



Losing Our Virtue

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Available now for the first time in paperback, *Losing Our Virtue* offers a bold critique of the moral disintegration taking place in contemporary society and its reflection in today's evangelical church. Continuing the series begun with David Wells's *No Place for Truth and God in the Wasteland*, this acclaimed volume urges the church to regain its moral weight and become a missionary of truth once more to our relativistic postmodern world.

Losing Our Virtue Details

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From Reader Review Losing Our Virtue for online ebook

Wes Hodges says

Part 3 of a 4 part series on Christianity and contemporary culture. A masterpiece on the topic of psychological man v. spiritual man.

John says

Wells set a high standard in his previous two books on postmodernism and the church. This one is good, but not quite as good as the previous two volumes. He spends a lot of time exposing the psychologizing within the church--a topic that at least for me I found tiresome very quickly.

I can only tolerate so much talk about "the self" before my eyes glaze over. That being said, he makes some important points, but some of the middle chapters seemed a bit too long and he beat his point to death.

Still, an important read and critique of the modern church.

Justin Daniel says

In my quest to read all of the series of David F. Wells' quartet of books (No Place for Truth, God in the Wasteland, and the Courage to be Protestant including this book) led me to "Losing Our Virtue" where Wells continues his critique of modernity and the Church. This book begins with a brief recapitulation of what was discussed in "No Place" and "Wasteland" before descending into his main thesis: the loss of virtue in our postmodern culture.

In times past, virtue was seen as in the community. These were traits, like honor, that were universally accepted by a community and were seen as objective sources of truth. Through the ages, particularly in modernization, this turned into "virtue" and then finally, "values." Today, values are things that literally, people value. But values cannot be objective because each individual has their preference on which values they... value. Therein lies the conundrum of modernity: we have left the realm of objectivity to a subjective baseline that relegates the once high status of virtues for a "have it your way" system that is reminiscent of our fast food choices. The individual reigns supreme as overlord of our own personal world, where each touchy subject is not based on any truth, but rather on preference. In essence, God has been replaced by moral self centeredness and individualism in our country and, even more frighteningly, our Churches.

Wells demonstrates this through several mediums. First, he shows how litigation has become a way to avoid the acceptance of blame. Instead of taking responsibility for one's actions, our first instinct is to have a lawyer argue in your favor to shift the blame somewhere else. Second, he speaks about how psychology today has become a way of salvation for modernity. If you have a problem in your marriage, simply go to a psychotherapist who will ensure you that you are not to blame for your problems but your parents or some other person was at fault. They even have a gospel message that tells you that the evil you experience in life is a by-product of not getting in touch with the "real you" and that by tapping into your inner potential, you can become successful and rich. Third, Wells' sees a similar problem in the medium of advertisements. The

gospel message here is that you are deficient because you do not have this or that product. But, you can attain the ideal (read: salvation) only after you buy and use this or that product.

Wells speaks at length at how shame and guilt have been redefined by our culture. Wells argues that shame and guilt are necessary by-products of each other in a world dominated by moral decisions. Wells defines the two in saying: "...guilt is normally the emotional response to our violation of a moral norm, and shame is our disappointment with ourselves that we are not other than what we are" (page 130). In other words, guilt is a response to sin and shame is a response to not being what we ought to be. Therefore, shame runs supreme in our culture because when we make mistakes or violate moral codes, we are ashamed not because we believe we have done anything wrong but because we are not fulfilling the potential within ourselves. Guilt then, is a response to being unacceptable before a holy God. It is clear to see then, that shame does not always act in a moral medium but is rather subjective from the individual. Wells argues that we have transitioned out of a phase of feeling guilty over our wrongs to one that is shameful that we are not our ideal.

The crescendo of Wells' book happens when he looks at honor in the context of the Bible. It is God who bestowed on us honor at creation by giving us human capacities (the conscious and therefore the soul). Then again, even more gloriously, at the rebirth of salvation. Therefore, Christ bore the shame (remember: the "disappointment with ourselves that we are not other than what we are") of our lives on the cross and has clothed us with righteousness. He then says that someday there will be a judgement and everything will be exposed. But for the Christian, this will be much less difficult for we are justified through Christ's redemptive work on the cross.

Lastly, he explores what this means for the Church. He speaks of the pervasive individualism of our psychologized culture with their false gospels. He rightly suggests that today subjects like sin are often times greatly downplayed because it will not appeal to a generation of people who like to feel good about themselves instead of facing the harsh reality that we are a fallen people. He says,

"In a highly pluralistic, commercially driven, secular culture such as ours, this kind of understanding of the human predicament seems to be a remote possibility, because all of its coordinates are gone. Gone is the God against whom sin is measured. Gone is the understanding, though not the experience, that we are all made to be moral actors by creation. Gone is truth and, as part of that, moral norms. It is this cultural reality that is bending Christian thinking and evangelistic Christian faith that tries to adapt itself to this culture in order to win a 'hearing' is a Christian faith that will be left with nothing to say. The ally of faith is not culture but creation, not the ethos and trends of modernity, but the stubbornly present *imago Dei*. For it is the image of God that persists in raising questions that must be answered, even as it is modernity, in union with our fallen proclivities, that works to obscure these questions."

For only the second time does Wells' make any mention of how we can reclaim the Church in this culture. He says the Church needs to go back to the Bible to discover the proper place of biblical anthropology in these postmodern times. He demonstrates this by explaining the discovery of the law in King Josiah's time in the Bible.

Really brilliant book. I am very impressed with this series so far and I am looking forward to re-reading "The Courage to be Protestant."

Marie says

Excellent! I'm sure I couldn't do it justice in a little Goodreads review. The author speaks eloquently about our society's loss of the sense of virtue, and what we can do to regain it. I've recommended this to quite a few folks already, and now I'm recommending it to you, the Goodreads community!

Pete Williamson says

Wells is one of those who seems to have the innate ability to see the world and the Church's role in it with precision and clarity. A stirring call to the Church to return to its first call.

Melody says

This was good. Written in the 80's. Gives a good synopsis of how our society views sin and how that affects the Church.

Brian says

This third book in Wells' series of five books on postmodernism focuses on the erosion of ethics within contemporary culture. This book is, in many ways, a series of contrasts between what was and what now is.

Classical spirituality, which Wells' defines by its doctrinal basis, its devotional habits, its moral character, and its responsibilities in Church and Society" [33] is the backdrop against which the a-theological spirituality of postmodernism is viewed. Wells demonstrates that talk about virtues has given way to clarification of values, that emphasis on character has shifted to a focus on personality, that theology has been displaced by psychology, and that feelings of guilt, which are God-centered in their moral orientation, have degenerated into the emotions of man-centered shame.

Wells gets at his diagnosis of the moral state of the Church and culture in several ways. In chapter one, "A Tale of Two Spiritualities," Wells contrasts the hymnody of the historic Church with the contemporary praise and worship songs of today. The results of his research are somewhat alarming, whatever one's taste in music happens to be. Another chapter, "The Playground of Desire," draws more from a study of sociology, zooming especially on what Wells calls "the competition between law and freedom," the relevance of which to the political realm he unfolds with penetrating insight. In yet another place, Wells examines the ideology of Robert Schuller, Senior Pastor of the Crystal Cathedral. Schuller's view of sin "is really nothing more than poor self-image, and salvation is its reversal," says Wells [200]. But, "where sin has lost its moral weight, the Cross will lose its centrality, Christ will lose his uniqueness, and his Father will no longer be the God of the Bible" [200].

One of Wells most astute observations is that "much of the Church today, especially that part of it which is evangelical, is in captivity to [the] idolatry of the self. This is a form of corruption far more profound than the lists of infractions that typically pop into our minds when we hear the word sin. We are trying to hold at bay the gnats of small sins while swallowing the camel of self" [203-204]. As can be seen, Wells operates with a sharp surgical scalpel. But let no one think that he is a knife-happy physician, for he not only diagnoses the disease and cuts away the cancer, he also prescribes the medicine that will heal the Church. That cure is nothing less than a recovery of the Gospel, with its high view of God's transcendent holiness.

This is a must read for Christians who are serious about engaging the culture on a philosophical or theological level. And those who are not interested in such an engagement may need this book most of all.

John Rabe says

Read it. Read all of Wells you can get your hands on.

Timothy Bertolet says

This is an extremely helpful book diagnosing the lost of morals in our church and how the concept of sin is replaced by psychological notions of self. The critique is penetrating. Like Wells' other books it leaves the church with a timely challenge that needs to be heard.

Steve Hemmeke says

David Wells contends that postmodern life is hollowing out our spiritual and moral inner life. Like a pumpkin with all the insides scooped out, and nothing left but a hollow and haunting smile, so we are reduced to self-made identity and meaning, in a world that rejects objective morality and meaning.

Such a world leads to emotional detachment, individualism that isolates, a life of the paltry devoid of godly passion. Such a world replaces guilt with shame: the fear is what others will think of us, not what God thinks. Such a world replaces character with personality: outward charisma matters more than inner virtue. We reinvent ourselves and have such “aggressive self-regard” because we believe in nothing outside of ourselves on which to plant our feet firmly.

Wells points to the psychologists and advertisers. Society looks to them most for healing, which reveals the problem. We think our feelings and our image are paramount. They are broken, and fixing them will solve it. But the problem goes much deeper than this. The church needs to point to the nagging presence of evil and sin in the world. Instead she is often caught up with the therapeutic and advertising culture herself.

Losing our Virtue is the third in a trilogy on this subject. I read the first two about 10 years ago in seminary and they deeply influenced me. Wells is so right in his diagnosis. Reading this third I found myself a bit more frustrated. Same incisive diagnosis, but what is the prognosis? He states in the last few pages that it is not complex, but the simple Gospel. We must believe that God is there, and recover a “moral seriousness” so that we repent. This is true, but it seems that more is missing. How do we live in a morally vacuous world with the Spirit’s new life pulsating in our breast, without allowing that vibrancy to be quenched?

Do we not need a living connection with other believers in the church, hearing the Word preached and receiving the sacraments? Do we not need to listen to our forefathers in the faith who have thought and lived more deeply in the Spirit and in the Word than we? Won’t a priority on these things drive out some of the more flashy yet petty things of life?

Mark Robert says

Wells tackles ethics and morality in his third volume of his series.

Robert says

A well written and researched critique of postmodern evangelical theology.

William Dicks says

The five books by Wells are a must read for every Christian today. They show the theological and moral bankruptcy of the modern church and calls for a theological reformation.

The books are:

1. No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?
 2. God in the Wasteland: The Reality of truth in a World of Fading Dreams
 3. Losing our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover its Moral Vision
 4. Above All Earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World
 5. The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World
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