so it is only in the context of a right relationship with God that a person can find life and peace. In Jesus Christ, God issues an invitation—a call to follow Jesus—and if a person answers that call, it will lead to the discovery of the way of life and peace.

Key Terms

- **Agnosticism:** A worldview position characterized by the conviction that it is not possible to know with certainty whether God exists or not and that the same is true of certain other religious claims.
- **Atheism:** Disbelief in the existence of a god or gods and, therefore, entails an understanding of reality that makes no reference to anything or any being beyond the physical universe.
- **Eudaimonia:** An ancient Greek word that refers to an excellent life of deep happiness, satisfaction, peace, and fulfillment.
- **Resurrected Life:** The resurrected life is the new life brought about through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the fundamental reorientation of the entire self toward God.

Application of Knowledge

- Being a Christian is much more than just understanding the Christian worldview, having Christian beliefs, or living a life that superficially matches Christian values. Instead, it is a whole-person transformation from death to life, becoming focused on following Jesus as the center of one's entire life.
- Because God has made us to be in relationship with him through Jesus Christ, following Jesus and living the resurrected life will permeate every aspect of a person's life and will result in true fulfillment, satisfaction, and peace.

Questions for Reflection

- Are you a Christian? Have you received the gift of salvation from God through Jesus Christ?
- What is happening in your life right now that is keeping you from experiencing the peace and fulfillment that God offers through Jesus Christ?
- In what ways have you tried to compartmentalize your life, separating your religious beliefs, attitudes, and commitments from other aspects of your life?
- What does it mean to be a Christian in your academic discipline or future vocation?

Resources for Further Reading

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GLOSSARY

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