

Dangerous 'Isms

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Lectures

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Lectureship Director

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Dedication

In 1965, brother and sister Homer and Gretchen Eaton, and a handful of others helped establish the Southaven church of Christ. The infant church originally met in the auction barn located on Highway 51 in Southaven, Mississippi.

In the early 1970's the church appointed its first elders. Brother Homer Eaton was one of the men appointed. For nearly a quarter of a century, he served as a shepherd of the local flock. During that time he distinguished himself as an elder who loved and lived the truth. Along with the other elders, he spent many hours and nights tending to the flock which was among him. His children still remember the willingness of their father to sacrifice his time in order that he might assist others. Brother Eaton continued to serve even when his health began to deteriorate. Finally, when it became apparent to him that he could no longer serve with the strength that had formerly characterized him, he announced to the congregation that he could no longer serve as one of their overseers.

Even after his health prevented brother Eaton from attending services, he and his godly and gracious wife Gretchen (also shut-in because of illness) continued to provide tremendous encouragement to everyone whose lives they touched. Those who have ever visited brother and sister Eaton, will tell you that they came away from that visit encouraged and inspired. Though it would have been understandable for brother and sister Eaton to complain concerning the health problems which constantly beset them, I never once heard them do so.

Brother and sister Eaton's influence upon their family speaks volumes about their greatness. Their son Tommy, and daughter, Barbara are both faithful Christians. Their precious grandchildren, Ginger, Eddie, Amanda, and Doug are all members of the Lord's church and models of courtesy and respect.

On Sunday morning, July 7th, 1996, brother Eaton was very sick. However, brother Eaton insisted that his concerned family go on to services. They did so. Although sick, brother Eaton anxiously awaited the beginning of The Bible Answer TV

Program, a program produced by this congregation for local cable access broadcast. During this program brother Eaton suffered the seizure which took his life. The very last thing that brother Eaton did before he died is one of the things that he loved most in life. He loved to hear God's Word preached. Even though Homer had passed away that morning, the entire family was present for evening services, with the exception of those who needed to stay home with sister Gretchen.

The family wrote: "The accomplishments in Homer Eaton's life might not make him a famous man by worldly standards, but he laid up a treasure for himself in heaven...The most appropriate way for him to be remembered is as a man who tried to live his life as God commanded. He was a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, and he stood up for what he believed in."

Sister Gretchen is no less worthy of praise. Although she has been shut-in for some time now, her persistent spirit of courage and optimism continue to buoy others with hope. Sister Gretchen is positively one of the most positive people I've ever met. I believe that if Homer were alive on earth today, and he were to read all of the positive things said about him, that he would be the first to admit that Gretchen has been "the wind beneath his wings." Because of our great affection and appreciation for them, this book is lovingly dedicated to brother and sister Homer and Gretchen Eaton.



Homer and Gretchen Eaton

Acknowledgements

I would be like the nine lepers of Luke 17 if I didn't take a few paragraphs to express gratitude to the many individuals who have contributed to the production of this volume. Of course, a few paragraphs won't adequately express the depth of my appreciation, but some bouquets need to be handed out nonetheless.

Special thanks to Geraldine Chaney who continues to bless the local church with her efficient secretarial skills and professional demeanor. Also, Lisa Craig put in a load of time at the computer, formatting text, entering corrections, and helping out in countless ways.

Gratitude is extended to the team of proofreaders who assisted in getting the book ready to go to the printer. While I have no illusion that this book is *entirely* free of errors, I know that it would contain multitudes more errors were it not for the sharp eyes of Bill and Othella Pierce, Annette Kellett, Paul and April Meacham, Bryan Kirby, Bonnie Reid, Floy Manning, Lee Hogan, and Bill Bryant. In addition, a special word of thanks is due to my wife Tish who stayed several nights at the building into the "wee hours" of the morning to finalize preparations for sending the book to the printer. She is a treasure beyond measure!

Thanks to Sain Publications. As usual, our working relationship has been a joy and privilege.

And last, but certainly not least, appreciation is expressed unto the elders of the Southaven church of Christ, Bill Pierce and Coleman Simpson. These men are unafraid to "try the spirits, whether they be of God" (1 John 4:1). These men truly love the truth, and attempt to model the truth in their lives. They, too, are treasures beyond measure.

--B. J. Clarke, Editor

Foreword

Centuries ago, the apostle Paul exhorted the Colossians, “*Beware* lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8). A survey of the New Testament reveals that Paul’s “beware” to the Colossians was not peculiar. The Savior directed, “*Beware* of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15). Moreover, the loving Lord was so concerned about the dangers of false doctrine that He did not shy away from specifically identifying the perpetrators of this poison: “Take heed and *beware* of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matt. 16:6).

Peter echoed the same inspired “beware” when he concluded his second epistle:

Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, *beware* lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness (2 Pet. 3:17).

According to Peter, even Christians need to be on guard against false doctrine, lest they be led away with the error of the wicked and fall. No doubt this is why Paul emphasized that one of the primary purposes of providing spiritual gifts for the early church was so “that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14).

It would be foolhardy to believe that our generation is somehow immune to the presence and spiritual danger of men of cunning craftiness who lie in wait to deceive. Times may have changed, but the need for vigilance

against the dangers posed by false doctrine has not changed! We still need to “try the teachers whether they be of God because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

If that were true in John’s day, it is certainly true in ours. The “false prophets” of our day are found in a variety of religious organizations. Some are downright secular. Some are connected with the mysticism of Near Eastern religions, which are making inroads into America faster than most people realize. Some are from mainstream denominationalism. Some are from within the body of Christ. It seems that everywhere you look a new “ism” is rearing its ugly head.

Of course, not all “isms” are dangerous. For example, “Theism” is a good “ism.” However, it seems that for every *good* “ism” in circulation there are a hundred *dangerous* “isms” floating around. As was the case in Paul’s day, there is the danger that the spiritual life of some will be “spoiled” by these secular and deceitful philosophies. Thus, the reason we refer to these “isms” as dangerous is because hearing error, believing error, and obeying error brings about disastrous consequences (Gen. 3:1-6). If we believe a lie we will be damned, even if we believe it sincerely (1 Kings 13; 2 Thess. 2:10-12). Only a knowledge of and obedience to the truth can ever set us free from the bondage of sin (John 8:32; 1 Pet. 1:22-23). We must “hate every false way” (Psm. 119:104). We must beware of any philosophy which is “not after Christ” (Col. 2:8).

Hence, this volume is produced to assist in keeping some from being led away with the error of the wicked and being tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine. This book does not pretend to cover all of the dangerous “isms” in the world, nor does it claim to be an exhaustive treatment of the “isms” that are covered. We have asked each author to **define** his assigned “ism” and to **defeat** it. We pray that their efforts to do so will greatly enrich your knowledge of truth!

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Chapter 1

Agnosticism

Ted J. Clarke

Introduction

My sincere thanks to the good elders of this congregation for allowing me to speak again on this great lectureship. I am modestly proud of my son, B. J., for the wonderful job he has done with organizing and directing this lectureship since it resumed three years ago. This year's theme on "Dangerous 'Isms'" will provide valuable resource material, with the book serving as a handbook for all who read it. May God bless all in this dedicated congregation as they continue to serve Him.

This lesson on "Agnosticism and Skepticism" is perhaps best placed at the beginning of this lecture series, because our subject deals with our ability to **know** things, to possess **knowledge**. Using our God-given abilities, can we know with certainty that God exists, that Jesus Christ is His Son, and that the Bible is a revelation from God to mankind? This is the burden of this lesson. We will leave it to B. J. to present the specific arguments that prove God's existence. While this manuscript is lengthy it is still not possible to deal exhaustively with all the issues involved with agnosticism, nor do I have the ability to do so. I do hope to demonstrate that we can have certain knowledge of God's existence and His will for us.

Definitions

As we begin this study, consider the following definitions:

skepticism, in the most common sense, the refusal to grant that there is any knowledge or justification [for our beliefs-TJC]¹

skeptics, those ancient thinkers who developed sets of arguments to show either that no knowledge is possible... or that there is not sufficient or adequate evidence to tell if any knowledge is possible. If the latter is the case then these thinkers advocated suspending judgment on all questions concerning knowledge.²

Agnosticism is a word that came along later, but refers to the same basic philosophy. It has become the primary word to describe doubts about whether or not we can truly know anything.

agnosticism, (from Greek *a* = , ‘not’, and *gnostos*, ‘known’), term invented by Thomas Henry Huxley in 1869 to denote the philosophical and religious attitude of those who claim that metaphysical ideas can be neither proved or disproved. . . Agnosticism is a form of skepticism applied to metaphysics, especially theism. The position is sometimes attributed to Kant, who held that we cannot have knowledge of God or immortality but must be content with faith. Agnosticism should not be confused with atheism, the belief that no god exists.³

It will be helpful to define two other words to

continue our study: metaphysics and epistemology.

metaphysics, most generally, the philosophical investigation of the nature, constitution, and structure of reality [meaning what is real-TJC]. It is broader in scope than science, e.g., physics and even cosmology (the science of the nature, structure, and origin of the universe as a whole), since one of its traditional concerns is the existence of non-physical entities, e.g., God. It is also more fundamental, since it investigates questions science does not address but the answers to which it presupposes. Are there, for instance, physical objects at all, and does every event have a cause?⁴

While agnosticism relates to the question as to whether or not we can know there is a God, the key word is “know,” and the key question is how do we come to that knowledge, if we can. This brings us to the major burden of this lesson, epistemology, or the theory of knowledge.

epistemology, (from Greek *epistome*, ‘knowledge’, and *logos*, ‘explanation’), the study of the nature of knowledge and justification; specifically, the study of (a) the defining features, (b) the substantive conditions, and (c) the limits of knowledge and justification.⁵

Another philosopher says:

Epistemology has traditionally been defined as the study of the possibility and nature of knowledge. Additionally, knowledge was seen to have intimate connections with notions such as belief (knowledge was regarded as a kind of belief), justification and truth. These connections have been classically

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expressed in the formula “**knowledge is justified, true belief.**” [emphasis mine-TJC]⁶

Please notice in this last definition that belief (faith) and knowledge are not exclusive of each other. This fact is crucially relevant as we discuss these terms in a biblical context.

In this manuscript it is not possible to explore any of these terms fully. Each word involves some incredibly complex and sometimes confusing concepts. However, I will attempt to show as simply as I can that agnosticism is self-defeating and that we can know with certainty that God exists and that the Bible is His revelation to us.

Philosophical And Theological Agnosticism

Philosophy

Philosophy is a broad term dealing with every area of one’s existence and thought. While its literal root meaning is “love of wisdom,” **The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy** does not give a simple definition of the term. It treats the subject under twenty-four specific topics such as philosophies of anthropology, biology, economics, education, history, law, language, literature, logic, mind, science, religion, et al.⁷

We all have a philosophy of life, although we may not have thought about it in the terms of all the areas listed above. One’s personal philosophy is **a world view**, the way we look at things in this world and beyond this life (if we are religious), and in turn the way we live our lives based on that philosophy. Colin Brown says:

Perhaps the term *world view* indicates no more than the habitual outlook that people bring to

things. On the other hand, people cannot help having views about the way things are. Moreover, human beings have a deep need for deepening and refining their views of the world and reality. God made us that way.⁸

Some philosophers state that we **cannot know** anything about reality, meaning what really *is*. We may be told that we cannot know even if we exist; that we cannot know if we are only dreaming or truly conscious of real things or events going on around us; that what we think we *see* may only appear to be; what we *feel* is only one's personal interpretation, not what truly *is*, and so on. These men tell us that things and thoughts have meaning only in a personal sense, since what a thing or thought may mean to you may mean something entirely different to another. In other words, **nothing** relating to things, events, or thoughts **can be absolutely true for all people at all times!** These are just some of the concepts of the general philosophy of unlimited agnosticism.

Theology

Theology (a study of God) is an integral part of one's world view, pertaining to what one claims to know and what one does about religion. The complete agnostic does not assert that God does not exist. To do so would be atheism. The total agnostic says that one **cannot know** if God exists; therefore God is unknowable.⁹ Geisler mentions that a weaker form of theological agnosticism only contends that we "*do not know God,*" which leaves open the possibility that one *can* come to know God.¹⁰ Some actual atheists may prefer to be called agnostics, since the term has not generally carried the same stigma as atheist, although it is questionable

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in our present society whether either term carries much reproach.

Some Forerunners Of Modern Agnosticism

The present problem of agnosticism has roots which can be traced to some key figures from the 18th and 19th centuries. Three of the many who have contributed greatly to the idea we cannot know matters with certainty are David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Soren A. Kierkegaard. Twentieth century thinkers have modified and built upon the thinking of these men, but significant concepts remain. We can only sketch briefly some of these contributions.

David Hume (1711-1776) was a Scottish philosopher who attended the University of Edinburgh and wrote largely to promote his theory of knowledge. "For him this meant that you could prove the existence of neither things outside oneself nor even of oneself."¹¹ Perhaps most significant was Hume's insistence that one cannot prove any cause-effect relationship between any two or more objects or actions. He said:

In other words, all that we are in the habit of thinking of as cause and effect is really a matter of sequence. It is not something that happens between objects. It is really a habit of the mind.¹²

Hume also denied the possibility of miracles, citing an insufficient degree of evidence for these supposed events, that miracles are contrary to our experience and violate the laws of nature.¹³

Brown notes that Hume did not discuss:

. . . the physical resurrection of Jesus, by which Christianity stands or falls. Instead, he talks in

general terms, all the time building up the impression that no self-respecting intelligent person could take miracles seriously. In doing so Hume started a trend which has virtually established itself as intellectual orthodoxy, thus relieving people of the need to think about miracles for themselves.

. . . But miracles are not the only item on which many thinkers have taken their cue from Hume. It is merely part and parcel of his aversion to the supernatural, of his defiant insistence that our thoughts must not stray beyond the physical realm. **David Hume has become the patron saint of contemporary agnostic philosophers.**"¹⁴ [emphasis mine-TJC]

Hume's denial of any supernatural intervention in human affairs impressed several of our own nation's forefathers with whom he was a contemporary, such as Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson believed in God, but published his own version of the Bible in which he purged all the accounts of miracles. Jefferson believed in God, but not that God was active among men. This is deism.

Immanuel Kant (1724 -1804) is another key figure in the development of religious agnosticism. He was born in Konigsburg, East Prussia, formerly part of the USSR, and educated at the University there. Kant contended that the content of knowledge came through the senses, while the structure of knowledge came from the rationalism of the mind. He reasoned that since people sometimes *sense* things differently, and since one person may *reason* differently than another, this meant that there could be **no absolute knowledge at all.**

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Norman Geisler says:

However, the unhappy result of this synthesis is agnosticism, for if one cannot know anything until *after* it is structured by the a priori forms of sensation (time and space) and the categories of understanding (such as unity and causality), then there is no way to get outside one's own being and know what it really was *before* he so formed it. That is, **one can know what something is to-him but never what it is in-itself. Only appearance can be known, but not reality.** In Kant's words we know the *phenomena* [appearance] but not the *noumena* [reality]. There is an impassable gulf between the real world and our knowledge of it; we must remain agnostic about reality. We can know only *that* it is there but can never know *what* it is.¹⁵ [emphasis mine-TJC]

Kant's theory of knowledge (how we know) was a mixture of rationalism (a view that "it is possible to obtain by reason alone a knowledge of what exists"¹⁶), and empiricism (the view that we have no innate ideas nor special revelation from God, but that all knowledge comes to us by means of the experiences of our senses of taste, touch, sight, feeling, and hearing).¹⁷ For Kant the mind does not actually perceive things as they truly are in themselves, but things are filtered by our senses and previous experiences so that they become to some extent "illusory." When a scientist or common man speaks of things or events as happening in time or space or as cause and effect relationships, that person is not talking about something which is actually there or truly happens. That person "is really talking about his own habits of mind. He cannot help talking in this way."¹⁸ He merely says what something appears to be **to him** in

his habitual way of thinking, but he can never know what it **really is**. From this approach to knowledge has come the idea in religion that what is true for one person may not be true for another, simply because we perceive things differently and reason differently. What naturally follows is the doctrine of tolerance; that since there can be no universal or absolute truths, we must allow everyone to believe and do whatever he or she perceives as truthful knowledge *to-him* or *to-her*. Strangely, Kant did believe that in morals there was a “categorical imperative. . . that was valid under all circumstances and was universally binding,” in spite of this seeming contradiction to his theory of knowledge.¹⁹

Brown notes that Kant’s agnosticism was even greater when applied to metaphysics (religion).

If Kant was skeptical about the possibility of knowing material things as they are in themselves, he was doubly so about realities that allegedly transcend the material. The Forms of Intuition [which Kant said made possible even an illusive form of knowledge about material things] are “valid only for objects of possible experience.” As soon as the human mind tries to press beyond the material order it lands itself in *Antinomies* or irreconcilable self-contradictions. The lesson to be learnt from this is that the mind cannot attain to rational knowledge of anything beyond its immediate experience of the world.²⁰

While Kant believed in a kind of God, he did not believe in the God of the Bible, nor did he believe the traditional proofs for the existence of God to be compelling. The arguments for God as a Necessary Being, or an uncaused First Cause, or the intelligent Designer of a complex universe were, for Kant,

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“arguments which lead us beyond the field of possible experience [and] are deceptive and without foundation.”²¹

As Colin Brown analyzed Kant’s religious perspectives on morality and the Bible, he made the following observations:

Kant subjected ethics to the same enlightened, rational scrutiny that we have seen him bringing to the questions of knowledge and philosophical theology. If modern people are to live as if they have come of age [which was the theme of the Enlightenment or Age of Reason of the 18th century] they must throw away all external and pseudo authorities. They must do what reason tells them is right. **People have no need of God in the capacity of either a heavenly adviser or of a provider of incentives.** They must realize that ethics is like science. The latter is concerned with the laws of nature; the former is concerned with the laws which govern behavior. **In neither case does God directly enter into it.** This is the theme of the opening words of Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*.²² [emphasis mine-TJC]

The traditional Christian view of revelation—of God revealing himself in history and personal experience through events and his Word—is replaced by reason. Bible stories are all right for the ignorant masses. They represent a graphic way of teaching them morality. But in the last analysis it is “universal human reason” which is “the supremely commanding principle.” The Christian view of grace and salvation—that God has done for human beings what they could not do for themselves by blotting out their sins and

restoring them to fellowship with himself—is replaced by an unbending religion of self-help. . . True religion is to consist not in the knowing or considering what God does or has done for our salvation but in what we must do to become worthy of it. . . and of its necessity every man can become wholly certain **without any Scriptural learning whatsoever.**²³ [emphasis mine-TJC]

Obviously, if there is no standard other than one's own reason, and if men reason differently from their own minds, then God and morality can and will be anything that any man reasons is right, in spite of Kant's claim that there is a "categorical imperative" regarding morality. He has no basis for such an imperative. Kant's agnosticism, whether in the physical or metaphysical realms, leads us to doubt and despair that anything can be certain.

Soren A. Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was born in Copenhagen, Denmark into a Lutheran family. He studied for the ministry at the University of Copenhagen, but never accepted his ordination. He wrote several books against Hegel's dialectical materialism and has subsequently been considered the father of existentialism.

Kierkegaard did not believe in historical Christianity, nor that faith could be grounded in reasonable evidence.

For Kierkegaard the very need to give evidence for God reveals that one has already rejected him. . . . The whole attempt to verify God's presence is ridiculous. One is not led to God by reason; only a **leap of faith** brings one to God.²⁴ [emphasis mine-TJC]

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How then does Christianity fit in, seeing that it is a historical religion? Kierkegaard's reply is that the results of historical research are uncertain, and that in any case they do not help. For what matters is the subjective choice, the leap of faith, one's commitment to the absurd.²⁵

For Kierkegaard the paradox of faith means that belief must be proportioned in the inverse proportion to the evidence. **The less evidence, the better. Faith and reason are mutually exclusive opposites.** With Kierkegaard what counts is not *what* you know, but *how* you react. And the end product is not more factual knowledge, but an enlarged understanding of oneself and human experience.²⁶

Brown properly notes that this rejection of objective truth in favor of one's own subjective opinion is hardly the manner by which we are summoned to faith in the Scriptures.

A gospel story without the resurrection of Jesus is the melancholy tale of a dead Christ who is helpless to save. The absolute antithesis which Kierkegaard draws between the objective and subjective is one which no biblical writer ever drew. The biblical writers summon men to faith not because it is absurd but because there are good grounds for committing oneself to Christ. These occur, for example, in the signs he performed and the fact that God raised him from the dead.²⁷

Kierkegaard's legacy to religion as it relates to our

topic of agnosticism is his insistence that faith and reason are mutually exclusive opposites. If so, faith is not a matter of knowing anything; for if Brown is right in assessing Kierkegaard's position, "the less evidence, the better." When the individual becomes the authority for faith then anything is permissible and no one can pass judgment on your beliefs, for you are the sole authority for yourself. The ability to know **the** truth for yourself and all men is thereby rejected.

One can see from the following definition of existentialism how Kierkegaard planted the seeds which others who have followed him have nurtured:

existentialism . . . Its origins are attributed to Kierkegaard. . . Existentialism is generally opposed to rationalist and empiricist doctrines that assume that the universe is a determined, ordered system intelligible to the contemplative observer who can discover natural laws that govern all beings and the role of reason as the power guiding human activity. In the existentialist view the problem of **being** must take precedence over that of **knowledge** in philosophical investigations. **Being** cannot be made a subject of objective inquiry; it is revealed to the individual by reflection on his own unique concrete existence in time and space. **Existence** is basic: it is the fact of the individual's presence and participation in a changing and potentially dangerous world. **Each self-aware individual understands his own existence in terms of his experience of himself and of his situation.**²⁸ [emphasis mine-TJC]

The way this philosophy plays out in this present

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religious world is just like it displayed itself in ancient times, when “everyone did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 17:6; 21:25).

Can We Truly Know Anything?

Kant was not totally wrong in his approach to the theory of knowledge. Human beings do have a rational nature in our ability to reason upon experiences that impress and influence us through our five empirical senses (taste, touch, sight, smelling, and hearing). The Scriptures assign man’s reasoning ability to the creative work of God. Making man in His image and assigning him duties in creation (filling, subduing, and having dominion over the earth) required that we possess a high level of rationality. Animal life may be more gifted by God in the various senses, such as the smell of a bloodhound, the eye of an eagle, or the hearing of a deer; but no matter how gifted in these ways or how instinctive animals may be, lions still have to run down their prey on foot and birds still have to migrate south flapping their own wings. Lions cannot drive Jeeps nor shoot a rifle to acquire their food. Birds do not buy tickets on 767 jumbo jets to go south for the winter. Neither can they invent such things. But man is constituted in his very being to be able to come to certain knowledge regarding matters both physical and spiritual (Gen. 1:26-30). God could communicate to the very first human beings through His creation and human language, and man could learn and reason upon these matters, coming to a certain knowledge of facts.

Without giving a detailed analysis of all the factors in the learning process, it is obvious that we begin this life learning (coming to knowledge) by way of impressions made upon our senses by our experiences and surroundings and reasoning upon these matters. A

baby **hears** the soothing sound of its mother's voice, **feels** the warmth and safety of her caress, and **tastes** her nourishing milk. The child learns the familiar **smells** of mother and father and soon begins to **see** the forms of its parents. These impressions are registered in the mind of the child and form associations which will enable the child to build its base of knowledge. Eventually, the child matures and with that process the reasoning capacity increases so that it can use its base of knowledge to acquire greater knowledge. This ability can be enhanced or hindered by a number of factors, but in general continues throughout one's life.

For example, a small child learns quickly that images and sounds emanating from a television set can be interesting and entertaining, although the child cannot express those thoughts yet in words. Sometime later she may learn that pressing a certain button on the TV can make those images and sounds begin, while another button can change the channel and produce different pictures and sounds more to her liking. However, this limited knowledge does not equip the child to know what to do if the TV is unplugged or if a fuse is blown and the set will not play. He may learn these things as he has a wider range of experience.

Most of us know little or nothing about the science of the transmission of video and sound waves. We have no idea how a video camera can capture the images and sounds of live action and carry them around the world in split seconds. However, our limited knowledge of these matters does not cause us to deny the reality of them. Why should it? We know that we see and hear them, even if we do not understand precisely how they arrive at our homes.

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Does the fact that the small child only sees and

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hears those TV transmissions mean that they are not real? Does our lack of knowledge as to how TV works mean that Michael Jordan's basketball skills are only an illusion, or that the Wheel Of Fortune does not really spin? If we need total knowledge or we can have no knowledge at all, then we could never know that there is no such thing as knowledge. If someone said, "Can we truly know anything?", you would have to say, "I don't know." You would have to be a complete, unlimited agnostic. There are those who say that we cannot truly know anything, but even though some claim this belief, it is impossible for them to live out that philosophy. The professed complete agnostic takes a shower because he knows that it will cleanse his body; he eats certain foods in place of poisons because he knows what will nourish him or kill him; he inserts the key into the ignition of his car knowing that it will start (if all the systems are properly working) and transport him along a specific road to where he wants to go. Why would a self-proclaimed total agnostic flip on a light switch, set in a chair, or even open his mouth to speak to another—if he cannot know what will be accomplished by these actions? Unlimited agnosticism is ludicrous to claim and impossible to live by.

The claims of some philosophers that one cannot even know if one exists, or that we cannot know if anything which appears to us is real are self-defeating. Why would these men even make such statements if one cannot know that he exists to make the statement and that others exist to hear it? Why do those who claim no physical objects are real act as though they are real? If you would throw this book at such a person, would he try to duck or deflect it? Certainly, he would or he would have a sizable knot on his noggin. They claim one thing but live differently. We rightly call such people irrational

(not using sound reasoning processes), or we call them hypocritical.

Complete agnosticism is self-defeating; it reduces to the self-destructing assertion that “one knows enough about reality in order to affirm that nothing can be known about reality.” This statement provides within itself all that is necessary to falsify itself. For if one knows *something* about reality, then he surely cannot affirm in the same breath that *all* reality is unknowable. And of course if one knows nothing whatsoever about reality, then he has no basis whatsoever for making a statement about reality. It will not suffice to say that his knowledge about reality is purely and completely negative, that is, a knowledge about what reality is not. For every negative presupposes a positive; one cannot meaningfully affirm that something is *not*-that if he is totally devoid of a knowledge of the “that.” It follows that total agnosticism is self-defeating because it assumes some knowledge about reality in order to deny any knowledge of reality.²⁹

Limited Agnosticism

There is a sense in which all of us are limited agnostics. That is, there are some things we cannot know.³⁰ Given our present limited knowledge of science, we cannot know if technology will ever take us to other galaxies in our universe. Even if man could develop such capabilities if given enough time, we do not know that Christ’s coming would be delayed that long. Because of our presently limited knowledge and the many variable factors which could affect the outcome, there are many major and minor things we cannot answer, as whether it will rain tomorrow, who will win the 1997 Baseball World Series,

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or when we will die.

We must confess that there are religious matters we do not know:

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God:
but those things which are revealed belong unto
us and our children forever, that we may do all
the words of this law (Deut. 29:29).

Likewise, we perceive of God as infinite (unlimited) in all His attributes of love, wisdom, mercy, knowledge, power, presence, et al., but it is obvious that we do not know God totally in all of His attributes. If we knew all there is to know about the Being of God we would know as much as God and be God. Still, our limitations on our knowledge of God do not mean that we cannot know anything about Him, or that our knowledge about Him cannot increase. In fact, we are told to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). “Grow” here is present active and literally means to “keep on growing.” As with the small child and the TV illustration, there are some fundamental things which we may learn very quickly, while other more involved matters can be known as we develop.

Some Additional Problems With Agnosticism

1. If anyone admits that we can know something about finite (physical) reality, as opposed to infinite (metaphysical) reality such as God, that person has adopted a limited agnosticism which leaves the door open to discuss whether or not we can **only** know finite reality as opposed to the spiritual realities such as God or Christ.³¹

2. Any claim to suspend all judgment about reality

is to do the very thing the claim denies we can do. It makes the judgment about reality that it is best to suspend all judgment about reality. How can one **know** it is best to suspend all judgment about reality if no one can know anything about what is real?³²

3. To say that it is impossible to speak of any knowledge about God because God is inexpressible is itself to express a statement about God. One who does so affirms the knowledge that God is inexpressible. If one can know this much about God, is it not possible that there are other so-called “inexpressible” facts about Him which may be known? One cannot use language and thought to express a fact about God’s nature and then say that language and thought are incapable of expressing anything about God.³³

4. In the **Warren-Flew Debate**, Anthony Flew chided brother Warren’s approach to proving the existence of God, stating that “one of the things that is wrong with the whole notion is precisely that assertions about God have been made untestable.”³⁴ The demand is often made that all things which can be verified (proven to be true) also need to be subject to falsifiability (that is, have criteria which could show the proposition to be false). While we must have some standards for establishing what is true or false, at least some matters cannot be falsified. Flew was editor of **A Dictionary of Philosophy** first published in 1979 and a second edition in 1984. Under the article “*Verifiability*” are these statements:

Some sorts of statements that are thus in principle verifiable could not be shown to be false (are not falsifiable). . . . existence claims can be verified but never conclusively falsified.³⁵

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This would apply to the existence of God, which fact Flew denies, but he would have to admit one could possibly verify the existence of God with knowledge claims without having to stipulate propositions which would be subject to falsification (proven false). Geisler shows that the atheist claim to know God does not exist is also unfalsifiable, noting, “a total state of non-existence of anything would be unfalsifiable, for example, since there would be no one and no way to falsify it. On the other hand, the existence of something is testable by experience or inference.”³⁶

5. Hume’s concept of all events “being entirely loose and separate” is senseless. He could not even make such a statement **unless the statement was connected to a consideration of more than one event**. The idea that all things are random and purposeless, with no cause and effect relationships would itself be a random and purposeless thought, unless the statement was itself the effect of some related cause, connected to what Hume thought was real and true.³⁷

6. The “leap of faith” philosophy of Kierkegaard, which rejects making any truth claims about itself, admits to being a **senseless** act with nothing to commend it to others. Such is nothing more than unjustified belief, with no claim of knowledge, and therefore cannot even be taught to others. For, if one offers justification for this “leap of faith,” then he has negated his original contention that faith is exclusive of evidence or justification. While it is true that faith is in a Person (God), that does not mean that the content of that faith cannot be expressed in words (propositional terms) which appeal to one’s ability to understand and come to a knowledge of what faith entails.³⁸

These are responses to the major claims of an

agnosticism that seeks to deny the possibility of any real knowledge of God.

How Knowledge Comes

The previous illustration of the child and the TV mentioned how impressions are made on our senses, increasing our ability to know and reason further as our body of knowledge increases. Brother Dick Sztanyo lists several avenues we use in coming to have knowledge as true justified belief.³⁹

1. Induction, which is the gathering of available evidence.

2. Deduction, which is reasoning from a general thought or event to a particular situation.

3. Use of empirical data, evidence that comes to us via the use of our five senses as the result of our direct experience.

4. Use of credible testimony, data or written or oral information from those who are qualified and trustworthy.

5. Intuition, which involves the use of our God-given logic (if I understand his point correctly).

6. Metaphysical deduction, which is deducing “from things which can be observed to things which **potentially** may **never** be seen” (in an empirical sense). He illustrates this with Robinson Crusoe who was marooned on an island, seeing a footprint which was not his own on the beach. Without ever seeing the man who came to be known as “Friday,” he deduced that another human made the footprint. Likewise, we make proper metaphysical deductions to know of God by the evidence He has left (Acts 14:17a; Rom. 1:19-22; Psm. 19:1-6; Heb. 3:4).⁴⁰

The Use of Logic

Unless we use logic to reason upon the information which comes to us, we will not come to true knowledge.

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We all use logic every time we think correctly, though we may not think of doing so any formal way. Logic is the process by which we attempt to achieve correct thinking and reject improper reasoning. Brother Thomas Warren's book, **Logic and the Bible**, is an extremely valuable tool on this topic. We briefly list the laws of thought he gives.

1. "The *law of rationality* says that men should draw only such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence, or, as Lionel Ruby put it, 'We ought to justify our conclusions by adequate evidence.'⁴¹

2. The *law of identity* simply means "if a thing has a certain property, then it has it;. . . if a proposition is true, then it is true."⁴²

3. The *law of the excluded middle* means "anything either has a certain property or it does not have that property;. . . every precisely stated proposition is either true or false (not true)."⁴³

4. The *law of contradiction* states "nothing can both have and not have a given characteristic (or property) in precisely the same respect; . . . no proposition can be both true and false, in the same respects."⁴⁴

We must likewise understand the principles of inference and implication. Explicit teaching "is to say that it [a teaching or action] is taught in just so many words (that is, words which say the exact matter under consideration).⁴⁵ Brother Warren then gives this illustration of implicit teaching through implication:

To say that proposition X (statement) implies proposition Y (statement) is to say that it is impossible for proposition X to be true without proposition Y also being true. This means that proposition Y is a logical consequence of the proposition X—that it *follows* from proposition X.

It says, in short, that proposition X functions as *evidence of* and that proposition Y functions as *conclusion*.⁴⁶

To illustrate, if Mark 16:16 implies that non-believers cannot be baptized properly (and it does), then the verse also implies that infant children, who cannot believe, are not proper candidates for baptism.

All evidence gathered and properly reasoned upon, using logic to guide our thinking correctly, brings a justified knowledge of those conclusions warranted by this process.

Faith, Reason, And Knowledge In The Scriptures

Any view which says knowledge is based on evidence and that faith (belief) begins where there is an absence of evidence is false. Such views have done much to weaken the assurances which God has given to us that He exists, that Christ His Son is our Saviour, and that the Bible is His revealed will to mankind.

One brother has written, “One of Webster’s definitions of faith is, ‘firm belief in something for which there is no proof.’ ”⁴⁷ Another defined his view of the “leap of faith” as “go[ing] as far as one can on reason and the rest of the way by faith,” implying faith is **unreasonable**.⁴⁸ A third brother insists that “. . . faith implies something less than knowledge.”⁴⁹

Present-day English dictionary definitions of “knowledge” may be contrary to biblical definitions of that word group, just as they often include inaccurate definitions on the words for baptize.⁵⁰ When Paul said, “For we walk by faith, not by sight,” the phrase “not by sight” does not mean without evidence or knowledge to justify that walk (2 Cor. 5:7). While faith and knowledge

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are not identical, “[they are not opposites.]”⁵¹ Indeed, if a good definition of knowledge is “justified, true belief,”⁵² one cannot have biblical faith without knowledge as defined in Scripture.

Consider three passages from the writings of the apostle John as illustrations of the above. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36). The faith necessary to “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” comes through evidence sufficient to warrant that belief, via the written record of Christ’s work and teaching. John had “written, that ye might believe. . . and that believing ye might have life in his name” (John 20:30-31). This same apostle, writing on the same theme, said:

These things have I written to you that **believe** on the name of the Son of God: that you may **know** that you have eternal life, and that you may **believe** [present tense, meaning “continue to believe”] on the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13).

This faith and knowledge comes from the written record of the inspired Scriptures, as with Paul’s statement saying, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). “Know” in 1 John 5:13 is from the Greek word *oida*, which “suggests fulness of knowledge;”⁵³ “absolute, beyond the peradventure of a doubt knowledge, a positive knowledge.”⁵⁴

There are additional passages where faith and knowledge are joined. In John 6:69, Peter said to Christ, “And we **believe** and **are sure** that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” The King James Version’s (KJV) “are sure” is translated “**know**” in the American Standard Version (ASV) and the New King James

Version (NKJV), from the Greek word *ginosko*, which is used over 200 times in the New Testament (NT). Paul couples these words in stating that all foods are acceptable if “received with thanksgiving of them that **believe** and **know** the truth”(1 Tim. 4:3). In terms of the Bible’s use of the words belief and knowledge they are not exclusive of one another! Faith is not a leap into the dark regions of uncertainty, without evidence or knowledge of where one is going or why. The following comments concerning **Knowledge, Experience, Ignorance** are pertinent to our study:

One of the most important marks of man as a rational being is his capacity to order and clarify his impressions of the world that surrounds him and to articulate standards of behavior. Cognition, practical knowledge and theoretical understanding are attained when the mind reflects on and judges sense experience. Originally *aisthanomai* and *ginosko* referred to experiencing an object through the senses. But whereas *aisthesis* and its cognates expressed physical apprehension through the senses apart from the intellectual act of interpretation, *ginosko* and its cognates included from the very first the idea of grasping and understanding the object perceived by the mind. Owing largely though not exclusively to the usage of the LXX [Greek OT], *aisthanomai* came to be confined to perception by the senses. The words of the *ginosko* group, however, embrace the whole gamut of knowledge from knowing things to knowing persons. When this process results in an item or body of knowledge which may serve as a basis for further thought and action, *oida* (infin. *eidenai*), to know, is used parallel to the perf. of *ginosko*. Both contain the implication of certainty

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based on experience.⁵⁵

It is therefore possible, in the biblical definition and uses of the words for knowledge to **know things, persons,** and, growing out of that knowledge, also **know that one's further thought and action** (one's way of life) **are certainly true beyond any doubt.** Remember, biblical faith and knowledge are not without evidence, nor beyond evidence. This wedding of faith and knowledge will result in eternal life if one acts upon the truth made known.

The striking equation of faith and knowledge in the relationship of man to God is also a part of the polemic against gnosticism which at the very least depreciated faith in contrast to knowledge. While John 17:3 attributes eternal life to knowledge, John 3:36 attributes it to faith. In the Johannine version of Peter's confession (John 5:69) [sic, the correct reference is Jn. 6:69 -TJC] one might be tempted to see faith as the first step subordinate to knowledge, but in 1 Jn. 4:16 the order is "know and believe."⁵⁶

While gnosticism vaunted its mystical but unsupported "knowledge" over biblical faith, the Scriptures are found to present true faith and knowledge as inseparable.

Our Sources Of Our Knowledge Of God

What are the available sources which begin and further our knowledge of God and spiritual verities? First, God may be known through the evidences He has given in "the creation of the world" (Rom. 1:19-20). David said that God had set His "glory upon the heavens,"

which is evident in the grandeur, immensity, and orderliness of the heavens and all that is in them (Psm. 8:1, 3-4). Genesis 1:14-16 testify of the practical nature of the sun, moon, and stars to meet the needs of man on earth. Further, “The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork” (Psm. 19:1; cf. 33:6-9). These verses speak of God’s **general revelation** to mankind. It is called general or “natural” because every man can see the evidence for God in the creation and natural order and reason upon it, not to a full knowledge of God, but to the facts of His eternal power and deity [Godhead] (Rom. 1:20).

The apostle Paul is emphatic in saying we can know God in this way for “**God hath showed it to them**” and “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world **are clearly seen**” (Rom. 1:19-20). This knowledge of God is capable of “**being understood by the things that are made.**” The certainty of being able to attain this knowledge is so absolute “**that they are without excuse**” (verse 20). Paul notes further that “when they knew God” they did not glorify Him and were not thankful for His gifts of creation. Consequently, they “became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened” as “they became fools” (Rom. 1:21-22, ASV; cf. Psm. 14:1-4a). These people and men today like them ignore the evidence, abandon the logical use of their senses (leaving the way God created us to think), and drifted into futile reasonings (like many of the philosophers we have noted), while their minds became darkened as they shut out God’s light (cf. Jer. 10:23). What knowledge they had of God they expelled from their minds, acting as “fools” who say there is no God (with a capital “G”), choosing to believe a lie rather than the truth, as they “worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25, 28, ASV).

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One can **ignore** the continuing evidence of the creation which is intended to bring one to a knowledge of God, as many have done and still do, but none can successfully defend agnosticism, which says, “There is no evidence or not enough evidence to warrant belief in the existence of God.” The price one pays for this escape from reason is a mind which has no answers to the questions which matter most—Where did I come from? What is my purpose for existing? What will happen when I die? God’s word answers these questions with certainty.

Second, there is **special revelation** which has come from God to man in words given to specially chosen and gifted men such as Moses, Paul and other authors of Bible books. Hundreds of times in the Scriptures these men affirm that they received and were writing the Word of God (e.g., 2 Sam. 23:2; Isa. 1:1-2; 2:1; Jer. 1:2, 4; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; 2 Pet. 1:21 et al.). While general revelation clearly establishes the existence of God, it required special revelation to reveal the details of God’s character and His specific desires for His creation. It is a fact that the writings of the OT and NT exist and they demand to be considered as evidence in our search to know God. They provide sufficient basis for a greater knowledge of God and His will, but many ignore God’s special revelation just as they ignore His general revelation.

Most of those who claim the Bible is insufficient evidence do not even know what it says. They do not consider the uniqueness of the Bible, its indestructibility, its unity of purpose, its theme, the fulfillment of prophecy, its scientific accuracy and foreknowledge, the confirmation of archaeology, and its miracles, just to name a few areas of evidences open to investigation.⁵⁷ Do the Scriptures tell us all that men might want to know about God and the spiritual realm?

No. But they give us knowledge of all we need to know and give proof of their truthfulness and knowledge claims about God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Deut. 29:29).

Third, the greatest evidence of God's existence and His love for us is seen in His Son, Jesus Christ. John 1:1-18 speaks of God being revealed through Jesus. Christ spoke of His purpose in coming and said knowing the Father would come through knowing the Son (John 14:1-14). Eternal life would also come through knowing both the Father and the Son (John 17:1-8). Although Jesus is not present with us today in the same sense He was during His personal ministry, we can just as certainly come to know Him through the inspired testimony of those who knew Him best, His apostles. Christ affirmed that He can be believed in and known through the word of the apostles in John 17:20-23; 20:30-31; Matt. 28:18-20. See also Ephesians 2:20; 3:3-5 as Paul promises the certainty of our being able to know what he knew, as we read what he wrote as God's grace enabled him to do so.

Luke wrote his gospel account that Theophilus "might know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:1-4). While the Scriptures contain the most accurate and complete record of Christ, He was a historical person and various writings outside the Bible testify of His existence in Palestine, as well as some of the acts He was credited with doing and the facts of His death and reported resurrection. Resources are available to study this matter more fully.⁵⁸ It remains true that we can only know Jesus as Savior and Lord through the credible testimony provided in God's Word.

The Problem Of Hermeneutical Agnosticism

Hermeneutics is simply the proper method of Bible study, applying the laws of language and logic in that

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study so that we can arrive at a proper understanding of what God's Word has to say to us in a particular passage, book, or totality of the Scriptures. We have previously noted that God created us with the ability to observe and reason on matters which come before us, and that He designed both natural/general revelation and the special revelation of His Word to appeal to those abilities.

We are told to "be ready always to **give an answer** [a defense] to every man that asketh you **a reason of** the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). We are to "prove all things" and "hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21); to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The apostle John said to "try [prove, ASV, or test] the spirits whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Christ commended the Ephesian church because they had tried and found false some men who were lying about their authority to teach what were found to be false doctrines (Rev. 2:2). To accomplish these things each one must "give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, ASV). We all have the obligation to "handle aright God's word of truth"! If we do not do so, we cannot arrive at the truth. If we do not make certain that others do so, they will not come to know truth and will live and teach error to others.

Mark it down, brethren and friends, **in order to successfully teach you false doctrine, someone will either have to get you away from the Bible in some manner or else pervert and twist the Scriptures to accommodate his erroneous teaching** (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 3:15-18).

Modern Attitudes of Religious Agnosticism

In 1965, a Methodist minister, Leslie D. Weatherhead wrote a book entitled, **The Christian Agnostic**. Weatherhead put into print on a popular level to the common man what liberal modernistic clergymen had been saying for years in their seminaries and to each other, and quite a few were teaching their congregations. The teachings of this book attacked some of the great foundational truths of traditional Christianity. Weatherhead criticizes many of the creedal statements of denominational religion such as the virgin birth of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and of Christ being God in the flesh.⁵⁹ While we do not defend the creeds of men, those matters just mentioned are matters of faith that are clearly taught in Scripture.

Strangely, a good deal of what Weatherhead said has most recently been adopted by some of our own brethren who feel a great need to change the church of Christ, as he wanted to make significant changes in denominationalism. In fairness to our “change agent” brethren, they have not gone as deeply into modernism as Weatherhead, but they are using many of the principles and attitudes he displayed.

I am writing for the “Christian agnostic,” by which I mean a person who is immensely attracted by Christ and who seeks to show his spirit, to meet the challenges, hardships and sorrows of life in the light of that spirit, but who, though he is sure of many Christian truths, feels he cannot honestly and conscientiously “sign on the dotted line” that he believes certain theological ideas about which some of the branches of the church dogmatize; churches from which he feels excluded because he cannot “believe.” His intellectual

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integrity makes him say about many things, “It may be so. I do not know.”⁶⁰

To cater to these unbelievers, Weatherhead was willing to reduce what he thought one needed to believe, making it easier for these men to feel comfortable in their infidelity. Are not some of our brethren doing the same? How far was Weatherhead willing to go?

Peter—as I see it—was a Christian the moment he accepted the invitation of Christ, “Follow me.” . . . Peter knew nothing of, far less did he believe in, the Virgin Birth, the Trinity and many theological improbabilities which some men have demanded of their fellows before they allowed them the label, Christian.” This is far indeed from the attitude of Christ. When people said to me, “I should like to be a member of the City Temple, what must I believe?” I used to say, “Only those things which appear to you to be true. These may increase or decrease as your discipleship deepens, but only loyalty to Truth *as it authenticates itself* in your mind is asked from you.”⁶¹

Jesus never mentioned the Virgin Birth, neither was it for centuries any part of the missionary message of the church. . . . How can a matter be fundamental in a religion when the founder never mentioned it? And all of this goes, not for the Virgin Birth only, but for a dozen improbabilities about which not even a reverent agnosticism is allowed by the die-hard Scribes and Pharisees of today, and the sad result is that we lose from Christian discipleship some of the ablest minds of our time.⁶²

For Weatherhead denominationalism is mostly about things that do not matter. Just a few “core” doctrines were all that mattered, essentially just some type of “a faith” in God and Christ. While I give our brethren who want to restructure the Lord’s church credit for not having fallen as deeply into agnostic thought as Weatherhead, consider his comments below and ask yourself if you have been hearing some of the same things from men like Max Lucado, Rubel Shelly, Carroll Osburn and others like them:

The essential in Christianity, past, present and future, is loving Christ and one another, and if the Quaker finds God in the silence and the Salvation Army in the band, the Roman Catholic in the Mass and the Baptist in immersion; if the High Anglican likes incense and ceremonial, and the Methodist puts emphasis on personal experience, the fellowship of the authentic class meeting and Charles Wesley’s hymns, why talk of disunity? The Air Force, the Navy and the Army can all serve the Queen, and, in the churches, what matters is the love of Christ, tolerance of one another and a passionate together against every form of evil.

Frankly, I think that theological opinion is comparatively unimportant. If Christ can—and he does—hold in utter loyalty the hearts of St. Francis and John Knox, of Calvin and St. Theresa, of General Booth and Pope John, of Billy Graham and Albert Schweitzer, who hold irreconcilably different beliefs about him, how can belief and uniformity of belief be vitally important? Further, where in the Gospels are we ever told that Christ demanded belief in some theological

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proposition before he would admit a seeker into discipleship? The answer is that he never did.⁶³

These things read like they were extracted from some of the recent teachings of those men we mentioned earlier; our “change agent” brethren. More on this later.

Weatherhead’s view of inspiration is such that he does not consider the writings of Peter, Paul, Jude, and other NT authors as being any final authority. He belittles Jude’s command to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints and claims no more “inspiration” for Paul than for the “later thinkers” of our day.

Each thinker has the right to do what Paul did, to set forth truth as he sees it, in thought-forms of his own day and generation, as long as he does not willfully distort truth merely to fit his own ideas. We have the right to do this too, and in many ways to disagree with Paul, who was admittedly inspired, but not more so than later thinkers in any sense which made him a finalist in his way of putting things.⁶⁴

The thoughtful layman often feels, however, that the churches are far more concerned to defend a hoary tradition than to follow the moving light of new insights and understanding; far more concerned to defend historic language than to discover truth. We talk much of the “faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” It is a dangerous phrase taken from the obscure book of Jude. . .⁶⁵

In essence, Weatherhead’s professed agnosticism, which says we cannot truly know what God thinks about

these lesser issues, is really unbelief regarding revealed truth in God's Word. He simply rejects as unworthy of Christ the doctrines he does not prefer and tries to retreat to a more dignified position of "reverent agnosticism." But this will not work. It is one thing to say, "We do not and cannot know" about things which are not revealed in God's Word, on which we have no or little evidence, such as what we specifically will be doing in heaven to occupy our time. On matters such as this we can indeed plead a "reverent agnosticism" (cf. Deut. 29:29), simply because we do not have sufficient information to draw warranted conclusions and speculations prove nothing. It is quite another thing to reject clear and reasonable revelation as evidence for truths God has made known (cf. Mark 7:7-9). This is not agnosticism, but unbelief. The absurdity of Weatherhead's supposed agnosticism is seen in this final quote from his book:

It is this unfair demand that to be a Christian one must "believe" this and that intellectual proposition which has put so many thoughtful and lovable people off. "Must" and "believe" are words that should never go together.⁶⁶

His own statements are a contradiction. "**Must**" we "**believe**" the "intellectual proposition" which he just made in the statement above? If yes, he contradicts his own position. If no, then his comments have no meaning and are but nonsense. "Must" one "believe" Christ's teaching that "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:3)? The "except" makes this a "must" statement. "Must" we "believe" what Jesus said in John 8:24 (ASV) that "except ye believe

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that I am he, ye shall die in your sins”? Such are the contradictions into which men fall when they abandon the Scriptures and reason.

More Agnosticism in the Brotherhood

We have already called your attention to the fact that some of our own brethren in the church have taken positions very much like Weatherhead, at least in some of his basic thinking, if not to the same degree. There is an uncanny resemblance to several areas from which we quoted Weatherhead. We are hearing that the items which make the Lord’s church distinctive from all other religions are really not important. What matters is the “core doctrine” of Jesus. If we know this we do not need to know about lesser things. Some are saying that we cannot know how God wants us to do some things today, because our times and culture are so much different than the first century.

While giving lip service to the Scripture, Rubel Shelly and Randall Harris deny its ability to present to mankind a “pure and unhindered method of communication” from God:

We believe Scripture to be the Word of God, the God who created us and who is unchanging in his nature. Given God’s eternal faithfulness to his own identity, his word is eternally binding and always relevant. Scripture can never be ignored, nor can we outgrow it. It is the primary source of our knowledge of God today.⁶⁷

This would be an impressive statement about the nature and utility of Scripture if it were not for what follows. One can read those comments and say, “Right on. That is what I believe.” However, do not be lulled into a false

sense of agreement with what these authors are teaching until you consider the rest of the story. Shelly and Harris balk at saying that we can know with certainty that we properly understand what God desired to communicate to us. It is as though the body of Scripture is truly God speaking, but we cannot be sure we can understand what He has said to us:

But there is *no* infallible method for interpreting Scripture. There is no heaven-given system of Bible study. And every method ever offered for handling the Bible responsibly—including the one outlined in this chapter—is human and fallible. . . . If God is going to communicate with human beings, it cannot be God-talk (whatever that may be) but must be in human language. So the Bible comes to us in the midst of a particular human culture, among particular historical events, and in a particular human language. If God wishes to speak to man, how could it be otherwise? . . . If God chooses to speak to human beings, whatever pure and unhindered method of communication is used within the Godhead must be abandoned for the sake of human language. The Bible is the result of that process. It is the Word of God as delivered to us through the medium of human language. Changeless divine truth is thus enmeshed in the ever-changing vehicle of human language. Perfect and eternal wisdom is wrapped up in the inferior medium of historical disclosure.⁶⁸

I have no desire to demean these brethren, nor do I want to attribute a position to them they do not truly espouse. However, it is important to grasp the implications of this latter quote. If there is “no infallible

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method for interpreting Scripture,” then there is truly no way to know with certainty that you have come to know God’s will for you. If there is “no heaven-given system of Bible study,” then all you can ever have are “human and fallible” attempts to know what God has revealed. “Fallible” carries with it the notion of uncertainty with the liability of mistakes and errors. Perhaps this is the major reason why brother Shelly has gone in the direction he has for the past several years. Has he lost his ability to feel that he can know with certainty the doctrines he believes are really true? If so, he certainly has not lost any ability to think he can tell those of us who still believe as he once did that we are very wrong! Of course, the view he now holds, doubting one’s ability to know the truth of God’s Word is a very convenient one when mingling with the denominations. Since we cannot really know what is important except the “core doctrines” about Christ, its all “I’m O.K. You’re O. K.” about everything else.

I contend that we do have a “heaven-given system of Bible study.” It is based on the abilities which God created in man to discover and receive evidence and to reason correctly upon it and to come to the knowledge of what is real and true justified belief (cf. Gen. 1:26-28; Eph. 3:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17; Jude 3 et al.). God has communicated with man in the manner suited to man’s ability to receive that communication and understand it. The laws and principles of language and the laws of thought (logic) combine to form a “heaven-given” hermeneutic (method of Bible study). We have not the time and space to pursue giving extensive examples of this point, but we will list several good resources.⁶⁹ Norman Geisler answers some objections to the idea that logic, the correct way of thinking and arriving at truth, is somehow denigrating to Bible study.

Using logic puts logic before God. No. We use logic in the process of knowing God, but that does not mean that God came after logic in reality. Without God, nothing could have existence. **God is the basis of all logic in reality** and He is in no way inferior to it. **Logic comes from God**, not God from logic. **But when it comes to how we know things, logic is the basis of all thought**, and it must come before any thought about anything, including God. For example, I need a map before I can get to Washington, D.C. But Washington must exist before the map can help me get there. Even so, we use logic first to come to know God, but God exists first before we can know him.

Using logic makes God subject to our logic. First, it isn't our logic. **Man didn't invent logic, he only discovered it. God is the author of all logic.** So, technically speaking, God does not flow from logic; logic flows from God. Second, it isn't God that we examine using logic; it is our statements about God. No one is trying to judge God. It is the statements we make about him that we analyze with logic. Logic simply provides a way to see if those statements are true—if they fit with the reality of who God really is. Finally, in applying logic to those statements God is not being tested by some standard outside himself. Logic flows from God. It is part of his rational nature, which has been given to us in his image. Using logic in theology is simply applying God's test to our statements about God. It is God's way for us to come to truth.⁷⁰

In view of the fact that God created man and gave

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him language and logic to make him a rational creature, it is ridiculous to state explicitly or to imply that since God must communicate to man using human language that He is somehow prevented from giving us a “pure and unhindered. . .communication.” The OT God and NT Christ state in explicit terms, as well as implicit teaching, that **man can know exactly what God has communicated to him.** The very passage which says that there are some things we cannot know because they are not revealed, says that what is revealed is for us to know and do (Deut. 29:29). The law of Moses was given to Moses by God, repeated by Moses to the people, written in a record and sprinkled with blood to ratify it (Exod. 24:3-8). When Moses finished telling the people “all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: ... all of the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said we will do” (verse 3). Then:

Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. . . And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said we will do, and be obedient (verses 4, 7).

Does this passage anywhere state or imply that God had difficulty communicating with Israel because He had to use human language? Does it state or imply that Israel could not know what God wished He could give them in some “pure and unhindered communication”? It certainly does not. The man who was stoned for picking up sticks on the Sabbath may have needed brother Shelly there speaking on his behalf, explaining to Moses and God the difficulty he had in understanding what God surely wanted to say but was

hindered from doing so because He had to use human language. There was no misunderstanding as to what the law had said against working on the Sabbath (Exod. 31:13-17). That was perfectly clear.

All Moses needed to know was what the manner of administering the death penalty would be, and it was revealed that the man who picked up sticks on the sabbath should be stoned to death by all the congregation (Num. 15:32-36). Also, when Moses explained to Jethro his manner of judging the people, he said, "I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws" (Exod. 18:16). How could he do so if human language was an inferior medium which hindered God from adequately communicating with man?

Jesus clearly said, "If you continue (abide) in my word. . . you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). Was Jesus also kept from "pure and unhindered communication" with man because He had to use human language? As conditions for our dwelling in God and Christ and Their indwelling us, we must **know, believe, and do** their commandments (John 14:15, 21, 23-24; 15:7, 10, 14). To have eternal life we must **know** both the Father and the Son (John 17:3). God's truth is said to be embodied in His Word, which is communicated to us by the inspired apostles and prophets of the NT (John 17:6, 8, 17, 20-21).

The words of human language were the medium which God gave to John when he was told to write in order to produce faith and knowledge of Christ and His will for us (John 20:30-31; 1 John 5:13). Hearing the word of such men enables us to **know the spirit of truth** and distinguish it from the spirit of error (1 John 4:1,6). Brethren, was God hindered in any way from revealing precisely to us what we need to "know" to be saved in

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all of those verses above? If there is no way to know with certainty the truth of God's Word, will God judge us and condemn us, using that Word as the standard of judgment (John 12:48-50; Rev. 20:12)?

The Lord expected the Sadducees to use logic and deduce the fact of the resurrection of the dead from what God said to Moses in Exodus 3:6. Since God said "I **am** the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," long after these men were physically dead, Jesus implied that the Jews should have used their God-given logical skills and reasoned properly that these men were alive in some manner (Matt. 22:23-32). "Have you not read that which was spoken to you by God" meant that they could know of this matter, even though it was a revelation in human language (verse 31). The fault was with them, not God's chosen manner of the communication of the revelation. These men were in error; not because there was no way for them to know the truth (and not because this was not a "core" doctrine), but for "**not knowing the Scriptures**" (verse 29). By a diligent effort, we can know the truth of God's word to us in our human language (2 Tim. 2:15; Acts 17:11). All of this palaver about an inadequate medium, or an inferior vehicle by which God had to communicate with man, is nonsense. It simply makes a way which some will use to try and tell us we cannot truly know what God meant about one thing or another, excusing the widespread division over what the Scriptures teach.

A Reductionist Bible

Part of the reason for agnosticism among us stems from efforts to reduce the inspired text of the Scriptures. This may be subtle, as in the case of the Shelly-Harris approach to hermeneutics above. These same men say, regarding the NT text:

Since we always attempt to conform our belief and practice to the person of Jesus, **we naturally place a priority on the Gospels and on the Christological sections of the epistles.** But we also **take note of** the early churches described in Acts and the epistles as they were attempting to become true communities of Christ. [emphasis mine-TJC] ⁷¹

The question here is whether or not it is biblically correct to “place a priority on the Gospels” and “take note of” the material in Acts and the epistles which does not directly refer to Christ.

The way it is used in the quote above, “take note of” clearly implies lesser importance paid to such passages which do not speak of the person of Jesus. It may sound impressive to speak of placing priority on the Gospel accounts, but it is not a sound approach when the rest of Scripture is given a kind of second class inspiration or importance.

Jim Woodroof brings this same kind of attitude to light, perhaps illustrating more clearly just how dangerous this doctrine is:

There is much good preaching that ought to be done from all parts of the Scripture, and I heartily encourage all such preaching. However, the Old Testament is but a *preflection*, or shadow, of the glory of Christ revealed in the Gospels (Heb. 10:1). Acts and the Letters are a *reflection* of that same glory. But the actual glory of the Lord is revealed in the Gospel records themselves. And we have not been a people who majored in the Gospels. . . . Plugging into any part of the Scriptures, except the Gospels, expecting to find power, is like

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plugging an electric motor into a reflection of a power outlet. A mirror is intended only to reflect where the real thing is. So does the Old Testament (and Acts and the Letters and Revelation) reflect where the power and glory of the Lord is.⁷²

One simply cannot exalt the Gospels by assigning a minor role to the rest of the NT record. While it may impress some, this claim to “place a priority on the Gospels” is tainted with an agenda to get people away from the rest of the NT, implying less importance and authority for Acts through Revelation.

In large measure the matters related in the Gospels have found common agreement among the denominations. While there are some significant differences between the Lord’s church and the realm of “denominational Christianity” (please understand I only join those two words accommodatively), for the most part we share common beliefs about the Lord with “evangelical” groups who call themselves Christians. **It is primarily the teaching in Acts and the epistles which distinguishes the Lord’s church from the denominations professing Christianity**, including the identifying marks of the church, the establishment and organization, the plan of salvation which the apostles taught, the work and worship of the church, names for the church and Christians, and the moral standards to guide our lives, to name a few distinctive features.

If the Scriptures which reveal these distinctions are said (or implied) to be of lesser importance, or if it is suggested that we cannot truly know what God intended us to believe in those areas, the conclusion might be that we should not be so demanding on our religious neighbors to reason upon these passages and all come to the same conclusions. Let us just preach about the

things which we can know, just preach Jesus and leave the peripheral matters taught in the epistles to each man's own judgment. **That, my friends, has been the denominational idea for centuries!** Is it correct, while those of us in the Lord's church have been wrong for all these years? **This is the gist of the teaching of the "change agent" mentality abroad in the church today!** I personally do not mind being wrong and changing if I can be shown what is wrong with my faith, but I have not seen convincing proof that we cannot know what God desires in the areas mentioned above. We debated denominational men for over 200 years on these distinctive issues and they were not able to stand against the Scriptures. Lucado, Shelly, and those following the same path could not do any better than the denominations did, because they do not have the truth. The denominations learned that they could not handle their error in public discussion so they quit debating, for the most part. **Our own digressive brethren refuse to openly defend the errors they are propagating, because they fear exposure as much as the denominations do.** Of course, our change agent brethren say that it is not fear of failure that keeps them from debating these issues. They just will not stoop to cater to our contentious spirit and do not feel that they have to defend themselves. Uhhh-huh! One wonders if these fellows study as much about Christ as they say they do. Christ was a controversialist who did not just speak out on the religious errors of His day in safe places, where He could not be challenged by others. He met with them head-on, face to face, often in front of crowds of people (cf. Matt. 21-23). Would that these men were more like Christ!

In the spirit of Weatherhead, several of these men are going about seeking to lower the demands for unity

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by broadening the acceptable diversity, teaching tolerance of error in divorce and remarriage, the design and purpose of baptism, the role of women in the church, special music in the worship (including instruments, choirs, and solos), taking the Lord's Supper on days other than the Lord's Day, and much more. As an example, consider what Carroll Osburn has been teaching for several years:

There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who differ on whether more than one cup in communion is acceptable, whether the communion bread is to be pinched or snapped, whether one can eat in the church building, whether funds can be used from the church treasury to support orphan homes, whether the Lord's Supper must be taken every Sunday, or whether instrumental music is used in worship. There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who believe that Christ is the Son of God, but who differ on eschatological theories such as premillennialism, ecclesiological matters such as congregational organization, or soteriological matters such as whether baptism is "for" or "because of" the remission of sins.⁷³

Brother Osburn, who is touted as a "distinguished scholar," makes an unscholarly blunder in grouping incidental matters of opinion with matters which the Scriptures treat as essential doctrines. Using a proper method of hermeneutics would clearly demonstrate the distinctions between these two areas. In presenting these varied doctrines without such distinctions, Osburn shows his contempt for what the Scriptures say regarding the Lord's Supper and a cappella singing in

worship, as well as baptism's role in receiving the forgiveness of sins. He must say that either we cannot know what God's Word teaches on these matters, or that it just does not make any difference what we believe and practice in reference to them. The following quote is revealing:

There are matters of faith. There are matters of opinion (Rom. 14). Genuine Christianity will always find itself in the position of having to discriminate carefully between what is acceptable as legitimate difference and what is a threat to the integrity of the faith. In this connection, one's proper relationship to God and Christ and the propriety of one's daily conduct in terms of that relationship are not negotiable.⁷⁴

Obviously, all the matters Osburn lumped together in the first quote are, for him, matters of opinion, and whatever one believes about these matters is of "no threat to the integrity of the faith." But these are not matters about which no one can know the truth, nor are they matters of indifference to the Lord. Christ's own words refute both of those options.

First, neither the teachings about Christ nor the teachings of Christ are confined to the Gospels. While men like Shelly and Woodroof admit that some teaching about Christ can be found in Acts and the epistles, **they seem to miss the point that the teachings of the writers of Acts through Revelation are in fact the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ!** Shortly before Jesus went to the cross He told the apostles:

I have yet **many things to say** unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the

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Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me. For he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you (John 16:12-14).

Earlier, Jesus told these same men that the Holy Spirit will “teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). These promises were fulfilled when the Holy Spirit revealed to the apostles and prophets who wrote the NT the “many things” Christ promised. The teaching of the Lord **is not** confined to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Acts through Revelation contain the “many things” of the Lord which He had promised to later reveal. We do not have only a “Red Letter” Jesus. All of the NT comes from the Lord through the Spirit and is all equally inspired (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Eph. 3:3-5).

The Holy Spirit stayed with the apostles all of their lives, guiding them in what they spoke and wrote (Matt. 10:19-20; 28:18-20). In 1 Corinthians 14:37, Paul said that the church needed to “acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” Paul makes the claim that the writings of men like himself, inspired of God, are as much the words of Jesus as the “red letter” words in the Gospels. How then can we state or imply that they are less important or only a “reflection” of what Christ Himself was or said? The Lord said of these men, “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me” (Luke 10:16; cf. Matt. 10:40; John 13:20). If we fail to “hear” what any inspired NT writer says, we fail to hear Christ Himself and God who sent Him. That is serious business. When

Acts through Revelation tell us something that Jesus did not say during His personal ministry, they are still giving us the teaching of Christ.

Second, to say that we cannot know the truth on whether or not baptism is essential for our salvation implies that we cannot know the truth on whether or not we **are** saved. How can one read Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:35-39; 22:16; Romans 6:1-5; and 1 Peter 3:20-21 and claim to be agnostic on the role of baptism relating to our salvation? These Scriptures make valid truth claims that baptism **is** essential in order to be saved. **A person who ignores that abundant evidence is not an agnostic, but an unbeliever**, in the same vein as Leslie Weatherhead. When Jesus said that we **can know** the truth which sets us free from sin, He implies that we can know the truth about baptism's role in our salvation (John 8:31-32, 34-36; Mark 16:16).

Third, to say that matters directly related to our worship of God are matters of opinion, such as the Lord's Supper and instrumental music in worship, is to say that we cannot know the truth of what the Scriptures teach on these things. If one can show that a proper method of Bible study proves these items to be unknown or merely opinion, let him do so and not merely hint at it. This attitude regarding worship contradicts what the Lord personally said. Christ stated that those "that worship him [God] **must worship him in spirit and in truth**" (John 4:23-24). However, if just any worship will do there can be no such thing as false or vain worship. Can we know the truth about how to worship God? Why did Jesus say that the commandments of men constitute false or vain worship (Matt. 15:9)? If we cannot use the commandments of men to worship God and we cannot know the true worship Christ insisted upon we are in a real quandary. Since true worship is a "must," we can

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be confident that we can know what it is by a diligent study of the Scriptures.

While Osburn mentioned “the propriety of one’s daily conduct” as a non-negotiable item, I would not be surprised for him to take an agnostic position regarding any number of moral issues such as social drinking, improper dress, divorce and remarriage, and the like. I do know that some who are following the same path as Lucado, Shelly, and Osburn as to what the Bible teaches are taking the agnostic position that we just cannot know what God will tolerate in some of these areas. I know of one preacher from an Indiana town who went to a meeting in Nashville, TN, several years ago, where brethren had gathered to discuss the problems of divorce and remarriage. He returned home to tell his elders and congregation that since so many well-educated, honest, and dedicated brethren held so many different opinions on this subject that we just cannot know what is the truth from God’s Word on these issues. Brethren, one could say the same thing about any doctrine of the Bible over which men differ. One could apply that same tactic to all of the differences we have with the denominational world. There are well- educated, honest, and dedicated men who hold different positions on every religious issue you can think of. Well, if there is no “heaven-given method of Bible study” where we can know when we have arrived at the truth, one man’s approach and conclusions would be as good as the next.

The preacher and church just mentioned now make no judgments regarding the Scriptural status of anyone’s marriage, even regarding the preacher’s own family. Listen, brethren and friends, the logical conclusion of such a position is that we cannot tell when a person is guilty of committing or living in adultery. **Yet, God has plainly said, “adulterers. . . shall not**

inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21). Will God condemn people to an eternal hell for being adulterers when He did not give us sufficient information (according to some) to be able to know that we are guilty of this damning sin?⁷⁵ Again, those who pit their man-made ideas against God’s Word, while claiming to believe in it, will constantly find themselves in contradiction to it.

Beloved, we are in serious trouble over these matters in our brotherhood. There are many who are eager to compromise revealed truth rather than take a stand for it. Satan has truly worked his lies:

with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

Conclusion

In Weatherhead’s book he expressed his major reason for promoting his brand of “Christian agnosticism.” He was concerned that the church, as he conceived it, was not appealing to a broad enough base of mankind. Many, he thought, could be brought into the church if only they were not compelled to believe things with which they were not comfortable.⁷⁶ His solution was to compromise these essential truths (although he did not believe they were essential) and let people believe or disbelieve as they saw fit, exercising “a large degree of agnosticism.” Hear him one last time:

I am sure that we can only recommend

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Christianity to the thoughtful men of today by a restatement which admits a large degree of agnosticism, eliminates magic, dispenses with imposed authority, and abolishes, from our conception of God, horror and cruelty which would degrade a man, let alone God. Such a restatement should not put up credal walls, let alone allow them to exclude loving souls who seek to follow Christ. He never demanded from anyone support for theological propositions, but told us to love God and our fellows and to react in all crises in the spirit which animated him, and which still calls forth our worship and adoration.⁷⁷

The present “change” movement in the church of the Lord exhibits a similar mindset to Weatherhead. The Shelly and Harris book, **The Second Incarnation**, merely broke ground, as it had hoped, for a broader and more liberal movement which has followed. The seeds were sown therein and we are now beginning to reap the bitter harvest.

The Second Incarnation has said that the church must break out of its traditional way of seeing itself for the sake of spiritual vitality in the new century. Those of us who are insiders to the church have fallen into the rut of perpetuating fallible—even corrupt and toxic—theologies, projects, and systems. We have become too defensive of the status quo. This book has argued for a fresh look at the biblical model of the church as the body of Christ. . . . It is therefore inappropriate for us to spend too much time inspecting each other—whether to boast of *our* “rightness” or to condemn *their* “wrongness.” All are under the judgment of God that we are less than we were meant to be. .

Thus we have the right to reconsider our identity under the Pauline metaphor of the church as the body of Christ and trace out some of the implications it has for us. Worship, life, mission, and evangelism all take on new appearances. . . . Denominational loyalties give way to Christ-centeredness, and what we have called “line-item theology” is replaced by Christological reading of Holy Scripture. We honor and preserve cherished traditions, but we preserve them *as traditions* without consciously or unconsciously elevating them to the status of dogma. We begin to experience freedom for our own unique spiritual adventure in Christ and, at the same time, feel the tendency to judge others in theirs dropping away.⁷⁸

What is it the authors hope to attain by breaking out of traditional ways, climbing out of our rut, admitting that we are just as wrong as others, giving “new appearances,” seeing our “cherished traditions” as non-binding on others, seeking a “unique spiritual adventure,” and dropping our supposed “tendency to judge others”? What they think will happen is what Weatherhead hoped would happen with his relaxing the requirements of God’s Word. They hope multitudes will flock to the Lord because of an easier, less demanding faith and that the church of Christ will accept its place among the denominations, which they consider “the larger Christian community.”⁷⁹

Consider this final quote from the Shelly-Harris book:

What, then, would happen if these things were taken seriously? There could be healthy, creative, liberating change. There would emerge the possibility of reaching millions of people whom

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we now impress only negatively, if at all. We could become a more attractive, robust, and resourceful body to our head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Like the computer whiz who eventually filled “one very large dumpster” with useless artifacts he was warehousing, we would likely have a tidier world from which to pursue God without pointless encumbrances.⁸⁰

I must frankly and sadly confess that in some significant ways a major part of the Lord’s church (but not everyone) seems to have lost its passion for saving lost souls. We need an all-out emphasis on the need for every member to be involved in evangelism everyday. There are some signs we are awakening to this great need. Let us fan the spreading flame. Who wouldn’t like to see “emerge the possibility of reaching millions of people” whom we are not influencing? However, the answer is not to compromise essential gospel truths as several brethren are suggesting, just to win converts to another gospel (cf. Matt. 23:15; Gal.1:6-9).

Since the Shelly-Harris book appeared in 1992 the movement to restructure the church has quickened and spread. In this elapsed time it has become clear what was only hinted at in the quotes above. The speeches and writings of the leading men in this digressive movement have made it clear that they believe that the church is nothing more than a denomination among many; that baptism is no longer considered as essential to salvation; that instrumental music in worship is not sinful; that worship with instruments, choirs, solos, and dramatic plays replacing preaching are desirable forms of public worship; and that unscriptural divorce and remarriage will not condemn one’s soul. Some of these men confess they believe that anyone who says he/she

believes in Christ is a Christian, by faith alone. These are some of the “new appearances” that have surfaced in the church.

It is impossible to lower the standards of the gospel and attract people who will serve God faithfully. People disregard certain elements of the gospel because they seek to please themselves, not the Lord. For example, proper teaching and practice on baptism is foolishness to some because pride and long practice against its necessity are promoted over truth (Mark 7:6-9, 13). So it is with the matters mentioned in the paragraph above. It is a worldly wisdom which refuses to accept the things which God’s Word marks as significant (1 Cor. 1:18-31).

Ah, yes, the popular appeal. How attractive it is to those who see the restoration concepts of the Scriptures to be too restrictive and stifling. “Remove the obstacles, just preach Jesus.” It is all just one more verse of the old song taught to mankind by Satan in Eden. “**Yea, hath God said, ‘Ye shall not...?’**” (Gen. 3:1)

We have shown agnosticism to be self-defeating. One cannot claim that we cannot know the truth without claiming to know that his claim is true. It is amazing how many claim that we cannot know God’s truths, but we supposedly can understand the “truths” those very men are attempting to teach. Using what ability God created within us to investigate and reason upon the evidences in God’s general and special revelations to us, we can know God exists and His will for us. This knowledge is true, justified belief.

Endnotes

1 Ernest Sosa, “Skepticism,” IN: **The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy**, Robert Audi, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 738. Hereafter this source is abbreviated as **TCDP**.

2 Richard H. Popkin, “Skeptics,” IN: **TCDP**, 741.

3 Louis P. Pojman, “Agnosticism,” IN: **TCDP**, 13.

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- 5 Paul K. Moser, "Epistemology," IN: **TCDP**, 233.
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- 31 Geisler, **Christian Apologetics**, 20.
- 32 Ibid., 22.
- 33 Ibid., 23.
- 34 Thomas Warren and Anthony Flew, **Warren-Flew Debate on the Existence of God** (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1976), 96. Cf. Geisler, **Christian Apologetics**, 19, 24.
- 35 Flew, **A Dictionary of Philosophy**, 368.

- 36 Geisler, **Christian Apologetics**, 24.
37 Ibid., 22-23.
38 Ibid., 50-53.
39 Dick Sztanyo, **The Concept of Rational Belief** (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, 1989), 4.
40 Ibid., 5.
41 Thomas B. Warren, **Logic and the Bible** (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1982), 14.
42 Ibid., 20.
43 Ibid., 21.
44 Ibid., 23.
45 Ibid., 28.
46 Ibid., 27.
47 J. D. Thomas, Letter to Mac Deaver, September 27, 1982, IN: Sztanyo, **The Concept of Rational Belief**, 8.
48 Batsell B. Baxter, **I Believe Because** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 23, footnote 4.
49 Arlie Hoover, **Dear Agnos: A Defense of Christianity** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 26.
50 Deaver, **Faith and Knowledge**, 1-3.
51 Ibid.
52 Wolfe, **Epistemology**, 14.
53 W.E. Vine, **The Expanded Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984), ed., John R. Kohlenberger III, 628.
54 Kenneth Weust, **Word Studies from the Greek New Testament** (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1966), 4:178-179.
55 Ernst Dieter Schmitz, "Knowledge, Experience, Ignorance," IN: **The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology**, ed., Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 2:390-391.
56 Ibid., 404.
57 Two recent good books covering these areas are: Curtis A. Cates, **The Bible-None Like It** (Memphis: Memphis School of Preaching, 1989) and Jim Laws, **The Inspiration of the Bible** (Memphis: Getwell Church of Christ, 1996).
58 One excellently documented book is: Josh McDowell and Bill Wilson, **He Walked Among Us** (San Bernadino, CA: Here's Life Pub., 1988). A more recent work is: Gary Habermas, **The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ** (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996).
59 Leslie D. Weatherhead, **The Christian Agnostic** (Nashville:
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Abingdon Press, 1965), 18-20.

60 Ibid., 15.

61 Ibid., 30.

62 Ibid., 31.

63 Ibid., 29.

64 Ibid., 29.

65 Ibid., 19. See also Carroll Osburn, **The Peaceable Kingdom** (Abilene, TX: Restoration Perspectives, 1993), 93-122, wherein Osburn denies that “contend earnestly for the faith” means to defend the system of faith for which Christ died.

66 Weatherhead, **The Christian Agnostic**, 32.

67 Rubel Shelly and Randall Harris, **The Second Incarnation** (West Monroe, LA: Howard Pub., 1992), 22.

68 Ibid., 19-23.

69 There are several good books on hermeneutics which treat these necessary areas. Thomas Warren, **Logic and the Bible and When Is an Example Binding?** (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1982 & 1975); Terry Hightower, ed., **Rightly Dividing the Word, Vols. 1 & 2** (San Antonio, TX: Shenandoah Church of Christ, 1990 & 1991); D. R. Dungan, **Hermeneutics** (Delight, AR: Gospel Light, n.d.); Jody L. Apple, **Hermeneutical Agnosticism** (Media, PA: New Testament Christian Press, 1985).

70 Norman Geisler and Ronald Brooks, **Come Let Us Reason Together** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 17-18.

71 Shelly and Harris, **The Second Incarnation**, 36.

72 James Woodroof, **The Church in Transition** (Searcy, AR: The Bible House, 1990), 33-34.

73 Carroll Osburn, **The Peaceable Kingdom** (Abilene, TX: Restoration Perspectives, 1993), 90-91.

74 Ibid., 91.

75 Jody Apple, **Hermeneutical Agnosticism** (Media, PA: New Testament Christian Press, 1985), 102-108.

76 Weatherhead, **The Christian Agnostic**, 353-354.

77 Ibid., 45.

78 Shelly and Harris, **The Second Incarnation**, 239-242.

79 Rubel Shelly, in a general letter dated March 11, 1997, sent out to denominational preachers in the Nashville, TN area, inviting them to a luncheon to promote the '97 Jubilee. While Shelly noted that the Jubilee is “an annual event sponsored by Churches of Christ,” he continued by saying, “we want to spread the word by means of this luncheon that the '97 Jubilee is intended for **the larger Christian community of Nashville.**” [emphasis mine-TJC] If that does not

mean that Rubel Shelly considers everyone in the denominations to be Christians, then he was being deceptive in what he wrote. I'm afraid he was being truthful. We are seeing him and those he leads becoming more and more like the denominations every little bit. We shouldn't be surprised.

It has been obvious for some time. Sadly, he is only one of many now leading a large part of the church in the opposite direction from the old paths (Jer. 6:16).

80 Shelly and Harris, **The Second Incarnation**, 244-245.

Chapter 2

Atheism

B. J. Clarke

Several months ago, a friend of mine showed me a ten dollar bill he had received as change at an area restaurant. However, this was not your everyday, ordinary, run of the mill, ten dollar bill. On the back of *this* bill, someone had stamped in red ink: “**Atheist Money.**” Moreover, at the top of the bill where it normally reads “In God We Trust,” a red “X” had been stamped on top of the word “God” and replaced underneath by the word “Reason,” thus making the bill read: “**In Reason We Trust.**”

I do not know the person who took the time to make such a statement on the back of their money, but the statement does bring us to the crux of the issue: Is it reasonable to believe in God? Does reason stand on the side of theism or atheism? George H. Smith, author of *Atheism: The Case Against God*, expressed his thesis in writing the book:

It is not my purpose to convert people to atheism; such efforts are usually futile. It is my purpose, however, to demonstrate that the **belief in god is irrational to the point of absurdity; and that this irrationality, when manifested in specific religions such as Christianity, is extremely harmful.** In other words, I have attempted to remove the veneer of intellectual

and moral respectability that often enshrouds the notion of a god. **If a person wishes to continue believing in a god, that is his prerogative, but he can no longer excuse his belief in the name of reason and moral necessity.**¹ [emp. mine BJC]

The above quotation not only informs us that atheists view theism as totally irrational and harmful, but Smith's use of the lower case "g" for the word "god" alerts us to the need for a more precise definition of atheism and theism.

Atheism Defined

Webster defines atheism as "a disbelief in the existence of deity; the doctrine that there is no deity."² This definition is true in a general sense, but not narrow enough for the purposes of this chapter. Total atheism rejects belief in any god of any kind, whether it be the God of Christianity, or the gods of pagan religions. For instance, some people who reject the God of Christianity, enthusiastically embrace the god/gods of their own religion. Consequently, some would not classify them as atheists due to the fact that they do believe in a supernatural being, albeit not the God of the Bible.

In his definitions of theism and atheism, Smith offers the following:

"Theism" is defined as the belief in a god or gods. The prefix "a" means "without," so the term "atheism" literally means "without theism," or without belief in a god or gods. *Atheism, therefore, is the absence of theistic belief.* One who does not believe in the existence of a god or supernatural being is properly designated as an atheist...*Atheism, in its basic form, is not a belief: it is the absence of belief.*³ [All emp. his -BJC]

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At first glance, the definitions given by Mr. Smith might appear to be generally plausible. However, a closer look at how Smith develops these definitions reveals a sinister ulterior motive for his semantics. Having described atheism as merely **the absence of theistic belief**, Smith posits the notion that newborn babies are, therefore, atheists! After all, they are not theists! They don't have the mental capacity to even learn about God, much less affirm their faith in His existence. Thus, since these infants cannot be classified as theists, Smith avers that they must be "a"-theists. Actually, we do agree with Smith on one thing: one would have to possess the reasoning powers of an infant to be an atheist!

Of course, the fact of the matter is that Mr. Smith has created a false dichotomy. Some classifications received at birth are immediate and in the realm of "either/or." For example, at birth a child is identified as either a boy or a girl. But does this mean that all classifications on earth are immediately conferred upon a child at birth? Perhaps Smith will tell us whether a newborn baby is a Republican or Democrat? His parents may be one or the other, but the infant is excluded from such a classification until such a time when he/she has the intellectual maturity to address the issues, and make an informed decision. Similarly, a newborn child is neither an atheist or a theist at the time of his birth. As he/she grows in mind and body, the time will eventually come when such a decision will have to be made, but it is desperation of the rankest sort to place the moniker of atheist on a helpless, innocent little child!

At this point, we should briefly observe the distinction between atheism and agnosticism. Even Smith recognizes that there is a distinction between the two philosophies:

Properly considered, agnosticism is not a third alternative to theism and atheism because it is concerned with a different aspect of religious belief. Theism and atheism refer to the presence or absence of belief in a god; agnosticism refers to the *impossibility of knowledge* with regard to a god or supernatural being.⁴

The agnostic approaches the question “Does God Exist?” and answers, “I **cannot know** the answer to that question.”⁵

Hence, when we speak of atheism in this chapter, we are primarily speaking of the conscious rejection of the existence of a supernatural, supreme personal intelligence who is responsible for the creation of the universe. We are not speaking of someone who has ambiguous feelings about whether God exists. Properly defined, atheism is the claim of an individual **to know** that there is no god or God. Contrariwise, general theism claims to **know** that a god or God exists. However, in this chapter, we are not merely affirming the existence of a god; rather we are affirming specific theism, i.e., that there is a God and that He is the God of the Bible. Like Paul, in advocating theism, we are monotheistically proclaiming our faith in the one true “God that made the world and all things therein” (Acts 17:24).

Therefore, when we affirm the existence of God we have reference to “the infinite, eternal, uncreated personal reality, who has created all that exists other than Himself, and who has revealed Himself to His human creatures as holy and living.”⁶

Before examining the arguments which defeat the philosophy of atheism, it is only fitting to demonstrate the importance of the issue before us. Consider the observation of Mortimer Adler:

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More consequences for thought and action follow the affirmation or denial of God than from answering any other basic question. The whole tenor of human life is affected by whether men regard themselves as supreme beings in the universe or acknowledge a super-human being whom they conceive of as an object of fear or love, a force to be defied or a Lord to be obeyed.⁷

Thomas Whitelaw regarded the question of God's existence as "the profoundest problem that can agitate the human mind."⁸ Concerning the issue of whether God exists, Whitelaw states:

Lying as it does at the foundation of all man's religious beliefs--as to responsibility and duty, sin and salvation, immortality and future blessedness, as to the possibility of a revelation, of an incarnation, of a resurrection, as to the value of a prayer, the credibility of a miracle, the reality of providence--with the reply given to it are bound up not alone the temporal and eternal happiness of the individual, but also the welfare and progress of the race.⁹

Simply put, one's world view is inescapably connected to one's view of how the world came to be.

Atheism Defeated

We have already heard the accusation of the atheist that belief in God is utterly irrational, absurd, and void of all reason. On the other hand, the Scriptures affirm that "the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God" (Psm. 14:1; 53:1). So the atheist charges that theists are fools for believing in God, while the book that Christian theists hold dear charges that atheists are fools for affirming that

there is no God.

The clear clash between these two philosophies is further corroborated by comparing the statements of a prominent atheist of yesteryear and the statement of one of the most famous theists of all time. Consider the following:

In the beginning was matter, which begat the ameba, which begat the worm, which begat the fish, which begat the amphibian, which begat the reptile, which begat the lower mammal, which begat the lemur, which begat the monkey, which begat man, who imagined God (*Charles Smith, President of the American Association For The Advancement Of Atheism, in the pamphlet "Godless Evolution," authored in 1929*).

3500 years earlier we find this affirmation:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth...And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (*Moses, Genesis 1:1, 26-27*).

One could not find two more contradictory assertions about the origin of man, and the universe!

Scripture affirms that God “made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion” (Jer. 10:12). Yet, atheists are unimpressed by appealing to Scripture to prove the existence of God.

It is at this point that we need to be balanced in our approach to apologetics. While it is true that the Bible

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possesses characteristics which conclusively demonstrate that it is beyond human production, the atheist will often close his mind to the Bible as a persuasive piece of evidence in settling the question of origins.

Hence, without abandoning our faith in the Bible as the product of God, we must try to find a balance between demonstrating to the atheist the internal evidences which prove the Bible to be divine, and the presentation of philosophical arguments which also prove the existence of a Supreme Being. In other words, once we have employed these arguments to prove to the atheist the necessity of the existence of a Supreme Being, we can then transport him to the Bible for a specific look at who this Supreme Being is.

It is true that a man has a right to testify on his own behalf before his detractors, and a fair and impartial hearing ought also to be given to the internal evidences of the Bible's Divine inspiration. However, if a lawyer knows that a jury already considers one of his witnesses to be fraudulent, then perhaps another group of corroborating witnesses ought to be called first to the stand to prepare the way for the witness who will come later. Unfortunately, the majority of atheists already possess such a jaded attitude toward the witness of the Scriptures, that should we call this witness first to the stand in the presentation of our case for the existence of God, the door of prejudice may be slammed in our face before we even have our foot in the door of the atheist's mind. The witness of the Scriptures should be called to the stand to testify to the existence of God, but the force of its testimony is greatly enhanced by first appealing to other witnesses to prepare the way.

Indeed, God has not left Himself without witness (Acts 14:17). The fact is that in addition to the powerful affirmations of Holy Scripture that God exists, the theist

has numerous arguments from the realm of philosophy and common sense which may be employed in the arena of debate. Despite the intimidating glances of scientific “scholars,” and the pronouncements of liberal theologians, atheism can be soundly defeated. Entire volumes have been penned for the express purpose of demonstrating the deficiencies of atheism. Obviously, we cannot adequately cover in one chapter all of the arguments which defeat atheism, but we will attempt to present some of the strongest evidence. Perhaps not all of the following arguments are equally weighted, but the combination of these arguments serves a demolishing blow to the philosophy of atheism.

Logic Defeats Atheism

The words of Ron Carlson and Ed Decker capture well the logical impossibility of atheism:

It is philosophically impossible to be an atheist, since to be an atheist you must have infinite knowledge in order to know absolutely that there is no God. But to have infinite knowledge, you would have to be God yourself. It’s hard to be God yourself and an atheist at the same time!¹⁰

In other words, you would have to know everything before you could dogmatically affirm that there is no God, because if you did not know everything, the very thing which may have escaped your notice is God. In a speech made to the faculty and students of Oskaloosa College, D. R. Dungan illustrated it like this:

If I should announce to you this morning that there is not in the walls of this building, deposited a silver dollar, you would rightfully understand me as affirming my perfect

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acquaintance with every piece of material used in their construction, large enough to contain such a coin. If I were not present when every brick was made and put into the wall, and when all the mortar was made, and if I watched not with unerring accuracy every act of all the workmen until the whole was complete, then you would laugh at my affirmation. You see at once that the genuine atheist must be a man of unlimited knowledge, and that none of you can claim to be such, at least till you will have graduated. Even then it is questionable if such a garment would sit gracefully.¹¹

The Cosmological Argument Defeats Atheism

The word “cosmological” is a compound word: (cosmos=universe; logos=study of). Hence, the cosmological argument involves the study of the universe and its existence. A simple statement of the argument is as follows:

1. Every effect must have an adequate cause.
2. The world is an effect.
3. Therefore, the world must have had a cause outside of itself and adequate enough to account for its existence.

A key word in the cosmological argument is the word “adequate.” For instance, if we are walking in the forest and we come upon a footprint in the soft earth, we immediately know that someone or something is responsible for causing the effect (the footprint). What caused the footprint? Was it a single raindrop? Was it the impact of a leaf hitting the ground as it descended from a tall tree? Of course not! Even though we were not present when the impression in the earth was made, we

immediately know that neither a raindrop nor a leaf would be an **adequate** cause or sufficient explanation for the footprint.

Suppose a teenage boy comes in from school and finds a cake sitting on the kitchen counter. It is obvious that the cake is for him because his name is written on top of the frosting. Pleased to see his favorite cake, the boy searches out his mother to thank her for baking it. He knows that the existence of the cake must have an adequate cause, and he is sure that his mother is that cause. However, when he approaches his mother and thanks her for baking the cake, she is sincerely puzzled. She didn't bake the cake and she doesn't know where it came from either. The boy is fairly certain that his dad didn't bake the cake, but he calls him up at work anyway, just to make sure.

The father is mystified at the suggestion that he baked the cake. He knows nothing about it. What caused the cake? Suppose that evening the father announces to the family that he has been able to determine the origin of the cake. He gathers them into the family room and says:

I heard that there were some tremors and earthquakes in the area today and that helps to explain the origin of the cake. You see, as the earth quaked, the vibration caused a mixing bowl to fall from its place in the cupboard to the counter below. Then a gas pipeline in the area was caused to burst by the earthquake. This produced an explosion which just so happened to send the ingredients necessary to the baking of a cake to come flying out of the refrigerator and kitchen cabinets. Fortunately, these ingredients collided in mid-air above the mixing

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bowl, and as fate would have it, these ingredients dropped together into the mixing bowl.

As the earth continued to quake, the contents of the mixing bowl vibrated in just such a fashion as to mix together. After being quaked to just the right consistency, another explosion sent the mixing bowl flying through the air where it collided with a cake pan. As the two fell to the ground together, the contents of the mixing bowl emptied into the cake pan. Another big bang occurred, separating the mixing bowl from the cake pan, and hurtling the cake pan toward the open oven door.

After the cake pan found its way into the oven, the vibration of the earth caused some Mason jars to work their way out of the cabinet directly above the oven. As the Mason jars fell towards the floor they collided with the temperature knob and bake setting knob on the oven. Fortunately, they hit the knobs in just such a fashion as to turn the temperature to just the right temperature and activate the bake setting.

After baking for just the right amount of time, another explosion sent the refrigerator door and oven door flying open simultaneously. As the cake came flying out of the oven, the frosting came flying out of the refrigerator. Fortunately the force of the explosion blew the lid off of the frosting. Somehow, the collision of the cake with the frosting left the cake evenly frosted and left your name written upon the cake. That's how the cake got here. Any fool can see that this is the only logical explanation for the cake's origin.

Can you show me an atheist in the world who would accept such an absurd hypothesis for the origin of a cake? The sad thing is that the explanation just given for the cake is not all that different from some of the atheistic explanations of the origin of the universe. A big bang and a few materials fortuitously colliding together in just the right way and “Presto change-o” you’ve got a universe! Show an atheist a cake and he will always reason back to a baker. Show an atheist a poem and he will always reason back to a poet. Show an atheist a house and he will always reason back to an architect and builder of the house. Show the atheist something far more complex than a cake, a poem, and a house, such as the universe, and he suddenly parks his reason and ascribes its origin to blind chance.

To show the utter folly of believing that blind chance is an adequate cause for the universe, Wayne Jackson notes:

Professor Harold Morowitz has estimated that the probability for the chance formation of the smallest, simplest form of living organism known is 1 to $10^{340,000,000}$ [that is 1 followed by 340 million zeros] (**Energy Flow In Biology**. Academic Press. New York. 1968. p. 99.). Do you know what a staggering figure this is? The entire universe is said to contain only 10^{18} electrons! Dr. Carl Sagan has estimated that the chance of life evolving on earth is 1 to $10^{2,000,000,000}$ [1 followed by 2 billion zeros]. It would take 6,000 books of 300 pages each just to write that number! Yet they expect us to **believe** it just freakishly happened! Professor Edwin Conklin of Princeton University put it this way: “The probability of life originating from accident is comparable to the probability

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of the unabridged dictionary resulting from an explosion in a printing shop” (**Reader’s Digest**, January, 1963, p. 92).¹²

One of the strengths of the cosmological argument is that it is built upon the scientific fact that from nothing comes nothing. Consider the following syllogism:

1. Something cannot come from nothing.
2. But Something exists.
3. Therefore, something has always existed.

The above syllogism is enhanced upon by Wayne Jackson:

If there was ever a time when absolutely **nothing existed**, then there would be nothing now, for nothing produces nothing but nothingness! Since something does exist, it must logically follow that something has always existed. Exactly what was that?

Well, everything that exists can either be classified as matter or mind. Can you think of something that cannot be so categorized? We think not. Accordingly, look at this argument:

1. Everything existent is either matter or mind.
2. But something existent is eternal.
3. Thus either matter or mind is eternal.
4. But as shown above, matter is not eternal.
5. Therefore, it is mind that is eternal. That Mind is identified and described in the Bible as God.¹³

The above information eliminates the intimidation of answering the question, “Where did God come from?”

because we discover that the atheist himself has to answer, “Where did matter come from?.” Hence, theists believe in an eternal Mind, whereas atheists believe in the eternity of matter. Therefore, we can affirm the following syllogism:

1. A rational being cannot come from an irrational thing. (If it could, this would be equivalent to something coming from nothing).
2. But a rational (thinking) being exists.
3. Therefore, a rational (thinking) being has always existed.¹⁴

In his debate with Woolsey Teller, in October of 1947, James D. Bales used the force of the above syllogism to ask his opponent some unanswerable questions:

How did matter become intelligent enough to deny that the universe is governed by intelligence?

How do you account for the order and intelligence which are manifested in such a being as man, if the universe is a product of non-intelligent forces?

Is there any rational account as to why matter in motion should have worked out theism in my brain and atheism in yours?¹⁵

Thomas B. Warren put Antony Flew in a similar prison when he pointed out that Mr. Flew would have to explain a number of things to be able to prove his proposition. He used a chart in which he depicted Flew having to escape

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through a number of different doors. He asked Mr. Flew to explain how:

Human beings came from that which was not human.

Intelligence came from that which had no intelligence.

Conscience came from that which had no conscience.

Consciousness came from that which had no consciousness.¹⁶

Truly, dead inanimate matter cannot be an adequate cause for that which is living and thinking. We unashamedly affirm “for every house is builded by some man, but he that built all things is God” (Heb. 3:4).

The Design Argument Defeats Atheism

Simply stated, the design argument says:

1. Evidence of design supposes an intelligent designer.
2. The world everywhere exhibits marks of design and intelligence.
3. Therefore, the world owes its existence to an intelligent designer and author.

As I think about the design argument, I cannot help but remember a visit to the St. Louis Science Center some years ago. The visit was both a joy and a sorrow. There were dozens of fascinating things to wonder at and observe.

Overall, I enjoyed the experience. But my ESP kept triggering. No—not Extra Sensory Perception—but Evolutionary Sensory Perception. Everywhere I turned there were films and placards promoting evolution as a scientific fact which had been established as conclusively as the law of gravity.

It is ludicrous to speak of evolution as science when the root definition of the word “science” means “to know.” Evolution is not based upon knowledge at all! It is based upon fanciful theories and speculations of those who do not like to retain God in their knowledge (Rom. 1:28). Professing themselves to be wise, many scientists become fools by saying in their hearts that there is no God (Rom. 1:22; Psm. 14:1). Jeremiah wrote in the long ago words that are still relevant for this modern age:

Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me...(Jer. 9:23,24).

To use the inspired language of Paul:

God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise...that no flesh should glory in his presence...that, as it is written, He who glories, let him glory in the Lord” (1 Cor. 1:27, 29, 31).

Consider just one example of the foolishness of these “learned” men. All over the St. Louis Science Center there were wall placards documenting the construction of the Science Center and the major contributors to its construction. There was even a TV monitor which depicted, in fast frame fashion, the building of the Center

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from foundation to its conclusion. Also, while we were in the Science Center we examined the intricacy and complexity of a jet engine.

So what's the point? Precisely this: There is not a scientist alive who would believe or teach that the St. Louis Science Center came about as the result of an explosion of brick, mortar and other building materials. No scientist would believe that even one exhibit or jet engine could just accidentally put itself together. Yet these "scientists" expect us to believe that the men who built these exhibits and the center to house them, came about as the result of an explosion and subsequent evolutionary processes. They can see that the design of the exhibits and the center itself imply a designer and architect. They are unwilling to see that the design of the universe and man himself imply a supreme Designer and Architect. These men and women who seem to be wise in this age need to become fools that they may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 3: 18,19).

Ironically, one of the most powerful illustrations of the force of the design argument came from the late Carl Sagan, noted atheist and Professor of Astronomy at Cornell University. He authored an article which appeared in Parade magazine, Sunday, June 6, 1993. The article is entitled, "Is There Intelligent Life On Earth?" The subheading of the article reads: "What an alien spaceship might reveal about our planet—and ourselves."

In the article, Mr. Sagan takes the reader on an imaginary trip through space while looking down on the earth from a spaceship. The entire article is, amazingly, devoted to proving that the design and structure of the earth is evidence of life upon the earth. Sagan imagines looking upon the oceans with infrared technology and discovering that there is "sufficient water vapor in the air to account for the clouds and just the amount that must

exist because of evaporation if the oceans are in fact made of liquid water.” You then discover that the air on this world is almost 1/5th oxygen. According to Sagan, “No other planet in the Solar System has anything close to so much oxygen.” Sagan grants that “the oxygen would not be proof of life but rather the merest hint of life.” As you continue your travel you discover that methane and oxygen are together in the same atmosphere. To quote Sagan, “In an oxygen atmosphere, methane is a sign of life.”

Perhaps the most telling section of Sagan’s article is found in the evidence of technology discovered on earth from the spacecraft. From the craft you are able to detect radio transmission from the earth. Sagan writes, “So, as an alien explorer, you would know that at least one of the species on earth has achieved radio technology.” To search for the species behind this technology, Sagan hypothesizes looking at the earth with a telescope at about 100 meter resolution. His next statement is absolutely correct and yet absolutely contradictory based on Sagan’s philosophy. Sagan writes, “The planet is revealed to be covered with straight lines, squares, rectangles, circles, *of regularity and complexity that would be hard to explain except by life and intelligence* (Emphasis mine, BJC). He then adds that if you take pictures at a few meters resolution:

You find that the criss-crossing straight lines of the cities and the long straight lines that connect the cities seem to be filled with streamlined, multicolored beings a few meters in length, politely running, one behind the other. At night they turn on two bright lights in front so that they can see where they’re going. The streets of the cities and the roadways of the countryside are clearly built for their benefit. Some of them,

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when their workday is done, go to little houses to retire for the night. At last you have detected ***the source of all the technology***, (Emphasis is mine - BJC) the dominant life form on the planet.

So what's the point of all this? Carl Sagan looks at the complexity of the makeup of the earth and its physical infrastructure and deduces that this just didn't happen by accident. In the magazine, Sagan inserted a satellite photo of the heart of Washington D.C. The caption reads: "The regular geometry of Washington, D.C.—including the Capitol, the Pentagon and bridges over the Potomac—***provide presumptive evidence of intelligent life on earth*** (Emphasis mine - BJC).

It is fair to ask, if the intricacy of one small section of Washington D.C. is evidence of intelligent life then would it not also follow that the more complex intricacies of the human body also point to an intelligent designer and architect? Mr. Sagan's article placed him in the unsavory position of believing that the roadways of Washington D.C. required intelligent beings to construct them, but the ones who built these roadways did not come from an intelligent source. They just accidentally got here.

Mr. Sagan's article admitted that technology has a source from which it was created or invented but according to Sagan the source of this technology, mankind, has no source from which he was specially created. You could never have convinced Mr. Sagan that the sophisticated high- powered telescopes taking these photographs from outer space just exploded into existence and yet Mr. Sagan believed that the planets in outer space did come from a big explosion. You could never have convinced Mr. Sagan that a spaceship could just create itself given enough time and yet Mr. Sagan believed that the ones who built the

spacecraft just evolved by accidental happenstance.

We wish that Mr. Sagan had been consistent enough to see the force of his argument as it related to the existence of God. Listen again to Hebrews 3:4: “For every house is builded by some man: but he that built all things is God” (Heb. 3:4). Mr. Sagan accepted the truth of the first part of this verse. To be consistent, he should have accepted the last phrase in the passage as well.

As Warren pointed out so well in his debate with Flew, no atheist would argue that a mechanical hand could exist without a designer, yet the same atheist looks at the complexity of the human hand and “reasons”(?) that it just happened.¹⁷ No wonder the Psalmist declared, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psm. 139:14). No atheist would look at the light shining from an electric light bulb and conclude that the light bulb evolved from darkness into light. Yet the same atheist looks at the light shining from the stars in the skies and thinks it is the product of mere happenstance. The words of Abraham Lincoln seem appropriate here:

I can see how it might be possible for a man to
look down upon the earth and be an atheist, but
I cannot conceive how he could look up into the
heavens and say there is no God.¹⁸

No wonder the Psalmist declared, “The heavens declare the glory of God ; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psm. 19:1).

The Moral Argument Defeats Atheism

Much could be written concerning this argument, but due to space limitations, we will simply reproduce the powerful argument presented by brother Warren in his debate with Antony Flew:

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1. True or False: In murdering six million Jewish men, women, and children the Nazis were guilty of real (objective) moral wrong.

2. In torturing and/or murdering six million Jews, the Nazis were guilty of violating which of the following (place check mark by each choice that is appropriate):
 - a. Law Of Germany
 - b. Law Of England
 - c. Law of USA
 - d. Law of God
 - e. Some other law (explain)
 - f. No law at all

This powerful argument devastated Mr. Flew. He found himself on the horns of a hopeless dilemma. He couldn't endorse the actions of a madman like Hitler. But on what grounds could he condemn him? Had Hitler violated the law of Germany? Hardly. He was the law of Germany at the time. Had he violated the law of another nation? He wasn't amenable to the laws of other nations. Then what law did he violate by his barbarism? He violated the law of God to which all men are amenable.

Since the atheist believes that man is merely matter in motion, he finds it impossible to explain the source of man's morality. Did dead matter consisting of rocks, dirt, water, gases, etc., provide man with a moral code? Or is it much more reasonable to conclude that man's morality is the result of an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving, all-moral Creator? To ask the question is to answer it.

Conclusion

We have by no means exhausted the arguments for

the existence of God. We have, however, given ample proof that humanity and the universe owe their existence to an adequate cause and intelligent designer. If space permitted, full treatment could be given to comparing the integrity of the God of the Bible with the so-called gods created in the fertile imagination of the minds of men. Sufficient for the moment is to say that the prophecies made in the Bible, compared with the alleged prophecies of other so-called divine productions, sharpens the distinction clearly between true Divinity and pretenders (Deut. 18:20-22).

Finally, it should be noted that “practical atheism” is a danger that must be avoided. The “practical atheist” expresses his confidence in the existence of God with his lips, but by his works denies the same (Titus 1:16). There is a God in Heaven (Daniel 2:28) and it is our obligation and privilege to serve that God till judgment day comes!

Endnotes

1 George H. Smith, **Atheism: The Case Against God** (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1979), p. xi.

2 **Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary** (Springfield, Mass: G&C Merriam, 1979), p.70.

3 Smith, p. 7.

4 Smith, pp.9-10.

5 For a thorough treatment and refutation of the subject of agnosticism, see chapter 1 in this book by Ted J. Clarke.

6 Thomas B. Warren, **Have Atheists Proved There Is No God?** (Jonesboro, Ark: National Christian Press, 1972), p. v.

7 Mortimer Adler, **Great Books Of The Western World**, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, Volume 2, p. 561.

8 Thomas Whitelaw, “Is There A God?,” **The Fundamentals**, ed. R. A. Torrey, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990), p.239.

9 Ibid.

10 Ron Carlson & Ed Decker, **Fast Facts On False Teaching** (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1994), p. 17.

11 D. R. Dungan, **Modern Phases Of Skepticism** (Shreveport, Louisiana: Lambert Book House, 1877), p.11

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12 Wayne Jackson, "The Existence Of God (Part 1), **A Study Course In Christian Evidences, Lesson No. 2** (Montgomery, Alabama: Apologetics Press, 1983), p. 3.

13 Ibid.

14 Roger E. Dickson, **The Fall Of Unbelief** (Winona, Mississippi: J. C. Choate Publications, 1982), p.70.

15 James D. Bales & Woolsey Teller, **The Existence of God: A Debate** (Shreveport, Louisiana: Lambert Book House, 1976), p.14.

16 **The Warren-Flew Debate On The Existence Of God** (Jonesboro, Ark: National Christian Press, 1977), p. 8.

17 Ibid, p. 221.

18 Max Anders, **God: Knowing Our Creator** (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), p. 1.

Chapter 3

False Ideas About Theism

Garland Elkins

This lectureship and this book have the potential for doing much good. It is my hope and prayer that such will be the case. There are so many false “isms.” All fatal false doctrine will cause people to be lost.

My subject is: **False Ideas About Theism**. However, before we study *false* ideas about Theism, let us briefly define and discuss **Theism**. *Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* defines Theism as:

The belief in one God as the creator and ruler of the universe, without rejection of revelation (distinguished from deism). Belief in the existence of God or gods (opposed to atheism).

In addition to the above quote, the *Encyclopedia Americana* says the following about Theism:

Theism, The God or Gods. It may take the form either of monotheism or polytheism and is opposed only to atheism, which denies the existence of such divine beings. From its use to express the belief of cultured Christian peoples, the term has been given a more restricted meaning. Thus, theism has been identified with monotheism, as implying belief in one God, and hence is distinguished from all forms of polytheism. Further, theism is

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distinguished from pantheism, on the one hand and deism on the other. Pantheism (q.v.) merges God with the world-process and thus practically denies His personality. Deism (q.v.) emphasizes the personality of God, but conceives Him as existing apart from the world of His creation. Theism endeavors to rise above both of these extremes and embrace the truth contained in each. On the one hand it maintains the personality of God and His transcendence of the world. On the other it insists upon the immanence of God, upon His presence in the world as its controlling and life-giving agency. Thus the God of theism is at once the Author and the Preserver of the world.¹

The Bible definitely teaches that there is one and only one God. A short definition of God is: "Deity, God, Supreme Being." There is one "God, Supreme Being." There is one God, one divine nature characteristic of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Three persons are Deity; i.e., they possess the same divine nature. There is but one God, and there are three persons who are possessed of Deity.

There are numerous Scriptures that teach that there is one God. In fact, seven "ones" are set out in Ephesians 4:4-6:

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all and in you all.

Paul also wrote:

For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God,

the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things and we in him. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge. . . (1 Cor. 8:5-7a).

The three persons in the Godhead are mentioned by Paul in the final verse of the 2 Corinthian epistle. He wrote, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. A-men.” (2 Cor. 13:14).

God Exists and He is Great

The incomparable greatness of God is affirmed throughout the Bible. The fact that so little is said in an explicit way to “prove God” does not detract from God. God’s existence assumed is a powerful argument to the intelligent mind. The oldest and most profound belief of man is his belief in God, and that without God, life would not be worth living. Belief in God molds our life and our action (Acts 17:22-31). In a real sense man becomes a product of his belief. (1 Pet. 1:15,16).

Evidences of God’s Existence

Paul affirms the cosmological evidence of God’s existence when he wrote:

For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

The Cosmological argument is defined by the dictionary as:

An argument for the existence of God, asserting

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that the contingency of each entity and of the universe composed wholly of such entities, demands the admission of an adequate external cause, which is God.

An inspired writer wrote:

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard (Psa. 19:1-3).

The heavens and the earth are not here by chance, but by God's design (2 Pet. 3:5). Apart from God our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, life holds no meaning. Peter said, "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ, (he is Lord of all:) (Acts 10:36).

The Nature of God

The Omnipotence of God, i.e., His sovereignty, is the underlying force of creation. This is shown by a study of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. We read in Genesis 1:3, "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light." How profound and powerful is our God! The entire first chapter of Genesis contains one "God said" statement after another! By His mighty word all creation began. The Hebrew writer stated, "Upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3). Not only did God create the world, and all that is in the world; He led the Israelites through the Red Sea on dry land (Heb. 11:29). By His power the walls of Jericho fell (Heb. 11:30). He made the sun stand still (Josh. 10:12). The dead were raised, the lame were

healed, the deaf made to hear, and Jesus was resurrected from the dead (Rom. 1:3,4; 1 Cor. 15:1-58).

The Omniscience of God

God knows everything both in time and eternity. Everything is naked before God (Heb. 4:13). He discerns the thoughts and intents of men's hearts (John 2:24,25; 1 Cor. 2:10). God's wisdom is unlimited and immeasurable (1 Cor. 1:20-25). Men are foolish when they think themselves wiser than God (1 Cor. 3:18-21).

As men grapple with the great issues of life they often question God's wisdom and judgement. However, when man attempts to answer the simplest of things, he finds that, like Job, he cannot answer a word! Let us note a few of the things that God asked Job concerning the universe and its operation:

Job, where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job 38:4-7). "Who shut up the sea with doors, so that it can come only so far?" (Job 38:8-11). "Have you made a morning? Have you caused light to come and displace darkness?" (Job 38:12-15). "Have you ever entered into the springs of the sea? Have you walked on the depths of the sea?" (Job 38:16). "Do you know where light dwells?" (Job 38:19). Have you unlocked all the treasures of the snow? Or of the hail?" (Job 38:22,23), "From whence hides the waters like a stone when the face of the deep is frozen?" (Job 38:29,30). "Do you control the various constellations in the heavens?" (Job 38:31-33). "Do you have power over the clouds or the lightning?" (Job 38:34,35). "What about death? Have the gates of death been opened to you?" (Job 38:17).

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Then concerning the mind of man, God asked Job, “Who put wisdom in the inward parts? Or who hath given understanding to the heart?” (Job 38:36). God knows everything, and He loves me; therefore, I can trust God always! Therefore, let us heed the inspired advice of the wise man, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:5,6).

God is Omnipresent: He is Everywhere

The psalmist wrote:

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee (Psm.. 139:7-12).

Since God is God We Should Do His Will

The Bible view of God encompasses God’s will (Matt. 5:48), God’s perfection, God’s holiness, (1 Pet. 1:15), God’s purity (1 John 3:3), God’s word becomes man’s standard (1 Pet. 4:11; Matt. 7:21; John 12:48).

We must turn to God to learn what to do to be saved (Eccl. 12:13-14; Matt. 7:21). God’s word is perfect and will furnish us unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Consider a few of the many passages along this line: “Thy

word is a lamp, unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105). “Thy word have I laid up in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11). “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works” (Psa. 119:27). “So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word” (Psa. 119:42). “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psa. 139:23,24).

Not only can we learn and understand God’s will, but we can also obey Him and be saved! “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17). Also consider:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

God would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). However, even though Christ died for all (Heb. 2:9), and God would that all men might be saved, yet the fact is only those who obey Him will be saved:

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him (Heb. 5:8,9).

Deism is a False View of God

Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary defines “Deism” as: “Belief in the existence of a God on

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the evidence of supernatural revelation distinguished from theism. Belief in a God who created the world but has since remained indifferent to his creation.” According to the *Encyclopedia Of Philosophy*:

The first interpretation of “deist” in both French and English as a euphemism for “atheist” was not followed by Dr. Samuel Johnson, who, in his *Dictionary* (1775), defined “deist” as “a man who follows no particular religion but only acknowledges the existence of God, without any other article of faith.”²

One of the best known deists in America was Thomas Paine. Again, the *Encyclopedia Of Philosophy* reports:

Born in England, Paine (1737-1809) arrived in America in 1774, bearing a letter of introduction from Franklin. A political theorist, diplomatist, and man of letters, Paine was a deist, but not overly until the publication in Paris of his *The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (1794-1796). The first of its two books, intended to rescue deism from the reigning French atheism, is a more or less scientific assault upon revealed religion in general as being supererogatory to natural religion. The second book carries the attack directly to both the Old and new Testaments, arguing that the Bible is not the word of God and depicting Christianity as a species of atheism. Paine wrote vigorously and extensively and was outspoken in carrying his message to the common people, whose battles he had fought on the political, social, and economic fronts as well. In *The Age of Reason*

the battleground was not new but was considerably enlarged from that of any earlier British deist. The work offended readers in France and shocked many in England and America who were laboring under the delusion that the deistical controversy was over and that orthodoxy had triumphed. Paine was rewarded for his efforts by banishment from England and by social obloquy in America. The patriot who throughout a long and turbulent career had accomplished so much for the new country, the man who had so vigorously combated atheism, was held to be an atheist, infidel, radical, and drunkard.³

So far in this lecture, we have proven the existence of God, and that the Bible is His inspired word; and in doing these two things we have disproved the error of deism. We now want to show that when deists contend that God created the world but that from that time forward has maintained an “hands off” policy, they are in error. As per their view, they basically contend that God more or less just wound up the world, then turned it loose to wind down on its own.

The Bible does not teach any such doctrine. Brother Thomas B. Warren and I co-directed the first *Power* lectureship, and we co-edited the first book of lectures. The subject discussed in the oral and written lectures was *The Providence of God*. That book is still available, and may be ordered from Southaven Church of Christ. My lecture was entitled, *Introduction To The Study of The Providence of God*. I quote a part of that lecture.

God The Great Giver

The subject of the gifts of God as recorded in the Bible is an inexhaustible and fascinating one. God loves the world, and gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16).

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Every good, and every perfect gift is from “*the Father of lights*” (James 1:17). Christ has given Himself (Gal. 1:4; 2:20); His body (Luke 22:19); life (John 5:21); a new commandment (John 13:34); wisdom (Luke 21:15; and understanding (1 John 5:20). To those who overcome, the Lord Jesus promises many precious blessings (Rev. 2:7). As Paul says “*He gave gifts unto men*” (Eph. 4:8). We are told that all of God’s gifts are good and perfect (James 1:17); that God gives freely (Rom. 8:32); liberally (James 1:5); richly (1 Tim. 6:17); without repentance (Rom. 11:29). One of the finest statements in the Bible on God’s giving are these words of Paul to Timothy:

Charge them that are rich in this present world, that they may be not high-minded, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17).

God Works Through His Providence He Does Not Do This Miraculously

The providence of God, like so many other Bible subjects, has often been misunderstood, and perverted. God, as He always has, rules in the affairs of men, but He does this within the confines of natural law and not by miracle. Unfortunately many sincere people labor under a serious misunderstanding of the words “*providence*” and “*miracle*,” as if God is limited to the miraculous in His providential working among men. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even in the days when God did sometimes use miracles to bring about the desired results, miracles were the exceptions and not the rule. Miraculous gifts are no longer available to anyone, notwithstanding the claims of the fake healers.

When the New Testament was fully delivered and confirmed, miraculous gifts ceased (Eph. 4:8-13; 1 Cor. 13:8-13). They were to exist only until “*the unity of faith*” (meaning until all the truth of the New Testament was delivered), then their purpose had been served (Gal. 1:8; 9, 22, 23; Eph. 4:8-13; Jude 3).

1. We do not believe that God’s children are orphans. The Bible teaches that God answers the prayers of the faithful Christians (I Thess. 5:17; Phil. 4:6; James 5:16).

2. We believe that God heals. However, let it be clearly stated, that though God heals today, and such is divine healing; God does not heal miraculously today. God uses His natural laws, not miracles to heal people.

3. God has a healing team. This team is composed of doctors, nurses, hospitals, technicians, dieticians, blood donors, etc. and the prayers of the saints (Luke 5:31; Luke 18:1; Eph. 6:18).

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit operates, but not miraculously on either saint or sinner. The Holy Spirit does operate on both saint and sinner through His *word*, the truth (Eph. 6:17; James 1:21; Acts 20:32). The modern so-called miracle workers talk loud and long, they make pretentious claims, but they are not only short, but totally lacking with their proof. Paul not only came to the Thessalonians in word, but he fully supported his claims with miracles of confirmation. He stated:

...how that our gospel came not unto you in word

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only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance; even as ye know what manner of men we showed ourselves toward you for your sake (1 Thess. 1:5).

It is also highly significant that Paul wrought these miracles at Thessalonica. He did not just talk about miraculous works a thousand miles away. Paul performed miracles right there! How unlike Paul are the so-called miracle workers of our day. They talk much; they do absolutely nothing in the way of real miracles. Sometimes they quibble and evade by saying, “*I cannot work miracles but God works miracles through me.*” Such is only a dodge, for the discerning person can easily see that God never works miracles through them! Why is it then when such false teachers are met and exposed in public debate they never exhibit their miraculous power? Why does God not work miracles through them? The answer is obvious: such men are imposters.

Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain” (Prov. 25:14).

Simon, the sorcerer, could have gotten more testimonials than any of them, for the Bible says:

But there was a certain man called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God (Acts 8:9-10).

In spite of all of his claims and his popularity, God

was not with him, and he never wrought a real miracle. Rather he “*bewitched*” them.

The word “*miracle*” means a thing is done in a supernatural way, contrary to natural law. What God does through natural law is not miraculous. God gives us bread through the use of natural means (Matt. 6:9-15). Such is not miraculous. When God gave the Israelites manna directly from heaven, such was a miracle (Exod. 16).

God has a reason for the fact that He is not now miraculously healing the sick and raising the dead. It is not that God is not able to give men power to raise the dead (Matt. 10:8). The reason God is not now making men out of the dust of the ground, as He did Adam, is not that He **cannot** do it. God does not do everything that He can do. *It is not a question of ability, but the issue is what has He willed to do!* Real miracles are not being performed today. They ceased by the time the New Testament was fully delivered, written and confirmed (Mark 16:17-20; Heb. 2:3).

There is as much difference between a fake miracle and a genuine miracle as there is between daylight and dark. The healing of the lame man in Acts 3 was a genuine miracle. The enemies of the apostles said:

...for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it (Acts 4:16). They could say nothing against it (v. 14). All men glorified God for that which was done (v. 21).

Although the man was “lame from his mother’s womb” (Acts 3:2), the man was healed instantly and publicly.

**An Example of God's Providence Through
The Power of Truth In The Human Heart:
No Miracle Involved**

During a part of the time when David was fugitive from Saul, he and his men lived in the wilderness of Paran. This was near a wealthy man by the name of Nabal. The Bible says:

And there was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel (1 Sam. 25:2).

His wife's name was Abigail. She is described as “. . . a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance” (1 Sam. 25:3). Nabal was a wicked man. The Bible says of him, “But the man was churlish and evil in his doings, and he was of the house of Caleb” (1 Sam. 25:3). David and his men had shown unusual kindness to Nabal. They had not injured any of Nabal's great flocks, but they had actually been a wall around them both by day and night, protecting them from wild beasts and robbers.

Sheep-shearing time was a season of generosity and goodwill, and so during that time, David, being conscious of the service that he and his men had rendered to Nabal, sent messengers to Nabal with kindly greetings with the request, “. . . Give I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David” (1 Sam. 25:8). To the surprise of the messengers Nabal was insulting, saying, “Who is David?”

The young men returned and related to him what had happened. He was stung to the quick, “And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. . .”

(1 Sam. 25:13). So David and his men went forth, vowing vengeance not only upon Nabal, but also to all his family. Fortunately, one of Nabal's shepherds who knew how much they were indebted to David, feared the consequence of Nabal's ungodly conduct, and so he went to Abigail and told her the entire story.

As already noted Abigail was "a woman of good understanding," which makes one wonder why she would marry Nabal, a man who "was churlish and evil in his doings." We, of course, do not know whether he was that evil when they married or became that way later. The facts in the case are that Abigail, a woman of good understanding, made haste and loaded her beasts of burden with an abundance and started on her journey to take to David and his men. She did not tell her husband, for she knew that he would refuse to allow her to do this thing which eventually saved his life.

When she and David met she let David know that she thought that Nabal's conduct was unbecoming, and then she congratulated him that God had kept him from shedding innocent blood which would sadden him (1 Sam. 25:18-31). She convinced David, and he thanked her, and not only so, but the major point that I want to emphasize in this connection is that he said that God "sent thee this day to meet me." Please carefully note what David said:

And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand (1 Sam. 25:32,33).

In summary of this story I call attention to a few of

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the points that have to do with the providence of God:

1. Abigail was “a woman of good understanding.”
2. She knew and loved the truth and she allowed it to be the ruling influence in her life.
3. She desired to save her life, and the lives of her family.
4. She both knew and believed the prophecies the promises of God to make David king of Israel.
5. Though there is nothing said that implied that she did not love her husband in spite of his wickedness, yet she did not, and would not, defend him in his wickedness. She correctly described him to David when she said, “Let not my lord I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him. . .” (1 Sam. 25:25).
6. She informed David, “. . .but I thine handmaiden saw not the young men of thy lord, whom thou didst send” (1 Sam.25:25).
7. David knew and loved the truth, and so realizing that her attitude was good and proper, and believing that everything that she said was true, and believing and desiring to do right himself, he gladly accepted her good advice.
8. Thus David attributed the solution of this problem to the Lord for sending Abigail to him, and for her good advice which caused him to refrain from shedding innocent blood.

9. The conclusion is irresistible that the power of truth in the hearts of Abigail and David and their desire to do right is all that is involved in this incident. Therefore, without any miracle, God made all things work together for the good of both David and Abigail (Rom. 8:28).

10. That is all that is needed, and that is all that is promised. God's providence does work in our lives even today, but it is non-miraculous.

God Through His Providence Blesses The Righteous And Punishes the Wicked

God has always worked through His providence. During the Patriarchal and Mosaic age, and in the first century, He sometimes performed miracles in bringing to fruition His desired ends. However, even though He continues to work providentially in the lives of individuals and nations as stated above He does not now work miracles, but He works through natural law. Also, it should be observed that even in the time when He did sometimes work miracles in bringing to pass His goals, yet, for the most part, He worked through natural law. Furthermore, God not only used the righteous, but sometimes the wicked to accomplish His will. First, let us study how He used the righteous.

1. Near the beginning of time there lived one of the most righteous of all men, "Enoch, the seventh from Adam" (Jude 14). It is said of him, "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). The Hebrew writer said of him:

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God

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translated him; for he hath had witness borne to him that before his translation he had been well-pleasing unto God (Heb. 11:5).

Enoch lived a righteous and holy life in every way. Not only did God oppose the wicked of Enoch's day, but Enoch also opposed them. Not only did Enoch oppose them in his day, but he also prophesied of the final destiny of the wicked:

And to these also Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their works of ungodliness which they have wrought, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him (Jude 14,15).

God certainly took care of Enoch, for he was one of only two men who were spared the ordeal of death (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5). Elijah was the other great man who went to be with God without dying (2 Kings 2:1-11).

2. Noah, like Enoch, walked with God. It is written of him:

These are the generations of Noah: Noah was just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9).

God instructed Noah to:

Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch (Gen. 6:14).

Noah did what God instructed him to do:

Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he (Gen. 6:22).

Thus, God providentially preserved Noah while at the same time He destroyed the wicked. Peter wrote:

Which sometimes were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 3:20-21).

And spared not the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:5).

This included using the water of the flood to save him just as baptism is a requirement of God that we must obey before we can be saved (1 Pet. 3:20-21).

3. God called Abraham, and because he was obedient He blessed him (Gen. 12:1-4). The Hebrew writer wrote:

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went (Heb. 11:8).

Abram's faith grew, and ultimately he became the

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father of the faithful. God took care of him, and blessed him, and Christians are of the spiritual seed of Abraham (Rom. 4:1-25; James 2:17-26; Gal. 3:26-29). During the lifetime of Abraham, God also punished many wicked people.

4. Joseph was hated by his brethren, and was ultimately sold by them as a slave, and he was taken into Egypt (Gen. 37:1-12; 18-28). Potiphar's wife first sought to tempt him, and since he loved God so much and was too good and pure to commit adultery with her, she lied about him (Gen. 39:4-20). However, God was with him in prison, and through His providence Joseph was able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams; thus causing Pharaoh to make him the second ruler in Egypt (Gen. 41:38-45). In the process of time Joseph's brethren came to Egypt to buy grain, and ultimately Joseph made himself known to his brothers. He, at that time, saw the providence of God in it all; and even though his wicked brothers had mistreated him, and treated him cruelly, they were now very penitent. Therefore, Joseph said:

Now therefore be not grieved, not angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt (Gen. 45:5-8).

Joseph sent for his aged father, Jacob, and after their joyous reunion, Joseph settled his father and brethren in Goshen, the best part of Egypt. After the death and burial of Jacob, Joseph's brethren once again besought Joseph to forgive them. Joseph, with great tenderness assured them of his forgiveness, and again stated his complete confidence in God and His providence. It is written:

And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them (Gen. 50:19-21).

5. The providence of God in preserving Moses and the Israelites, while at the same time punishing Pharaoh and others is clearly seen. The history of Moses divides itself into three equal periods. His first forty years were spent in Egypt (Acts 7:23); the next forty years were spent in the wilderness as the great leader of God's people. Moses sets out the providence of God in many passages. In Deuteronomy chapters 31-34 are some of the choicest statements of God's providence in blessing His people, and punishing the wicked. One of the great summary passages is: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. . ." (Deut. 33:27). God's providence will be more clearly apprehended when we "*sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb*" (Rev. 15:3), in heaven.

6. God providentially blessed Daniel but overthrew his enemies. The key to much of the success

of truth over error was the faithfulness of Daniel to his God (Dan. 1;8). God conveyed His love to Daniel through His messenger when he said, “O Daniel, a man greatly beloved. . .” (Dan. 10:11).

7. The providence of God is demonstrated in the life of Esther. The people of God were saved, and the wicked were defeated. Although Mordecai was not certain as to how the providence of God would work when he said to Esther, . . .who knoweth whether thou are come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (Esther 4:14), yet, in looking back no one can doubt that God through His providence did make things turn out well.

God Sometimes Uses Wicked People To Punish Other Wicked People

Sometimes God uses wicked people to punish His own unfaithful people. Later he punishes the wicked that He has used according to their deeds. God used Nebuchadnezzar to punish Judah. In fact, He refers to Nebuchadnezzar as: “Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant. . . (Jer. 25:9). Later God punished that proud, and wicked monarch (Dan. 4:1-37).

God Sometimes Protected His Faithful Children From The Wicked

During the reign of righteous Hezekiah, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, “came up against all the defended cities of Judah, and took them” (Isa. 36:1). Rabshakeh, Sennacherib’s general came with a mighty army, and he blasphemed God, and demanded of Hezekiah that he surrender. Hezekiah took it to the Lord, and He said: “For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake”

(Isa. 37:35). The result was:

Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib, king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Armenia: and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead (Isa. 37:36-38).

God used Cyrus, the Persian king, to deliver the nation of Judah from Babylonian captivity:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying. Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The Lord his God be with him and let him go up (2 Chron. 36:22-23).

God Knows How

When Lot chose the well-watered plain of Jordan, and pitched his tent toward Sodom he showed lack of consideration and respect for his uncle Abraham.

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However, after a period of time of living in wicked Sodom, he is represented by the apostle Peter as being a righteous man:

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto day of judgment (2 Pet. 2:9).

The Bible definitely teaches the providence of God, but great caution should be exercised in dogmatically contending that a given act is providential. What may appear at first to be providence may be, and often is seen to be otherwise, in time to come. Generally, in order to ascertain providence one must look backward as did Joseph. Even though Paul thought in the case of his sending Onesimus back to Philemon his master, (now as a Christian, since Paul had converted him in Rome, Philemon 10), that the whole thing was turning out to be providential, yet he merely stated that “perhaps” such was the case. He wrote:

For perhaps he was therefore parted from thee for a season, that thou shouldest have him for ever; no longer as a servant, but more than a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much rather to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord (Philemon 15-16).

God’s General Providence

God blesses both saint and sinner in many ways:

Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun

to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the Gentiles the same? Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:43-48).

God provides for the animals:

He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry (Psm. 147:9).

The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God (Psm. 104:21).

God cares for the birds:

Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they? (Matt. 6:26).

God's Special Providence

God takes special care of His children. Paul wrote:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

Even when Paul was in prison, God's providence was at work. He said:

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Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel; so that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole praetorian guard, and to all the rest; and that most of the brethren in the Lord, being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear (Phil. 1:12-14).

Paul assured the Philippian Christians of God's providence for them in these words:

And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

Not only to the Ephesian Christians, but also to all Christians of all generations, the following words serve as a great encouragement:

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us (Eph. 3:20).

Polytheism is False Doctrine

Polytheism is defined as, "The doctrine of or belief in more than one god or in many gods." (*Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*). Since we have proved the existence of God, and the inspiration of the Scriptures, one section of Scripture is sufficient to refute polytheism. Paul wrote:

Concerning therefore the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that no idol is anything

in the world, and that there is no God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth; as there are gods many, and lords many; yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him. Howbeit there is not in all men that knowledge” (I Cor. 8:4-7a).

Scientific Theism Is False Doctrine

The view of Scientific Theism is the idea that there is a god, but not necessarily the God of the Bible. However, I have shown abundantly from both Scripture and nature that there is but one God, and He is the God that we read about in the Bible. I have also shown that the Scriptures are from God, i.e.; inspired, and they constitute our pattern to learn, know, obey, and to be judged by (John 12:48).

Endnotes

- 1 **The Encyclopedia Americana**, volume 26, page 505.
- 2 **The Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, volumes 1 & 2 under *Early History of Deism*, pages 327.
- 3 **The Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, volumes 1 & 2, page 327.
- 4 **The Providence of God**, Editors, Thomas B. Warren & Garland Elkins, pages 12 - 27

Chapter 4

Darwinism/Naturalism

Trevor Major

Introduction

Charles Darwin (1809-1892) was a shy, retiring sort of man. If he could hear about the success of his theory in the 20th century, he probably would react with some surprise and satisfaction. Today, most biologists try to understand life in terms of his theory of evolution, just as physicists try to understand the Universe in terms of Einstein's theory of relativity. Yet while we hear a lot about Darwinism, we hear hardly anything about whether Einsteinian physics should be in the textbooks, or whether Einstein should get equal time with Newton in high school physics classrooms. Why is this? How did Darwin get to have an "ism" named after him, and why is it debated so hotly?

The reasons for Darwin's influence, I believe, are threefold: (1) Darwin's theory has come to dominate a whole branch of science, namely, biology; (2) Many people have seen a use for Darwin's theory in other areas that touch on every aspect of human life, such as politics, economics, medicine, psychology, religion, and sociology, to mention just a few; and (3), Darwinism is an important application of naturalism and, thereby, is seen to be a useful denial of theism. In the following sections, I would like to discuss these reasons in more detail, and see where they go wrong from a Christian point of view.

Darwinism As A Biological Theory

Two hundred years ago, most teachers, scientists, and philosophers in the Western world explained nature through a belief in the words of the Bible. But this began to change during the Age of Enlightenment. First, Immanuel Kant suggested that our Solar System formed from a swirling, gaseous mass. Then James Hutton, and later Charles Lyell, said that it was possible to explain all the features on Earth by natural processes operating over long periods of time.

Having explained the origin and history of Earth without using God, the next step was to explain the origin of life without God. Several theories were offered, but the ideas of one man prevailed. That man, Charles Darwin, convinced many people that all life had evolved from a single common ancestor over long periods of geological time. What was his idea, and how did he arrive at this conclusion?

The Voyage Of The Beagle

Darwin was born in 1809 to a wealthy, upper middle-class family. His father Robert, and his grandfather Erasmus, were both well-respected medical doctors. Naturally, Robert wished Charles to pursue a medical career, and shipped him off to Edinburgh University to train as a doctor. However, he found the lectures dull, and the experience in the operating theater was too much to bear. Much to the consternation of his father, Charles dropped out of medical school, and decided to train as a clergyman at Cambridge. Once again, he was not too excited about the lectures. He did, however, develop an intense interest in natural history, and read a great deal in this area. Plus, there were many men “of the cloth” who were teaching in natural sciences at Cambridge.

When he graduated in 1831, his friend and mentor,

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professor of botany John Henslow, made him a great offer. Captain Robert FitzRoy was to lead a hydrographic survey to South America, returning by way of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. These voyages of discovery were very important to the British navy. Remember, this was a time when most maps had “unknown” written over vast areas of Africa and South America. The navy wanted to know what to expect when they visited as-yet uncharted bays and islands. Henslow could not go, but would Charles be interested? Of course, but only after his uncle Josiah Wedgwood (of fine pottery fame), convinced Robert that it was a good idea.

In 1831, the twenty-two year old Darwin boarded the *HMS Beagle* on a scientific exploration that would take him around the world and have a profound effect on his thinking. His job as a naturalist was to report on the people, plant life, animals, and other natural features in those faraway places.

On reaching South America, he was impressed by the incredible variety of plants and animals. This was an eye-opening experience for a young man who had only ever known the gentle streams and meadows of the well-ordered English countryside. Also, he observed that slightly different varieties of the same type of animal or plant could be found in different parts of the world.

It seems he was most impressed with the remote Galápagos Islands, located 600 miles west of South America. Darwin noticed that tortoises, mocking thrushes, finches, and other animals were different from their counterparts on the mainland. After talking to people on the islands, from his own observations, and from studying his specimens, Darwin realized that these animals also varied from island to island.

He was particularly interested in the finches, so much so that they are now called “Darwin’s finches.”

Some of these birds live in the trees and eat insects, while others spend most of the time on the ground eating seeds, flowers, and other plant material. Also, within each major group of finches there is variation in color and size. All these differences in appearance and life-style have been used to classify the Galápagos finches into thirteen separate species.

Natural Selection

In the years following the expedition, Darwin sought an explanation for the variety he had seen around the world. For him, the finches presented a fine example. He proposed that the Galápagos finches had descended from a hypothetical common ancestor that had flown from the mainland many generations before.¹ The overall characteristics of each bird population changed in response to natural conditions, such as geology, climate, vegetation, and competition with other animals. These changes were preserved because the new species were separated geographically from other finch populations. The following is a simplified version of what he thought might have happened:

1. A flock of finches lands on a very dry island where the only plants are cacti.
2. Only those individuals able to eat cacti survive.
3. The survivors pass on their character traits, including the ability to eat cacti, to their offspring.
4. If this new population can stay separate from other finches for long enough, then a new species of cactus-eating finches may arise.

Darwin referred to this natural culling process as “natural selection” or (as we will see later) “survival of

the fittest.”

It may be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinizing, throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good; silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life.²

Feeling confident that he could use natural selection to explain the origins of thirteen finch species on the Galápagos, Darwin felt confident that the same process was responsible for all life on Earth. He saw natural selection as a way to achieve “descent by modification,” or as it is called today, evolution.

Darwin’s findings were especially significant because they fit the growing naturalism of the time. Here was an explanation for the origin of life that required no Creator. To Darwin, the variation from mainland to island species was logical and understandable by natural processes. He writes:

I believe this grand fact can receive no sort of explanation on the ordinary view of independent creation; whereas on the view here maintained, it is obvious that the Galápagos Islands would be likely to receive colonists, whether by occasional means of transport or by formerly continuous land, from America; and the Cape Verde Islands from Africa; and that such colonists would be liable to modifications still betraying their original birth place.³

In concluding this discussion he argues that the form and distribution of species are “utterly inexplicable on the ordinary view of the independent creation of each species.”⁴

Note the phrase “independent creation.” Darwin was battling the prevailing view that God created each species in its own special place—that He created the big-eared African elephant in Africa, and the smaller-eared Asian elephant in Asia. Like Darwin, explorers and naturalists of the nineteenth century were becoming more aware of the world’s tremendous diversity. They also realized that some species, or seemingly similar species, were found in widely scattered portions of the Earth. How did they get there? Two theories emerged from the religious and scientific climate of the time: either God acted as some sort of divine landscaper and zookeeper, putting each individual variety in its own special place or, as Darwin proposed, similar varieties were descended from a common ancestor.

Theologians rejected the second theory because it implied change; it would just “not do” to suggest that nature had changed God’s original creation. In fact, Linnaeus, the father of taxonomy, had set forth, as a matter of religious dogma, that species were immutable and unchangeable. Unfortunately, he mistook the biblical “kind” to mean species, and because the Bible says that each plant and animal “brought forth...after its kind,” then each species must remain unchanged. Although some evolutionists would like to portray creationists in this way,⁵ most modern creationists deny the fixity of species idea. Many maintain that the biblical “kind” cannot be pinned down to a single taxonomic level.

Unfortunately, it was so easy for Darwin to show that species were not fixed, and if he could show that species were capable of tremendous variation, then

there was no need for independent creations. Darwin's book intended to undermine the foundation stones of the Anglican church's objection to change within nature. Once he attacked their basic beliefs, he left people with only one choice: either accept the easily discredited doctrines of the church, or accept Darwin's well-grounded scientific findings.

We could play a what-if game here: we could try to imagine what would have happened if the religious authorities of the time had not endorsed fixity of species. However, I do not believe it would have made much difference in the long run. As suggested earlier, Darwin's ideas were the inevitable culmination of a trend toward an increasingly naturalistic and secularized society that sought to eliminate the need for divine "interference" in nature. Why propose special creation, they would argue, when regular cause and effect could explain everything? Nonetheless, I cannot help feeling that the bad arguments in vogue at the time actually hastened the acceptance of Darwin's theory.

Artificial Selection

Darwin realized that people would challenge him to prove that species were not fixed, so he set about studying domesticated plants and animals. He looked at roses, horses, cows, dogs, and was especially interested in the tremendous assortment of pigeon breeds or "sports." As for pigeons, he was convinced that all the domesticated breeds had descended from the wild rock-pigeon over many generations. Still, this was a time frame of centuries, at most. If man could achieve so much by *artificial* selection in such a short period of time, Darwin reasoned, imagine what the great forces of nature could accomplish by *natural* selection over long periods of time! He enthused:

How fleeting are the wishes and efforts of man!
how short his time! and consequently how poor
will his products be, compared with those
accumulated by nature during whole geological
periods.⁶

Then a few pages later, having presented examples of artificial selection and variation in nature, he stated the following:

Slow though the process of selection may be, if feeble man can do much by his powers of artificial selection, I can see no limit to the amount of change, to the beauty and infinite complexity of the coadaptations between all organic beings, one with another and with their physical conditions of life, which may be effected in the long course of time by nature's power of selection.⁷

Finally, on November 24, 1859, Darwin revealed his theory to the world in *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. The world was ready for this kind of work, and it was accepted by many people with great enthusiasm.

Problems With Natural Selection

Some scientists, however, questioned Darwin's mechanism of change. Natural selection, they realized, could work only on those characteristics which were already present in a population. It could account for variations within a species, perhaps, but could not produce new characteristics. Natural selection, it seems, could only select what was already there.

This problem is best illustrated by the English peppered moth, *Biston betularia*. Before the Industrial

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Revolution, most of these moths had a light, mottled-gray appearance. The rest were a rare, dark variety. But the ratios were swapped later on. By 1900, shortly after the Industrial Revolution had ended, observers noticed that 90% of these moths in the heavily populated and industrialized city of Manchester were dark.

In the early fifties, H.B.D. Kettlewell conducted experiments to show, as theory predicted, that these fluctuations in the proportion of light and dark varieties were caused by changes in the environment.⁸ His experiments involved releasing equal numbers of each variety into polluted and unpolluted areas. In polluted areas, the dark moths survived predation from birds in greater numbers because they were well-camouflaged on soot-covered surfaces. He repeated this procedure in unpolluted areas, and noticed that the lighter moths survived in greater numbers because they were well-camouflaged on the lichen-covered trees and rocks. Today, the amount of soot in the air is decreasing, and the mottled variety is becoming more frequent once again.

There is little doubt that natural selection (industrial melanism, to be precise) has worked on peppered moths: selective predation changed the moth population over time. However, it also shows a limitation of natural selection. The insect started out as a peppered moth, remained a peppered moth throughout, and finished as a peppered moth. Changes in the environment simply led to changes in the proportion of varieties already present in the population. As L. Harrison Matthews observed, the peppered moth experiments:

...beautifully demonstrate natural selection—or survival of the fittest—in action. But they do not show evolution in progress. For however the populations may alter in their content of light,

intermediate, or dark forms, all the moths remain from beginning to end *biston betularia*.¹⁰

Darwin's Two Mistakes

Darwin made two critical errors in his reasoning. First, he used the Galápagos finches, and other examples, to show how natural selection might account for variation within groups of plants and animals. However, he went beyond the data to argue that such change could explain the origin of *all* life from a common ancestor. While Darwin was right to argue against those in his time who said there could be no change at all, he failed to realize that there were restrictions on the amount of change.

Second, artificial selection was a bad analogy for natural selection. Artificial selection is guided by the intelligence of man, whereas natural selection is at the mercy of an essentially unpredictable environment. Even with man's help, the evolutionary significance of artificial selection is debatable. Years, even centuries, of breeding have not produced the changes required by Darwin.

Modern Evolution—Neo-Darwinism

In the decades following the publication of Darwin's book, people remained convinced that evolution was true, despite the problems discussed previously. What they wanted, however, was a way to make new characteristics on which natural selection could work. Help came from an unexpected source—the Austrian monk, Gregor Mendel (1822-1884). Although he spent most of his life in a monastery, Mendel had training in mathematics, and had a great interest in botany and improving agricultural plants.

While Darwin was working on his pigeons, Mendel was crossing specially selected strains of peas. He found, for instance, that when he crossed peas with yellow seeds

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and peas with green seeds, most of the offspring had yellow seeds; if he crossed peas with round seeds and peas with wrinkled seeds, most of the offspring had round seeds. By conducting careful experiments, and subjecting his data to statistical analysis, he concluded that individuals inherit traits from both parents in certain predictable ways.

He presented these findings in 1866 to the Brunn Society for the Study of Natural Science. Yet their importance was not recognized; Mendel literally was a man “ahead of his time.”

At the beginning of the twentieth century, three European scientists rediscovered Mendel’s theory of inheritance. His work, together with new knowledge about the cell, launched our understanding of heredity. Biologists realized that changes in hereditary factors (genes) could be passed from generation to generation.

One of the scientists who rediscovered Mendel’s work was Dutch botanist Hugo De Vries. Not only did he confirm Mendel’s work, but he found that unexpected varieties of plants would occasionally arise within a population. De Vries called these changes “mutations” (from the Latin, meaning “to change”). A few years later, an American geneticist called Thomas Hunt Morgan discovered mutations in fruit flies. Evolutionists saw these genetic changes as the source of new traits on which natural selection could work. Darwin’s idea was modified to say that natural selection acts on mutations to produce new species. This is called *neo-Darwinian* evolution.

Problems With Neo-Darwinian Evolution

But do mutations help the evolutionists’ case? Rather than supporting evolution, genetics shows instead that mutations are insufficient to produce long-term, large-scale changes. First, mutations are fairly rare. It is a

tribute to the design of genetic systems that so few mistakes are made from generation to generation.

Second, when mutations do occur, they are random, unpredictable, and nature has no choice in the matter. For instance, it may just happen that a mutation for long necks in giraffes might come along at just the right time, say, during a drought when the animals have to reach higher and higher for leaves. But if the population is filled with short-necked, medium-necked, and long-necked giraffes, and there are no selection pressures for height, then nature will not select and favor any particular neck length. Natural selection needs the right mutation at the right time to preserve a change in the population, which eventually may contribute to a new species.

And third, mutations are nearly always harmful to the plant or animal in which they occur. That is, either they produce changes with no advantage, or they result in the sterility or premature death of the afflicted organism. Consider the case of the humble fruit fly, *Drosophila melanogaster*. Scientists like to work with fruit flies because they breed so fast, which allows them to observe many generations within a short period of time. Anyway, various natural and artificial mutations have been noticed in fruit flies. There are flies with white eyes, yellow bodies, small wings, brown eyes, short wings, curly wings, and so on. But none of these are a lot of use to the fruit fly. We also get sterile flies, flies that cannot fly, and plenty of dead flies. But after years and years of being irradiated, dosed with mutagenic chemicals, and subjected to other indignities, no new species of fruit fly has ever emerged in the lab.

On occasion, harmful mutations may seem to give an advantage. The most commonly cited example is sickle-celled anemia. In this disease, a mutation produces an

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abnormal form of the oxygen-carrying protein hemoglobin. The mutated hemoglobin reduces the life span of the red blood cells in which it is carried, and changes the shape of the cell. Consequently, people who inherit the sickle-cell gene from both parents will suffer from severe, often fatal, anemia. However, people who carry a mutated gene from one parent, and a normal gene from the other parent, will have nonanemic red blood cells resistant to malarial parasites. This would seem to be an advantage in malaria-ridden areas of the world like West Africa, where (in some places) 40 percent of the people carry the sickle-cell trait. Others who do not inherit the sickle-cell gene have no resistance to malaria, but at least they cannot pass the disease on to their children.

Sickle-cell anemia is a special case where natural selection has preserved a mutation, but it is useful only to those who carry one copy of the gene; the remainder of the population is at the mercy of either malaria or anemia. It is hard to imagine that this mutation can be considered “good” for long-term evolutionary change when 1 child in 4, on average, will die from the sickle-cell disease.

At best, mutations produce harmless variations with no selective advantage; their preservation is by pure chance. At worst, mutations cause death and disease, and natural selection works to reduce or eliminate them from the population. The supposed evolutionary mechanism of natural selection working on mutations is very limited in its ability to create new species.

The Fossil Record

Darwin’s greatest scientific achievement was to prove that species have tremendous potential for variation. But is this potential unlimited? Can variations build upon variations to transform fish into amphibians,

amphibians into reptiles, and reptiles into birds and mammals, as evolutionists propose? If evolution is correct, the fossil record should show many transitional forms.¹¹ In the *Origin*, Darwin freely admitted that these links were missing.¹² He gave several reasons why this might be so, but he was convinced that fossil collectors would eventually find sufficient transitional forms.

Yet, more than a century later, problems with the fossil record remain. First, while evolutionists have proposed many intermediates, clear transitional forms are absent. For example, they often cite *Archaeopteryx* as the first bird and an intermediate link in the reptile-to-bird transition. Some believe that its skeletal form is very similar to that of the chicken-sized dinosaur *Compsognathus*. Indeed, evolutionists propose from these similarities that birds are the direct descendants of dinosaurs. However, *Archaeopteryx* does have bird-like features and, most noticeably, its feathers resemble those of modern birds in every way. Fossils showing the transformation of scales into feathers do not exist. Also, only a few other fossil bird specimens span the supposed seventy million years or more between *Archaeopteryx* and birds with fully “modern” features.

The second problem is that animals with tremendous variety and complexity appear suddenly in the fossil record. For example, evolutionists believe that single-celled organisms (e.g., algae and bacteria) exist in some of the oldest rocks on Earth. However, an alleged three billion years of evolutionary history pass before soft-bodied, multicellular creatures appear in the fossil record, and then they emerge suddenly with intricate designs. These are followed, with equal abruptness, by animals with hard parts like snails, clams, trilobites, and even fishes. All the major body plans appear very early in the history of life.

Third, evolutionary history contains notable instances of stability. These are most often represented by “living fossils”—plants and animals whose fossil remains bear remarkable resemblance to their modern counterparts. Perhaps the most famous example is the coelacanth. This unusual fish, swimming today in the Indian Ocean around the Comoro Islands, has changed little since it first appeared in the fossil record 375 million years ago (by evolutionary estimates). The coelacanth is joined by a mushroom, hagfish, magnolia, tuatara, and many, many others—all of which present a serious challenge to the proposed mode and tempo of evolution.

Darwinism In Human Societies

As we have just noted, Darwin’s theory of natural selection makes a very general claim. It says that nature will preserve those characteristics within a population that are most suited to survival. If an organism has a better chance of survival, then it has a better chance of producing more offspring, and passing those favorable characteristics on to the next generation.

Evolution and Progress

Darwin’s theory inspired many Victorian Englishmen and women, especially those enamored with the Victorian ideal of progress.¹³ This, really, was a carryover from the Enlightenment. It was an optimistic view that humanity would improve itself through education and liberty. It is easy to imagine how all but the poorest Englishman could see how far they had come, how “right” it seemed that their nation should be so great, and how this privileged condition must be just “natural.” If the powers that be would stop making laws contrary to nature’s way, the liberals argued, then any individual could improve their lot in life.¹⁴ When putting on its kindest

face, this view seemed to express a hope that God was working providentially through some sort of natural process to bring about a better world or, at least, a better England. In its grimmest form, this view wished a pleasant future on nobody, poor or rich. It held that whatever we see now must be the highest, most-developed state of society. The poor could improve their lot in life, but only if nature happened to move in that direction. Progress would arrive by competition, not by cooperation and charity.

Serious proposals along these lines existed long before Darwin's views on the natural world took shape. For instance, the seventeenth century English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, described humanity as being in a "war of all against all." A properly-organized society was just a convenient way to rise above that constant struggle. In 1798, Thomas Malthus put forward his "principle of population." This argued that strife and famine occurred when the rate of population growth exceeded available resources.

Malthus, Darwin, And Spencer

After reading Malthus, Darwin realized that the descendants of a single pair of mice, or humans, or elephants, would overrun the world in a few generations. Yet this was not happening. Why? Because nature only preserves those individuals that have the instincts, behaviors, and physical traits necessary for survival.

All this came full circle when the English philosopher, Herbert W. Spencer (1820-1903), adopted Darwin's natural selection for his own theories on human society. In fact, in his *Principles of Biology* (1864), Spencer coined the phrase "survival of the fittest."

For Spencer, evolution permeated everything; it was a cosmic inevitability. Matter, animals, and human societies began in an indistinguishable, homogenous

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form, and progressed to a state of increasing specialization and individualization.¹⁵ Just as there were many types of bees, and many types of deer, each adapted to its own special place in nature, so an advanced human society was one in which there was a “division of labor.” Of course, this just happened to describe industrialized England of the nineteenth century. If this were the latest stage of development, then it must be the highest stage of evolutionary progress. Following Malthus, but with Darwin’s natural selection as justification, Spencer argued that the poor were not fit to survive. They could not compete for resources, so they starved. The only course of action, Spencer argued, was an extreme *laissez-faire* economy and government. In other words, individuals should be allowed to do whatever they want; nature would determine the outcome. This, in principle, is social Darwinism.

American Social Darwinism

Spencer earned a great deal of respect in his own time and country, but he was as popular, if not more so, in the United States. Also, Americans had their own Spencer in the form of William Graham Sumner (1840-1910). Many tycoons endorsed social Darwinism because it lent an air of scientific respectability to their ruthless business practices. Note some of their comments:

Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919): After reading Spencer, he “remembered that light came as a flood and all was clear.”

James J. Hill (1838-1916): “The fortunes of railroad companies are determined by the law of the survival of the fittest.”

John D. Rockefeller (1839-1937): The growth of the large business is merely survival of the fittest This is not an evil tendency in business. It is merely working out of a law of nature.

Both Hill and Rockefeller ran operations that were found to be in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act. Apparently, they believed that competition was good, but no competition was even better! Clearly, social Darwinism came after the fact with these people; we cannot blame Darwin, or even Spencer, for human greed. After making their fortunes, Rockefeller and Carnegie won renown as philanthropists, donating hundreds of millions of dollars for education, museums, and research, but not to the poor directly.

As a popular doctrine, Spencer and Sumner's social Darwinism fell out of favor on both sides of the Atlantic. Several horrifying events, such as the American Civil War, and certainly the First World War, dashed the romantic, Victorian illusion of inevitable progress. Also, scientists—the people who handle Darwin's theory on a day-to-day basis—did not see how one society, or one part of society, was inherently more evolved than any other.

Arguments Against Social Darwinism

Apart from going out of fashion, social Darwinism made a number of critical errors. First, Darwin envisioned no such thing as evolutionary progress toward a particular goal or ideal. Evolution has no goal. Rather, a particular feature or species may appear highly successful at one moment, and a dismal failure at the next, depending on the whims of nature.¹⁶ Darwin's young disciple, Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895), also known as Darwin's bulldog, took pains to get this message across. In his

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opinion, the idea that evolution leads to perfection is a fallacy that pervades “the so-called ‘ethics of evolution.’”¹⁷ He drew a distinction between the “natural process” of change at the biological level, and the “ethical process” of change in society. In fact, he viewed progress in human societies as one where we actually fight against our natural desires.¹⁸

Huxley’s distinction highlights a second and, perhaps, the most fatal weakness in social Darwinism as a system of “evolutionary ethics.”¹⁹ Not only is it very doubtful that natural selection improves human societies, but it is also very doubtful that natural selection can provide the standard for morality. In other words, how is it possible to make the transition from the natural to the ethical; from the *is* to the *ought*? We may be able to *describe* the actions of the majority, for instance, but why should this *prescribe* the standards of morality. For instance, most people traveling on a particular stretch of highway may be going 75 m.p.h., but it hardly makes sense to say that this must be the right and proper speed. Like the Good Book says, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil” (Exo. 23:2).

Even if natural selection works “out there” in nature by changing the proportion of light and dark moths, or preserving resistant strains of mosquitoes and bacteria, how can it be right or wrong in a moral sense? If a lioness attacks and kills a baby zebra, is that right or wrong? If a late snow storm kills a newborn lamb, in what way is this good or bad—morally speaking? Human sensitivities aside, we understand that this is “nature’s way.” Is that not the whole point, though? We cannot put our sensitivities aside? We do imagine ourselves in the place of the zebra or the lamb, and we cringe because we would not want to be in their place. Yet, despite these feelings, we cannot hold nature responsible for what it does. It is

quite a different matter when humans are involved. What if one person kills another, or a baby freezes to death in an unattended car? In these cases, we can probably put ourselves in the place of victim and perpetrator, and wonder whether these deaths should have happened, and what we can do to stop them happening again. Normally, all this goes on among humans, not at the biological level, but at the social level. The bottom line is this: it makes no sense to go from a natural process, which has little if anything to do with the operations of human society, to an ethical system, by which all human society is supposed to operate.

Social Darwinism And The Bible

For fear of stating the obvious, the teaching of Christ is hardly compatible with social Darwinism. This is not to say that the Christian life does not include competition and struggle. After all, it was Paul who said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). He also assured the Ephesians that we *wrestle*, not “against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (6:12). And I believe that Peter, more than any other New Testament writer, reinforced the inevitability of suffering for one’s faith, and encouraged watchfulness and strength in the face of adversity (e.g., 1 Pet. 1:6-7,13; 2:19-21; 3:14,17-18; 4:1,12-16,19; 5:8-9).

In Christianity, however, competition and struggle are *means* to an end, not the ends in themselves. For someone who believes they live in a dog-eat-dog world, the aim is to be top dog. But for Christians, the ultimate goal is to spend eternity in heaven with God, the highest good is to love God, and the second highest good is to love our neighbor (Mark 12:29-31).

The social Darwinist may show his love by allowing “nature” to eliminate the poor and the sick. At most, like the great American philanthropists mentioned earlier, he would allow the poor to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. We may think this has a parallel in a very famous biblical passage: “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thess. 3:10). However, the Bible shows a great deal of compassion toward the poor. Under the Mosaic law, for example, the poor were granted the following provisions: they were not to pay interest on loans (Exo. 22:25); they were allowed to use a field, vineyard, or olive grove that was left at rest every seventh year (Exo. 23:11); they were allowed to gather from the corners of the field, and to pick up any grain, grapes, and olives left over after the harvest (Lev. 19:9-10); they were not to be discriminated against, and the rich were not to be favored, in judicial matters (Lev. 19:15); their labor was not to be abused or exploited (Lev. 25:34ff.; Deut. 24:12-15); and when in dire need, they were to receive loans (interest-free, of course) or outright gifts (Deut. 15:7-11; cf. 15:1). Surely, all such provisions were designed to help the poor, and not to see them eliminated from society.

We should note, also, that Paul’s instructions to the Thessalonians applied to those who could work, and chose not to. It could not apply, for example, to orphans and widows without any means of support (James 1:27; 1 Tim. 5:3-16). Finally, there were times when the will and the ability to work were not enough, and direct donations were needed (as we see in the relief sent to the brethren of Judea; Acts 11:28-29).

Do all these examples prove that we are, in the end, selfish brutes who require rules to keep in check our overwhelming desires for self-preservation and self-gratification? Did Paul not say, “with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom. 7:25)?

Actually, this seems to be a classic chicken-and-egg problem. In other words, which came first: the desire to lie, war, steal and murder in a peaceful society, or the desire for harmony, love and compassion in a dangerous, violent society? Evolution would have us believe that the second scenario is true; that ethics came along after the emergence of the human species from an ape-like ancestor. However, the Bible definitely comes down on the side of the first scenario: that it was man's initial condition to be peaceful, and then came Satan. If there had been no sin, then Adam and Eve, and their descendants, would be in paradise; there would be no need for a Savior. What is unique about man is that we are able to make moral decisions. God's laws exist, not so much to dampen our sinful desires, but to judge the choices we make (2 Cor. 5:10).

There is no problem, therefore, in seeing the huge disagreement between social Darwinism and Christian ethics. When an argument broke out among the disciples, Christ assured them that "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). An ethic that puts the interests of others before the interests of self is hardly conducive to struggle and competition. In no one do we find a greater example than Christ Himself, Who put the whole world ahead of His own life (John 3:16-17).

From Social Darwinism To Sociobiology

Social Darwinism, in the form advocated by Spencer, has not survived to the current era. This is not to say that someone out there may still think it a good idea. And, I have no doubt, that some in business, politics, or what have you, justify their actions by a "survival of the fittest" mentality. In all likelihood, for these people, any excuse for a dog-eat-dog, don't-care-who-I-step-on-to-get-to-the-

top-of-the-ladder ethic, would serve just as well.

However, new Darwinian views of society continue to pop up on occasion. Rather than trying to *invent* an ethical system based on evolution, these new ideas attempt to *explain* the moral behavior that exists already. Usually, these ideas fall under the heading of what Harvard entomologist, Edward O. Wilson (1929-), termed sociobiology; that is, “the systematic study of the biological basis of all social behavior.”²⁰ Some of the most common examples center on the assumption that our overwhelming mission in life is to propagate our own genes. Now, you may not be aware of such a desire, but we are assured that it is buried deep within countless generations of evolutionary development.

To cite a fairly trivial example, a survey among university students in Australia found that women were more attracted to slim men.²¹ Apparently, the journalist did not feel this scientific finding was complete without consulting an evolutionist on the matter. Dr. Tim Flannery, of the Australian Museum, obliged by dismissing this trend as a “passing fad.” In reality, women could care less about appearance. To ensure “evolutionary success,” all women really care about is their prospective mates’ “status, power and money.” So, wives *think* that they came to love their husbands, perhaps attracted initially by a sense of humor, or strength of character, or good looks. But no, when a wife tells her husband, “I love you,” she really is saying “I value your ability to pass my genes on to the next generation.” What, then, could cause these young Australian women to disregard their evolutionary dispositions? Is this a behavior that will prove evolutionarily unsuccessful and, as a result, a whole generation of Australians will have less chance of survival? Will those women who desire status, power, and money in a man, and ignore less important features such as

kindness or good looks, pick the best mates, and pass this superior sense of survival on to their daughters. Eventually, will the behavior trait of preferring-slim-men go the way of the dodo? Perhaps there are a number of “beefy” young men who certainly hope so.

More sobering examples can be found among family relationships. There is, for example, the “Cinderella effect,” which shows that stepchildren occupy a dangerous position in society.²² In the U.S., according to homicide statistics from 1976, infants (aged 0-2 years) living with one or more substitute parents are 100 times more likely to suffer fatal abuse than infants living with natural parents. Similarly, statistics from Canada for 1974-1983 show that children in this same age group are 70 times more likely to die at the hands of stepparents.

The explanation for this effect, according to Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, is that evolutionary selection has favored such homicidal behavior. It is in the interests of the stepfather, say, to ensure that energy is not wasted on children who do not carry his genes. So, upon entering the household, the first order of business is to kill his predecessor’s babies. Scientists have observed similar behavior among nonhuman populations. Among Hanuman langurs (a type of monkey that lives in India), for example, males eventually lose their harem to a challenger. The new male frequently will kill his predecessor’s infant offspring. Theoretically, the mothers would stop nursing, thus making them available to mate and produce the successor’s own offspring. This behavior would ensure that a new male would make as many living copies of his genes as possible before he, too, was chased out of the harem.²³

If similar behavior occurs in humans, so the argument goes, then culture does not exempt us from such evolutionary forces. How, then, do we explaining the

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“Brady Bunch” effect? That is to say, why is it that most stepparents get along quite well or, at least, cope with their stepchildren, without murdering them? According to Daly and Wilson, this is a matter of reciprocity, otherwise known as “I’ll scratch your back if you scratch mine.” Or, to put it in evolutionary terms, “I’ll not get in the way of your genetic legacy, if you’ll not get in the way of mine,” or “I’ll be nice to your kids, which will make you think I will be a suitable mate, so that we can have children of our own, and we’ll both pass our genes on to the next generation.” Again, what we interpret as love or genuine altruism really is just a cultural mask for genetic self-interests.

Is this interpretation demanded by the evidence at hand? All the statistics seem to show is that: (a) people are more likely to have a conflict with someone nearby that they know (e.g., a family member), than with someone further away whom they do not know; and (b), when family conflict occurs, the most defenseless members are the most vulnerable to a person with the least parental attachment. The explanation could be one of moral breakdown on the part of the perpetrator, and unfortunate circumstance on the part of the victim, rather than genetic predisposition.

A comment by Stephen Jay Gould seems appropriate at this point. While he admits that evolution could have programmed humans to, say, distinguish between members of our own group, and members of other groups, this in itself does not compel us to wipe them out. Here is an outspoken evolutionist who rejects the idea that genes determine behavior. His comments relate to genocide, but they could apply equally well to infanticide, rape, adultery, or other behaviors attributed to our supposed evolutionary heritage:

An evolutionary speculation can only help if it

teaches us something we don't know already—if, for example, we learned that genocide was biologically enjoined by certain genes, or even that a positive propensity, rather than a mere capacity, regulated our murderous potentiality. But the observational facts of human history speak against determination and only for potentiality.²⁴

Genes And Behavior

Where, in fact, is the proof that evolution has selected a trait for wiping out one's stepchildren? Another way of posing this question is to ask, "Where is the gene for infanticide?"

The point is this: genes store the code that the cell uses to make proteins. These proteins may have one or more roles to play in forming structure (hair, bone, etc.), regulating functions (hormones), transporting substances, defending against intruders (antibodies), or catalyzing chemical reactions (enzymes). So, what proteins incite a man to kill his stepchild? Does a child emit some sort of chemical, like a pheromone, that causes a violent reaction among all genetically unrelated people in close proximity? [We may have met some children like that, but it would be nice to see the evidence supporting those feelings!] Would it not be evolutionarily more advantageous to preserve a gene for something (again, like a pheromone) that endears a child to its parents and stepparents alike? Does a human adult male really benefit from infanticide? Using the reciprocity principle, a potential mate may look at an infanticidal man and wonder whether this same person was capable of killing the children of their union. Even if there were some genetic link, these questions, and the statistics mentioned earlier, lead me to conclude that infanticide is abnormal. Infanticide may

be a common practice among Hanuman langurs, but does not seem to be an important survival strategy in most human societies.

From Genes To Memes

Soon after Edward Wilson published *Sociobiology*, Richard Dawkins (1941-) generated an equal amount of controversy (and many more sales) for his book, *The Selfish Gene*.²⁵ Neither book devoted much space to human society specifically, although the concluding chapters in the first editions of each book ended on this topic. It was clear, nonetheless, that Wilson and Dawkins each saw an important application—indeed, a reason for their books' existence—in what they had to say about Darwinian evolution and human culture.

Unlike Wilson, Dawkins was not concerned so much with the biological basis of any behavior, but rather, the biological basis of selfishness and altruism in particular. He argued, as the title of the book suggests, that genes are selfish; they will do whatever it takes to ensure that their carrier—the individual—makes more copies of these genes.²⁶ Evolution, therefore, has ensured that our behavior brings about the preferential survival of the genes we carry. Those behaviors are selfish, in the sense of preserving our genes at the expense of competing genes contained in other “survival machines.”²⁷ On occasion, our behavior will be altruistic, in the sense of enhancing the success of another individual's genes, to the apparent detriment of our own survival. Like other sociobiologists, Dawkins argues that there is no such thing as genuine altruism; in reality, altruism represents a behavior that will favor a selfish gene's survival in some way.

In general, the same criticisms leveled at sociobiology apply also to Dawkins' theory on the connection between behavior and genetics. That is to say, where are these

genes for selfishness or altruism, and how do they function? When it comes to certain aspects of human culture, however, Dawkins takes a different approach. For instance, E.O. Wilson might say, “Show me an individual’s behavior—whether war, choosing a mate, altruism, religion, art, etc.—and I’ll tell you why that behavior enhances the survival of the group.” Somewhere in there, he seems to argue, we are going to find the genes for those behaviors that we share with, and inherited from, our ape ancestors, and also those genes that produce different survival behaviors in different societies.²⁸

For his part, Dawkins seems to argue along the following lines: “Forget the individual, or society, or the gene, for that matter; show me a behavior, and I’ll tell you why that behavior survives.” He supposes that once natural evolution produced our brains, a similar but separate process—cultural evolution—started to shape human societies. Whereas hereditary transmission and the fundamental units of natural evolution are genes, cultural transmission and the fundamental units of cultural evolution are *memes* (a term invented by Dawkins).²⁹ Also, whereas the cell copies genes, the brain imitates memes. Under this new word, Dawkins lists uniquely human concepts such as “tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothing fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches.”

Dawkins really is not saying anything tremendously profound about culture, aside from giving us another word that happens to rhyme with gene. In fact, it looks as though Dawkin’s idea has nothing to do with biological evolution either, because memes emerge from the brain, which is supposed to be natural selection’s final gift to the human species. All Dawkins seems to be saying is that persistent, popular cultural elements must be successful. This leads us to the less-than-Earth-

shattering conclusion that denim jeans, or the first couple of bars of Beethoven's 5th, are successful memes because they have survived through several generations. As Gould said, "An evolutionary explanation can only help if it teaches us something we don't already know"

Further, Dawkins does not intend to produce a theory of cultural evolution; he invented memes to show the universality of Darwinism.³⁰ He wants to show that if Darwinism works on anything that can be copied, even ideas, then surely it works on genes.

That aside, the analogy between genes and memes fails completely, and Dawkins acknowledged some of these criticisms himself.³¹ So why talk about memes anymore? Because people like Dennett and Dawkins still believe it is useful to "biologize" culture by this analogy to genes.

Obviously, meme-talk is not going to go away. During the course of writing this paper, I received notice of a new *Journal of Memetics*. And following the mass suicide of among members of the Heaven's Gate cult, an article in *Newsweek* drew on the "new science of memetics" to suggest that their self-destructive ideas, or "mind viruses," could find new hosts through the popular media.³² However, not much is to be gained by comparing viruses to ideas, and there are many differences between genes and memes, of which the following is a partial list:

1. *Changes in genes (mutations) occur randomly, whereas changes in ideas are not random.* That an apple falls from a tree is a random event; Isaac Newton's theory of gravity, inspired from such an event, is itself nonrandom. His pen did not wonder aimlessly over shapes and figures on a page and then, just by chance, there appeared a

correct, workable calculus and universal law of gravitation.

2. *Genes carry information about proteins, whereas cultural features may or may not carry any useful information.* We could say that the idea, “God exists,” is a very successful meme, yet Dawkins would deny that it conveys any worthwhile information, or that it is true. [Christians would say, of course, that the statement speaks volumes about the greatest Truth of all.]

3. *Genes exist only in the organism, whereas cultural elements may exist outside the human brain.* Although Dawkins credits the brain with inventing memes, and although memes can travel from brain to brain, they can also exist in a book, on a record, or as data on a computer. This means that songs, or scientific theories, do not have to be in someone’s brain before they can travel to another person’s brain (as we are going to see in the next point). Dawkins likes to talk about memes as a kind of mind virus, because a virus contains information and can exist outside the cell. However, a virus depends totally on transmission to the cell before copying occurs, whereas someone can punch out a million music CDs, and never have the tunes enter their mind.

4. *Cells copy genes exactly, whereas minds copy cultural elements with changes.* Whenever a cell undergoes division, it makes a new copy of the entire genetic code, and rarely makes any mistakes. It is the nature of the human mind, however, to change just about everything it

absorbs. We take in very few ideas, or tunes, and repeat them faithfully; fashions and technologies, by their very nature, change at a much higher rate than the genetic copying mechanisms of living cells.

5. *Genes are discrete, whereas cultural elements can blend.* Through his experiments on peas, Mendel showed that the units of heredity are separate, and occur in pairs. This means, for instance, that you could inherit a gene for black hair from your father, and a gene for blonde hair from your mother (assuming, for the sake of simplicity, that there is just one pair). But your hair is not going to be a mixture of the two; it may turn gray later on in life, but that is another matter. The actual color will reflect whichever variety of the gene is most dominant (probably black, in this case). However, two totally different ideas can come together to form a third.

6. *Gene copying is Mendelian, whereas transmission of cultural elements is Lamarckian.*³³ Darwin's main competitor was the Chevalier de Lamarck (1744-1829). He advanced a theory of evolution which said that changes acquired during a lifetime will pass to the next generation. If a giraffe strives to reach higher branches on a tree, then its legs and neck will get longer, and the next generation will inherit these characteristics. If you dye your hair green every day of your life, then your children will have green hair. Thanks to Mendel, we know this theory is not true. If you carry traits for black and blonde hair, then rest assured that your baby will not have green hair. Their

(natural) hair color will depend on the specific genes they inherit. However, Lamarck's theory *is* true for ideas. We *do* acquire ideas during our lifetime, and we *do* pass them on to our children.

Back To Evolutionary Ethics

Dawkin's unsuccessful analogy highlights the inherent problem in applying biological principles to aspects of human culture. However, like Dawkins, there are many evolutionists who would dearly love the general populace to know that Darwinism transcends stuffy labs and dusty fossils. They really want us to know that Darwinism is far more important than just another scientific theory. That is why, I suspect, these people cannot resist making ethics out of evolution or, at least, they talk as if such a task is possible.

How did this happen? Sociobiology was supposed to be nothing more than a description of why we value certain behaviors. Dawkins, in particular, has been very emphatic about not wanting to commit the same error as Herbert Spencer, i.e., in making *ought* out of *is*.³⁴

Yet, this pretense at objective inquiry—this attempt to explain human culture in light of evolution—does not stop at description. For sure, these men have their opinions on specific behaviors, which they keep largely to themselves, but they really do have a larger “vision” for an evolutionary ethic. Listen to Wilson's sense of frustration in the following passage: “Scientists and humanists should consider together the possibility that the time has come for ethics to be removed temporarily from the hands of the philosophers and biologized.”³⁵ He concludes that a deeper understanding of human biology “will make possible the selection of a more deeply understood and enduring code of moral values.”³⁶ So he seems to have changed his mind: he really does want to

do more than study or explain ethics after all.

To his credit, Richard Dawkins seems to shy away from framing an evolutionary ethic. In fact, like Thomas Huxley, Dawkins believes we should go against evolution and subvert our genetic heritage.³⁷ He is keen to explain how evolution molded our tree-swinging, cave-dwelling ancestors into selfish “gene machines,” as long as he does not have to live next to them. “My own feeling,” Dawkins cautions, “is that a human society based simply on the gene’s law of universal ruthless selfishness would be a very nasty society in which to live.”³⁸ Having said that, I guess we can all breathe a sigh of relief. He goes on to suggest two values: “Let us try to teach generosity and altruism, because we are born selfish. Let us understand what our selfish genes are up to, because we may then at least have the chance to upset their designs, something that no other species has ever aspired to.”³⁹ There is no necessary causative relationship between understanding our genes, and choosing to swim upstream against our survival instincts. Apparently, Dawkins just thinks that a world of generous, selfless people would be a better place in which to live.

Anything But God

Honestly, Wilson and Dawkins really seem to want a Christian, or at least a benevolent religious, culture. As we have seen already, one of Christ’s most important messages was to put others first, i.e., the altruism desired by Dawkins. Further, the Bible already balances the concerns of groups and individuals, which Wilson would like to see.⁴⁰ For example, the church is to form a unified body, yet each member plays a crucial role (1 Cor. 12:27). And we are to be good in our other roles as husbands, wives, children, employees, and citizens (1 Pet. 2:12-3:7); yet these ties do not come before our

personal relationship with God (e.g., Luke 14:26; Matt. 22:21).

Daniel C. Dennett, a philosopher and fan of Dawkins, has made an interesting comment along these lines. He points out that biblical ethics are a case of going from what the Bible says, to what we should or should not do. Whether this is valid or not depends on your view of Scripture. If you claim that the Bible contains wise sayings, but is the product of human hands, then you are on no better ground than evolutionists who derive ethical precepts from Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*. "Now," Dennett points out, "if you believe that the Bible (or some other holy text) is *literally* the word of God, and that human beings are put here on Earth by God in order to do God's bidding, so that the Bible is a sort of user's manual for God's tools, then you do indeed have grounds for believing that the ethical precepts found in the Bible have a special warrant that no other writings could have."⁴¹ In other words, it is quite valid to go from God's ought ("Thou shalt") to our ought ("I should").

The only valid Christian ethics, then, is a Christian ethics based on accepting the divine inspiration and authority of God's Word. Espousing a "Christian ethic" without these beliefs will not work any more than espousing an evolutionary ethic based on Darwinism. What are the alternatives? Obviously, for evolutionists, Christianity is out of the question. This leaves only one option: secular humanism. Although Wilson, Dawkins, and Dennett would have you believe that they can offer a biological basis to ethics, they all end with the humanist's plea to fulfill our potential as autonomous, thinking beings.⁴² The "evolution" in evolutionary ethics seems nothing more than a nod to nature for creating a brain mysteriously capable of moral judgments, and a body predisposed to self-preservation. There really is no basis,

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no set of facts, from which to defend or justify secular humanism, except the assumption that we must look to ourselves, and ourselves alone, for what is right. Ethics lie, not in our biological self of genes, not in our eternal self of a God-given soul, but in our cultural self as a member of the human species.

Although these writers offer only a vague outline of evolutionary ethics, and offer no reasonable support, they are most definite about their intense dislike of Christianity. E.O. Wilson hopes that scientific materialism—a bringing together of humanism and evolution—will replace religion as “the more powerful mythology.”⁴³ His attack is two-fold. First, he wishes to overcome the seemingly invincible idea of a Creator God by using scientific materialism as his siege machine. He is confident that humanistic scientists will come up with more ideas to explain the origin of life or the Universe without God, and eventually will undermine the foundations of a belief in divine creation.⁴⁴ And second, he wishes to explain religion away. If scientific naturalism can “explain traditional religion, its chief competitor, as a wholly material phenomenon,” then theology will not survive as an independent intellectual discipline.⁴⁵

In Dawkins’ opinion, the “God meme” survives because “it provides a superficially plausible answer to deep and troubling questions about existence. It suggests that the injustices of this world may be rectified in the next. The ‘everlasting arms’ hold out a cushion against our own inadequacies which, like a doctor’s placebo, is none the less effective for being imaginary.”⁴⁶ Responding to the success of religion, he says: “Religion is a terrific meme. That’s right. But that doesn’t make it true and I care about what’s true. Smallpox virus is a terrific virus.

It does its job magnificently well. That doesn't mean that it's a good thing. It doesn't mean that I don't want to see it stamped out."⁴⁷ He calls religion a "bore" and God a "naive personification."⁴⁸

Finally, like Wilson, Dennett believes that evolutionists should engineer the extinction of religion as a vital force in society. Darwin's "dangerous" idea (i.e., Dennett's view that evolution has implications for every part of our existence) will create a "toxic" cultural environment for fundamentalist religion.⁴⁹ The only place for religion will be a kind of cultural zoo; churches will become monuments and museums. "Save the Baptists! Yes of course," Dennett says, "but not *by all means*. Not if it means tolerating the deliberate misinforming of children about the natural world.... Misinforming a child is a terrible offense."⁵⁰ His final solution is a promise to undo a child's religious training:

If you insist on teaching your children falsehoods—that the Earth is flat [sic], that "Man" is not a product of evolution by natural selection—then you must expect, at the very least, that those of us who have freedom of speech will feel free to describe your teachings as the spreading of falsehoods, and will attempt to demonstrate this to your children at our earliest opportunity.⁵¹

The agenda, then, is quite clear: there is no proven biological basis for an evolutionary ethic; there is no reasonable connection between Darwinism and culture or values; but anything will do as long as it is couched in the language of science or nature, and as long as it can displace religion in general, and Christianity in particular.

Darwinism As An Application Of Darwinism

Nearly all scientists, whether consciously or not, operate under various assumptions or presuppositions. For instance, they believe that nature is real, i.e., that what they are trying to describe is really “out there,” and not a figment of their imagination. They believe that nature is intelligible, i.e., that humans have enough reasoning powers to make sense of the Universe. And further, they believe that nature is uniform; i.e., that natural processes operate in the same way throughout time and space; that the law of gravity works just as well on the moon of Io as it does on Earth; or that it works today the same as it worked two thousand years ago.

These assumptions form the basis of other guiding principles in science, such as the law of causality, which says that every natural event has a natural cause, or the concept of predictability, which gives us some assurance that once we understand nature, we can invent useful applications, like the combustion engine or immunization. All of these assumptions really fall under one heading: *methodological naturalism*. This is the belief that scientists should be looking for naturalistic answers alone. In other words, there is no appeal to a mysterious life force, or God, or anything beyond nature. Nonbelievers (atheists, skeptics, etc.) may go one step further and affirm *philosophical* or *metaphysical naturalism*, i.e., the belief that nature is all there is—that the total sum of reality includes nothing more than nature.

Evolution, as envisioned by Charles Darwin and his latter-day followers, is an extension or application of pure philosophical naturalism. Darwin made a deliberate choice to remove any divine influence from his theory: explanations for the diversity of life would

be sought in nature, and nature alone. He allowed that God could have set forth the laws by which nature operates. However, those laws had no predetermined goal or purpose set in motion by God at the creation, and they were not under any sort of ongoing, divine supervision.⁵² Darwin had a two-fold objection to any compromise with the God of theism.⁵³ First, if natural selection, as he described it, really could explain the origins of all species, then there was no need for God to “help” the process along. And second, he could not see how God could be responsible for a process, such as natural selection, which necessarily involves pain and suffering.

On the religious side, no one had a clearer appreciation of Darwin’s approach to evolution than Charles Hodge, the nineteenth century Princeton theologian. He posed the question, “What is Darwinism?” and replied, “It is atheism.”⁵⁴ His 1874 book bearing the title of that question cut to the heart of the matter in the following paragraph:

The conclusion of the whole matter is that the denial of design in nature is virtually the denial of God. Mr. Darwin’s theory does deny all design in nature; therefore, his theory is virtually atheistical—his theory, not himself. He believes in a Creator. But when that Creator, millions on millions of years ago, did something—called matter and a living germ into existence—and then abandoned the universe to itself to be controlled by chance and necessity, without any purpose on his part as to the result, or any intervention or guidance, then He is virtually consigned, so far as we are concerned, to nonexistence.⁵⁵

He was careful not to accuse Darwin (who rejected Christianity and preferred the term “agnostic”⁵⁶) of being an atheist. Rather, Hodge’s point was to show that the theory itself, taken to its logical conclusion, rules the theist’s God out of existence.

Lest anyone get defensive over this conclusion, and insist that evolution has no negative implications for the Christian faith, we need only look at how the theory is employed by atheists themselves. For example, in arguing against design, Ernest Nagel wrote:

Darwin showed that one can account for the variety of biological species, as well as for their adaptations to their environments, without invoking a divine creator and acts of special creation.⁵⁷

Theistic Naturalism--NO

Despite Darwin’s objections, and Hodge’s penetrating insight, many theists believe that evolution is compatible with a belief in God. This means more than supposing that God, say, “guides” the process of evolution in some way. Such a theory might be called evolutionary creationism or directed evolution, but God is still involved. The only way to put on the appearance of philosophical naturalism, while saying that God exists, is to take Him out of nature altogether. At this point we have theistic evolution in the strict sense of the term.

Today, Howard J. Van Till ranks as one of the leading proponents of theistic evolution in the evangelical world. He, and several other scientists and theologians, have given their strongest endorsement of naturalism in *Portraits of Creation*. Van Till believes it is possible to say that God created the first matter, and the laws by which that matter would function, as long as we do not have

God directing the formation of the matter itself, or influencing natural laws, whether providentially or miraculously.⁵⁸

John H. Stek—one of Van Till’s co-authors—seems willing to allow miracles, as long as they do not affect historical or empirical science.⁵⁹ I presume, therefore, that the miracle at Cana or Christ’s resurrection are matters of “faith” that lie conveniently beyond the scope of scientific inquiry. Any matters that come under the purview of science, such as whether humans descended from apes, must have completely naturalistic answers because the created realm is complete and operates independently from God.

The problem with theistic evolution is that it tries to merge a creating God with a naturalistic explanation for life. This conflicts with the biblical view that God worked miraculously to create “heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them” (Exodus 20:11). Further, the very idea that God used evolution challenges His divine attributes.

First, theistic evolution proposes that an infinitely intelligent and powerful Being superintended a completely purposeless process. Darwin, drawing fully on philosophical naturalism, attempted to show that nature contains no evidence of design, supposed examples of design are illusory, and gradual accumulation of changes is sufficient to explain new features. Such a Being that purposes without design and guides without direction is not the God of theism.

Second, theistic evolution proposes that God has yet to complete His creation. Indeed, it is impossible for Him to do so; there is no goal toward which the process of evolution is striving; there never will be a time when He can proclaim it “very good.” He is never able to receive worship as an all-powerful, all-good Creator because He

remains forever imperfect. Once again, this is not the God of theism. By its very intention, evolution is a program of philosophical naturalism, and is entirely anathetical to a belief in the God of the Bible.

Theistic Scientists—YES

Yet, when you think about it, the step from methodological naturalism—a tried and true assumption of science—to a compromise such as theistic evolution, is temptingly small. After all, if the endeavor of science has proven so successful in answering scientific questions by seeking natural causes, then why not go the whole way, and simply assume that God is not involved at all? Still, this compromise is not enough for the dyed-in-the-wool philosophical naturalists. It is not enough merely to act as if philosophical naturalism were true, and pray to God. In their view, there is no such thing as someone who believes in God and practices good science at the same time. If someone brings up the name of a great scientist with a strong faith in God, such as Michael Faraday, then the typical response is to say that such a person had to leave their science behind when they went to church on Sunday morning. Most importantly, such a scientist would have to exchange their religion for a lab coat the rest of the week.

There is a perception, in fact, that a committed Christian represents a threat to “good” science. Philosophical naturalists fear that the truth will suffer if someone is willing to conclude that God is the best answer to a particular scientific problem. Nancey Murphey, a professor of Christian philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary, expressed these reservations as follows:

Many Christians are wary of invoking divine action in any way in science, especially in biology,

fearing that science will advance, providing the naturalistic explanations that will make God appear once again to have been an unnecessary hypothesis.⁶⁰

Is this a real danger? Would a believing scientist arbitrarily invoke God whenever he or she could not find an answer? Imagine, for instance, an aircraft engineer who is assigned the task of finding out why it is that the wings of a certain model are showing stress fractures after a given number of hours in the air. He looks at the problem from all directions, carries out all the standard tests, goes home, and then shocks his boss the next day by announcing, "Problem solved, sir. God is doing this." I think we would expect one of two reactions: either "You're fired," or "You've been working too hard; go home and take a rest." However, as far as I can tell, this is not going on among a great majority of theistic scientists today, nor has it been the practice of such scientists over the last 100-to-150 years.

Evidently, theistic scientists have been quite comfortable finding purely natural. They have, for the most part, rejected the idea of *deus ex machina*—god from a machine.⁶¹ So, under what conditions would a theistic scientist decide that God did it? In what circumstances would he or she seek supernatural? In other words, how does a believer practice science? Surely such a person would have to have some way of distinguishing between natural and miraculous events. An obvious approach is to insist that an event not only must be remarkable, but it must have divine purpose and theological context (i.e., that it fits the criteria of a miracle). Surely, a Christian who practices science would have to be convinced that a miracle has occurred before he or she gave up on a naturalistic explanation.

Does this ever happen? Is there ever a time when

a theistic scientist becomes convinced that something in nature simply must be explained by something outside of nature? Of course, the answer to that is “Yes.” I have tried to present one popular response in the first part of this paper, i.e., it is impossible to account for the origin of all species by purely natural processes. One recent book that develops this argument in finer detail is Michael Behe’s *Darwin’s Black Box*.⁶² Following the title motif, the author likens organs such as the eye to a kind of black box, and its components to a series of smaller black boxes. A “black box” is a term drawn from the world of modern machines. It is something very complicated that your average mechanic will not touch. He will unplug it, send it away to the factory for repair, and replace it, but he will never open it up to fix anything inside. Someone could go to an airplane, for example, remove the black boxes, put them together with some fresh aluminum sheets and parts from other planes, and create a whole “new” design. But he will get nowhere without those preexisting, highly complicated black boxes. When special kinds of scientists—people such as biochemists—open up the black boxes of molecular machines, blood coagulation, and the metabolic pathway (to use some of Behe’s examples), they fail to find still smaller black boxes. At some point they run into “irreducible complexity”: a single system which, if any part were removed or crippled, would cease to perform its obvious function. Behe concludes, therefore, that blind, unthinking, natural processes cannot explain the origins of this irreducible complexity. For Behe, it is not just a matter of saying, “Science doesn’t have a better answer right now, but instead of waiting, I’m going to hazard a guess that God is the cause of such living systems.” Rather, Behe is saying that science itself is doing the job of eliminating any purely natural explanation.

Naturalism Only An Assumption

Creationists appeal to a supernatural cause to explain a unique event: the origin of the Universe, the Earth, and all life. For many evolutionists, that explanation is just plain unscientific. The late Judge Overton expressed his agreement by striking down the Arkansas Balanced Treatment Act that required the teaching of both creation and evolution in the State's public schools. In his 38-page decision, Overton dismissed creation theories because they do not conform to what scientists think and do. In part, he concluded that a theory is truly scientific only when it is "guided by natural law."⁶³

Obviously, this decision disappointed creationists, but Overton's definition left some philosophers of science aghast. Chief among them was Larry Laudan: "The victory in the Arkansas case was hollow for it was achieved only at the expense of perpetuating and canonizing a false stereotype of what science is and how it works."⁶⁴

First, as I have mentioned in the preceding section, many scientists get along quite well with a firm belief in God. As Blackmore and Page comment, "In a previous age the essence of science was to discover God's ways of working. Miraculous interventions were perhaps rare, but certainly permissible. They would have found Overton's dismissal of miracles presumptuous."⁶⁵

Second, and most importantly, evolutionists have limited themselves to purely natural causes; creationists have not. Neither choice makes one more or less scientific than the other. The reason is really very simple: no scientific study or experiment can prove that science should operate by the principles of philosophical naturalism. From a scientific point of view, it is an assumption imported from an atheistic world view. Likewise, Christians may import the possibility of supernatural causes into science from their theistic

world view. Which is correct: naturalism or supernaturalism? This is not a question for science to decide. However, science can pose the following question: Is there a given naturalistic theory that can explain all the facts at hand? Scientists should be open to a “No” answer, rather than eliminating certain explanations because they do not fit debatable presuppositions.

Conclusion

Charles Darwin has left a huge legacy for the modern era. He became convinced that nature, and nature alone, could explain the origin of species without recourse to divine creation or any sort of goal or purpose. After seeing the forces of nature in operation on wild populations, and the effects of man’s work on domesticated species, Darwin concluded that a process of natural selection could produce unlimited change. However, examples such as the English peppered moth show that natural selection seems merely to change the proportion of characteristics within a population. Eventually, Darwin came to realize this limitation, but further developments would have to await the arrival of the genetic age. The discovery of mutations suggested a way for new traits to appear in the population, but most of these turned out to be harmful, and natural selection often will work against their preservation.

Darwin also believed that natural selection would work at a very slow rate, and so we would not fully appreciate the changes taking place within wild populations. He proposed, therefore, that we would see the changes preserved as numerous transitional forms within the fossil record. Although evolutionists have proposed many intermediates, problems remain: (1) huge gaps appear where these transitions were supposed to take place; (2) complex, multicellular organisms appear

suddenly; and (3) stability is common.

Despite these problems, many people viewed Darwinian evolution as the only reasonable solution that avoided any appeal to a Creator God. It came at a time when people were looking to shed the constraints of church authority and its influence over education and society. The existing powers had a vested interest in maintaining order and the status quo as a matter of divine economy. There was little room within that power structure for talk of change, either in nature or society. Darwin's theory challenged these conventions by implying that change, not stability, was the natural state of life on Earth. Reformers interpreted this change as progress, specifically, progress toward a freer, stronger, wealthier society. Many of them believed that this could only occur by unconstrained competition, as outlined by Thomas Malthus. From this mixture emerged Herbert W. Spencer's social Darwinism.

Spencer's idea struck a popular nerve by suggesting that social institutions should step aside and allow nature to cull the poor and destitute, thus creating a fitter race of beings. Ironically, Darwin never approved this application of his theory. Eventually, social Darwinism fell out of favor for several reasons: (1) many people did not want, and would not permit, large-scale starvation among the unemployed and working poor; (2) wars and the changing fortunes of America and Britain destroyed the notion of inevitable progress; and (3), contrary to the prejudiced Victorian outlook, scientists came to realize that neither technology nor material wealth were good indicators of a given culture's complexity or survivability.

The latter quarter of the twentieth century has seen a revival of cultural Darwinism, especially in the form of Edward O. Wilson's sociobiology. Ostensibly, this field of study differs from Spencer's view in wanting to *describe*, rather than *prescribe*, human behavior. Some

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of these accounts are proving highly controversial, especially those that attempt to describe adultery, rape, domestic violence, infanticide, and other abhorrent behaviors in terms of evolutionary theory. The usual interpretations include motives of self-preservation and an unstoppable urge to multiply one's genetic wealth at almost any cost. However, these attempts begin to look like Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories* because there is a great lack, if not an outright absence, of solid evidence showing the causative relationship between biology and behavior.

Richard Dawkins has taken a different approach by proposing that human culture evolves apart from biology, but according to Darwinian theory. He has coined the term "meme" to describe units of cultural inheritance, and intends to draw a strong analogy with genes. However, ideas, tunes, and other so-called memes follow neither Darwinian principles of selection nor Mendelian rules of inheritance and transmission.

Despite the promise of merely describing behavior, all such writings give the impression that evolution can and will point toward a system of ethics based on biology. Certainly this is the case with Wilson. He believes that a greater knowledge of genetics will reveal a moral code more suited to our genetic heritage. Apart from the poor prospects of finding such a connection, there seems to be no adequate justification for going from what *is* the case in biology, to what *ought* to be the case in human culture.

Dawkins believes that evolution created a brain capable of making moral judgments, but he stays clear of suggesting an evolutionary ethic as such. If anything, Dawkins sees evolution as a challenge. Humans, he believes, are in a unique position to act against their selfish survival tendencies.

For all their talk of sociobiology and cultural

evolution, both Wilson and Dawkins, and other popular writers such as Daniel C. Dennett, have a typical humanistic agenda in mind. Specifically, values and morals will have a basis in whatever makes human beings human. There is a sense of urgency in their appeals because they wish to bring an end to Christian ethics and any other religiously motivated controls on society.

Yet, as Dennett points out, if God exists and the Bible is His Word, then Christianity is on the firmest ground of all. Not only has God provided principles and rules by which we are to act, but has promised that He will enforce those laws. But Christ's teaching offers more than rewards for faithful obedience and punishment for disobedience. His message was one of purpose, self-discipline, selflessness, concern for one another, and God's love of every individual.

At bottom, the driving force behind evolutionary biology, ethics, and culture is a commitment to philosophical naturalism. This was true for Darwin, it is true for most of biology, and it is true for science in general. Even within the courtrooms of America, science has been defined as an enterprise that seeks natural causes. Some believers, also, have bought into the naturalistic agenda, evolution and all. The result, theistic evolution, consigns God to the role of a distant spectator Who looks on a world with no purpose and no goodness. However, there are reasons to believe that some natural effects demand a nonnatural cause. Just as information and complexity in a man-made object lead us to wonder at its craftsman, so information and complexity within the natural world lead us to wonder at its Craftsman: "He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God" (Heb. 3:3b-4).

Endnotes

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- 2 Darwin, 133.
- 3 Darwin, 386.
- 4 Darwin, 392.
- 5 Richard Milner, **The Encyclopedia of Evolution** (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 413.
- 6 Darwin, 133.
- 7 Darwin, 153.
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- 9 *Discover*, "Moth Mutants," (November 1990), 20.
- 10 L. Harrison Matthews, "Introduction," to **The Origin of Species** by Charles Darwin (London: J.M. Dent, 1971, reprint), xi.
- 11 Darwin, 206.
- 12 Darwin, chap. 9.
- 13 Frederick Gregory, "The Impact of Darwinian Evolution on Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century," in **God & Nature**, ed. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 379.
- 14 Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin* (New York: Warner Books, 1991), 217,294-295. Contrary to modern usage, a "liberal" in the nineteenth century was one who wished more personal freedoms, and less government involvement.
- 15 Desmond and Moore, 394.
- 16 "in my theory there is no absolute tendency to progression, excepting from favourable circumstances," Charles Darwin, Notebook N47, 1838-1839, In Paul H. Barret, and others, eds. **Charles Darwin's Notebooks: 1836-1844** (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).
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Chapter 5

Humanism

Kevin Beard

American culture has undergone much change in the past fifty years. What once was known as a “Christian” nation, now must be considered “anti-Christian” in many regards. At one time the school day began with prayer and Bible reading, but now such action has been branded as unconstitutional, and even dangerous. Crime and violence now fill not only the metropolitan areas, but also smaller towns, and as result, Americans feel more insecure about their personal safety with each year that passes.

The entertainment industry used to produce films that parents, without hesitation, could allow their children to view; but today that industry has evolved into one of the greatest purveyors of filth the world has known. At one time television shows, through fictitious families like the Cleavers and the Nelsons, supported the ideals of loving, nurturing relationships in the home. Today television is one of the home’s greatest enemies through its glamorization and promotion of adultery, homosexuality, violence, and such like.

It used to be that teenage pregnancy was looked upon as a shameful thing; now it is so common that schools are beginning to provide child care for their unwed students. What has caused such change in such a short time? Who or what has wielded such influence over an entire society? Many things have contributed to this

metamorphosis, but one factor stands at the top of the list: humanism.

Humanism Defined

Humanism is:

a doctrine, attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values: especially: a philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capability for self-realization through reason.¹

One prominent humanist wrote:

To define twentieth-century humanism briefly, I would say that it is a philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and advocating the methods of reason, science, and democracy.²

This philosophy looks no further than the natural world for the answers to questions regarding the welfare of mankind. Human reason becomes the final arbiter in discerning truth. Such a view excludes the possibility of any supernatural revelation of truth. According to Storer, humanists are those who:

... in the basic deliberations and action decisions of their lives, have set aside faith in revelation and dogmatic authority (if they ever *had* it), and have settled for human experience and reason as grounds for belief and action, putting human good — the good of self and others, in their life on earth — as ultimate criterion of right and wrong, with due concern for other living creatures.³

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Because of these beliefs, Thompson has said:

Humanism is not **just** a system of thought which places a high importance on humans (mankind). Far more than that, humanism is a very subtle, disarming and sophisticated way of saying ‘atheism’.⁴

One does not have to look too far to find the basic tenets of humanism. *Humanist Manifesto I* and *Humanist Manifesto II* proclaim the fundamental principles of the humanist philosophy. The first of these documents appeared in print in 1933, the second in 1973. These documents make bold claims about the condition of man and religion, and the ability of religion to fill the need man has to realize his greatest worth. This philosophy is not content to share the hearts and affections of mankind with religion; it seeks to depose religion completely. The sixth proposition of *Humanist Manifesto I* states: “We are convinced that the time has passed for theism, deism, modernism, and the several varieties of ‘new thought.’”⁵ *Humanist Manifesto II*, under the heading “Religion,” proclaims:

We appreciate the need to preserve the best ethical teachings in the religious traditions of humankind, many of which we share in common. But we reject those features of traditional religious morality that deny humans a full appreciation of their own potentialities and responsibilities.⁶

In even more hostile tones, Julian Huxley said:

The time is ripe for the dethronement of gods from

their dominant position in our interpretation of destiny, in favor of a naturalistic type of belief system. The supernatural is being swept out of the universe in the flood of new knowledge of what is natural. It will soon be as impossible for an intelligent educated man or woman to believe in a god as it is now to believe that the earth is flat, that flies can be spontaneously generated, that disease is a divine punishment, or that death is always due to witchcraft.⁷

So then with humanism, it is an “all or nothing” proposition. On this point Christians and humanists can agree: Christianity and humanism *cannot* coexist!

The Foundation Of Humanism

Humanism rests on a foundation composed of three interconnected elements: (1) God (whether Jehovah or any god or gods) does not exist; (2) man is the result of purely natural processes (that is, evolution); therefore (3) man is sovereign. Carl F. H. Henry stated:

The controlling tenets of naturalistic ethics are: (1) that nature is the ultimate reality; (2) that man is essentially an animal; (3) that truth and right are intrinsically time-bound and changing.”⁸

This kind of belief undergirds the humanists’ “live life for all it is worth” mentality. Lamont alludes to these three elements, proclaiming that:

. . . Humanism is the viewpoint that men have but one life to lead and should make the most of it in terms of creative work and happiness; that human happiness is its own justification and

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requires no sanction or support from supernatural sources; that in any case the supernatural, usually conceived of in the form of heavenly gods or immortal heavens, does not exist; and that human beings, using their own intelligence and cooperating liberally with one another, can build an enduring citadel of peace and beauty upon this earth.⁹

Simpson has stated clearly the progression of these three fundamental tenets:

Man stands alone in the universe, a unique product of a long, unconscious, impersonal, material process with unique understanding and potentialities. These he owes to no one but himself, and it is to himself that he is responsible. He is not the creature of uncontrollable and undeterminable forces, but is his own master. He can and must decide and manage his own destiny.¹⁰

The first two of these premises cannot be separated. If God does not exist, then there is no other possibility but that man evolved from purely naturalistic means. This foundation stone of the humanist philosophy truly supports the entire weight of the system. Knowing this, the humanists tenaciously advance their belief that there is no God. Under the heading "Religion," *Humanist Manifesto II* shows the self-determining views of this philosophy, using such terms as "We believe. . .," "in our judgment. . .," "We find. . .," to advance their proposition that God does not exist. Their first thesis concludes with these words:

But we can discover no divine purpose or

providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.”¹¹

Humanism poses a great threat to Christianity not only because of its antagonistic positions, but also because of its adversarial nature. Not content with voicing their opinions about God and religion and allowing each the freedom to choose for himself, humanists desire to eradicate belief in God and its consequent religion. They believe such things to be destructive. Consider:

Promises of immortal salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful. They distract humans from present concerns, from self-actualization, and from rectifying social injustices.¹²

In fact, they believe religion to be one of many “obstacles to human progress.”¹³ So, consistent with their desire to bring about “good” for mankind as a race, humanists would love nothing more than to see belief in God and religion become extinct, and to see humanism control the hearts of mankind. To this end, Lamont says, “Without being dogmatic or intolerant about it, I wish to see the philosophy of Humanism steadily increase in influence.”¹⁴

If God does not exist, and man resulted from purely naturalistic causes as the humanists contend, then man must be sovereign; he must be free to choose for himself what is right and wrong. And if man is constantly evolving as they contend, then what is right and wrong must be constantly changing right along with him. These things the humanists firmly believe:

We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is *autonomous*

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and *situational*, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest.¹⁵

As stated by Henry above, humanism contends that “. . . truth and right are intrinsically time-bound and changing.” Thus, humanists recognize no absolute standard of values or ethics. Each action must be judged in its own context and by its own consequences.

When concrete systems of right and wrong are abandoned, man is left to do whatever feels good to him. In all areas of life man can choose for himself what things are right and wrong. Humanists seem to be particularly interested in the area of sexual behavior. For the humanist, achieving one’s full potentiality requires the freedom to indulge in whatever sexual activity he chooses:

In the area of sexuality, we believe that intolerant attitudes, often cultivated by orthodox religions and puritanical cultures, unduly repress sexual conduct. . . . While we do not approve of exploitive, denigrating forms of sexual expression, neither do we wish to prohibit, by law or social sanction, sexual behavior between consenting adults. The many varieties of sexual exploration should not in themselves be considered “evil.”¹⁶

This “I want it my way” mentality extends to other areas of life as well. Proclaiming that man must “experience a full range of civil liberties,” *Humanist Manifesto II* says, “It also includes a recognition of an individual’s right to die with dignity, euthanasia, and the right to suicide.”¹⁷

So humanism rejects God and sets man in God’s place.

Humanism: Not Such A New Idea

Humanists claim that the growing body of knowledge in the world has brought about the philosophy of humanism. They believe that mankind has matured to the point that he no longer needs some supernatural authority. But while the philosophy of humanism as an organized system of belief may have been around for only a short time, the mindset which governs this philosophy has existed for centuries. Whittaker Chambers aptly stated:

Humanism is not new. It is, in fact, man's second oldest faith. Its promise was whispered in the first days of the Creation under the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: "Ye shall be as gods."¹⁸

How interesting it is that Satan first lured man away from God through man's desire to be in control of himself. Compare the serpent's enticement with the proclamations of the humanists. The devil convinced Eve that God was withholding wonderful things from her and Adam by forbidding them to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil:

For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:5).¹⁹

Eve wanted the wisdom that would enable her to "know good and evil;" she wanted to be her own god. God's way was just too restrictive. Humanism says the same thing: ". . . we reject those features of traditional religious morality that deny humans a full appreciation of their own potentialities and responsibilities."²⁰ Satan

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still tells man, "You can be your own God!"

But Satan's promises failed. Instead of receiving wonderful blessing and freedom, Adam and Eve received God's punishment for consuming the forbidden fruit. No longer able to enjoy the wonderful garden, those first human beings were driven from God's presence to endure a life made more difficult by the woes God brought upon them and their descendants. When man rejected God's standard in search of autonomy, terrible consequences resulted. That principle established in the beginning has remained in effect throughout the ages.

In the days of the judges in Israel, men demonstrated a view of life similar to today's humanists.

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Judg. 21:25).

This statement appears at the close of the sad story of the Levite's concubine. Even though Jehovah had given them an extensive system of law at Mount Sinai, the people of Israel chose self-determination. That self-determination led to the brutal molestation of a woman and the near extermination of an entire tribe in Israel.

History shows that when man casts off the restraints of morality imposed by God, good does not result. Henry correctly notes:

The severance of ethics from fixed values and standards, ardently promoted by John Dewey and the naturalists, has brought moral chaos. Theological sanctions discarded, the modern man covets only social, and sometimes only individual, approval of his behavior.²¹ When man seeks only individual approval of his behavior, who or what will stop him from doing anything?

Humanism's Threat To Society

That is precisely the problem facing Christians in America today. Humanists (and those influenced by their philosophy) are running roughshod over the morals held by most Americans since this nation was founded. Their agenda is to change the hearts and minds of people. Their tactics are ruthless. As one writer has termed it, it is a battle for the mind.

This enemy of godliness understands that people do not bend easily, especially when it comes to firmly held convictions. For this reason, they have targeted the education system, so that they might mold impressionable children into a new generation of humanistic thinkers. Dobson states:

Secular humanists, particularly the more radical activists, have a specific objective in mind for the future. They hope to accomplish that goal primarily by isolating children from their parents, . . . It will then be relatively easy to 'reorient' and indoctrinate the next generation of Americans. This strategy explains why their most bitter campaigns are being waged over school curricula and other issues that involve our kids. Children are *the* key to the future.²²

In the battle for the mind, the school rooms have become the main theater of operations for the humanists. One writer stated it this way:

When the Christian mother leads her 6-year-old to the first grade room or her 5-year-old to kindergarten, she leads him from the sheltered environment of the home into the cold, pagan environment of secular humanism. From that day on, the child will be taught two contradictory religions.²³

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Lest one think such a statement as this was made by one who is overreacting or paranoid, consider the words of humanistic educator Chester Pierce:

Every child in America entering school at the age of five is mentally ill, because he comes to schools with certain allegiances toward our founding fathers, toward our elected officials, toward his parents, toward a belief in a supernatural Being, toward the sovereignty of this nation as a separate entity. It's up to you teachers to make all of these sick children well by creating the international children of the future.²⁴

Yes, the humanists believe the schools to be their own indoctrination facilities, and they intend to continue in their treachery.

One weapon in the humanists' arsenal is sex education. Schools across the country are implementing liberal sex education courses into their curricula. They have tried to justify this by arguing that such courses will help reduce the dangers of teen pregnancy and AIDS. But these reasons only mask their true agenda. By opening the classrooms to frank discussions about sexuality, humanistic educators know they can subvert the values systems parents have tried to impress upon their children. Dobson lists three reasons that humanists have chosen child and adolescent sexuality as a battleground: (1) By teaching a different sexual ethic, they can drive a wedge between parents and children; (2) By undermining sexual fidelity on which marriage is based, the family can be destroyed; (3) By destroying religious values concerning sex, they can destroy children's faith.²⁵ They do not wish to decrease the dangers of teen pregnancy and AIDS, they want to increase the number of humanistic people in the world.

A look at some of the things promoted in these sex education courses should clarify the point. James Dobson summarized the concepts commonly taught in public schools' sex education courses. Some of the things he listed include: promotion of premarital sex with efforts made to reduce the guilt associated with it; homosexuality is held up as a valid life-styles; often they included emphasis on such practices as bestiality, homosexuality, sex with excrement, etc.; distribution of and instruction on how to use contraceptives.²⁶ When teenagers are bombarded with this kind of information, is it any wonder that their sexual activity increases, especially when the courses teach that no activity is wrong?

If these educators (or should we say "propagandists") were truly interested in preventing teen pregnancy and AIDS, would it not stand to reason that they would support any program that proved to be successful? There is one program which is successful in preventing teen pregnancy and AIDS every time it is used: abstinence. If teens do not have sex they will not get pregnant or contract AIDS. Yet the humanistic forces controlling many American school systems refuse to allow sex education courses based on abstinence to be utilized. One school system in the state of Washington attempted to implement such a program, but:

... the State Superintendent's office ruled that the district violated state regulations because their material acknowledged only the traditional family, gave limited information on contraception, was written from the pro-life perspective, and was presented strictly within the context of marriage.²⁷

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Obviously there is more at work than helping children stay “safe.”

One of the important cogs in the sex education machine is homosexuality. It is discussed, promoted, even glamorized. Homosexuals are invited to class to discuss their “life-style.” One curriculum sought to brainwash children with books such as *Heather Has Two Mommies*, *How Would You Feel if Your Dad Was Gay?*, and *Gloria Goes to Gay Pride*. One such book, *Daddy’s Roommate*, intended for children aged three to eight has this message:

My Mommy and Daddy got a divorce last year.
Now there’s somebody new at Daddy’s house.
Daddy and his roommate Frank live together,
Work together,
Eat together,
Sleep together,
Shave together,
And sometimes even fight together.
But they always make up....
Mother says Daddy and Frank are gay.
At first I didn’t know what that meant.
So she explained it.
Being gay is just one more kind of love.
And love is the best kind of happiness.
Daddy and his roommate are very happy together,
And I’m happy too!²⁸

The push to legitimate homosexuality has not been limited to the classroom. Virtually every area of society today has some push to normalize this perversion. F. LaGard Smith pointed out, “Somebody, or a group of somebodies, is zealously pursuing a course of action

aimed at the homosexualization of America.”²⁹ Television sitcoms, movies, entertainment awards shows, magazines, newspapers, television news reports, parades, amusement parks, courts and countless other outlets and events have been used to plead for Americans to accept the “loving” relationships of these people, oppressed for so long by the narrow-mindedness of religious bigotry.

These kinds of examples could be listed seemingly with no end. What about abortion, euthanasia, the destruction of the family, the all out war waged against public displays of religion, and all the other drives being carried out in this nation today? Satan is hard at work here using a vile weapon known as “humanism.”

Humanism Defeated

To show humanism to be a false philosophy, one need only destroy the cornerstone of its foundation. That cornerstone is the belief that God does not exist. If God (that is the God of the Bible) does exist, then the entirety of humanism is false. Humanism can also be shown to be false through showing the self-contradictory nature of its own claims.

God Does Exist

(Thomas Warren performed a great service to Christianity, even to the world, through his debates with atheistic humanists Antony Flew, Wallace Matson, and Joe Barnhart. The following discussion of God’s existence is taken from the arguments given in the *Warren-Flew Debate*.³⁰ The reader is encouraged to read this work as well as the other two for a fuller, and certainly more scholarly discussion of these truths.)

“The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God” (Psm. 14:1). Atheists show themselves to be fools because

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they propose to prove something that cannot be proved. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork” (Psm. 19:1). Nature cries out that God is. The existence of this world, and the existence of man in particular, are evidence of God’s existence.

Man exists. Therefore, there must be a cause for man’s existence. Either man is the result of creation, or he is the result of evolution. One of these must be true. If man is the result of creation, then God must exist. If man is the result of evolution, then at some time, the first human was born of something nonhuman, or something nonhumans was transformed into the first human. But neither of these things has ever happened. No human being ever was born to a nonhuman creature, nor has any nonhuman creature ever been transformed into a human being. Therefore evolution must be false. Since evolution is false, creation must be true. And since creation is true, God exists.

“I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well” (Psm. 139:14). The complexities of the human body imply that an all-powerful Being designed them. A designer is clearly implied by the design seen in such things as buildings, automobiles, watches, and so forth.

Yet the human body’s design is far more intricate than that of any production of man. The respiratory system of man is designed in such a way that oxygen passes from the lungs, through the capillary walls, into the blood, to be distributed throughout the body. In the same way, carbon dioxide passes from the blood, through the capillary walls, into the lungs to be exhaled. Oxygen (and thus this process of respiration) is so important to the body, that man cannot survive longer than five minutes

without it. Yet evolution claims that the process by which human beings were produced occurred not over a period of minutes, but over a period of years, millions of years! Again the theory of evolution must be seen to be false. If evolution is false, then creation must be true. And if creation is true, God exists.

Humanism: A Self-Contradictory Philosophy

Humanism presents inconsistencies in at least two major areas. From these self-contradictions, it can be seen that the system is false. These contradictions involve the humanists' self proclaimed goal of achieving good for the whole race of mankind, and their definition of ethics as being autonomous and situational.

First, consider the main goal of humanists as presented in *Humanist Manifesto II*. That document was produced to publicize the humanists' beliefs concerning mankind and place in the world. In it they deny the existence of any value system which transcends mankind. Belief in supernatural, authoritative moral codes is destructive, inhibitory, and dehumanizing, they say.

Yet their entire manifesto pleads for something better than what now exists. By whose definition or determination is what they propose to be considered better than what now exists? Are they not appealing to a higher moral code that transcends the individual, or societal, or national values? Yet they say that “. . . moral values derive their source from human experience.”³¹ Does all human experience agree that the moral code to which they appeal truly is better than what now exists? Certainly it does not.

By their definition, ethics is autonomous and situational; thus, interpreted strictly, every human being has the right to determine his own ethic based upon the unique situations of his life. However, they call upon the

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entirety of the human race to adopt their ethic because they consider it to be conducive to achieving the “good life.” Within the seventeen theses of the second manifesto, the humanists use the word “must” eighteen times, and they use the word “should” twenty-three times. These words connote responsibility, duty, obligation. Forty-one times they place the moral obligation of accomplishing their goals upon individuals, societies, and nations. But the important question is, “**Why** should or must we do all of these things?” What moral imperative is there behind all of this? Consider one illustration. The humanists proclaim, “We deplore racial, religious, ethnic, or class antagonisms.”³²

Why? Suppose two ethnic groups exist: group A and group B. And suppose the consensus of thought in group A is that group B is an ethnic group to be despised, rejected, and suppressed. Suppose that group B collectively believes the same thing about group A. Here are two ethnic groups determining for themselves what their own values are. Yet the humanists come along to make themselves arbiters of what is right and wrong against the wishes of an entire ethnic group. They do exactly what they say should be rejected in religion. Of course antagonism based solely on race, ethnicity, class, religion, and such like is deplorable. But what makes this antagonism wrong? It violates a higher standard: one that transcends human beliefs and customs. That standard originates not with man, but with God.

Second, consider the fact that humanism implies falsehood. If ethics is situational and autonomous, then two groups could form opposing views on a single issue and both be right. Consider the example of the Nazi war crimes. The Nazis tortured and slaughtered six million Jews. According to the laws of Germany, they did nothing wrong; torturing and slaughtering six million Jews, for

them, was the right thing to do. However, the rest of the world believed the torture and slaughter of six million Jews to be wrong. According to *Humanist Manifesto II* both are right. Consider it in other words. Is the torture and slaughter of six million Jews morally right or morally wrong? The answer to the question, using humanist doctrine, is “yes” and “no.” A single act then becomes both right and wrong. But how can a single act be considered both right and wrong. It must be one or the other. Thankfully the rest of the world did not believe what the humanists believe because the Nazis were tried for their crimes, sentenced, and executed for having violated a law which transcends the laws of any nation. That law originates with God.

Conclusion

The way of humanism is the way of fools, for “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psm. 14:1). Whenever man seeks to establish for himself a way that is right for him without God he is bound to fail. Man does not possess the potential to determine his own way. Jeremiah proclaimed, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). And whenever man concocts some system of belief or some philosophy to govern his life, those attempts are merely childish jabbering in the eyes of God. He said through Isaiah:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither
are your ways my ways saith the Lord. For as
the heavens are higher than the earth, so are
my ways higher than your ways, and my
thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

And for anyone to put his life on the line with a

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man made philosophy like humanism is to bring about his own destruction. The Lord said, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (1 Cor. 1:19). True wisdom and true knowledge come from God. Solomon said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7); and "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9:10).

Humanism denies God and makes a god out of man. Its teachings are vile and destructive, yet they are gaining influence in more and more areas of life every day. Christians must awake to the danger that humanism poses and be prepared with God's Word and unswerving faith and devotion to stand against this fiery dart of the wicked one.

Endnotes

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Chapter 6

Pluralism

Barry Grider

It is a great joy and privilege to be a part of this 1997 Power Lectureship series. Much appreciation is extended to the outstanding Southaven eldership and a most capable lectureship director, B.J. Clarke. Truly, a study of the multitude of dangerous “isms” affecting the church and our world is of utmost importance.

Pluralism is a situation or understanding which embraces a diversity of contrasting cultures, values, ideas, religions, or other major elements seen as independently valid. It is the opposite of monism which is the doctrine that only one ultimate principle or being exists. Consider first the idea of pluralism philosophically. Among those considered to be great pluralistic philosophers were Empedocles and Anaxagorus. Their work primarily was to find common ground between the Eleatic school which proposed one whole unit as changeless and the Heraclitian thinkers who postulated that all things were in ceaseless change.

Empedocles proposed:

Four basic elements, namely, earth, air, fire, and water, each of them imperishable, homogenous, unchangeable, without any beginning, yet each divisible into smaller segments capable of change and movement. Although each object is

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subject to change, none contains within itself the cause of its motion; the cause is that external principle referred to by Empedocles as love and hate. Love and hate are **powers**, not mere feelings, functions, or relations.¹ (emphasis-BG)

Anaxagoras believed:

in a universe made up of innumerable elements and assumed that every object in nature contains the elements and merely differs from other objects in form, color, and taste.²

Democritus, considered to be among the most eminent Pluralists, maintained that “nothing comes into being nor perishes in any absolute sense.”³

While the above mentioned philosophers may be considered being very scientific, the Bible student can see clearly that one who espouses love and hate as powers in and of themselves and who rejects any form of absolutism would also deny the existence of one God who rules with absolutes. Thus, if there is rejection of an absolute God, there is a rejection of absolute truth. John Dewey, the father of modern education stated:

Man’s search for absolutes might better have been directed toward an amelioration of the human state, and that instead of looking for one, all inclusive purpose, it would be wiser to recognize that there are many, many purposes in life- one, so to speak, for every time, place, and set of conditions. It is in this sense that pragmatism may be said to be pluralistic.⁴

One important reason that pluralism may be readily embraced is because, like Dewey, there is a rejection of absolute truth. Generally, people are

subjective in their thinking. What may be true to me, may not be true to you. For example, consider the following statement:

Men accept or reject philosophies, when according to their needs and their temperaments, not according to objective truth, they do not ask, is this logical? - they ask, what will the actual practice of this philosophy mean for our lives and our interests? Arguments for and against may serve to illuminate, but they never prove.⁵

Thus a variety of opinions, ideals, and understandings should be considered until the equation is properly satisfied. All of which are valid and maybe right (if of course you can determine right).

Despite men's search for answers based upon "their needs and their temperaments, and not according to objective truth," this does not mean his solutions are correct or that no absolute standard exists. In this particular lesson we shall consider pluralism from a religious vantage point.

God-One Or Many

Obviously, the pluralists would reject the idea of one all encompassing, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and absolute ruler of the universe. Since the universe is made up of so many ever changing products you cannot limit its beginning to one solitary creator. Yet, the Bible clearly teaches there is one God who created all things (Psa. 148:5).

Down through the annals of time, those who live in darkness have sought gods devised of their own imagination. Pagan nations look at the awesome power of running water and create a god. After learning to appreciate the warmth of fire, there likely would follow

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a god to the fire. When the heathen would look into the sky and see the sun, moon, and stars, they would then devise gods to the universe. The ancient Greeks and Romans were noted for their multiplicity of gods (Diana, goddess of love; Mars, god of war, e.g.). Remember Paul's words to the throng gathered in Athens:

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us: For in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, for we are also His offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device (Acts 17:22-29).

In recent years the Islamic world has thrust upon us the concept of their god named "Allah" who rules from heaven and is very fierce and militant, which is seen from the lives of this religion's followers.

Whether it be monotheism or polytheism,

pluralistic thinkers would have us believe that each can exist and be a valid form of belief. Yet, the Bible clearly teaches one God:

Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:
And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all
thine heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy
might (Deut. 6:4,5).

While the Bible student understands that three distinct personalities make up the divine Godhead, the Godhead is one nature. When God made man he declared:

Let us make man in our image after our likeness:
and let them have dominion over the fish of the
sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the
cattle, and over all the earth, and upon every
creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So
God created man in his own image, in the image
of God created he him; male and female created
he them (Gen. 1:26,27).

Notice, the unity of purpose of the divine Godhead which created all things. Quite the contrary, the Pluralists who subscribe to evolutionary thought, later detailed by Dewey and Charles Darwin (see *Origin of Species*), describe a universe not created with a single thought behind it, but rather a plurality, each independent of the other, a composition of multiple units to fill up the great void.

A Savior - One Or Many

The need for a Savior is pressed into the heart of man because of his sin. Yet, to whom or what to look for his salvation, man has once more tried to solve such a

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problem on his own. By the abuse of his own body or his meditating in a Bhuddist trance he tries to find relief. Pluralistic thinkers would envision that whatever may relieve the mind of men and give him peace would be valid and worthwhile.

Something is far different about the nature of the God of heaven. Man did not go searching for Him, but rather He sought man. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). The Bible does not offer a multiplicity of Saviors such as Bhudda, Mohammed, etc., but rather one Savior, namely Jesus Christ:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me (John 14:6).

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Tim. 2:5,6).

This Savior, Jesus Christ, was also present for the creation of all things:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:1-3).

Man may search for a plurality of ways to reach heaven, still only one way exists.

Truth - One Or Many

Jesus said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Truth in and of itself is very narrow. As a child it did not make any difference how much I argued with my teacher over an incorrect answer, it was wrong based upon what was truth. While it may seem beneficial or encouraging to a student’s psyche for him to believe that two plus two equals five, it is still wrong. This acceptance of any belief or ideal as truth links subjectivism with pluralism, the idea that each thought should be considered on the basis of its own merit and developed in the light of ever changing circumstances. However, Jesus again taught that truth is very narrow:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matt. 7:13-14).

Jesus Himself is the embodiment of truth (John 14:6) and we are sanctified through the Word of truth (John 17:17). Truth is not that which is made up of the materials that form this universe, but rather that which is revealed from God:

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw Him: and I will raise Him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me (John 6:44,45).

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For one to do the Father's will he must obey God. An individual must obey God specifically to please Him. Therefore, to say various religious groups all have some good in them and thereby form a legitimate purpose for being is a form of religious pluralism and is rejected by the Bible. Such statements as "We are all trying to go to heaven just through different avenues," or "one church is good as another" are statements that in a real sense reflect this philosophy. However, Jesus taught, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matt. 15:13).

Purpose In Life - One Or Many

The question of "why man exists" has plagued man for centuries. Is there an ultimate principle by which we are to live and is there an ultimate purpose? The pluralist knows that whatever man chooses to do is his ultimate purpose, but that there are many purposes. For one individual, his purpose may be making much money and for another, it may be receiving a scholarly education. However, the wise man Solomon sought for various purposes in life and was found wanting:

And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it? I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under

the heaven all the days of their life. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: I gathered me also silver and gold and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun (Eccl. 1:17 - 2:11).

Solomon at the conclusion of the book of Ecclesiastes stated man's purpose, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13). Those who are constantly seeking various ways to give their life meaning, have missed out on the ultimate principle which is to serve God. Once this life is over they will gravely regret their seeking after the things of this world, rather than seeking after God (Mark 8:36).

Conclusion

The study of pluralism, though varied in meaning and scope, is rejected by the Bible. There is one God, one Saviour, one ultimate body of Truth, and one purpose in life. While we disagree in part with monism (not to be confused with monotheism), we know one ultimate being and purpose exists. For example, while there is one God, this being is composed of three distinct personalities (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). A triune God does not, however, reject their one nature. Likewise, a rejection of pluralism does not mean that other religious groups do not have the freedom to exist and practice their philosophy. However, they are still false. While it is good to be open minded in our reasoning and attitudes, let us never forget to be narrow minded, for this is the path to heaven. (Matt. 7:13, 14).

Endnotes

1 William S. Sahakian and Mabel Lewis Sahakian, **Ideas of the Great Philosophers** (New York, Barnes and Noble Inc., 1966), p 123.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Frederick C. Neff, **Philosophy and American Education** (New York, The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1966), p.71.

5 Will Durant, **The Story of Philosophy** (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1961), p 385.

Chapter 7

Pragmatism

Mike Hixson

In Genesis chapters 1 and 2, one is introduced to the handiwork of God. The inspired Record indicates that when God surveyed all that He had created, “it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). God placed the man whom He had created in his own image and likeness in a utopian environment, the garden of Eden. Moses writes concerning this place of paradise:

And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates (Gen. 2:8-14).

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God recognized that the man He had formed from the dust of the ground was without a suitable helper or companion. Thus, He decreed, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18). The inspired Record describes how God provided a suitable companion for the man:

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man (Gen. 2:21-22).

Adam responded to God’s beautiful creation in these words:

This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Gen. 2:23-24).

It was in beautiful Eden that the first couple was blessed to live and enjoy the bounty of God’s creation. The one prohibition God set before them reads as follows:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:16-17).

In Genesis chapter 3, the Bible indicates that a

figure emerged in the garden armed with deadly deception and intent on destroying the first couple's relationship with the Almighty. The Scriptures state:

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat (Gen. 3:1-6).

It was at this juncture in human history that sin made its inception into the world. In verse 15, Moses indicates that God interposed on behalf of fallen mankind and set forth the promised seed, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." This statement heralds the unfolding of God's great and grand scheme of redemption to save men and women through His beloved Son, Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 1:3-7; 1 Pet. 1:18-21).

The point to press from this limited historical analysis of man's fall is that since that fateful day in the garden, Satan has relentlessly pursued the crown of God's

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creation. The apostle Peter said with regard to man's age-old nemesis, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Make no mistake about it, Satan seeks to deceive, destroy, and damn members of the human family through his endless assaults.

The nefarious work of Satan has been felt in every sector of society and by every generation of people, from Adam and Eve onward. Now, if one is going to overcome the subtle advances of the devil, he must not be ignorant of his devices (cf. 2 Cor. 2:11). And one of the most effective devices employed by Satan to dupe members of the human family is false philosophies and doctrines. During His earthly ministry, Jesus said:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (Matt. 7:15-20).

And it was Paul who set forth this solemn admonition, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8). The term "spoil" in this passage means "booty, spoil,...to carry off booty:...to carry off as a captive (and slave),...to lead away from the truth and subject to one's sway."¹ The saints in Colossae had been liberated or

“delivered...from the power of darkness, and...translated into the kingdom” (Col. 1:13). And Paul is warning them against allowing anyone to spoil, rob, or plunder their faith in Christ.

Definition And Origin Of Pragmatism

It is with these foundational thoughts in mind, that attention is now directed to the assigned topic, “Pragmatism.” The philosophy of pragmatism owes its origin to three men: Charles Sanders Pierce, William James, and John Dewey. Pierce, who lived from 1839-1914, introduced the name “pragmatism,” and emphasized the concept that a statement was true or false depending on its results:

Put roughly, Pierce’s pragmatism is a rule of procedure for promoting linguistic and conceptual clarity - successful communication - when men are faced with intellectual problems. Because the emphasis is upon method, Pierce often remarked that pragmatism is not a philosophy, a metaphysic, or a theory of truth; it is not a solution or answer to anything but a technique to help us find solutions to problems of a philosophical or scientific nature.²

While Charles Pierce’s pragmatism took a scientific approach, William James took a moralistic approach to pragmatism:

In Pragmatism James made his moral conception of philosophy unmistakably evident in saying that ‘the whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants in our life, if this world-formula or that world

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formula be the true one.’ The phrase ‘what definite difference . . . at definite instants in our life’ is by and large James’ way of critically judging the meaning and truth of ideas. For James, meaning and truth are included in a more fundamental category of value; to determine the meaning or truth of ideas one must evaluate their ‘practical consequences,’ ‘usefulness,’ ‘workability.’ In several famous pronouncements, James spoke of truth as what is good or expedient in our beliefs. In a phrase that permanently shocked some of his readers, James described the meaning and truth of ideas as their ‘cash value.’³

James philosophical approach to pragmatism could be summed up in two words, “What works?”

Scriptural Examples Of Pragmatism

The philosophical concept that if it works for you it is “right” goes all the way back to Cain and Abel. These two individuals, the children of Adam and Eve, brought an offering to God on one occasion. The inspired Record reads:

And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect (Gen. 4:3-5).

The case could be made that the sacrifices of Cain and Abel took the same amount of labor, care, and cultivation to produce. In terms of dollars and cents, the two sacrifices could have been of equal value. The

difference in the two sacrifices is reflected in the fact that Abel's was offered "by faith" (Heb. 11:4), and Cain's was not. And it was Paul who said, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). The only conclusion to draw from this account is that God had specifically indicated the kind or type of sacrifice to be offered. Thus, Abel honored what God said and his brother did not. However, if you are going to take a pragmatic approach to sacrifice, what works is all that matters, whether it be the fruit of the ground or an animal sacrifice. It boils down to what is right for the individual.

A second example that might be cited is Nadab and Abihu. These two men presumptuously took it upon themselves to offer "strange fire," which God had not commanded. What was the penalty for such practical thinking? Moses provides this commentary, "And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD" (Lev. 10:2).

A third example that is worthy of consideration has to do with a man by the name of Uzzah. Note the details of the ill-fated actions of Uzzah as recorded in the Scriptures:

Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims. And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab

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which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God (2 Sam. 6:1-7).

While a number of things could be said about this incident, one will suffice. And it has to do with those who were transporting the ark. Moses had specifically written:

At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister unto him, and to bless in his name, unto this day (Deut. 10:8).

Who was to have been transporting the ark? The Levites. David certainly got the message, for he provides this commentary on Uzzah's death and the transportation of the ark, "Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever (1 Chron. 15:2). What was the penalty for Uzzah's seemingly good intentions and practical thinking? Death!

Contemporary Examples Of Pragmatism

As the human family nears the end of the another millennium, the call that is ringing from many sectors is "political correctness," which equates to **tolerance**. F. LaGard Smith is right in his analysis of the politically correct movement. He states:

“Political Correctness” is nothing more than a benign catchphrase for “the liberal agenda.” In other words, you and I have to tow the line on issues like abortion, gayrights, and radical feminism, or else be reported to the sensitivity police for being intolerant....

Enter, then, the matter of religious tolerance. Should we not also be tolerant of all religious faiths? If the campus generation has been convinced that “political correctness” demands tolerance of such illegitimate interests as abortion, gay rights, and radical feminism, “political correctness” could, and should, demand religious tolerance.

But here it’s important to remember what is meant by “tolerance” in a relativist society. It doesn’t mean what it used to mean: permitting each person the right to believe (or disbelieve) according to his own conscience. That would be a respect far too noble for a secular society bent on the eradication of religious faith. In sharp contrast, today’s ‘tolerance’ means having to accept all values, truths, and beliefs (no matter how spiritually or morally bankrupt) as equally valid.

In such a “politically correct” climate, then, who would dare challenge religions which do not honor Jesus Christ? Or speak out against abortion and homosexuality? Or question whether someone’s faith in Christ is complete without baptism? Or even mildly suggest that God may have called men and women to different role responsibilities in the church and

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in the home? These challenges are simply no longer acceptable. Besides being intolerant, they are anti-intellectual, unsophisticated, and altogether unAmerican.⁴

This “new wave” of tolerance being heralded in America is reigning in the realm of morality. What works? That is the key. If abortion fits your need and circumstance in life and works for you, then it is the “right” thing to do. If practicing the “alternative life-style,” scripturally known as homosexuality, works for you, then it is the “right” thing to do. If euthanasia works for you, then it is the “right” thing to do. After all, “what works” is the governing principle.

The Threat Of Pragmatism In The Church

Has pragmatism made inroads in the church of Christ? Unfortunately, the answer to this question would be a resounding YES! As a matter of fact, this “practical” approach is being tested in many congregations across the United States. Many congregations have shelved Biblical authority for the sheer sake of numbers and acceptability by contemporary society. The question is no longer, what does the Bible say about a matter. Rather, the question that is often generated is, “what works?” What will it take to get people in the door. What will it take to recapture the interest of young people, especially the Baby-boomers and Baby-busters?

In an attempt to provide communities “user-friendly” congregations, many churches of Christ across America have literally sold out the truth of God for a carnival atmosphere catered to the whims and likes of worldly minded people. For instance, people are no longer touched by a simple declaration from the Word of God. After all,

people today are too sophisticated and intellectually enlightened to sit and listen to a sermon underscoring God's will for them. Thus, what will work is a dramatic presentation to stimulate and motivate people to love God and His Son. This is what is going to bring the masses of people into the Lord's church, the pragmatist says.

Or what about the need to connect with today's woman. If they are not allowed to take a more expanded role in worship services, they will leave the church. And if the church is going to connect with the "unchurched," surely this is going to mandate giving women a more expanded role in worship. After all, if it gets them interested in serving the Lord, what's wrong with that? If it works, what's the problem, the pragmatist asks?

The pragmatist might evaluate declining figures in worship services and decide the church needs to make some adjustments in the realm of music. What could possibly be wrong with employing a chorus or soloist to enhance and enliven the worship services? Certainly this will appeal to the aesthetic senses and bring the people in from the community. Or what about "clapping" during the song service? Surely this will appeal to the young people. If it works, what's the problem, the pragmatist asks?

In the realm of the Lord's Supper, what would be really spiritual and turn the community on to the church would be to meet on Thursday night, dim the lights, and partake of the "feast Divine." Who could possibly find fault with wanting to commemorate the death of Christ? After all, if it is bringing the people in and prompting them to think about the death of Christ, who could fault that, the pragmatist asks?

Once congregations begin bending doctrinally, then don't be surprised to see them drift morally. If a "new hermeneutic" is needed to understand doctrinal matters,

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then who's to say one is not needed to determine moral values? How is the homosexual, pro-abortionist, social drinker, or gaming community going to be reached for Christ without finding some kind of flaw in the current hermeneutical process? Certainly the end result would justify the means employed, the pragmatist would exclaim. No doubt, even if it means changing the current hermeneutical process!

A Biblical Treatment Of Pragmatism

The criterion for what is right and wrong doctrinally and morally is not the practical philosophical approach, "what works?" Rather the criterion has always been and will always be the truth as revealed in the inspired Word of God. Under the old covenant, the Word of God directed the people in their relationship with Almighty God. The Decalogue set forth laws that were both vertical and horizontal in nature. These laws were intended to govern the actions of ancient Israel. The Psalmist underscored the beauty of the law in these words:

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward (Psa. 19:7-11).

And it was in Psalm 119:105, that the Psalmist exclaimed, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light

unto my path.”

With regard to the law as revealed in the Old Testament, God strictly prohibited His people from tampering with it. In Deuteronomy 4:2, Moses said:

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

And in Prov. 30:6, the Bible reads, “Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.”

When Christ died on the cross, He validated His last will and testament, and sealed it with His Divine blood. The death of Christ on Calvary’s cross terminated the old law, for Paul said, “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (Col. 2:14). Thus, all people are now amenable to the law of Christ. The Bible indicates that Christ has all authority. In Matt, 28:18, Jesus declared, “ All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” Members of the human family must hear Him (Matt. 17:5), and honor His Divine will as recorded in the New Testament.

It was Paul who said, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17). To do something “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” simply means to do it by His authority. Thus, in matters of religion, all people must appeal to the authority of the Scriptures, regardless of the subject. Mankind has no right to define the parameters of how he will worship and serve God. Nor does God give the human family the liberty and latitude to approach matters of religion from the pragmatic standpoint of “what works”? Dave Miller writes:

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Perhaps no other doctrine is emphasized so frequently as the principle of authority. The Scriptures make clear that from the beginning of human history, God has required people to structure their behavior based upon God's will. We humans have no right to formulate our own ideas concerning religious truth.⁵

The problem that plagues the religious world in general is a failure to respect the authority of Christ. And unfortunately, the problem among many brethren in churches of Christ is a failure to appeal to the authority of Christ. Whenever people cast aside the authority of Christ, there is no shoreline. Moreover, when the criterion in religion is the pragmatic approach, any number of innovations foreign to New Testament Scripture will surface.

For example, where is the authority for dramatic presentations in corporate worship? Will drama draw large numbers of people to the worship assembly. Sure, the world loves and craves entertainment. But are numbers the gauge by which one determines if a thing is pleasing to God? Absolutely not. God has never been impressed by numbers (cf. 1 Pet. 3:20; Matt. 7:13-14). The truth of the matter is that “it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). Preaching was a part of the first century worship assembly (Acts 20:7). And the apostle Paul indicated centuries ago God's method for dispensing the gospel of Christ:

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season;

reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Dave Miller is right on target in his assessment of those pushing for drama in worship today. He writes:

The Bible everywhere represents God communicating His word through preachers - not actors. God wants His word presented very simply through oral proclamation without the distractions and inventions of man (I Cor. 2:1-5). Those pushing for drama in the worship are essentially declaring to God that His way of communicating His will is inadequate, defective, and culturally obsolete. The ultimate effect of this alteration will be a devaluing of preaching. The crucial role of preaching will inevitably be undermined and the impact that God intended for preaching to have upon the church will be hampered.⁶

In matters relating to the worship and service of Almighty God, people would do well to return to the Scriptures and ask, What does the Word of God say about the matter? Peter issued a statement in the Scriptures that bears emphasizing:

If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the

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ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (1 Pet. 4:11).

The time has come to call people back to a “thus saith the Lord approach” in the realm of worship and service to God. And it is worth underscoring the timeless words of Paul in his letter to the church at Corinth. He said, “that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6). Paul is here emphasizing the fact that whatever is done in religion must have a stamp of approval on it that comes from the written Word of God. Dramatic skits and presentations, choirs, solos, special singing groups, handclapping, the observation of religious holidays in worship (Christmas and Easter), etc., are not found in the Word of God. These things may appeal to the aesthetic senses of members of the human family, and their employment in the worship assemblies may result in large numbers of people frequenting services, but there is absolutely no authority for them in the Scriptures. To utilize these practices in worship is to go “beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6).

To those who might be tempted to flirt with and implement the pragmatic philosophy in the realm of religion should give careful consideration to the words of the apostle John in his second Epistle:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son (2 John. 9).

In short, those who fail to abide in the doctrine of Jesus Christ place themselves on the perilous spiritual

grounds of apostasy and stand in jeopardy of losing their eternal soul in a devil's hell unless they repent.

May God's people stand firm and steadfast, resisting the temptation to exchange Scriptural authority for the pragmatic philosophy of "What works?" May God's people ever remember the words of Paul in his closing address to the elders of the Ephesian church:

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

Endnotes

1 Joseph Henry Thayer. **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p.594.

2 Paul Edwards, Editor-in-chief. **Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, vol. 5&6, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1972), p.432.

3 Paul Edwards, Editor-in-chief. **Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, vol. 5&6, p.433.

4 F. LaGard Smith. **The Cultural Church**, (Nashville: 20th Century Christian, 1992), pp.78-79.

5 Dave Miller. **Piloting the Strait**, (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996), p.462.

6 Dave Miller. **Piloting the Strait**, p.243.

Chapter 8

Judaism

Jim Laws

A good beginning point in studying any religious view is to remember a point about stereotypes. This is especially true when it comes to a study of Judaism; considering both what it is and what it teaches. This is something that members of the Lord's church are familiar with as the faithful Christian often finds himself in the position of defining Biblically what New Testament Christianity¹ truly is as well as distinguishing it essentially from modern day denominational churches. Discussions of this nature are common with others who are not familiar with the work of returning to God's way of doing things; i.e. the restoration plea.

For instance, when the Jew today thinks of Christianity he more often than not thinks of Catholicism. We are quick to insist and rightly so, that we are not Catholic or Protestant. We simply want to follow the teachings found for us in the New Testament and be Christians. The same lesson is needed when it comes to our thinking about modern day Judaism. More often than not, when thinking of Judaism today certain mistaken stereotypes come to mind for some; "God's chosen people," or those people who are trying to live by the old law, the law of Moses or even questions pertaining to the Jews and Jesus. The answer to questions such as, "What do Jews believe regarding the messiah" depends upon who you ask. Judaism, like modern day denominationalism,

is divided. The answer that you happen to hear from one regarding a particular inquiry will not be the same as what one will hear from another. The same is true as to the source of what modern Jews believe. The reader will find, that modern day Judaism does not strictly speaking, try to justify their beliefs from the pages of the Old Testament; a point that will be developed as this chapter continues. Therefore, one must remove the stereotypes from the mind in order to properly understand modern day Judaism, and as one will learn, it is not at all the same thing as Old Testament Judaism.

A good place to see this point of stereotypes is with the Bible itself. Jews do not consider or call their scripture the “Old Testament.” To Christians, it seems natural to refer to the writings of the Hebrew Bible as such, but to Jews there is no such thing as an “Old Testament.” Jews contend that “Old Testament” is a Christian term which they reject because it presumes (they say) that the Old has been supplemented by the New. Because “old” assumes “new,” strict Jewish people prefer the term Hebrew Bible.² There are some who are strongly traditional who reject both the term Bible as well as Testament and choose the word Tanakh, an acronym for the three divisions of the sacred writings: Torah, the five books of Moses; Nebiim, the books of the prophets; and Ketubim, the other sacred writings. Even though Jews reject the term “Old Testament” they do not seem to mind the term New Testament and use it when referring to the twenty-seven books used by Christians.

Judaism today is divided into three separate branches: **the Orthodox**, which are the strictest to the original law and the Talmudic law; **the Reform**, which is the most liberal branch of Judaism; and the **Conservative** branch of Judaism. In essence, to study Judaism, one is studying in some respects three different approaches or

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view points. In order to understand three different branches more completely, eliminating as much of the confusion as possible, one must go back and study some of the historical situation out of which these three branches sprang.

A Brief Historical Look

The Jews were expelled from England in 1290, which caused a great deal of unrest among the Jewish people. They were expelled from France several times but finally so in 1394, and then expelled from Spain in 1492. Driven into the ghetto, which was a compulsory living place for the Jews to separate them from other races, the Jews fortified their spirit by religion. They erected out of the Law a wall behind which they retired and to which they gave deep reverence. It was from this attitude toward the Law and this hiding behind the Law that the Jews grew conservatively, gripped by fear of any change which might disturb any little security they had. Consequently, they began to reverence tradition.

Jewish emancipation took place during the French revolution. It was during this revolution that the walls of the ghetto were leveled. This gave most Jews the same privileges, both legally and otherwise, as normal citizens even though the French revolution did a great deal toward the emancipation of Jews, the persecution still continued in Russia throughout most to the 19th century on up to the time of the Communist Revolution itself. Germany showed anti-Semitic feelings on up to the end of World War II, where six million Jews were slaughtered.

Persecution has caused Jews to migrate all over the existing world prior to World War I and the subsequent passage of the American immigration quotas. Great bulks of Jews immigrated to the United States between the years of 1880 and 1914. It was through this conservatism which grew from Judaism during the ghetto years, which

produced a branch of Judaism known today as Orthodox Judaism. The main emphasis of Orthodox Judaism is upon the Torah, to the virtual exclusion of everything else and the carrying out of the detailed practical observances. In this group the stress is on the intellectual comprehension, particularly of the difficult logic and reasoning of the Talmud.

Eastern European Jews maintain traditional Jewish customs, education and even language, while at the same time western European Jews found new opportunities as intellectual leaders among the secular world when the ghetto walls had fallen. It was because of this that more Jews were entering into the academic life and finding many advancements in all types of secular study. Due to this western European Jewry, Rabbinical learning of the Law was at an all time low. At the same time, eastern Europe continued its stress on Rabbinical learning, and it flourished because it was the chief career open to Jews with talent.

Consequently, two different goals in Judaism developed. First, found in eastern Europe was the goal of learning and maintaining of the old traditional laws, the maintaining of a devout piety, and traditional learning. In western Europe there was a sterility which grew in the traditionalist camp. They placed the most trivial regulation of the Rabbinical tradition on a par with the most august of Biblical ordinances, and it imposed a doctrinal requirement on Jews everywhere. In Eastern Europe belief rather than practice was the touchstone of Judaism. In western Europe, the opportunities which Jews found themselves facing were great. Opportunities in the academic world, the scientific world, as well as the industrial world gave Jews new avenues in which to work and new goals to attain. Due to the opening up of new careers for Jews, a new type of Judaism quickly came into

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being. The emphasis on western Jewish philosophy was the goal of academic, scientific, and intellectual work, the innovation and the discovery of new ideas, the extending of the frontiers of man's knowledge, and the broadening of Jewish religious horizons. This emphasis of broadening horizons and introducing new ideas ultimately became known as Reformed Judaism.

Simply stated, in the eastern part of Europe, even though the ghetto walls had fallen down and Jews were moving into other avenues of life, the chief opportunity which faced Jews at that time was the Rabbinical Law, so a young Jewish boy who had any talent whatsoever studied earnestly the Law and the Pentateuch, because his future success depended upon his mastery of this Law. In western Europe this was not the case. Jews found themselves open to many different opportunities. Many Jews found themselves pursuing careers in science, business, medicine and academic learning. Because of this study of the Talmudic law, the Law and the Pentateuch was not emphasized, and because of it the traditional viewpoint of the Jewish religion was replaced with this emphasis of leaning and the discovery of New ideas. Thus came into being Reformed Judaism.

Conservative Judaism holds middle ground between Orthodox and Reform and seeks preservation of the values and ideals of both. From Orthodoxy it takes its belief in the Torah, observance of dietary laws, and use of the Hebrew language; from Reform comes its tendency to reconcile the old beliefs and practices with the culture in which it finds itself at work.

Core Doctrines: A Brief General Statement

First, Judaism does not regard the world as a moral chaos that should be fled, but rather as a society that should be fashioned in ever upward progress. Judaism

holds that mankind as well as life is inherently good. As God created He looked upon his creation and saw that it was good (Gen. 1:4,10,18,21,25,31).

Judaism has always held on to the idea of man's boundless potential for good. As David de Sola Poll wrote, "Because of this optimistic teaching of human potential, I wish to be a Jew."³ Therefore, man is inherently good and secondly, contains a moral conscience that it reinforced by freedom of will. The great Rabbi Akiba said that although everything is foreseen by God, yet He has given man free will. Maimonides, the medieval philosopher, stated, that everyone altogether of his won free will may be as righteous as Moses or as sinful as Jereboam, wise or foolish, kindly or cruel. Third, sin does exist objectively, and temptation is always with us, but by his own strength, a man can overcome them. Fourth, a very important feature of Judaism is the feature that no human figure can be a unique manifestation of the divine. As de Sola Poll phrases it, Jews have not deified their seers however sanctified their teachings may have been. The religious revelation has been transmitted not by any single individual but by a long unbroken chain of men, whose lives have been touched by the vision of the divine (as he puts it).⁴ In other words, it is contrary to the belief and understanding of Judaism that any attribute of deity could be given to man with human form which would cause one to be considered any kind of mediator between God and man.

Orthodox Judaism

Orthodox Jews have been called "Torah True" Jews; it is the branch of Judaism which seeks to preserve the theology and traditions of old-world Jewry in the new world. It assigns equal authority to the written and oral law and the ancient Jewish codes embodied in the Torah and the Talmud and their commentaries. They believe

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that the Torah is all important and basic to all the rest: the Torah is of God, given to Moses, and there is no way to God except through obedience to the laws of the Torah; the Torah is a revelation of the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, and as they contend, it explains the place of the Jews as the chosen people of God.⁵

Reformed Judaism

As has been noted already, Reformed Judaism is liberal Judaism. Isaac Mayer Wise, one of their outstanding leaders in the United States, founded in the United States, the Union of the American Congregations (1873), the Hebrew Union College (1875), and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (1889); these important groups sum up the aim of Reform Judaism and their conviction that Judaism should “alter its externals to strengthen its eternal.”

Primarily, the distinction between Reformed Judaism and that of Orthodoxy is their view of divine authority.⁶ Revelation in Reform is not confined to the Old Testament; it is more progressive. The Reform Jew limits himself to the practice of the ceremonial laws of the Pentateuch, with the exception of those laws which, like the law of sacrifice, he regards as having no application or purpose in the present day. The sacrifices of the Mosaic era, he insists, were merely concessions to the customs of the time. Claiming that the mission of Judaism is the spiritualization of mankind, he sees such practices as covering the head at worship, dietary laws, the wearing of phylacteries as acronyms which isolate the Jew from the rest of mankind and makes such spiritualizing impossible, and hence should be abolished. In other words, the Orthodox Jew accepts the entire body of oral and written law as sanctified by traditions, the Reformed Jew has simplified the ritual and adapted it to modern needs.⁷

Conservative Judaism

The Conservative movement arose in the middle of the 19th century, both in Europe and in the United States., It is known commonly as “historical Judaism.” Conservative Judaism affirms:

1. The end of the ghettoization of the Jews and emancipation and the separation of church and state.
2. They hale the westernization of Jews in manner, education and culture.
3. They realize that some Jewish changes were inevitable in the modes of Jewish religious life, and they could be made validly in the light of Biblical and Rabbinical precedent.

Jews must respond creatively to new challenges, they say. Conservative Jews believe that the traditional forms and precepts of Judaism were valid, but changes in practice are to be made only with great reluctance just as long as these innovations do not touch essential commitments of the Conservative belief. With this in mind there are three things Conservative Jews maintain: first, devotion to the Hebrew language, second, observance of kosher foods, and third, Sabbath laws. Conservative Jews recognize that it is impossible to follow literally all of the ceremonial requirements of the Torah yet Reformists go too far in their discarding of the ancient practices. Conservatives, therefore, retain many of the Sabbath customs, many of the dietary laws and a large amount of Hebrew in the worship services. Congregations decide for themselves the extent of the adherence to the traditions.

It can be seen from this, that in one sense when studying modern Judaism one is studying three different

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religions as they each have their own particular viewpoint about specific elements of doctrine and at the same time in another sense they are one in that there are beliefs that are common to each perspective. All three aspects of Judaism, whether it be Orthodox, Reform or Conservative deny the supernatural power of any man. The Jews teach that they are “a chosen people.” Many Jews feel that God set the Jews above all other people and in his own good time will make Jewish superiority manifest.⁸

How To Identify The Messiah

The Jews have asserted all along that it would be an impossibility to think of the Messiah that was foretold in the Old Testament being executed on a cross. To the Jewish mind, the Messiah was an heroic figure, which to some Jews, would deliver them back to a physical kingdom in Jerusalem,. To other Jews., Reform especially, the Messiah is going to be a golden age in which all men will one day be brothers, and all men will one day accept the truth of God. The one thing that all Jews are in agreement upon is that the Messiah could not have taken on human characteristics and divine ability, nor could he have been executed on a cross and become a saviour in that respect. Jews have continually said that the Messiah could not be in human form. Maimonides summed up the general trend of the Jewish teaching about the personality of the Messiah with his emphatic statement:

One must not let it enter into his mind that the Messiah will come performing miracles, changing natural phenomena, or resurrecting the dead. Nor would the eventual Messiah of prophetic vision appear for atonement of sins; that is an obligation which rests inescapably on each individual and on no one else. Messianism

is a vision of ideals becoming reality on the earth, not in the life to come. It is not some far off event or visionary Utopia miraculously to be attained. It is an ideal that man has called on to realize in this world.⁹

Such a statement can be seen as representative of Judaism concerning the Messianic concept of the messiah. Therefore, Judaism claims that Jesus of Nazareth cannot be the Messiah as it is impossible for the Messiah to come and take on human form, they say, and at the same time take on characteristics of deity. It is impossible for the Messiah to come and be crucified or executed on the wooden cross. However, Judaism is wrong in making such assertions as these in that they can not be proven by the Hebrew Scriptures. In fact, the Hebrew Scriptures disprove unmistakably this Judaistic doctrine. There is no better place to see this than with the prophecies regarding the Messiah coming from the Old Testament. Notice just a few:

He Was To Be

I. The Seed of woman who would bruise Satan's head: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

II. Of Abraham's Seed: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed" (Gen.

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I. God sent His Son, made of a woman... to redeem..."(Gal. 4:4) For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of of the devil (1 Jn.3:8).

II. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds

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17:7). See also Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18; 21:12.

III. Of the house of David: I will set up thy seed and establish his house forever” (2 Sam. 7:12f Gen. 49:10; Psm. 132:11; 2:12; 89:3-4; 110:1-2; Isa. 11:1; Jer.

IV. Preceded by a messenger: “Behold, I will send my messenger; he shall prepare the way (Mal. 3:1; Isa. 40:3).

V. Born of a virgin: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isa. 7:14).

VI. Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

VII. The Shepherd: “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd (Isa. 40:1)

as to many: but as of one...which is Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16).

III. Of David’s seed has God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus (Acts 12:23)

IV. “He shall go before him to make ready a people for the Lord” (Luke 1:17

V. “When his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18).

VI. “Now, Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea (Matt. 2:1).

VII. “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep (Jn.10:11f).

Such a list of Old Testament prophecies are not meant to be exhaustive by any means as the list of

prophecies pertaining to the Messiah and his work along with their New Testament fulfillment in Christ would go on and on. However, such is sufficient to prove that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies pertaining to the Messiah.

The New Covenant. Jeremiah foretold that God would make a new covenant which would be unlike the old, or Mosaic covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; 1 Kings 8:9, 21). Since Moses, the mediator was to be replaced by another prophet (Deut. 18:15-19), it was natural that his covenant would be replaced by another covenant. A few years before the destruction of Jerusalem, in A.D. 70, it became impossible for Israel to continue to keep the Mosaic covenant. Christ established a covenant which has continued to exist even until now. No other such covenant was established which has continued even until this day. The New Testament affirms that Christ is the prophet like unto Moses (Acts 3:22-23). The Old Testament prophecies concerning the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ, as well as the particular characteristics of his person and work are such as to be beyond those of mere men. It is by this method that one proves that Jesus is the Son of God.¹⁰ This would therefore mean that he is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah. That he is the mediator of this new covenant.

Do Jews still look forward to the coming of the Messiah? Traditionalists believe in some kind of a personal deliverer to be sent to earth By God. Liberal Jews have given up the belief in a personal Messiah, but subscribe to the conviction that man has it within him to create a Messianic period on earth. Most modern Jews think in terms of such a Messianic age of brotherhood and peace to be realized by cooperative and combined human effort rather than by that of any single individual. However, this view runs contrary to what the Scriptures

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teach regarding the Messiah. The Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures was an individual. Take for instance the Suffering Servant passages from Isaiah. The question has always been, “Who is this Suffering Servant?” The problem is succinctly stated in the words of the Ethiopian eunuch, who while reading from this section of Isaiah, inquired of the evangelist, Philip, “Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself or of some other?” (Acts 8:34). The answer which one accepts to this question has far reaching consequences for his view of both the inspiration of the Bible and the Deity and saving power of Jesus Christ.

In Isaiah chapters 40 - 55, Isaiah presents to the reader a “Suffering Servant.” Basically, the interpretations concerning the Servant of Isaiah 53 for instance have followed along two lines, Jewish and Christian. Judaism contended that the Servant was the personification of Israel or its noblest part. It is very significant to note that there were some Jews who thought that the Servant was to be identified with the Messiah, but as the apostolic church presses this interpretation and applies it to Jesus of Nazareth, the Jews, almost inversely, adopted the collective view, seeing Old Testament Israel as the Servant in one way or another.¹¹

A crucial passage for this collective view is Isa. 49:3, which identifies the Servant with Israel. Outside the songs themselves, the context of the material also supports this view (Isa. 42:19; 43:10). However, even though in some of these early sections of Isaiah’s prophecies concerning the suffering servant, the prophet refers to Old Testament Israel, one can not ignore the fact that in other places of the writing the Servant is clearly to be distinguished from Israel in a number of ways. Isaiah 49:5-6 clearly make such a distinction and represent the Servant as gathering Israel back unto God.

In considering the entire collection of “Servant

Songs,” Bernard W. Anderson lists six differences which are so sharp as to indicate that Israel in fact is not to be considered the Servant in other passage of this Servant section of Scripture.¹² By careful consideration of the text, one can see any number of distinctions. For instance, the servant of Isaiah 53 was a silent sufferer, in contrast to the wailing Israel at the time of her oppression and suffering. Second, the suffering of the servant was to bring redemption to the world, but Israel’s sufferings have never been voluntary sufferings by a people for guilty people, and could therefore have no intrinsic moral value and no redemptive power. Third, the sufferings of the Servant were to end in death, but Israel, in spite of exile, dispersion and attempts at forcible assimilation still maintains her racial identity. Fourth, the servant was to experience a resurrection, but since Israel has never died, there is no possibility of such a resurrection in her history. Fifth, the Servant’s sufferings would have the effect of making the nations break down in confession of guilt and result in a moral transformation, but the history of the world with regard to Israel denies this in their case.¹³

It is clear from careful consideration that one cannot logically say that Israel is what Isaiah had in mind when writing about the Servant. The New Testament evidence with regard to this question of the Suffering Servant’s identity is unmistakable as to the conclusion which it draws. In Acts 8:32-34, the Ethiopian eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53 and he asked Philip concerning the identity of the person spoken of by the prophet. Luke notes that “Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this scripture, preached unto him Jesus.” There can be no more obvious inference than that Philip claimed that Isaiah 53 found its fulfillment in Jesus. Matthew also identified Jesus with the servant of Isaiah 53 in Matthew 8:17. By looking at the characteristics of the Servant and

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Jesus, one must conclude that the inspired writer, Isaiah, foretold of a particular individual being the suffering servant of God's nation, Jesus Christ.

Judaism continues to deny the force of such considerations. They continue to maintain two unsupported assertions regarding this matter, those being that it is impossible for the Messiah to come and take on human form and at the same time take on characteristics of deity, and second, that it is impossible for the Messiah to come and be crucified or executed on a wooden cross. However, the Jewish position is seen to be false when one comes to realize the truth that it is well within the power of God to bring about His divine plan in His own divine way; with God, all things are possible (Matt. 19:26).

A Concluding Statement

The research has presented a brief statement as to the history of the Jewish people as it pertains to the primary consideration of this chapter, that being, to acquaint the reader with the position of modern day Judaism. It has also pointed made the point that Judaism is divided into three main branches and has pointed out some of the basic differences between them. It has looked at the doctrinal posture of each and has given special emphasis to the Jewish position of the Messiah as predicted from the Hebrew Scriptures with an evaluation of that position. It is hoped that this brief introduction to Judaism will be helpful in the readers efforts to win the Jew to Christ.

Endnotes

1 Throughout the course of this paper the term "Christian" will be used in the broad general sense to refer to all religious views considering themselves to be Christian though the specific views of such may not be found in the pages of the New Testament. This will help the reader distinguish such from Judaism or other non-Christian religions. However, such is to be distinguished from New Testament

Christianity, that is, the religion which is in reality authorized by God for all men every where in the New Testament.

2 There is some uncertainty among Jewish scholars as to what the best term is for the scriptures which they accept. Some suggest the term Hebrew Bible, while others contend that this is not quite accurate either in that sections of the Hebrew Bible are written in Aramaic. A new set of terms is being used by some, that being, "First and Second Testament." Please keep in mind that the term Old Testament is a Scriptural designation as Paul refers to the Hebrew Scriptures as being such (2 Cor. 3:14). However, though there may be some technical points with which scholars disagree over which term is the most appropriate, the term Hebrew Bible is used in this work to refer to the Bible of the Hebrew people. Terms such as Hebrew Bible and Old Testament are used interchangeably in this research.

3 David de Sola Pool, **Why I am a Jew**, Thomas Nelson & Sons, New York: 1963, p. 64-65.

4 Ibid., p. 77.

5 A good summary statement of this position can be found for the reader in Frank S. Mead, **Handbook of Denominations**, Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1970, pp. 123-124.

6 Obviously, due to the size of a work of this nature, it will be beyond the scope of this research to elaborate all of the many facets of Jewish doctrine held between these three branches. This research will only make mention of the distinctions which are to be seen between the various of branches of modern day Judaism.

7 Ibid., p. 124.

8 Paul J. Williams, **What Americans Believe and How they Worship** New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962 , p. 342. This doctrine of the "chosen people" has caused a great deal of anti-Semitic feeling among other people of the world. This doctrine may also mean, according to some Jews themselves, that the Jewish people have a loyalty or a mission which must be fulfilled which has come through punishment which implies no superiority inherent in Jewish people, but they are more so charged with the duty to carry an important message. The message is what is superior and not the Jewish people themselves.

Closely connected with this is that fact that it has always been a major aspect of Judaism to be proud of his pure racial heritage, but modern anthropologists, such as Ralph Linton, in his book, **The Story Of Man**, Appleton Press, 1936; and Ruth Benedict and Gene Welfish, **The Races Of Mankind**, have proven rather conclusively that the Jews are themselves a mixed race of people today like the rest of the

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Europeans and Americans. There is no biological characteristic that identifies a person as a Jew. "Jewishness", therefore, is not necessarily determined by biological factors. What is more important in determining if one is in fact a Jew is his espousing to one of the three branches of American Judaism.

9 **Pool**, p. 166.

10 The reader is referred to the basic argument for the deity of Jesus Christ presented by Thomas B. Warren, "Jesus Christ, The Son of God," **The Spiritual Sword**, Vol. I, No. 3 (April, 1970).

11 Robert Pheifer, **Introduction to the Old Testament** Harper & Row, New York, 1948, p. 459-460. The Targum of the Prophets dated in the 3rd century A.D. is a translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Aramaic. The Targumim are helpful today in understanding ancient Jewish interpretations of the Old Testament. Because they are paraphrased, they cannot be used to attest the original Hebrew reading of a Bible passage.

12 Bernard W. Anderson, **Understanding the Old Testament** Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Incorporated, 1966, p. 417.

13 These points are gathered and summarized from Frederick A. Aston, "The Servant of the Lord" **Christianity Today** Vol. 11, March 13, 1961, pp. 9-12.

Chapter 9

Roman Catholicism

Jerry Moffitt

Editor's Note: Brother Moffitt was originally scheduled to be with us in this year's lectureship to speak on this topic. Unfortunately, a busy and pressing schedule necessitated that he postpone this year's appearance. However, he has graciously consented for us to publish pages 323-344 concerning Roman Catholicism from his book on Denominational Doctrines. We believe that you will find this excerpt so informative that you will want to purchase his entire work on denominational doctrines.

Roman Catholicism

The Church And Authority In Religion

We are going to begin a series regarding the original church and what is the authority in religion. We will discuss certain statements made in religion, and in doing so strive to learn more about that original church we read about in the Bible.

Arguments On The Church

1. It is said that Jesus is God and as such He would not make a mess of His church as seen in all the divisions today. Since the Catholic Church is not divided, it must be the true church.

However, the Catholic Church, as all denominational churches, is divided. There is Greek Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed Churches. God never wanted division, yet even the first century church had division (2 Cor. 11:13-15; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 7-11; Jude 3,4). The Bible

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warned us that there would be division (1 Cor. 11: 18,19).

2. Then it is argued that Jesus said to the apostles, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world” (Mat. 28:20). The apostles were not going to live to the end of the world; therefore Jesus must have referred to their successors. This shows that in the true church you will have successors to the apostles.

However, an apostle was to be a witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:8; Acts 1:22). Witnesses do not have successors. Too, Matthew 28:18-20 just says Jesus will be with all disciples as they carry out the great commission until the end of the world.

3. Sometimes it is said that Jesus said the gates of hell would not prevail against the church (Matt. 16:18), and that the only church which has existed all of these 2,000 years is the Roman Catholic Church.

Though we often admire good Catholics for their devotion to their religion, we are sad to disagree with them on this. We sincerely date the Catholic Church around 600 A.D. It does not resemble at all the first church, the one we read about in the Bible. And the gates of Hades never did prevail against that original church unto this day, though it may not be visible in the pages of history. Too, the seed of the kingdom is the word of God (Luke 8:11). The kingdom is the church (Matt. 16:13-19; Heb. 12:23,28). If you have wheat seed you have wheat. If you have the seed of God’s kingdom you have the kingdom, and the gates of Hades can never prevail against it (Matt. 24:35). Also, if today we take the pure word of God and plant it into the hearts of men, it will today produce only that New Testament Church (Luke 8:11). All we need do, to have the original church in our day, is put away human doctrines, human traditions, catechisms, manuals, and disciplines, and follow the word of God alone. In that way we can restore the original church in our own day. In

that way we can have pure, undefiled, New Testament Christianity, without addition, without subtraction. But let's go on.

The Final Authority In Religion

4. It is said that scriptures are not the final authority in religion; the living voice of the church is the final authority. The first problem such a statement encounters is the fact that it not only finds no support for the statement in the Word of God, it actually contradicts the Word of God. Paul said:

If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37).

Again, Paul said:

Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be **complete, furnished completely** unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

Well, what about traditions of the living voice of the church? Jesus said:

ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you saying, This people honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men (Matt. 15:7-9).

Regarding traditions of men He further said, "Every

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plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up” (Mat. 15:13). And the apostle Paul warned:

Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (Col. 2:8).

5. It is argued that if scripture were the final authority wouldn't Jesus himself have written? We wonder why at all that would be the case. This was to be the work of the Holy Spirit and His chosen apostles and prophets. See John 14:26; John 16:13, and 2 Peter 1:19-21. Baptism is essential to salvation, but Jesus did not baptize (John 4:1,2).

6. But it is asked, if scripture were that important, would Jesus have not asked His apostles to write? Yet at least on one occasion He did. He told John, “What thou seest, write in a book and send it to the seven churches” (Rev. 1: 11). And in truth, through the Holy Spirit they were to be guided into all this (1 Cor. 4:6; 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Pet. 3:15-16). It is true that of the original 12 only a few wrote, but that few was all that was needed to make the New Testament, along with Paul and the prophets who wrote the New Testament.

7. How could the written word be the ultimate court of appeal to the early church? The church existed for years before anything was written down, some say. However, it is admitted things **were** early written down and called the Word of God (2 Thess. 3:6; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). However, as we shall see, the word of God was the final appeal. That word was first in the apostles, then in the apostles and their writings, then in their writings alone.

8. How can the Bible be the final authority? Half the world is illiterate? Yet the Bible has been translated into almost every known language. And literate men read scripture to the illiterate. Now it is being widely put on audio tape so all can listen to it.

9. Where would they for so many years get access to the books?, some say. Until the 1500's there was no printing press. So for 1600 or 1700 years men couldn't use the Bible. But we would reply that there were enough Bibles for honest and good hearts to be evangelized. Men galore preached to those who did not have a Bible. To preach from the Bible and according to the Bible is still to follow the rule of the Bible and to express that it is the final authority. Such a case is still preaching the word of God and not the traditions of men.

10. Someone however argues, some in the church did not accept Revelation, Hebrews, or James for almost 300 years. Too, it is argued, the early church read the Shepherd of Hermes and the Didache. It wasn't until the Catholic Council of Nice that the New Testament Canon was decided.

Yet we would reply, many read the Bible in the written form before the printed form. They read James, Revelation and Hebrews and others though these book's full inspiration was doubted by some. Some doubted the inspiration of the book of Revelation because it was hard to understand. They doubted Hebrews because there was no name put on it, though the early church always thought Paul wrote it. James seemed to some to have a lot of Judaism in it. But these and other books which were questioned by some because they were small, and personal, were always accepted as Scripture by many. They were read as good books by others, and the weight of evidence in them that they were the word of God eventually caused them to win their way into the Canon. The other books

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which some thought might be inspired could not pass the test and were just set aside finally as mere Christian literature. I have read all the apostolic fathers without injury to my faith. But it seems the Bible books won the honest and good hearts of each generation, though they were slow in winning general and universal acceptance.

Too, no Catholic Council decided what books were to be accepted into the Bible. The books themselves decided the issue. The Council of Nice merely stated what people had already accepted. The books had already won the day for themselves.

11. But some ask, what do you do if you can't read Greek? You have, they say, to take an individual's word for it. Well, we would reply, their word and their translation is open to all scholars and they point out the weaknesses found in any translation. They are glad to do it and often more than zealous to do so. It is the least of our worries that some will change the meaning of the original. Scholars in every denomination can check the original for those who are not proficient in Greek and Hebrew. So it is no big danger to rely on a comparison of versions. Too, you have to take someone's word if you rely on the living voice of the church. It is even worse when they are not inspired and the living voice of the church is truly not inspired. They contradict each other. But regarding Scripture, we have a multitude of translations to check, most of which corroborate each other. The ultimate test is to ask if they produce a proper faith. Do they speak according to the truth? And Peter indicated that the written word can even be more sure than what was witnessed (2 Pet. 1:19).

So no, only scripture can be our authority in the Christian faith.

12. It is argued that you have to accept the Catholic "Living Voice of the Church" as the authority in religion

because even if you can read Hebrew and Greek, you cannot compare such manuscripts with the original documents.

However, we reply that various manuscripts are so numerous that all that understand textual criticism claim we, with certainty, have surely the exact original in the copies we have. And again, you cannot compare the “Living Voice of the Church” with original manuscripts. Too, when you compare the “Living Voice of the Church” with copies of the original they contradict each other.

13. Sometimes it is said that you can't claim the Bible is inspired just because it says it is inspired. True, but we rejoice that the Catholic Church has taken a stand, saying the Bible is inspired. But the reading of the Bible causes one to believe it is inspired, not merely its claims. But we would add, mere statements to the effect that the “Living Voice of the Church” is inspired does not make it inspired. And again, we have in the Bible the words of the very apostles of Christ and prophets produced by them. And they claimed to have all the truth in their day, none to be delivered later in a so-called “Living Voice of the Church” (Acts 20:27; John 16:13; 2 Pet. 1:3; Jude 3).

14. Then it is argued that the church did not come from Scriptures; rather, Scriptures came from the church. But that being so tells us nothing about there being a “Living Voice of the Church” which was to serve as an authority once the apostles and prophets died off. The miraculous forces that produced scripture were only to last until scripture was completed (1 Cor. 13:10). First there was truth, then the church, then the writing down of truth. Truth was before the church, and today truth is in the scriptures and those scriptures contradict the “Living Voice of the Church.”

15. Attention is drawn to the fact that the Eunuch told Philip he could not understand scripture unless

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someone guided him (Acts 8:31). However, the Eunuch was not a Christian, much less a prophet making an inspired statement, much less talking of the necessity of the “Living Voice of the Church.” Too, he did not have the gospel facts whereby he could properly interpret Isaiah 53. Today we are aware of the gospel facts and they are all written down in scripture. As scripture they can guide us into all truth. The apostles and prophets of scripture were inspired by God, but the theologians of the “Living Voice of the Church” never even claim inspiration. They contradict scripture and they contradict each other.

16. Similarly it is argued that the Old Testament wasn't the supreme court for the Jews. It is said Jesus told the apostles to do and observe all that the scribes and Pharisees taught and said. However, they taught what Moses taught and should have been listened to. When they taught on their own laws Jesus said it was vain worship and traditions of men which should be rooted up (Matt. 15:7-9,13). See also Matthew 16:6; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1.

17. To support the “Living Voice of the Church,” some point out that faith comes by hearing not by reading (Rom. 10:17). Vine says in his *Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words* that “hearing” in Romans 10:17 means “the receiving of a message.” So something more than mere audible hearing is in mind. Receiving the word and not mere audible hearing is in mind. And John said as clearly as it could be said, that miracles were written so that we might believe.

18. It is argued that taking the scriptures as the sole authority in religion does nothing but cause division, for every man has his own interpretation. However, the Bible lays division off on false teachers (Acts 20:29,30; 2 Peter 2:1-3), human traditions and doctrines of men (Matt. 15:7-9; Col. 2:8), carnality (1 Cor. 3:1-4), lack of good will

toward God (John 7:17), lack of love for truth (2 Thess. 2:9-12), ignorance and instability (2 Pet. 3:16), and love of evil (2 Thess. 2:11,12). How could any of us dare say God's word was the cause of division?

19. Sometimes it is said that a church is proved not to be a human institution if it stands a long time without falling. But error does stand a long time. It is in synchronization with the world, and the world loves darkness and error and helps human religion to stand. So the kingdom of Satan does very well. Many false groups are growing.

20. If a house is dirty, some say, you sweep it out, not tear it down. But if the foundation is rotten you tear it down. Churches built on faulty foundations of human wisdom and traditions of men need to be torn down. Jesus said, in a context of traditions of men, "Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up" (Mat. 15:13).

Arguments For The Sole Authority Of God's Word

Now let us spend a little time discussing why the Bible is the sole authority in religion.

1. When Jesus was on earth, he asserted He would reveal all truth to the apostles (John 14:26; John 16:13). The apostles evidently got what Jesus promised. Paul said, "Wherefore I testify unto you this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I shrank not from declaring unto you the **whole** counsel of God" (Acts 20:26,27). Peter asserts the same thing. He said, "seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us **all things** that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). So they had it all in the first century while the apostles were alive. But Jude went further and said the faith was delivered once for all (Jude 3). It was understandable to boot (John

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8:31-32; Eph. 3:3-4; 2 Cor. 1:13). And Paul said scripture was sufficient, clearly refuting the notion of a living voice of the church. He said, “all scripture is God-breathed and is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be **complete**, furnished completely unto **every** good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Yes, Paul says this of scripture, what is written down. And further, he says, “If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). He said Christians needed to learn not to go beyond what was written (1 Cor. 4:6). So, that which is written is our final authority. It was revealed to the apostles; they had it all; they said it was sufficient and that it would not need to be delivered again. So as such, what is written in Scripture is our only reliable authority in religion.

2. Notice, too, Jesus said all authority in heaven and on earth was delivered unto Him (Matt. 28:18-20). He said the world would be judged by His words: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). We will be judged by the words of Christ, and that even through the writings of His apostles and prophets, and not through the teachings of uninspired men who even contradict Christ as well as each other.

Someone might say, “well, we don’t have all Jesus spoke.” But Jesus said, Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35).

3. Then we notice that the apostles and prophets wrote down truth. John said he wrote that they may not sin (1 John 2:1). See Revelation 1:10-11. The mystery was committed to writing, (Ephesians 3:3-4). See 2 Peter 1:15-21.

4. So we can sum it up this way. First the Word of God was solely in the apostles and prophets and was all oral (Acts 2:1-4; Acts 20:20-27). Then when they began to write, the Word of God was both oral and written. It was found in the apostles, and in their writings or Scripture (2 Thess. 2:2,15). Finally, when they died it was all written (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 13:9-11).

So no, in Christianity, there is no such thing as “The Living Voice Of The Church.” Human wisdom, along with human traditions and human philosophy are all condemned. The only reliable source of God’s Words is in the writings of the apostles and prophets called the Bible. We should not be afraid of the Bible. We should use it as the final arbiter in all religious matters, for truly, it only is the Word of Almighty God.

Peter Never Was A Pope

It is with reluctance that I must speak on what must be a very cherished belief of some. But truth must be upheld and defended, and we have a charge from God’s word to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3). The notion that Peter was a Pope is a position which came, not from a study of the Bible, nor can it be defended by God’s word. Jesus never having authorized a Pope, such a doctrine is a tradition of men and as such is clearly condemned in the Bible (Mat. 15:7-9; Col. 2:8; 1 Pet. 4:1 1). We do not deny he was an apostle, we only deny he was the chief apostle or that he held any office such as the papacy has.

In regard to such a notion, we want to investigate various arguments used to argue that Peter was a Pope, and the first Pope at that.

Argument One

It has been argued that Peter must have been a Pope

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for in every list of the apostles Peter is named first. We are invited to see Matthew 10:2: “Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: the first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother...” Though we might wonder why such a list might prove Peter was a Pope, we dismiss it altogether when we read Galatians 2:9:

And when they perceived the grace that was given unto me, James and Cephas [Peter] and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship (Gal. 2:9).

There is a list of pillars and Peter does not appear first. Notice: “Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter” (John 1:44). So there is nothing to this argument.

Argument Two

It is argued that Peter must have been a Pope for he was the only one to have his name changed. John 1:42 says, “He brought him unto Jesus. Jesus looked upon him and said, Thou art Simon **the** son of John: thou shalt be called Cephas (which is by interpretation, Peter)” (John 1:42). Yet notice, “and Simon he surnamed Peter; and James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and them he surnamed **Boanerges**, which is, Sons of thunder” (Mark 3:16-17). Too, we notice Barnabas was surnamed but he held no office such as Pope (Acts 4:36). Neither did James and John. And how would a surname indicate one was a Pope? We know not.

Argument Three

In Matthew 17:23-26, Jesus paid the temple tax just for Peter and Himself. The question is, why did He give the tax just for Peter and Himself? Because Peter was

the one to whom they asked whether Jesus paid the tax, Jesus paid the tax for him. Too, Peter, not the other apostles, came to Jesus about the matter.

Argument Four

After the resurrection, when Peter and John ran to the tomb of Jesus, John got there first but waited for Peter (John 20:6). Why did John wait for Peter?, it is asked. Well, it was not because Peter was Pope. The flimsiness of such arguments show the lengths that are gone to to try to establish that Peter was the first Pope. We can see how barren the arguments are. The reason John waited and Peter did not is probably because John was more cautious and timid, and it is easy to see Peter is more forceful and strong in almost everything.

Argument Five

In Acts one, when they are laying down the conditions for an apostle and one to replace Judas, Peter takes the lead. But we would reply that such does not indicate that Peter was a Pope. Peter was headstrong, forceful, aggressive, and impetuous. In most cases this was good. When Jesus walked on the water it was Peter who asked if he could walk on the water to come to Jesus (Matt. 14:28). At the transfiguration of Jesus it was Peter who spoke up to mention building tabernacles (Matt. 17:4). When the mob pressed on Jesus and Jesus asked who touched Him it was Peter who spoke up and said the multitudes crushed him (Luke 8:45). Peter was outspoken, aggressive, and of strong character. But none of that says anything about being a Pope, an office never found in God's word. All it shows is Peter had a strong personality and was a natural leader.

Argument Six

It is argued that Peter preached the first two

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gospel sermons and did the first miracle. However, on the day of Pentecost others were preaching as well as Peter. All the apostles got the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). All were preaching (Acts 2:14). It is the evident design of Luke in the book of Acts to spend the first part talking about Peter and the second and greater part talking about Paul. So we naturally in the first part of Acts find stories about Peter, how he and John appear before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4,5), etc.

Argument Seven

Peter brought the Gentiles into the church, it is argued. However, someone had to do it. Too, why would this make Peter a Pope? There is nothing in the writings of any of the apostles and prophets about such an office. Too, Peter, as we have seen, was one of the pillars of the early church, one of repute (Gal. 2:6,9). Who better could get the Jews to accept the fact that Gentiles could enter the church. But to draw from that that there should be a Pope is to flatly add to God's word and to violate Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; and Proverbs 30:6. The concept of a Pope is to go beyond the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11).

Argument Eight

It is argued that the church was built on Peter. After all, Jesus said, "And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). It is true that *Peter* means "rock," but there is more to it than that. The word for Peter in the original Greek is *petros*. It is masculine gender and means a small detached stone. When Jesus said "upon this rock" He used *petra*, a feminine gender, and referring to a ledge or a cliff. I believe the ledge on which Christ built His church

is the confession which Peter just made, the fact that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. The church is built on that confession. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die" (John 11:25,26). So, no, the church is built on Christ, not Peter.

Argument Nine

It is argued that Jesus spoke in Aramaic and that the two terms for rock are the same in it. But we must reply, Jesus had to show in Aramaic, somehow that Peter and the rock on which the church was built were different for when written in Greek the Holy Spirit made them different. Then it is noted that no person occupies two positions in the same illustration. Peter is looked upon, because he spoke out first, as the doorkeeper with the keys. He would not also be the foundation of the building in the same illustration. Further, no apostle felt the need to lay a foundation of Peter. Paul said, "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1 1).

Argument Ten

It is argued that Peter was given the keys of the kingdom and thereby had the authority to define laws for Christ. Yet, in Matthew 16:18-19 the perfect tense is used in the Greek. The Greek perfect tense denotes the present state resultant upon a past action. So it literally could read, "Whatsoever you bind on earth, **shall have been** bound in heaven." So the apostles did nothing on their own. They bound only where heaven had already bound. Too, from Matthew 18:18 we learn it was not merely Peter doing the binding. All the apostles received that authority. **All** the apostles would be on twelve thrones and judging

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(Matt. 19:28). That certainly does not put any one over the others.

Argument Eleven

It is then argued that Peter in John 21 was told to feed the flock. But when you read the whole story, Jesus is merely giving Peter, who denied Jesus three times, the opportunity to confess Him three times and to go to work again. Any other idea drawn from that would be assumption, pure and simple. It is Christ, not Peter who is called the Chief Shepherd. We read, “and when the Chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Pet. 5:4). And again Peter says, “For ye were going astray like sheep; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and bishop of your souls” (1 Pet. 2:25). Christ, not Peter, is the Chief Shepherd. And we have often said, we could do a better job of making Paul a Pope rather than Peter. Paul said he was entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision just as Peter was with the circumcision (Gal. 2:7,8). Then he said, “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I resisted him to the face, because he stood condemned” (Gal. 2:11). And on and on we could go.

Argument Twelve

But it is then argued that since there is a visible church there must be a visible head of the church. But we wonder why that should be. Our membership in the church is invisible. The kingdom of God is within (Luke 17:20,21). No, in the Lord's church, the Lord has the authority. He said:

All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into

the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Mat. 28:18-20).

We function here on earth with Christ as our head. He is the Chief Shepherd, the bishop of our souls, the King of the Kingdom. And never does He say He would put one here on earth over the church.

Various Doctrines

We have been studying various doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. We now move on from a study of the authority of the word of God and the living voice of the church and a study of the church into various and sundry doctrines.

The Covering Of The Head

Some individuals and various churches believe that a woman in worship should have her head covered in some fashion. After all, 1 Corinthians 11:5-6 says:

But every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonoreth her head; for it is one and the same as if she were shaven. For if a woman is not veiled, let her also be shorn; but if it is a shame to a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be veiled.

But here we would notice that Paul puts the covering in the same category as a woman with her head shaved. It was often a **custom** that an adulteress or a harlot would have her head shaved. It seems the Grecian woman understood that in Christianity there was

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neither Jew nor Greek, bond or free, male nor female (Gal. 3:28). While custom had a woman wear a veil as a sign of the authority of her husband, these women thought that now that they were Christians such a custom need not prevail. Paul says it is one and the same thing as shaving her head, which customarily was done to a harlot or an adulteress. If that custom would embarrass them, then custom must matter, and they should then follow the custom of a woman wearing a veil. It was one and the same thing (1 Cor. 11:5). Then Paul again places it in the realm of custom when he says, "But if any man seemeth to be contentious, we have no such **custom**, neither the churches of God" (I Cor. 11:16). Paul and the other churches had no such custom as of women taking the veil off because they were Christians. So no, we do not have such a custom as wearing the veil for women to show the husband's authority, so women today need not wear the veil. If we were going to keep that custom, why not keep the custom of the holy kiss (1 Thess. 5:26), foot-washing (1 Tim. 5: 10), and other customs unique to their culture.

Purgatory

We all know the doctrine of purgatory, a supposed place where saints go to burn away their sins. Only we do not know the doctrine from the Bible. The Council of Trent said everyone who denies purgatory is anathematized, so the doctrine, we suppose, must be found in the living voice of the church. But what does the Bible say regarding sin remaining and needing to be burned away in punishment for the believer? Paul said, "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him [Christ]" (Rom. 5:9). And again he said, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8: 1). When one becomes

a Christian, he is cleansed of his sins in water baptism, and *is just* by the blood of Christ, saved from the wrath of God, and under no condemnation. The scriptures are clear on that, and thus the Christian need not go to his grave with sin. In fact, he must not. The Bible teaches that when a Christian sins he must repent of sin and pray to the Lord for forgiveness (Acts 8:22). He confesses his sin to God and the blood of Christ keeps on cleansing him of sin (1 John 1:7- 10). Christ is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:1,2). He appeases the wrath of God and covers our sin. We do not face God laden with sins. Paul said we have been, “reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unprovable before him” (Col. 1:22).

Sometimes 1 Cor. 3:15 is used to teach there is a purgatory. It says, “If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:15). But this obviously is a reference to the fires of tribulation which every Christian must pass through in this life in order to mold their character so that they are fitted out for eternal life. Jesus said, “In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). So Paul said, “confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). The same or similar interpretation is applied to Psalm 66:12; Isaiah 43:2; Amos 4:11, and Jude 23. Just because a passage has fire in it does not mean it speaks of purgatory, a concept never proven from the Bible.

Then sometimes 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 is used. It says:

In the name of our Lord Jesus, ye being gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, to deliver such a one unto Satan for

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the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:4,5).

But this passage says nothing about purgatory. It discusses church discipline and chastening **in this life** for a sinner. The man under discussion did not go to purgatory. He was later received back into fellowship by the Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:11). 1 Timothy 1:20 talks of chastening and church discipline also. See Hebrews 12.

Prayer To Mary And The Saints

It is taught that we should pray to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and to other saints so that they can intervene between Christ and us. However, Jesus is the one in the role of mediator of the New Covenant. The Holy Spirit said of Jesus:

And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15).

Hebrews 12:24 says, “and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant” (Heb. 12:24). But there is only one Mediator. 1 Timothy 2:5 says, “For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus”. To say there is another mediator is to cast severity on the tender nature of Christ. We certainly need no other mediator from the standpoint of Christ being too severe. We read of Jesus, “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted” (Heb. 2:18). Paul said, “For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been

in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). And Jesus said:

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Mat. 11:28-30).

There is not one shred of scriptural evidence that we should ever pray to Mary or any saint. Jesus taught us to pray to God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son (John 14:13,14).

The Celibate State For Priests

Then it is said that priests should not marry. However, in the original church we read about in the Bible there was never a clergy called priests. The way God set it up all Christians were called priests (1 Pet. 2:9). And to forbid marriage is a mark of the fallen-away church. Paul condemned those who would fall away “forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by them that believe and know the truth” (1 Tim. 4:3). It is true that 1 Corinthians 7:26 shows that it was good to remain single **during great distress** if you had the ability. But Peter was married (Mark 1:30). He led his wife about with him as did the rest of the apostles. Paul said marriage was to be had in honor (Heb. 13:4). And he said, “Let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband” (1 Cor. 7:2).

To Call A Man Father

Then there is the custom of calling the priest

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“father.” But Jesus said, “And call no man your father on the earth; for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven” (Matt. 23:9).

Someone will say Paul called Timothy his child in the faith (1 Tim. 1:2; Philippians 2:22). He said to the Corinthians that they had not many fathers for only he begat them through the gospel. But what Paul said was true. He fathered them and Timothy. But he refused to wear “Father” as a religious title in direct contradiction to what Jesus commanded. True, one can be described as to a work he performs; but it is sin to wear a religious title as that which separates one Christian from another. Jesus clearly condemned religious titles such as Reverend, Priest, Bishop and Pope.

The Perpetual Virginity Of Mary

It is taught that Mary, after the virgin birth, never had children. But the Bible, clearly taken for what it says, shows the opposite. Her children are all listed in Matthew 13:55. And in Matthew 13:55 since father and mother are mentioned, we know the text speaks of Jesus’ immediate family when it says, “Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, **James** and **Joseph**, and **Simon**, and **Judas**? and his sisters, are they not all with us” (Matt. 13:55-56). In Galatians 1: 19, James, **the Lord’s brother** is mentioned. In Acts 1: 14, Mary, the mother of Jesus is mentioned along with Jesus’ brethren. And in John 7:3-5 his brethren are distinguished from his disciples. So, no, the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary is a human tradition.

May God help us to only speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11). May we not add to or detract from the Word He gave us (Deu. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18,19). May we never accept human doctrines and the traditions of men (Mat. 15:7-9; Col. 2:8; 2 John 9-11).

Chapter 10
**Debate With Catholic
Response**

Stephen Wiggins

On May 4-7, 1996, I debated three representatives of *Catholic Response*, an apologetics organization from San Antonio, Texas. Brother Jerry Moffitt, director of the Gulf Port Lectures in Portland, Texas, arranged for the discussion to be conducted in connection with their fourth annual lectureship. Since few have had opportunity to debate the Catholics, the following reflections should be of interest.

First Proposition

In the first two sessions I affirmed: “The New Testament is the sole, complete, and final authority for the Christian religion.” This proposition entails that the New Testament scriptures are the Christian’s only rule of faith and practice in religion. While all the Bible is inspired (2 Tim. 3:16), and whereas the Old Testament contains lessons for God’s children today (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10, 11), it is the New Testament specifically that provides mankind with the needed information to equip himself in knowledge and obedience as a Christian. The totality of “all truth” that Jesus revealed to his apostles by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), as an expression of his will for the Christian religion, is found in written form only upon the pages of the New Testament. It is the sole, complete, and final authority for the Christian religion.

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Catholics deny this because their position is that the revelation of the gospel is contained in *both* the written books of the New Testament and in the unwritten, apostolic traditions which allegedly have been passed down orally from generation to generation since the first century. Thus, while Catholics acknowledge the New Testament as God's inspired word, they maintain this is not the totality of God's revelation for the Christian religion. Rather, one must give equal authority to "the living voice of the living Church," that is, the Oral Traditions of which the Catholic Church claims to have been sole stewards since apostolic times.

Any debate with Catholics on "Scripture alone" as the sole rule of faith, is really a controversy pertaining to the *identity and sufficiency* of God's word. Where has God's special revelation been deposited for mankind today? Is that standard of authority contained solely upon the written pages of the Bible? And, is this written revelation sufficient in providing all essential information for the faithful Christian? Or, as Catholics maintain, is the completed word of God found within Oral Tradition and the Bible? These questions gain center attention when it comes to controversy with Catholics as to the standard of authority for the Christian religion.

Argumentation

I offered two arguments in the affirmative. The first pertains to what is called the *material and formal* sufficiency of the Scriptures. That the Scriptures are "materially" sufficient is to affirm they contain all essential information necessary to become and remain a faithful child of God. There is not a single doctrine of truth pertaining to the Christian religion that one must know, practice, or obey in order to become and remain a faithful Christian that is not found within the Bible, and more

specifically the New Testament as it contains in written form that which was revealed through the apostles.

The New Testament scriptures clearly teach they are materially sufficient. In 2 Tim. 3:16-17 Paul writes:

All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instructions which are in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.

Here the apostle says “all scripture” is God inspired, embracing both Old and New Testaments. He further asserts their sufficiency by pointing out that by the scriptures man is made “complete” as he is furnished with adequate information pertaining to truth and instructions for righteousness.

That the Scriptures are “formally” sufficient is to affirm that they may be understood without the need of an infallible interpreter, such as the pope. Herein lies the heart of the controversy. For, if one can demonstrate by valid argument that the scriptures may be correctly comprehended without the aid of papal infallibility, then one may dispense with Catholicism as a whole. In view of this fact it is more than a passing interest that in 1837, in his debate with Alexander Campbell, Bishop John B. Purcell stated that, “No enlightened Catholic holds the pope’s infallibility to be an article of faith. I do not; and none of my brethren, that I know of, do... no man is infallible, either in doctrine or morals” (*Campbell—Purcell Debate*, p. 23). Not until thirty-three years later, at Vatican Council I in 1870, would papal infallibility be defined as Catholic dogma. Before this “no enlightened Catholic” ever entertained the idea.

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The New Testament scriptures clearly teach they are formally sufficient and thus may be understood without an infallible interpreter. This is taught in Ephesians 3:3-5. Here Paul affirms that when the revelation of the gospel was made known he “wrote” in “words” so when brethren “read” they could perceive his understanding in the mystery of Christ. Just as first century listeners could understand the gospel when it was proclaimed orally, they, as original readers of scripture, could understand that same message when it was committed to written form. If an infallible interpreter was not needed to understand the oral message why should one be needed to understand the written? If one today cannot understand the epistles of Peter, which were allegedly written by the first pope, without an infallible interpreter, what compels the Catholics to suppose one can read and understand an *ex cathedra* encyclical written by Pope John Paul II? Rest assured that the very words of the Master go against the Catholic grain at this point. For, it was he who said of anyone reading scripture, “let him that readeth understand” (Matt. 24:15).

One final point might help as it pertains to “material” and “formal” sufficiency of the scriptures. When debating Catholics one should be careful to distinguish between the two kinds of sufficiency. The reason is because some Catholics will say they allow for the sufficiency of scriptures. But they are speaking of material sufficiency, not formal sufficiency. The Church Magisterium, which is the authoritative teaching office comprised of pope and bishops, is indispensable to Catholicism as an infallible interpreter. Their insistence on the necessity of this interpretive authority is an outright denial of the formal sufficiency of Scripture. Do not allow an opponent to confuse the audience in this regard.

The Test

My second argument consisted of a challenge. I asked my opponents to cite a moral, religious, or spiritual truth from their Oral Traditions that (1) is essential to our salvation, but (2) not already taught within the Bible. I insisted that whatever is cited must be essential to our salvation or it cannot rightly said to be a part of the gospel which is God's power to salvation (Rom. 1:16). I further demanded that whatever is cited could not already be taught within the Bible or else it would not be *oral but written* apostolic tradition (2 Thess. 2:15). No reply was attempted. With dead silence emanating from the other side, it was then impressed upon the audience the absolute futility of Catholic claims that God's word is composed of Oral Tradition in addition to the Scriptures.

There is not one solitary thing within the so-called Catholic "Oral Apostolic Tradition" that reveals anything about any aspect of New Testament Christianity that one may not already learn from the written word of God. One is completely "justified in maintaining that God's full and final covenant embodies all moral and spiritual truth" (James Bales, *The Finality Of The Faith*, 40). This is a most effective argument. It works well when debating anyone claiming additional revelation to the scriptures; Mormons, Pentecostals, etc., as well as Catholics.

Second Proposition

In the last two sessions I negated:

The Roman Catholic Church is the one true Church of Christ, identical in origin, organization, name, worship, and doctrine with the New Testament church, and in it alone is salvation from sin received.

The proposition summons for scriptural proof that the Roman Catholic Church is *identical* in all the identifying traits of the New Testament church; a task, I might add, impossible to accomplish. Is it any wonder, then, that aside from the initial reading of the proposition in their introductory remarks, my opponents never again referred to the proposition throughout the remainder of the debate? No, not even so much as an allusion to the terms within passed from their lips. It was a deafening silence, a most telling admission which I turned to my advantage. While space fails to allow for detailed evaluation of all that was said on both sides, I here present two matters I think of interest.

Doctrine Of Development

Although a shock to the Church of England, Catholics everywhere were elated when, in 1845, prominent author and priest, John Henry Newman, converted to Roman Catholicism. Immediately afterwards he published his *Essay on the Development of Doctrine* wherein he set forth the novel view that “the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church are legitimate *developments* of the teachings of the Church of the apostles” (*The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, 607, emphasis supplied). This “development of doctrine,” accepted and promoted by Catholics since the publication of Newman’s book, is defined as “the notion that the Church’s understanding of divinely revealed truths *grows and evolves throughout the centuries*” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, 303, emphasis supplied). The idea is that doctrines peculiar to Catholicism need not be found explicitly within the Bible as they admittedly are unrecognizable upon the pages of the New Testament. Rather, these dogmas developed gradually over the centuries to form the more mature and complete doctrines currently within Catholicism.

In fact, it has sometimes taken the Church centuries to recognize officially that specific doctrines are authentic *developments* of the definitive revelation given by Christ. Moreover, in officially accepting such *developments*, the Church implicitly acknowledges that *further developments are possible in the future* (*The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, 247, emphasis supplied).

The following quotes supply the reader with further documentation from Catholic sources wherein the authors lavishly apply this developmental procedure to major dogmas. These excerpts are all the more revealing when one realizes that Newman postulated his “doctrine of development” long before any of these major articles of confession were ever defined as Catholic doctrine. In short, the way in which these newfangled dogmas gained acceptance was by means of Newman’s developmental theory.

The primacy of the pope, the quality of being first, which according to Catholic teaching belongs to the Bishop of Rome, *developed over many centuries* (Ibid., 693).

But the idea of purgatory as a particular place in the other world seems to be a creation of Western Christianity and is dated in the late twelfth century. Once this idea arrived on the scene, it was possible for medieval theologians to *develop the theology of purgatory* in terms that would remain familiar to the twentieth century (Ibid., 704).

The idea that Mary enjoyed [a bodily] assumption is not affirmed in any direct way by the New

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Testament, or in the most primitive tradition, but rather *developed gradually* out of the Church's life of prayer, biblical reflection, and sacrament (Ibid., 56).

The fact is that no one person can take credit for it, the Rosary having *developed over centuries...* (*Catholic Answers Tract*, emphasis supplied in all preceding quotes).

When debating Catholics one must be prepared to refute this idea that doctrinal truths develop to form more mature and completed dogmas which comprise modern day Catholicism. Prior to my debate with representatives of *Catholic Response* they had already publicly stated:

The Church grows. It does not remain exactly the same in the sense that it must always look exactly like it did in the New Testament times; in the sense that there will be all of the characteristics within the church as seen in their *fully developed form ...* (Mike Luther in a San Antonio debate with brother Darrell Conley).

Acceptance of doctrinal development, as promulgated by Newman and universally adopted by Catholicism, forfeits any identification with the church of the New Testament. For, one cannot maintain that the doctrines and identifying characteristics of the church have changed through developmental procedure and then simultaneously argue from the scriptures that the Catholic Church is *identical* with the first century church. Yet this is exactly what my opponents sought to do. It was for me to show, then, that the only possible way one can identify the Lord's church today is by pointing to those

identifying marks within the New Testament pertaining to name, organization, worship, doctrine, practice, and terms of entrance. The Roman Catholic Church falls woefully short of meeting this criterion. Not only do Catholics cut themselves off from any appeal to the New Testament for scriptural authority by their doctrine of development but with the same stroke they sever any legitimate appeal to their so-called Oral Tradition. The very idea of a tradition is something that has been passed down from ancient times. But, if admittedly the church has progressed through doctrinal development, why appeal to that which is ancient? Why appeal to the old when the new is supposedly better? Whereas Newman's book has been touted by Catholics as the tour de force against fundamentalism, as early as 1888, Anglican Professor George Salmon authored a devastating reply of 500 pages in his *Infallibility Of The Church*. One will read with profit this brilliant and unanswerable volume.

Catholic Compromise

No one person, or even group of persons, of any religious body should be held responsible for the ecumenical compromises fostered by their own liberal-minded brethren. It is a different matter altogether, however, when the one initiating and leading the compromise is universally recognized by that religious body as the infallible head of the church, the vicar of Christ on earth. Whereas my opponents were obligated to affirm that in the Roman Catholic Church "and in it alone is salvation from sin received," the very one they acknowledge as "Holy Father," Pope John Paul II, continues the same ecumenical agenda initiated at Vatican Council II (1962-1965).

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The Second Vatican Council has provided a remarkable clarification of this issue. It teaches unambiguously that grace and salvation operate beyond the visible limits of the [Catholic] Church (*The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, 786).

As is always the case, when the floodgates of liberalism are flung open to accommodate the ecumenical spirit of compromise there is no stopping place. And so it is with Catholicism. Catholic authorities now take the position that a person “may achieve eternal salvation” in the absence of any knowledge of Christ and total ignorance of the gospel. From their best-seller, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, one reads:

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience — those too may achieve eternal salvation (p. 224).

Catholics attempt to explain how one may receive forgiveness of sins and thus possess eternal salvation in ignorance of the Savior by what they call a “baptism of desire.” This is based on the naive supposition that one would have obeyed the Lord had he not remained in ignorance of the gospel.

Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have *desired Baptism explicitly* if they had known its necessity (*Ibid.*, 321).

One need not suppose that Catholic authorities are merely saying that one may be saved in innocent ignorance of the gospel, as if this were not unscriptural enough. No. Their ecumenical spirit moves them further to declare that one may attain and maintain a right relationship with God while consciously denying Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world. In their revolutionary document, “Nostra Aetate,” Vatican II bishops affirm their convictions pertaining to “the ongoing validity of God’s covenant with the Jews.” This is all gleefully reported in a recent issue of a popular Israeli magazine under the title, “The Church Repents: Christianity Makes Its Peace with the Jews.” Jewish writer Vince Beiser, further states:

If God’s covenant with the Jews remains valid — as the pope himself has repeatedly reaffirmed — then the inevitable conclusion is that they can *achieve salvation even without accepting Jesus as the messiah*. And, despite widespread Jewish assumptions to the contrary, that is precisely what post-Vatican II Catholic theology teaches (*The Jerusalem Report*, 1/1 1/96, p. 35, emphasis supplied).

I have not the slightest notion as to just how Pope John Paul eludes the unequivocal statements uttered by the Lord concerning himself, “for except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). And again, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). How is it that the Jew in the first century was lost when he rejected Christ but the Jew in the twentieth century may “achieve salvation even without accepting Jesus as the messiah?” The fact is God’s inspired word teaches that the gospel

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of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1: 16); and that those who “know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thess. 1:8-9). Whereas many old-line Catholics continue to maintain that in the Roman Catholic Church “and in it alone is salvation from sin received,” Pope John Paul, as their alleged infallible head, renounces this claim.

[Video or audio tapes of this debate with *Catholic Response* may be purchased from Tullstar Tape Ministry, 504 Cosgrove, San Antonio, TX 78210,(210)-533-1866].

Chapter 11

Denominationalism

Paul Sain

What a joy it is to be associated with my friend, B. J. Clarke and the good faithful brethren at the Southaven church! The precious fellowship of beloved brethren in the Lord is truly a treasured blessing. My appreciation and high esteem for the good works of the people of God at this place can not be properly expressed.

Introduction

Larry (all names have been changed) is well known throughout the community. He taught in the public school system for several years and is quite involved in local sports. He is the music director at the Baptist church. He “witnesses” to many of the ones he meets. **Jennifer** believes in God and sincerely wants to serve Him. Her parents were Church of God (sincere, devout and heavily involved until their death) and she cannot possibly bring herself to believe they were lost. **Rebecca** has great talent, as a pianist. Each week she plays the piano or organ in her local church. She is meek, quiet and feels it her duty and privilege to serve her Lord in this capacity. **Stephen** is a local businessman. He is highly respected for his community interests. He serves as a deacon of the local Baptist church and firmly is convinced he is going to heaven one day. **Jackie** thinks

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there are good, honest and sincere people in all denominations whom God considers His people. He does not believe man should judge and condemn others. **Helen** is a widow lady who serves as a bishop of the local Methodist church in her small town. She is very religious, loved by all, and anyone who dares speak against her is considered a villain. **Danny and Rachel** are excellent neighbors, hard workers earning a modest income, have two lovely children, but quick to speak of their profound faith in God. They are in worship “*every time the doors are open.*” Their Presbyterian faith reflects their parent’s, grandparent’s and great-grandparent’s faith.

First Century Christianity Was Udenominational

The church of our Lord began on Pentecost, in Jerusalem, A.D. 33 approximately. Paul wrote in Romans 16:16, “*The churches of Christ salute you.*” He spoke of congregations of the one true church which existed at different localities. Ones who obeyed the gospel were called “*Christians*” (Acts 11:26). There were no divisions (different distinct religions) as now abound. There were no hyphenated-Christians, such as Baptist Christian, Methodist Christian, etc.

The term “*Christian*” and “*churches of Christ*” stated the obvious, “*belonging to Christ.*” Their allegiance was to Christ and Him alone. They were followers of Christ – “*Christians!*” They were saved, added to the church (Acts 2:47). They did not “*join*” a church. The Lord “*added*” them to His church. The obedient, saved ones constituted “*the church*” or “*churches of Christ*” (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23; Rom. 16:16).

In the Bible, the church Christ built was described as simply “*the church*” over 70 times; “*the body of Christ*”

thirteen times; “*the church of God*” eleven times as well as “*the house of God,*” “*the church of the firstborn,*” and “*the churches of Christ*” once. The church we read about in the Bible is described by these and other references. It was the bride of Christ, the body of saved people.

In the New Testament we find the word “*sect*” several times. It is derived from the Greek word “*hairesis*” which is found nine times in the Greek New Testament. It is translated sect, heresy, or faction. Simon Peter spoke of “*damnable heresies*” (2 Pet. 2:1) which existed in the first century. Enemies of the church (in Bible times) sometimes inaccurately called God’s people, the church, a sect.

The church which Christ built, purchased with His blood, is NOT a sect. It is not a denomination. It is the whole body of Christ. It is not a part, or party. It is not a class, group, or unit of the whole. The church for which our Lord died contains all children of God.

Some time ago, Alan E. Highers wrote:

If the church were a denomination, it would mean that *some* of the saved were in the church and *some* out of it. To be a denomination, it would have to be a *part* of the whole; but *all* who are in Christ are in His body. Consequently, the church is not, and cannot be, a denomination.

The precious bride of Christ is not a sect.

**Many Of The World Suggest:
“Join The Church Of Your Choice”**

Many in the religious world think the church is comprised of all the different denominations. They teach that when a person is saved, he merely selects or “*joins*” a particular church to hold membership in.

Tragically, denominationalism has so confused

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folks of the world that many doubt that “*undenominational Christianity*” even exists.

Some Of The Brotherhood’s View Of “Denominationalism” Today

Rubel Shelly has declared (some time ago):

There are sincere, devout, knowledgeable Christians in all denominations (Centerville, TN speech, 1983).

Woodmont Hills / Rubel Shelly participated in a “**Community Wide Worship**” on April 10th, 1994, on which the following report is given:

...1,100 people came together for an hour in that church’s sanctuary....All these people were together to affirm the common elements of orthodox Christian faith to which we are committed. In spite of doctrines and traditions that divide us, we were able to join with Presbyterians, Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and Baptists to affirm the resurrection of Jesus Christ and its meaning (**Love Lines**, Woodmont Hills bulletin, April 13, 1994).

Golf Course Road church in Midland, Texas had a “**Community Sunrise Service**” celebrating the risen Saviour (per their bulletin announcement) on Easter morning (April 15, 1992).

Magnolia Church of Christ in Florence, Alabama participated in the **Community Thanksgiving Assembly** per the announcement from the Shoals Area Ministerial Association. Folks from the Baptist, Episcopal, New Birth Ministries, Faith Tabernacle, and

Shoals and Magnolia Church of Christ were involved. The advertisement continued:

Congregational singing with special music by The Magnolia Singers. Join your neighbors from across the Shoals on this special day!

Holy Week was conducted in the Florence, Alabama area (1995) with speakers and/or participants from the Catholic, St. Paul AME Church, Methodist, Trinity Church, Presbyterian and Church of Christ (*Times Daily*, April 8, 1995).

The annual *March For Jesus* (an interdenominational activity) has found numerous preachers and members of the Lord's body involved with many from almost every denomination.

Promise Keepers (an interdenominational structure) has many from all faiths and doctrines. In recent times many from the Lord's body have spoken at area meetings in promotion of the Promise Keepers movement. *Haskel Sparks* spoke at such a gathering near Hohenwald, TN, per an elder of a local congregation there.

Community Church of Christ (Hendersonville, TN) had the following in their bulletin in 1996:

Next Wednesday night is "Wipe Out," a large evangelistic crusade at First Baptist Hendersonville. Guests will include Christafari and speaker, James Mitchell. If you have any friends who will come, this could be the night they make a decision for Christ.

Mike Cope has carried a segment of the brotherhood into further apostasy by his unscriptural, ungodly article in **Wineskins**:

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...what are you going to do with the many wonderful Spirit-filled, Jesus-like, prayerful believers who don't go to church where we go, who weren't baptized the same way we were baptized, and whose doctrine doesn't line up exactly like ours? ... the people who were having such an impact on me ... Billy Graham, Richard Foster ... Tony Campolo ... John Stott [Anglican preacher] ... a man of utter holiness. A man in whom the Spirit works powerfully. A man of prayer. And yet, on the other hand, a man who didn't share my understanding of baptism. Full of God's word. Full of God's Spirit. But different understanding of baptism ... I believe that these are God's people, even though they're not a part of my little group. (*Christians Only—Not The Only Christians,* **Wineskins**, April-May, 1997).

In 1996 Max Lucado spoke at a Promise Keepers gathering of ministers in Atlanta. He:

...spoke on unity. He called on Christians to quit building walls between denominations, but to let those walls come down. To honor one another and to give a witness to the world by the way we treat one another. To quit thinking that we're the only little ones in Christianity. It was a valiant call for unity (Mike Cope's article in **Wineskins**, April-May, 1997, speaking of Max Lucado's speech).

On a San Antonio, Texas radio program (Dec., 1996) Max Lucado taught the following:

...All you have to do is say "yes" to the Father... Maybe you never understood that the invitation was for everyone. Maybe you thought that you were unworthy. Maybe now you do understand

God will make you worthy, and the invitation is for you. And all you have to do is call Him Father. Just call Him Father. Just turn your heart to him right now as I am speaking. Call Him your Father. And your Father will respond. Why don't you do that? "Father, I give my heart to you. I give you my sins, I give you my tears, I give you my fears, I give you my whole life. I accept the gift of your Son on the cross for my sins. And I ask you Father, to receive me as your child. Through Jesus I pray. Amen.

ANNOUNCER tells of new publications available and plans for future broadcasts and then says: "*Max Lucado returns with a special word for those who received the gift of salvation just moments ago in prayer.*" Then Max Lucado continues with the following:

Today is the first day you've ever prayed a prayer like that. Could you do me a favor? Could you write me a letter? I don't have anything I am going to ask from you. I do have a letter I would like to send to you. I'd like to give you a word about the next step or two. I want to encourage you to find a church, **I want to encourage you to be baptized**, I want to encourage you to read your Bible. **But I don't want you to do any of that so that you will be saved. I want you to do all of that because you are saved.** You see, your Father has a great life planned for you, and I want to tell you about it. Give us a call, and drop me a note. And, thanks my friend, for making the greatest decision of your life. I'll be back Monday. I hope you will be, too.

Denominationalism 100%! Just ask the Saviour into

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your heart! Be baptized, but not to be saved, but because you are saved! Unbelievable! False doctrine through and through!

Contrast the above to the statement made by a preacher from eastern Tennessee a few years ago:

The Lord's church is at war with every false religion, be it Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, or Islam. There can be no compromise, no peaceful coexistence. When we fall into the snare of compromise, we are doomed. I can hardly visualize the prophet Amos making application to the wicked false teacher Amaziah, priest of Bethel, for membership in the local Ministerial Alliance. Of course, Amos had a definite message of rebuke to deliver to such men. Perhaps herein lies the difference in him and brethren who would affiliate.

Instead of being at war with false teachers and their false doctrines, many have compromised, gone over to their side. They are supporting, encouraging, complementing the enemy. This has been done on a wide scale as well as the local scale. May I make the point crystal clear, from a personal reference? A preacher for the Lord's church stated a few months ago that he spent about half his time "*undoing what is taught in Truth In Love*" (the 16 page bimonthly published by the East Hill church; 24,000 mailed to individuals and congregations). This same preacher recently stated his closest preacher friend had moved from the area (the one he referred to was a Baptist preacher).

Denominationalism Examined And Exposed

1. *Denominationalism Is Sinful Because It Opposes*

God's Eternal Purpose And Plan To Redeem Man.

God's eternal plan (Eph. 3:11) was made known in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4). God's specific plan was for His Son, Jesus Christ, to be given (John 3:16) as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Denominationalism says that such was not necessary. Denominationalism says that God's plan was worthless. Denominationalism says that man's way is as sufficient. Denominationalism says that God failed to realize that man could accomplish his salvation on his own.

2. Denominationalism Is Sinful Because It Violates Jesus' Prayer For Unity (John 17:20-21). Jesus simply stated there would be one fold (John 10:16). According to the apostle Paul, the people of God are to be united in the same mind and the same judgment (I Cor. 1:10). Jesus built ONE church (Matt. 16:18); gave His followers ONE name to wear (Acts 11:26); and ONE faith (gospel) to follow (Jude 3).

Marshall Flowers clearly and emphatically stated this truth (**What Is Wrong With Denominationalism**, tract):

Denominationalism, to the contrary, glories in its divisions, exalts its different names, defends its many churches, and claims that there are many faiths and one is as good as another. Denominationalism thrives on division and then tries to make out like this division is according to the will of God.

Our Lord prayed for Himself (John 17:1-5); the apostles (John 17:9-16). Then He prayed for all who would hear, believe and obey the powerful gospel.

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

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That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20-21).

The Lord's prayer of John 17 is complemented by the Saviour's plan for unity, as contained in the inspired writings of the apostle Paul:

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:3-6).

Note the:

Unity of organization One Body
Unity of revelation One Spirit
Unity of aim One Hope
Unity of authority One Lord
Unity of doctrine One faith
Unity of practice One baptism
Unity of worship One God

Note that denominationalism would change three of the seven items above. They would claim MANY bodies (not "*one body*"); MANY faiths (not "*one faith*"); and MANY baptisms) not "*one baptism.*" Friends, which is correct? Both could be wrong, false! But both cannot be correct, right! Do you accept the Bible or denominationalism?

3. Denominationalism Is Sinful Because It Destroys The Bible As THE Sole Authority In Religious Matters.
The Bible is the "*inspired*" Word of Almighty God:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Almighty has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). The doctrine (faith) has been given unto us once and for all (Jude 3).

Denominationalism takes the position that one group can have a “*manual*” while another may have a “*catechism*.” A third may have a “*discipline*” and a fourth may have the “*confession of faith*.” Such an attitude and belief makes the Bible incomplete and faulty. Jehovah does not today need, nor has He ever needed, man to supplement His authority (will).

We must do what our Father authorized His people in this dispensation to do. We learn from many who have lived before who either did exactly as God commanded, and were blessed as a result (Noah, Gen. 8:22; Abraham, Heb. 11) or who did not obey God and as a result were punished (Nadab and Abihu, Lev. 10:1-2; King Saul, 1 Sam. 15:22).

Whether it pleases people to hear this or not, it is the truth – every denomination teaches or practices something which contradicts what the Bible teaches. A few areas of false teaching to illustrate this point would include: baptism is not necessary to be saved; instruments of music are acceptable in worship; faith only will save; babies should be baptized; women taking a leadership role in public assemblies; etc.

4. *Denominationalism Is Sinful Because It Creates Confusion, Making Jehovah Unreliable.* God is

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certainly not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). Jehovah is not responsible for the religious mass hysteria in our world. He is the author of “*the way*” (John 14:1-6) that leads to heaven. He will save “*only those who do the will of the Father*” (Matt. 7:21ff). We can know, understand and do the will of Jehovah God (John 6:44-45; John 8:32; 1 Peter 1:22-25).

If God expects mankind to hear, know, understand and obey Him (which He absolutely requires!), but if He gave mankind various instructions that can not be understood alike, then God is incompetent and unreliable. This is obviously NOT the truth of the matter! God is NOT responsible for such. It is denominationalism that is incompetent and unreliable.

Consider for a moment the conflicting doctrines, which are diametrically opposed to each other, which are preached by preachers and teachers who claim to be a minister of the gospel of Christ. Many explicitly state that God has (supposedly) revealed this to them, or told them to preach “*such-and-so*.” In view of such, it is little wonder that many of the world are confused, disgusted and have turned religion off. It is especially in view of this that the Lord’s people should intensify their efforts to call people back to the Bible, the Bible only, as their authority and guide.

God is reliable. God is competent. God, the Creator of the universe, is all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere present. He has provided mankind with “*the way*” that leads to eternal life. Those who “*receive with meekness the engrafted word*” (James 1:21f) and “*do the will of the Father*” (Matt. 7:21) will be saved. Those who choose to develop their own religious course of action will NOT be saved by the heavenly Father (Gal. 1:6-9; Matt. 15:7-9).

5. Denominationalism Is Unacceptable, And Must Be Rejected, Because It Would Make Jesus A Hypocrite, Foolishly Contradicting Himself. Our Lord specifically condemned the doctrines and commandments of men. If Jesus expects one man to teach what He called another man to deny, then obviously He is contradictory.

What we believe, teach and practice is critically important. We must teach the “*doctrine of Christ*” nothing more, nothing less, nothing else! Note Matthew 15:1-15, which sets the context for the following quote:

Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, **teaching for doctrines the commandments of men** (Matt. 15:7-9).

We can rightfully draw the following conclusions from these verses: (1) Some religious people transgress the commandment of God because of their tradition. (2) Some make void the word of God because of their tradition. (3) Some may claim to be honoring God but in reality they are practicing “*vain worship*.” (4) When confronted with truths such as these points, some are offended. (5) Some brethren are more concerned with the ones offended with the truth which needs to be spoken, than they are with pleasing God. (6) Plants which are not the Lord’s will be rooted up. (7) Those who lead others to their destruction will definitely be lost eternally.

Paul warned, in the epistle to the church at Galatia, of perverting the gospel of Christ, and the eternal consequences of such action:

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I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would **pervert the gospel of Christ**. But though we, or an angel from heaven, **preach any other gospel** unto you than that which we have preached unto you, **let him be accursed**. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

Denominational preachers today often say, “*God called me to preach ...*,” or “*God put this in my heart.*” Do we dare conclude that God is to blame for the unbelievable confusion?

Paul said the faithful followers of God are to speak the same thing (1 Cor. 1:10). Simon Peter said we are to speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11). If we accept what denominational preachers teach as truth, then our Lord is contradictory. If we accept what Jesus said as truth, then denominational preachers are hypocritical, false teachers!

6. *Denominationalism Is Wrong Because It Denies What The Bible Teaches About The Oneness Of The Church.* Why did Christ die? Was it so all people could be in any “*church?*” No! What did He purchase with His shed blood? All “*churches?*” No! What does it mean to be “*in Christ?*”? To be a member of any religious body which makes one a member of the overall church? No!

Denominationalism declares: “*One church is as good as another,*” “*Join the church of your choice,*” “*One can be saved in any denomination,*” or “*The church is not important ... believing in Jesus as your personal Saviour is what is important.*”

To believe and teach the above statements, various Bible facts must be ignored.

Prophecies of long ago Isa. 2:2-3; Dan. 2:44
The church to come Mark 9:1
Jesus built His church Matt. 16:18
He built ONE church Eph. 4:4
Purchased by Christ Acts 20:28
Christ = Foundation 1 Cor. 3:11
Christ is head of it Eph. 1:22-23

Can one possibly know the above truths and disregard them in order to accept denominations of men?

7. Denominationalism Must Be Rejected Because It Makes The Lord's Death Worthless! Why did the Saviour die? Acts 20:28 tells us plainly:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed **the church** of God, **which he hath purchased with his own blood.**

When denominational preachers claim the church is not important, that one can choose whichever "*church*" he/she likes, then they are teaching the Lord shed His blood in vain. His death was of no value. If the Lord's church, the one for which He died, is no different than any of the two or three hundred religions of men, then why did He die? If Buddha, Mohammed, Rev. Moon, etc., can create, develop, concoct their own "*church*" and it be able to save folks (as they claim) then Christ died in vain!

8. Denominationalism Is Sinful Because It Destroys The Lord's Plan Of Salvation! Jesus is explicitly clear concerning what one must do to become a Christian. Note the words of Christ: "...if ye **believe** not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). "...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). "...confess me before men..." (Matt. 10:32-33). "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...*" (Mark 16:16).

In contrast to the specific plan of salvation found in the inspired Word of God, the denominational world says, "*ask the Lord to come into your heart,*" "*pray the sinner's prayer,*" "*accept the Lord as your personal Saviour,*" "*give God your heart,*" "*just believe Jesus is God's Son and He will save you,*" etc.

9 Denominationalism Is Sinful Because Unscriptural Unauthorized Names Are Worn! The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch (Acts 11:26). Followers of God are saints (1 Cor. 1:2), sons and daughters of God (2 Cor. 6:18), an elect race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9). These are divine names to be worn with honor. To wear any other name than those given by Jehovah is to dishonor Jehovah! There is something in a name:

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is **none other name** under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:12).

We understand the significance of a name when we write a check, sign a note at the bank, transfer a deed, or if a man were to call the name of another woman while he was sleeping. There is something in a name in these occasions. The followers of God were to be given a new name (Isa. 62). They were given a new name, and it

is important. We are to wear His name; not some name of a human being, nor a name which represents action, or a movement.

10. *Denominationalism Is Of Satan!* Doctrines of men, choosing the church of one's choice, developing a new worship according to the whims and fancies of man, etc., cannot be supported in Scripture. Jesus is "*the*" way (John 14:6). Only those who follow the strait and narrow way will be saved (Matt. 7:13-14). If, and only if, we obey the commands of our Saviour will we be saved eternally (Matt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9).

We are either for Christ or against Him (Matt. 12:30f). We cannot serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:24). We must obey God, not man (Acts 5:29). Our goal and primary thrust in life cannot be *winning friends and influencing people* – but rather pleasing our heavenly Father through complete obedience to His will.

Can Unity Ever Be Attained Religiously?

If we will accept the Bible as our authority, and accept what the Bible commands, and obey the commands found in the Bible – then we can see the Bible alike, and be united. To be united, we must not go beyond what the Bible authorizes.

...If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18-19).

We must follow the doctrine of Christ. We must

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reject doctrines of men. We, in fact, must refuse to bid God speed to man's doctrines or we will be guilty of the same evil deeds.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

We are to strive for unity, endeavor for it, pray for it and rejoice when it is accomplished. But God does not condone all forms of unity. Being united with error, compromising with Satan and his servants has never been and will never be pleasing to God.

The Faithful People Of God Are At War!

We must fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12). While our warfare is not carnal (2 Cor. 10:4), we are to war a good warfare (1 Tim. 1:18) as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:3-4). We are to put on the whole armor of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of Satan (Eph. 6:10-18).

All faithful Christians (soldiers) must be watchmen. Watch and stand fast in the faith (1 Cor. 16:13); watch thou in all things (2 Tim. 4:5); watch and be sober (1 Thess. 5:6).

We must NOT fraternize with the enemy!

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them (Eph. 5:11).

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you (2 Cor. 6:17).

We are told to “*mark them*” which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine of Christ. To fulfill this command we must draw attention to, expose, or point out the false ways. The Psalmist stated it clearly when he said to hate every false way (Psm. 119:104).

Become Your Enemy?

When faithful Christians speak up and endeavor to help others learn the truth about the Lord’s church, often people get upset, terminate the conversation, strike out with penetrating words. We should be reminded frequently that it was not man who drew the lines, established the restrictions. It was the Lord. It was Jesus Christ, who stated in the Holy Word, by the pen of the apostle Paul, that if we pervert the gospel, we will be accursed. Jesus said every plant which His heavenly Father did not plant (man-made organizations) would be rooted up (Matt. 15:13).

In the Galatian epistle, the apostle Paul stated,

Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? (Gal. 4:16).

Let us be reminded that it is not a crime to have enemies. We should live righteously, which will demand we are enemies of Satan and his servants. We must speak the truth, fulfilling our duty as God’s people. If such action creates enemies, we regret it, but must NOT change our action. Recall the Bible examples and statements found in Matthew 10:36; Matthew 14:3-11. There are enemies of the truth, whom God will

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ultimately punish (Heb. 10:30-31; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rom. 12:19).

Conclusion

Denominationalism exists today because religious folks have gone beyond the Word of God for their doctrine and practices. They have “*perverted*” the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:6-9).

A man can do everything the Bible teaches him to do to be saved and **never be a member of a denomination!** He has to do something in addition to or instead of what the Bible teaches to be a member of a denomination!

When you believe and do everything the Bible teaches you to believe and do, you will simply be a Christian, and the Lord will add you to the church (Acts 2:47) which began on Pentecost, approximately A.D. 33, and over which He is the head, and of which He is the Saviour!

Chapter 12

Hinduism

Stephen Waller

The study of Hinduism is extremely interesting, yet at the same time it can produce much weariness. The influence of Hinduism is spreading around the world and its influence is felt very much in the United States where a number of Hindu temples have been or are now being erected. When one begins to research the Hindu religion in the numerous volumes available, he will find that unless the author has chosen to study the various religions alphabetically, Hinduism will most often be the first religion discussed.

The reason is that many scholars and researchers consider Hinduism to be one of the world's oldest religions, if not the oldest, and thus, will begin with Hinduism. It is believed by many that Hinduism began between approximately 2,000 to 1500 B.C. Some think that it antedates Judaism, while others believe that in some ways it copies certain aspects of Judaism. All of this fails to take into account the fact that from the beginning God (the God of the Bible, Gen. 1:1) expected man to honor and obey Him (Gen. 2). The very first earthly family was instructed in the manner that sacrifices were to be made to God (Gen. 3; Heb. 11:4). The Scriptures teach that God spoke to the fathers by the prophets (Heb. 1:1-2). The Patriarchal system of the Bible is the first true religious system and it antedates Hinduism.

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Let it be understood that we have no ill-will toward anyone who holds to the beliefs or doctrines of the Hindu religion. We care for the Hindus very much and are deeply interested in their salvation. We do believe, however, that the Hindu religion is filled with error, that it is contrary to the revealed will of God in the Bible, and that to follow it will result in eternal condemnation. It has not been our effort to misrepresent in any way the various doctrines and practices of this highly interesting, but false pagan religion. The quotations from Hindu sources speak for themselves.

Hinduism is a religion, a culture, a way of life that is so diverse and has undergone so many changes through the centuries that it is extremely difficult to define or describe. There are nearly one billion people who follow Hinduism, most of whom live in India. Hinduism does not have a central earthly headquarters. A former president of India has stated, "Hinduism is more a culture than a creed."¹ 'Hindu' is the Persian word for "Indian."² Hinduism involves a close relation between the land India occupies, the social caste system that has existed there for centuries, and the history of India's inhabitants. Sanatana Dharma, meaning "righteousness forever" or "eternal religion" of "that which has no beginning or end," was the original name of Hinduism. The term "Sanatana Dharma" is still used today.

...Hinduism encompasses a broad spectrum of philosophies ranging from pluralistic theism to absolute monism. It is a family of myriad faiths with four primary denominations: Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smartism. These four hold such divergent beliefs that each is a complete and independent religion. Yet, they share a vast heritage of culture and belief:

karma, dharma, reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity, temple worship, sacraments, manifold Deities, the many yogas, the guru-nishya tradition and a reliance on the Vedas as scriptural authority.³

Origins

From very early times the inhabitants of India were the Dravidians, a dark-skinned type of people. Researchers believe that Indo-Europeans or Aryans migrated into or invaded the area known as India. The blending of these cultures worked to produce Hinduism. The Aryans spoke Sanskrit and were the authors of a collection of hymns which were composed over a period of time. “The best known of these hymns is the Rig-Veda (lit., knowledge enshrined in verses).”⁴ Nature gods, to whom were attributed personal characteristics with superhuman powers, were worshipped. Sacrifices were offered to various gods. It was believed that these gods could be persuaded to bestow appropriate rewards to men. Ancestor worship was practiced. The Aryans constantly waged war with the indigenous people and eventually brought all of India (which included the Dravidians) under their rule.

The Indo-Aryans who came to rule India formed a caste system which worked to keep the people of India in subjection by means of their religion. Hindu religion teaches that Lord Brahma created all beings and the caste system, and that Manu set up roles of conduct for all castes.⁵

Hindus believe that the first man, called “Manu” originated four types of people. From his head came the “Brahmins” [or Brahmans, SPW] who were the priests and holy caste. From his hands

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sprang the “Kshatriyas” who were the caste of rulers and warriors. From Manu’s thighs came the third ranked caste who were called “Vaishyas;” they were the merchants and craftsmen. Everyone else came from Manu’s feet and formed the lowest caste called “Sudras;” they were the servants and laborers. Eventually out of these four castes grew thousands of sub-castes and outcasts. The Caste System has dominated India for three thousand years. One is not supposed to marry out of his caste or associate with those of other castes. Though the system is outlawed by India’s present constitution, it is still held to by many.⁶

Hindu Sacred Writings

Hindus believe that the writings that guide them are sacred and are the revealed truth of God. They believe that these writings or “Sruti literature” have just as much power, authority, and sacredness as the Holy Spirit inspired Bible (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Among the “sacred writings,” or Vedas, of the Hindus are four categories. The term “Veda” means “wisdom” or “knowledge.” Hymns and ritual instructions were added to the Rig-Veda (Veda of Hymns) from the Sama-Veda (Veda of Music) and the Yajur-Veda (knowledge of rites). Later, “...a fourth group of writings was collected, called the Atharva-Veda, which consisted largely of spells and incantations addressed to gods or demons, with marked animistic features.”⁷ The Vedas are believed to have been written between 1500 and 1000 B.C. Four other groups of sacred Hindu writings, out of many, are the Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Puranas. Many philosophical writings are found in the Upanishads which were written between approximately 800-600 B.C. There

was supposedly a warrior king whose name was Lord Rama whose exploits are found in the Ramayana. Lord Rama is believed to be an Avatar (incarnation) of Lord Vishnu (a Hindu god). The Mahabharata consists of many poems, stories, and sermons. It is the longest poem in the world. A portion of the Mahabharata is the Bhagavad Gita, which is looked upon as the Hindu Holy Bible.

The Bhagavad Gita is the essence of the Vedas. It is indeed a summation of the Upanishads...The Gita has an answer to every problem a man may face in his life. The Bhagavad Gita never commands one what to do. Instead it gives pros and cons of every issue and the final decision is left to oneself. Throughout the Bhagavad Gita, you will not come across even one line starting with “Thou shalt not.”

When Christian Scriptures talk about permanent hell for sinners, the Bhagavad Gita proclaims salvation for all in various couplets (4:36, 9:30, 9:32). All of us, whether we believe in God or not, are destined to attain salvation one day. Only the time factor differs for the best and worst among us.

All through the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says “I am the Way” and “Come to Me...” To understand the immortal words of Christ, one needs the Bhagavad Gita and other Hindu scriptures. Without the aid of Hinduism, one may even come to erroneous conclusions when one tries to explain the sayings of Christ.⁸

The Puranas teach moral behavior and expound moral truths. The word “Purana” means ancient. The

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Puranas are written in question and answer form.

God And Gods

Hinduism has three hundred thirty-three million gods. They believe that all of nature is full of life. Thus, they build shrines to honor trees, rocks, rivers, waterfalls, the sun, moon, stars, and mountains. Whatever man can see or conjure up in his mind, a Hindu might build a shrine to it. The Hindu believes that the mountains and trees speak to him about the struggles of man on earth and help him to understand the differences between good and evil. The Ganges River is considered a symbol of the source of life and is highly esteemed and sacred to the Hindu. He believes that it symbolizes eternal life. So, the Hindu will make his journey to the Ganges to bathe and perform his religious or ceremonial rites. He believes that when he dies and is cremated, that if his ashes are cast upon the waters of the Ganges River, life will continue.

Hindus believe in one God expressed in different forms. One Hindu writer states, "It won't be wrong to state that God did not make man in His own image as the Old Testament says, but instead man made God in his own image."⁹ The Hindu concept of God may be explained as follows:

1. All came from that one which cannot be defined, called Brahman (monism)...
2. All came from That, so all existence is good and divine (pantheism).
3. There is only one God (monotheism).
4. All of us are Gods. This, of course, is just like saying that if you can analyze one drop of sea water, then you know everything about the

entire sea, or that if you know the properties of the electricity within the light bulb, then you know all about the electricity in the entire network.

5. To search for God is like a pinch of salt finding the depth of the ocean. The moment the pinch of salt hits the surface of the ocean, it becomes part and parcel of the ocean. Similarly, a devotee who seeks God becomes part and parcel of That.¹⁰

Devotion to God and the Gods of Hinduism is known as Bhakti. It is an entire realm of knowledge and practice unto itself, ranging from the childlike wonder of the unknown and the mysterious to the deep reverence which comes with understanding of esoteric interworkings of the three worlds. Hinduism views existence as composed of three worlds. The First World is the physical universe; the Second World is the subtle astral or mental plane of existence in which the devas, angels and spirits live; and the Third World is the spiritual universe of the Mahadevas, “great shining beings,” our Hindu Gods. Hinduism is the harmonious working together of these three worlds...

Hindus believe in one Supreme Being. The plurality of Gods are perceived as divine creations of that one Being. So, Hinduism has one supreme God, but it has an extensive hierarchy of Gods.¹¹

Hinduism gives us the freedom to approach God in our own way, without demanding conformity to any dogma. This freedom makes the concept of God in Hinduism the richest in all the world's

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religions... Hinduism is both a monotheistic and a henotheistic religion. Hindus believe in one supreme God who created the universe and who is worshipped as Light, Love and Consciousness. Hindus were never polytheistic, but were always henotheistic. Henotheism is defined by Webster's as "the belief in or worship of one God without denying the existence of others...." We Hindus believe that there is one all-pervasive God which energizes the entire universe. We can see Him in the life shining out of the eyes of humans and all creatures. This concept of God as existing in and giving life to all things is called "panentheism." It is different from pantheism, which is the belief that God is the natural universe and nothing more. It is also different from theism which says God is only above the world. Panentheism is a beautiful concept. It says that God is both in the world and beyond it, both immanent and transcendent. That is the Hindu view. Hindus also believe in many devas who perform various kinds of functions, like executives in a large corporation. These should not be confused with God. There is one Supreme God only. What is sometimes confusing to non-Hindus is that we may call this one God by many different names, according to our tradition. Truth for the Hindu has many names, but that does not make for many truths.¹²

The gods of Hinduism in order of rank may be classified as follows from the highest to the lowest: First, is Brahman, the indefinable, timeless reality - immovable, inconceivable, unborn; an impersonal god. Second, is AUM or OM, the vibratory aspect of Brahman. The Hindu says this compares to and is parallel with the "Word" of the

Bible as described in John 1:1. It is a sacred, mystic syllable standing for the Absolute, and is uttered at the beginning and end of most Hindu prayers, and can be found at the beginning of most sacred Hindu writings. It is considered the very essence of the Vedas. It is chanted and supposedly has a cosmic sound imperceptible to the senses. In many Indian languages, it means, “yes, verily” or “hail.”¹³ Third, there is a Trinity or Trimurthi, consisting of Brahma (creation), Vishnu (preservation), and Siva (annihilation). This is followed by the fourth, the Mother Goddess, consisting of three: Saraswathi (knowledge), Lakshmi (wealth), and Parvati (power).

These are followed by the Gods of Nature, Surya (sun), Soma (moon), Vayu (air), Agni (fire), Varuna (water), Indra or Devendra (heaven). Other gods follow: Kubera (god of wealth), Garuda (god of birds), Himavan (god of mountains), Anathan (god of snakes), Ganges (goddess of rivers), Hanuman (monkey god), and Nandi (god of four-legged animals). Then, there are gods of fields, gates, villages, the elephant-faced Ganesha (honored by Hindus of every sect as “...Lord of Obstacles, revered for His great wisdom and invoked first before any undertaking, for He knows all intricacies of each soul’s karma and the perfect path of dharma that makes action successful”),¹⁴ the Rig Vedic goddess of earth and a god of the sky. There are other gods referred to as “Scriptural deities.”

Then, there are Avatars of Vishnu, Siva, and Mother Goddess. There are “celestial beings” and “celestial females,” planetary gods, female imps, witches, departed saints, and prophets.¹⁵

One should note in the foregoing paragraph that Hindus believe in Avatars. An Avatar is an incarnation of God or a God. It is believed that God, or any number of Gods, may come down to earth in some kind of life-form. The Bhagavad Gita states, “Whenever there is a decay of

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Dharma (righteousness) and outbreak of Adharma (non-righteousness), I descend Myself to protect good, to annihilate the wicked and to re-establish Dharma. I am born from age to age.” Hindus claim that Jesus Christ, Krishna, Buddha and Mohammed were all Avatars. The Hindu believes that Lord Vishnu (the God of Preservation) had ten major Avatars and a number of lesser Avatars. The claim is that Lord Vishnu came to earth in the form of a tortoise, a fish, a boar, a man-lion, a dwarf, a warrior with an axe, a man on a white horse, and took on numerous other forms. Great mythical stories have arisen giving the alleged reasons for the return of Vishnu in these various forms. Epic stories and exciting legends are told extolling the power and victory of these Avatars over various forms of evil in the world.

Someone might ask, “What about the sacred cows?” Cows have always been considered a blessing because they provide milk, butter, and yogurt. The dead cow’s skin was used to make shelters and clothing. There was a mythological cow named Kamadhenu which could grant or fulfill any wish. The slaughtering of cows is forbidden. The Rig Veda (6:28) states, “Cows are God; they seem to me to be Indra, the God of Heaven.” Many fanatical Hindus avoid eating beef, yet there are many others who consume it.

Fundamental Beliefs Of Hindus

The core beliefs of Hindus center in three areas: karma, reincarnation, and a basic belief that Divinity is everywhere. Following are nine beliefs of Hinduism which have been published in *Christianity Today* (2/8/93) and by the Religious News Service, Washington, D.C. (8/95):

1. Hindus believe in the divinity of the Vedas, the world’s most ancient scripture, and venerate

the Agamas as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither beginning nor end.

2. Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.

3. Hindus believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.

4. Hindus believe in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.

5. Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.

6. Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.

7. Hindus believe that a spiritually awakened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry and meditation.

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8. Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, “noninjury.”

9. Hindus believe that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God’s Pure Love and Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.¹⁶

Reincarnation

If one knows anything about Hinduism he probably knows that Hindus believe in reincarnation, or the transmigration of souls. The Bhagavad Gita 2:22 teaches reincarnation:

At the time of death, the body dies but the soul never dies. The soul passes from one body to another after death like a body changing clothes. The soul goes on taking an endless number of bodies, until the soul exhausts all Karmas attached to the soul. This process is known as reincarnation.

In answer to the question to discuss and describe reincarnation, Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, prepared the following statement:

Reincarnation, known in Sanskrit as samsara, is a very openly discussed subject these days. Shirley MacLaine went “out on a limb” on this subject and made popular throughout the United States. Now nearly every television script has standard statements written into it such as “See you in the next life,” or “I must have known you in a past life.” The TV serial “Quantum Leap” is

a great example of a program that is bringing this knowledge of a one soul inhabiting many bodies to the forefront of mass consciousness. I talked with Shirley a few weeks ago in San Francisco and told her what a fantastic job we all thought she is doing in spreading this knowledge, and assured her that she has the full support of Hindus.

Now to three answers that you can memorize to give when this question is asked of you. Don't forget to precede your answer with your sweet smile and confident prologue.

Answer #1: Reincarnation, yes, carnate means flesh. The word reincarnate means to "reenter the flesh." We Hindus believe the soul is immortal and keeps reentering a fleshly body time and time again in order to resolve experiences and thereby learn all the lessons life in the material world has to offer.

Answer #2: There have been many recorded out-of-the-body experiences. These have been researched by scientists, psychiatrists and parapsychologists during the last decade and documented in some very good books. Even science is discovering reincarnation.

Answer #3: Yes, we Hindus believe in reincarnation. To us, it explains the natural way the soul evolves from immaturity to spiritual illumination. I myself have had many lives before this one and expect to have more. Finally, when I have it all worked out and all the lessons have been learned, I will attain mukti. This

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means I will still exist but no longer be pulled back to incarnate in a physical body.

Summary

I would like to explain the process of reincarnation in a little more detail. When the soul leaves the physical body never to return, the soul does not die but lives on in another subtle body called the astral body. The astral body lives on another plane of consciousness called the astral plane. Here we continue to have experiences until we are reborn again in another physical body as a baby. The soul chooses a home and a family which can best fulfill its next step of maturation. Hindus understand the natural growth of all humans as they experience evolution because they know these facts. After enlightenment, however, we do not have to reexperience the baseness of human existence but go on in evolution in our other bodies. As an example: After we graduate from school we don't have to nor do we want to re-enroll in the fifth grade. We are beyond that in understanding.¹⁷

The Hindu believes that the experiences of life leave impressions upon the soul during various earthly lives and in the life they think exists in an in-between existence referred to as the astral plane. Life experiences and behavior involving "cause and effect" all combine to make "karma." One's karma is developed and refined through a succession of birth, death, the soul's journey to the astral plane, rebirth into a different earthly body, and on and on the soul continues to travel and reincarnate time after time and takes on varied fleshly bodies. The process repeats thousands of times. And, the body one takes on in the next earthly life may even be that of a beast or an

insect! The Bhagavad Gita 6:19 states, in the words of “Lord Krishna,” “I make the cruel and vicious persons take birth again and again as ferocious animals.” The soul may carry a heavy burden of karma. Whether one is born to a life rich or poor, good or bad, is determined by one’s past life. Past actions are attached to one’s soul and determine the course of travel which the soul takes. At death one’s soul goes into the astral plane, but where one goes in the astral plane depends on his earthly life and the good or evil mind he had while living on earth in a fleshly body.

Because certain seed karmas can only be resolved in earth consciousness and because the soul’s initial realizations of Absolute Reality are only achieved in a physical body, our soul joyously enters another biological body. At the right time, it is reborn into a flesh body that will best fulfill its karmic pattern. In this process, the current astral body-which is a duplicate of the last physical form-is sluffed off as a lifeless shell that in due course disintegrates, and a new astral body develops as the new physical body grows. This entering into another body is called reincarnation: “reoccupying the flesh.”

During our thousands of earth lives, a remarkable variety of life patterns are experienced. We exist as male and female, often switching back and forth from life to life as the nature becomes more harmonized into a person exhibiting both feminine nurturing and masculine intrepidity. We come to earth as princesses and presidents, as paupers and pirates, as tribals and scientists, as murderers and healers, as atheists and, ultimately, God-Realized sages. We take bodies of every race and

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live the many religions, faiths and philosophies as the soul gains more knowledge and evolutionary experience.

Therefore, the Hindu knows that the belief in a single life on earth, followed by eternal joy or pain is utterly wrong and causes great anxiety, confusion and fear. Hindus know that all souls reincarnate, take one body and then another, evolving through experience over long periods of time. Like the caterpillar's metamorphosis into the butterfly, death doesn't end our existence but frees us to pursue an even greater development.¹⁸

Eventually, after all the karmas have been exhausted throughout all the various lives one lives, one will hopefully come to a state of God-realization, or Self-realization. At this point the soul has come to full maturity, goodness and light. With the help and use of yoga and the instructions from a Guru, the Hindu comes to know the Absolute Reality of God. His soul merges with the Absolute Soul or infinite power, Brahman. This merging process is known as salvation. The soul is freed from the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, and one becomes nothing. It is said that one has achieved "moksha" at this point. Salvation is attained by one of three ways: the Way of Works, the Way of Knowledge, and the Way of Devotion.¹⁹ The claim is made that reincarnation gives hope to all and that no one will be punished forever. However, even the most dedicated Hindu will honestly say that there is no "corroborative scientific evidence to prove the science or theory of reincarnation."²⁰

Other Hindu Beliefs And Practices

Hinduism believes in perpetual creation and

annihilation of the universe. It is believed that our world will come to an end in approximately 427,000 years when Lord Vishnu will appear as the Man on the White Horse and destroy the world by fire and flood.²¹

The Hindu will quote the words of Jesus in John 3 concerning being born again and refer to one who is “twice born.” The belief is that one who knows God is twice born, and or will automatically realize God. “According to Hinduism, unless there is an absolute change in consciousness and absolute self-purification, nobody can achieve God-realization. So, it is to be assumed that omnipresent Jesus Christ was referring to a complete change of consciousness rather than any ritualistic or symbolic gestures. He who is born again is a Christian as well as a Brahmin.”²²

The Hindu views Satan as a negative force caused by ignorance. Sin is ignorance in Hinduism. One way to extricate oneself from this delusion is to meditate. “Hinduism does not regard the devil as the personification of a dangerous being, but only as a negative force standing against the spiritual upliftment of man.”²³ The Hindu believes that man creates the demonic forces in the world through his own thoughts, words, and deeds. Yet, Hindus speak of various demonic entities and ghosts, but at the same time refer to all of it as mythology, which one may believe or disbelieve.

Ancient literature refers to the wearing of a dot on the forehead as a means of power. All Hindus, particularly the Brahmin caste, wear the dots on the their foreheads. This is known as the Ajna Chakra, the “spiritual eye” or “third eye.” One believes that he or she is to meditate upon this point and thus, it will enable him to be enlightened. Hindus even try to refer to this as the meaning of the words of Jesus, “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body

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shall be full of light” (Matt. 6:22).

Hindus worship by meditation, sacrifice, and rites. They express adoration to their gods by means of homage to idols, sacrificing to one’s ancestors, honoring the rising sun, and paying homage to the great “Mother” Ganges River. Ira Y. Rice, Jr. wrote:

Because Hinduism is so multi-faceted, no single Hindu can ever learn it all. This makes it hard to pin-point and define its doctrines, many of them being so various and seemingly contradictory. However, it all seems to boil down to one thing: will worship. The key to eternal bliss, they seem to think, is the control of one’s desires and the imposition of self-discipline.²⁴

The apostle Paul condemned “will worship” or a self-imposed religion in Colossians 2:20-23,

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. (Col. 2:20-23, NKJV).

The various acts, rites, and methods of worship in Hinduism are unauthorized in the New Testament of Christ. “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17).

What The Bible Teaches

One might consider Hinduism to be a religion or way of life based upon mere mythology. In some Hindu writings of our time the authors often quote from the Bible and try to make it appear that there is very little difference between the basic philosophy of Hinduism and Christianity or between Hinduism and Biblical teachings, whether of the Old Testament or New Testament. The fact is that there are so many differences, contrasts, and inconsistencies between Hindu teachings and what the Bible teaches that we cannot begin here to list all of them and examine them thoroughly. However, we must address some of the more outstanding beliefs of Hinduism in light of the Bible.

The Hindu God, Brahman, is in fact not a Person as is the God of the Bible. Brahman is a concept, a principle, which is impersonal and permeates the universe. He is a god which is no god at all (Gal. 4:8)! The Bible teaches that there is one God, not many Gods or gods. The Bible teaches that the one eternal God is a spirit who loves and cares for man, and seeks through His grace the good of man. He offers a genuine salvation from sin and true hope of eternal life in heaven through His Son Jesus the Christ, though man is undeserving of His goodness (Gen. 3:15; John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Heaven is the dwelling-place of God and is real (John 14:1-6). Man's soul will not go away into nothingness one day, but will enjoy eternal happiness with God in heaven or be punished eternally in the torment of hell (which is also a real place) (Matt. 25:46; Mark 9:43-48).

The Bible does not teach many different manifestations or revelations of the one God. "And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord" (Mark 12:29). The book of Genesis affirms monotheism (only one God)

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and denies the pagan error of polytheism (many gods). Genesis also denies the Hindu belief of henotheism (belief in one God without denying the existence of others). The Bible also denies pantheism (God is all and all is God).

In giving the Law from Sinai, God declared that there are to be no other gods honored by man since He is the one and only God. And, man has never been authorized by God to erect, design, or devise any kind of idol, icon or image in His honor or in the honor of any imaginary god.

And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments (Exod. 20:1-6).

When Paul journeyed to Athens he found idolatry, superstition, and temple worship in abundance, all of which is contrary to the New Testament of Jesus.

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and

all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. (Acts 17:22-29).

Man is not God or a god, nor will man ever become a god. But, man is the highest creation of God on earth (Gen. 1:26-28). Every human being is important to God. There is not one thing about us that God does not know or about which He is not concerned. Jesus taught:

But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows (Luke 12:5-7).

God is a very personal God who is very much aware of His creation, and who looks upon man as being of more value than the common beast of the field. The beast of

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the field has no eternal soul or spirit, but man does. Man is made in the very image of God (Gen. 1:27), and thus differs from any other creation of God. Paul, in describing the depravity of man, provides an apt description of the unrighteous practices of the adherents of Hinduism as well as all other idolaters:

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. (Rom. 1:19-25).

Hinduism's belief that Satan is a negative force that results from ignorance is seen to be false when one understands that Satan, who in the form of a serpent, tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3) and Jesus (Matt. 4:1-11). The Bible shows that the devil is a real being, not merely a negative force. The Bible reveals Satan as the devil, who is a destroyer or slanderer. He is described as the angel of the bottomless pit (Rev. 9:11),

prince of the world (John 12:31), a liar and murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). He is called the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4). “He was an angel who, because he was puffed up with pride (1 Tim. 3:6), was cast out of heaven (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 12:7-9), and became the leader of all fallen angels who were also in rebellion against God.”²⁵ Man sins when he follows the enticements of this very real being known as Satan. The Bible teaches, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jas. 1:13-15).

Sin is not merely ignorance, it is the transgression of God’s law which separates man from God, and is against God. “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4).

Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

Sin unrepented of will result in the loss of the soul. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

There is no way that a literal word or sound, “OM” or “AUM” can correspond to the “Word” of John 1:1. John 1:1-3 states:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word

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was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

The Word of John 1:1 is the second person of the Godhead who left heaven and came to earth, being born of a virgin who had conceived of the Holy Spirit. “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). The Word became flesh. He was and is the Son of God, a real person, but He was not an Avatar! “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The Word was Jesus who left heaven and came to earth to bring redemption to man (Phil. 2:5-11). Jesus (the Word) is not a mere a sound or a vibratory aspect of Brahman. He does not in any way correspond to such. He was flesh and blood who loved man so much that he sacrificed His body and life’s blood when He died upon the cross to bring forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven to man (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Mohammed, Buddha, and Krishna were not Avatars. The Bible does not recognize Avatars.

Although the so-called “sacred writings” of the Hindus are revered as divinely given, there is not one shred of evidence for such a belief. In fact, Hindu writers admit that many of the stories contained therein are mythological. To compare them with the Bible is to denigrate the Bible and to relegate it to a collection of mere myths. The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, was written by men selected by the Lord and divinely guided, word for word, by the Holy Spirit to reveal to

man God's will and scheme of redemption (1 Pet. 1:10-12; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

There is no room in the Bible for the theory of reincarnation. Reincarnation is the doctrine of the "second chance," whereby it is believed that one has numerous opportunities through numerous physical rebirths to finally "get it right." Hebrews 9:27 states, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:" The term, "once to die," in this passage indicates, "once for all." Death here is a conclusive act.

Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets....Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. (Eccl. 12:5, 7).

The doctrine of reincarnation is wholly false and opposes every basic principle of Christianity.

It mocks the judgment (how can one be judged both as a good person and a bad person in varying states of this life?), it renders impossible the resurrection, and the doctrine of rewards and punishments, so plainly taught in the Scriptures from which it seeks support.²⁶

(See John 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 15; Matt. 25; 2 Pet. 3:5-12). The Bible teaches that the earth will be destroyed on the judgment day with fire, not fire and floods. Additionally, the Bible nowhere sets any time for the end of the world, nor does it teach that the earth and

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universe go through cycles of rebirth. When Christ appears again time shall be no more.

Reincarnation promotes the belief that all humans will ultimately be saved (universal salvation). But Jesus taught:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matt. 7:13-14).

He said further,

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matt. 7:21-23).

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28).

Reincarnation involves the belief in fatalism, which takes away any free choice in God or man. Man is left to the mercy of whatever is out there and has no control or decision-making power as to his destiny.

The law of karma makes no place for grace or

divine forgiveness...In fact, karma also leads to infinite backpedaling to previous incarnations to find the first cause of our suffering. In the end, it offers only an infinite postponement of the problem of evil, not a solution.²⁷

The Hindu concept of the new birth is contrary to what Jesus taught in John 3:1-8. One who is born again is not both a Christian and a Brahmin, and being born again is not at all as described earlier by Hindu sources. Jesus illustrated the new birth (a spiritual birth) by discussing natural birth. In the new birth there is a begetting by the heavenly Father through His seed, the Word, when it is planted in the good and honest hearts of men (1 Pet. 1:22-23; Jas. 1:18; 1 Cor. 4:15). The seed, which is the truth, God's Word, is the product of the Holy Spirit. Thus, to be born of the Spirit is to be begotten by the Word (2 Pet. 1:21).

The sinner is quickened by the power of God through His Word (Romans 1:16). He is born of water and the Spirit. One is born of water and the Spirit—one birth with two elements (John 3:5; Matt. 28:19-20). Baptism is an act of God. It is an operation of God (Col. 2:12). This birth requires a change in relationship prior to the birth. This change includes faith (John 8:24), repentance of all sin (Acts 17:30-31), and confession of Christ with one's mouth (Rom. 10:9-10). Baptism (immersion) in water is in order to receive remission of sins (Acts 2:38) and is the final act in the process of the new birth.

Conclusion

Perhaps one reason that so many of the Hindus in India have obeyed the gospel of Christ in the past few years is because they have recognized that the Hindu gods are no gods. Hindu gods are a mere figment of the

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imagination. There is a great need for our ceaseless efforts to win these lost ones to Jesus Christ, the only true Savior. The God of the Bible offers genuine love, salvation, hope, peace and eternal life in a real place called heaven. The gospel of Christ is still the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

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Chapter 13

Buddhism

John Grubb

Introduction

A number of years ago, I had a Bible study with a lady in Taiwan who said she believed that all religions came from God. Even though all of the different religions teach different and contradictory doctrines, she believed that since they all came from God, we should just pick and choose the best of each one and leave the rest alone. She also believed that since all religions came from God, we should not criticize various religious groups. We know God did not institute contradictory religions because “God is not the author of confusion” (1 Cor. 14:33).

It is granted there is **some** good in all religions. If a religion did not have anything good about it, who would be interested in following it? However, it only takes a little false doctrine to destroy us spiritually. When you want to kill rats, you do not use 100% rat poison. Even a rat is smart enough to know not to eat pure rat poison. It only takes a little poison to kill the rat. So, you put a little poison in the midst of good food, and when the rat eats the good food, he eats the poison and dies. Such is the case with Buddhism. There are some good things stressed in Buddhism, but it is the poison mixed in with it that will cause a person to be lost eternally.

There are so many religions or philosophies that

claim to be the guide for people in this life. Buddhism makes this claim. There are approximately 300 million Buddhists in the world today.

Buddhism is one of many eastern religions that fits into Paul's description of those who "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator" (Rom. 1:23,25).

Just as with many eastern religions, Buddhism is very idolatrous in nature. The Bible is filled with passages that show the folly and sinfulness of idolatry that has existed in eastern religions through the years (Psm. 115:4-8; Psm. 135:15-17; Isa. 40:18-20; Acts 19:24-28; 1 Cor. 12:2).

It is our purpose in this lesson to define Buddhism, then discuss how to defeat it. Defining Buddhism will be much harder than the discussion on defeating Buddhism, because there are so many different interpretations of Buddhism even by those who practice it.¹

Buddhism claims it has evolved into different forms so that it can be relevant to the different cultures in which it exists. It has been reinterpreted over the centuries so that it can remain relevant to each new generation. It had to be relative to be relevant. Outwardly, the types of Buddhism may seem very different but at the center of all of them is the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Paths.

The Founder Of Buddhism

Buddhism is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (563?483?), also known as Shakyamuni. Gautama was born in what is now Nepal. He was born into a noble family and was raised in wealthy circumstances. He married at the age of sixteen and had a son at the age of twenty-nine. It was after the birth of his son that he began his search for enlightenment. After

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trying the ascetic way of life, he turned to meditation. It is claimed that through meditation he realized enlightenment and began to teach his beliefs.

Buddhism was born in India, the home of Hinduism. Since Gautama came out of the Hindu background, there are a number of similarities between Hinduism and Buddhism, e.g., teachings regarding reincarnation and karma.

He began to teach the four noble truths, the interdependence of all living things, and karma. It is said he died at the age 80 after eating spoiled food.

Buddhism Today

Buddhism is divided into three branches. The oldest branch is Theravada, the “Way of the Elders.” Theravada is predominantly found in southern Asia (Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia). By far the largest branch of Buddhism is Mahayana or “Great Vehicle.” It is predominant in northern Asia (China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam). The third branch of Buddhism is the Vajrayana or “Diamond” tradition. It is dominant in Tibet. The Dalai Lama is the leading figure of this branch.

Though there are different branches of Buddhism, the four noble truths and the eightfold path are at the heart of this philosophy.

The **FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS** are: (1) Suffering exists. (2) Suffering arises from attachment to desires. (3) Suffering ceases when attachment to desire ceases. (4) Freedom from suffering is possible by practicing the Eightfold Path.

According to Buddhism, The **EIGHTFOLD PATH** is the way to end this suffering. It will also enable the follower to attain nirvana. This eightfold path includes: (1) Right view or understanding. (2) Right thought. (3) Right speech. (4) Right action. (5) Right livelihood. (6)

Right effort. (7) Right mindfulness. (8) Right contemplation or concentration.

The eight items of the path may be classified under three headings: (1) the first two under the heading of wisdom or understanding; (2) the next three under ethical conduct; (3) the last three under mental discipline.

The Bible teaches that suffering exists. Sometimes we suffer because of the consequences of sin (2 Pet. 2:4; Luke 16:19-31; Heb. 3:7-17). However, the Bible teaches some suffer in spite of righteous living (Jas. 5:10,11; 1 Pet. 4:12-16; 2 Tim. 3:12).

The goal of the Eightfold Path is nirvana. The Bible teaches the goal of righteous living is eternal life in heaven (Matt. 5: 10-12; Matt. 7:21).

What Is Nirvana?

In Sanskrit, nirvana literally means, “extinction, blowing out.’ Nirvana is the ultimate goal of spiritual practice in Buddhism. It is the liberation from the cycle of rebirth and suffering. Nirvana is the total, absolute and permanent cessation of suffering. Buddha says, “one without attachment realizes nirvana.” Buddha also says, “end of craving is nirvana.”² The Buddha described nirvana as supreme happiness, peace and immortality. It is the merging of the individual into being one with the universe. Nirvana means “never having to be reborn.”

The goal of the Christian is also to go to a place where there will be no suffering or pain (Rev. 21:4; 1 Pet. 1:3-9). However, a heavenly reward does not mean we cease to exist (John 5:28,29; Matt. 25:31-46). These passages also point out the unrighteous are not reborn, but will be doomed to hell.

The Meaning Of Karma

Buddhism teaches that happiness or suffering in this life is the result of our deeds (karma) in past lives, or past

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actions in our present lives. Karma is “intentional action, that is, a deed done deliberately through body, speech, or mind.” The effects of karma may be evident either in short term or in the long term. Karma can either manifest its effects in this very life or in the next life or only after several lives.

A man does wrong and suffers for it. But he may suffer when he has done no apparent wrong. Hence his wrong was done in a former life, and if he does wrong and apparently receives no retribution, he will be punished for his sin in another birth.³

The Buddha said:

According to the seed that is sown, So is the fruit you reap. The door of good will gather good result. The door of evil reaps evil result. If you plant a good seed well, Then you will enjoy the good fruits.⁴

According to the idea of karma in Buddhism, an individual has free-will, but he carries the baggage of deeds done in previous lives. What does the Bible teach? The Bible teaches each individual is responsible for his own life (Ezek. 18:4,20; Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). We do not inherit the sins of our ancestors, nor do we inherit sins from previous lives.

Reincarnation Or Rebirth

The idea of reincarnation permeates our society. In the early 1980's, almost one in four Americans believed in reincarnation.⁵ There have been a number of books written, television shows and movies produced that

promote this teaching. Many famous people in history believed they were someone else in another life. According to Buddhism, all creatures (including animals) have a soul, so it would be cannibalism to kill and eat animals. Many who believe in reincarnation are vegetarians.

Those who believe in reincarnation try to use the Bible to uphold their doctrine. In the Old Testament, they refer to the examples of Job (Job 1:20,21) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4,5) to try to uphold their doctrine. They also use Psalm 139:13-16 to try to support their teaching. In the New Testament, they try to use passages that speak of Paul (Gal. 1:15,16) and Elijah (Mt. 11:14; 17:10-13; Luke 1:17). None of these passages remotely suggest this teaching.

The Bible does not uphold this doctrine. In fact, the Bible refutes reincarnation. Take, for example, the case of Elijah. Reincarnation teaches that when a person dies, he is born as someone else in another life. But Elijah did not die (2 Kings 2:11; Heb. 11:5). Also, Elijah appears as himself with Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-5). John came “in the spirit and power of Elijah’ (Luke 1:17).

Reincarnation teaches we die over and over again.⁶ However, the Bible tells us “it is appointed unto men once to die” (Hebrews 9: 27). This same verse tells us that after we die, we wait for the judgment.

The Buddhist View Of God

As in Hinduism, the Buddhist view of God is that there are many gods, or no gods.

In Chinese style polytheism, the pantheon of gods is open....In China ... religions are viewed as inclusive, and a person may commonly be a combination of Buddhist, Taoist, and

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Confucianist, with some other elements thrown in as well. Chinese tend to look for a “god that can solve a specific problem at an immediate time, and to fill a particular need. They visit a variety of temples and shrines to give offerings. When the Westerner inquires as to which idols or images in the temple are representative of which religions, it is most likely none of the Chinese in attendance knows.⁷

Buddhism is a religion that “offers the chance to be an atheist out having to dispense with religion.”⁸ So in Buddhism, you can be a polytheist or an atheist. It does not affect the final outcome or goals of Buddhism. The Psalmist said, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God’ (Psm 14:1).

Defeating Buddhism

The key to defeating Buddhism or any eastern religion is to first establish the truth of the Bible. If the Bible is true, then anything that contradicts the Bible must be false. We can prove the truth of the Bible.

What is so special about the Bible that makes us realize it is the greatest book ever written? The Bible claims to be from God (2 Pet. 1:20,21; 2 Tim. 3:16,17).

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:20,21).

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly

furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

The Bible Is True

Jesus said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). He then says, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). The Word of God is our source of truth (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

No Contradictions

There are no contradictions in the Bible. The Bible was written by about forty different writers over a period of about 1600 years. The writers of the Bible were men who lived in different periods of time, having different occupations, and living in different places. In many cases, the writers did not know each other. In spite of this, there are no contradictions in the Bible. This could not have happened by accident. Buddhism does not even try to claim there are no contradictions in their sacred writings.

Scientific Facts

We can also consider the scientific facts found in the Bible. The Bible is not a science book, but it has scientific facts in it. Columbus and Magellan proved the earth is round. That was just about five hundred years ago. The Bible told us the earth was round thousands of years before anybody ever heard of Columbus or Magellan (Isa. 40:22; Prov. 8:27).

The Bible also tells us we are not able to number the stars. In 1940, astronomers finally came to this conclusion. Almost 2,500 years ago, Jeremiah recorded:

As the host of heaven cannot be numbered,
neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I
multiply the seed of David my servant, and the
Levites that minister unto me (Jer. 33:22).

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Almighty God cannot only count the stars, He can call them by name (Psm. 147:4).

Fulfilled Prophecies

There are more than one thousand prophecies in the Bible. The fact that every prophecy is fulfilled is further proof that the Bible is true. More than three hundred of these prophecies are concerning the Messiah. Jesus fulfilled every one.

There Is Only One Right Way

The Bible teaches there is only one right way (John 14:6). We will be judged by the words of Christ (John 12:48). There are only two choices in life - the narrow way or the broad way (Matt. 7:13,14). If we want to **go** to heaven, we have to obey the will of God (Matt. 7:21-23). The Bible is the proven guide for the lives of all people.

Buddhism Contradicts The Truth Of The Bible

The Bible teaches there is only one true God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 44:6; 1 Cor. 8:6). The Bible also emphasizes the existence of God (Gen. 1:1; Dan. 2:28; Acts 17:23-29). Buddhism teaches there is either no God or many gods, your choice. The Bible is right! Buddhism contradicts the Bible; therefore, it cannot be right!

The Bible teaches it is our guide in life and it reveals all truth (Psm. 119:105; John 14:26; John 16:13; 2 Pet. 1:3). Buddhism teaches the writings of Gautama and one's own feelings are the guide in this life (Prov. 14:12; Jer. 10:23).

The Bible proclaims Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God (Rom. 1:4; John 20:30,31). The Bible teaches that Jesus rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:3,4). Buddhism denies Jesus rose from the dead and denies Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Since Buddhism contradicts these plain passages, Buddhism cannot be true!

The Bible reveals God's eternal plan to save mankind through the church (Eph. 3:8-11; Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:22,23; Eph. 5: 23). Buddhism denies this is the path of salvation. According to Buddhism, a person is to follow the Eightfold Path that will lead to Nirvana. Since this contradicts the Bible, it cannot be right!

The Bible teaches that our soul is eternal and we will be judged according to our works, by the word of God (Matt. 10:28; 1 Cor. 15: 45; Rom. 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:10). The difference between humans and animals is humans have an eternal soul, animals do not. Yet Buddhism teaches all life, human and animal, is of the same value. Buddhism also teaches reincarnation, which is a continual rebirth. These views are in conflict with the Bible. The Bible is true; therefore, these doctrines of Buddhism are false.

Conclusion

Buddhism stresses self-dependence and self-salvation. It cannot be true because it is a religion from man (Mat. 15:8,9,13-15). Christianity is far superior to any other religion in the world. It offers forgiveness of sins through our obedience to Christ (Heb. 5:8,9). The only hope this world has is through Christ (Eph. 2:12; John 14:6; 1 Thes. 1:9).

May God help each of us to use every opportunity to preach the gospel of Christ to those who practice and follow Buddhism, and give them the opportunity to believe and obey the gospel (2 Thes. 1:7-9; Rom. 1:16).

Endnotes

1 An excellent reference book for studying eastern religions is Survey Of World Religions by Rod Rutherford.

2 Yahoo Search Results: Four Noble Truths, **Buddhism In A Nutshell**, P.43

3 Edward J. Thomas, **The Life of Buddha** (London: Broadway House, 1949), P. 174.

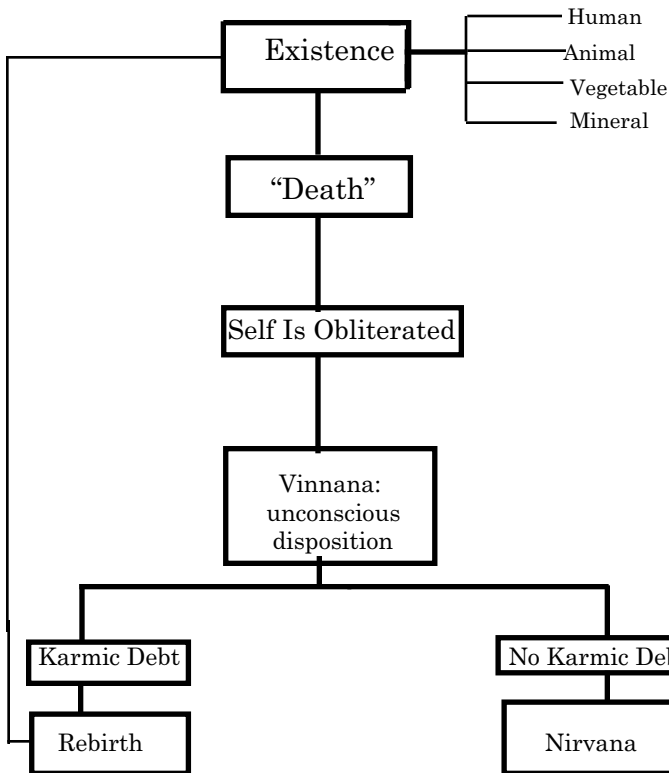
4 Yahoo Search Results: **Essentials of Buddhism**, Karma, P.

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5 Norman L. Geisler and J. Yutaka Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986), p. 7.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Buddhist View Of Reincarnation



7 Richard W. Hartzell, *Harmony in Conflict* (Taipei: Cave Books, 1988), P. 565.

8 Wulf Metz, "The Appeal of Buddhism In The West," in *The World's Religions* (Herts, England: Lion Publishing, 1982), P. 242.

Chapter 14

Muhammadanism

David Jones

We are thankful once again for the opportunity to participate in this great and good lectureship. The past lectureships have proven to be truly important weeks, producing much valuable material for the devoted student of God's word. This year's choice, **Dangerous 'Isms**, will, no doubt, be a bulwark for truth and defense of the same. The elders of this good congregation have done much to advance the cause, both at home and abroad and we are proud to be their friends and fellow soldiers. The local preachers at Southaven, B.J. Clarke and Bill Bryant, are two servants who are desperately needed in this area at this time. Brother Clarke does a remarkable service for the Lord in directing this lectureship. Brother Bryant is a humble servant who diligently advances and defends the kingdom of God. It is both a pleasure and a blessing to know these two men and their good families.

The subject of discussion in this chapter is Muhammadanism or Islam. This dangerous religion poses a staunch challenge to the cause of Christ for the future. The apostle Paul wrote: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim 3:12). The Lord promised the faithful eternal life, but not without persecutions:

But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this

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time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life (Mark 10:30).

The threat of persecution for this and the next generation from the followers of Muhammad looms perilously on the horizon. It would behoove every Christian to be concerned enough to prepare himself for this battle and then personally engage in the fight for eternal life.

Definition Of Islam Origin of Islam

Islam had its beginning in Arabia, a huge peninsula in southwestern Asia, bounded by the Red Sea on the west, by the Persian Gulf on the east, and by the Indian Ocean on the south. Not far to the north, separated from Arabia by a desert, was Palestine, the homeland of Christianity.¹ The Arabian peninsula formed the link between Africa and Asia, thereby making these two continents accessible to the spread of Islam.² The Arabian Peninsula was inhabited by nomadic Bedouins (children of the desert) engaged in herding and brigandage (living as bandits), and by city-dwelling Arabs engaged in trade.³ The dominant religion of Arabia at this time was a form of the old Semitic religion with shrines of various gods and goddesses in many places. There also appears to have been a widespread belief in a high god or supreme god, Allah. The other gods were sometimes regarded as angels, and could be asked to intercede with the supreme god on behalf of the worshippers.⁴

In brief, in the sixth century after Christ, the majority of the people of Arabia were still pagans, but monotheism was spreading steadily. The time was ripe for the Arabs to abandon their superstitions in favor of a more spiritual

and monotheistic conception of God.⁵ The Bedouin Arabs claimed to be descendants of Ishmael, one of the sons of Abraham, and half brothers to Isaac. Their government was tribal and for four months of each year, the Arab tribes ceased their fighting and made the pilgrimage to Mecca to visit the famous sanctuary called the Kaaba, which means “Cube.” It was a cubical building which was known as the “House of Allah.”⁶ The original Kaaba was supposedly destroyed by a flood and rebuilt by Abraham and Ishmael. There is no Biblical evidence of such. The Kaaba housed three hundred sixty idols and a small black stone (probably a meteorite) which legend declared had been brought down from heaven.⁷

Most of the Arabs were members of nomadic tribes and believed more in human excellence than in any divine power. They believed that what happened to them was determined by Fate or Time, which they thought of as not a being to be worshipped, but simply as “the course of events.” Some tribes or parts of such had become Christians and there were also Jewish communities in Medina.⁸ One of the most important traditions among the tribes was vendetta. This code of protection and retribution was greatly observed; it was an obstruction to their accepting Christianity. The idolatrous rites incorporated the observance of holy months, celibacy, fasting and pilgrimages. Emphasis was placed on man’s actions being directed by Fate. Arabs respected poets highly, and the physical was highlighted above the spiritual.⁹ Although most of the Arabs were idolaters, some of them recognized the “unknown God” of the Jews, whom they called “ALLAH,” the creator of all things.

Having many Jewish and Christian residents during the sixth and seventh centuries, Arabia was open to the spread of the conception of one God.¹⁰ Mingle with these settings, the fact that a dominant religion just prior to

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Muhammad was Sabianism, a religion in which heavenly bodies were worshipped. The moon was viewed as a male deity and thus, a lunar calendar was used. The pagan rite of fasting began with the appearance of the crescent moon.¹¹ In Arabia the sun god was viewed as female. In pre-Islamic times, Allah, the moon god, was married to the sun god, and together they produced three goddesses called The Daughters of Allah. They were viewed as being at the top of the pantheon of Arabian deities, those 360 idols in the Kaaba at Mecca.¹²

Thus we see at this time a context which says they had been totally idolatrous in their past, observing tribal customs, but entering into the picture was a trend to accept the view there was one true God who created all things.

Into this setting, Muhammad was born in A.D. 570 in Mecca. At the time of his birth Mecca was the center of trade and religious activity.¹³ He was of the tribe of Koreish; his father's name was Abdullah, and his mother was Aminah.¹⁴ His father died two months before his birth and his mother died when he was six years old. At his mother's death, he was given to his grandfather who died two years later. Brother Woods points out that his grandfather was a high priest of one of the local idolatrous temples.¹⁵ At that time he was given to an uncle to complete his rearing.

One story is told that when Muhammad was born he opened his mouth and said, "God is great! There is no God but God, and I am his prophet." Another story has it that he was born with a symbol between his shoulders which indicated that he was going to be a prophet.¹⁶ J. Christy Wilson writes that when Muhammad was twelve, he was taken on a caravan journey to Syria. There he had his first encounter with Christians and it was said he formed a friendship with a Christian monk.¹⁷ Mattox relates some stories concerning caravan journeys

Muhammad made with his uncle, a merchant. On one journey an angel hovered over him and protected him from the burning heat with his wings. On another occasion the story was told that Muhammad was protected by a cloud over his head¹⁸

When Muhammad was 25 years old, his uncle recommended him for employment to Khadija bint Khuwaylid, a woman who was twice widowed with children, and fifteen years his senior.¹⁹ Soon after, Khadija asked for Muhammad in marriage. Her wealth freed him from working for his material needs and proved to be a wise move relative to his future.²⁰

Muhammad was a man who was practically illiterate and one who had tremendous mood swings.²¹ His newly found wealth placed him in position to be included in the civil councils in Mecca.²² Muhammad was not satisfied by material wealth, and in time, was driven by his restlessness and moodiness to spending much time in caves meditating. On one such occasion in the cave in Hira, near Mecca, Muhammad was convinced God called him to be his prophet. He was approximately 40 years of age when he received his “calling.” We read in Eerdmans’ Handbook To The World’s Religions, of the night of Muhammad’s calling:

His first biographer, Muhammad Ibn Ishaq, recorded the events of that night. Muhammad was spending time alone on the Hira mountain. ‘I was lying asleep,’ he reports in his own words, ‘when an angel came to me with a piece of material and said: “Read this!” I replied: “I cannot read!” Then he pressed the material against me so hard that I thought I would die. Then he let me go and said again: “Read!” The angel repeated his command once more.

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Nervously, I replied: “What am I to read?” The angel said: “Read in the name of your Lord. He who created and made man from an embryo. Read, for your Lord is merciful like no one on earth. He who instructed man by the pen. He taught him what he did not know.” I awoke from my sleep, Muhammad went on, and it was as if these words were written in my heart. I came out of the cave and stood on the mountainside. Then I heard a voice calling to me from heaven: “Muhammad, you are God’s messenger and I am Gabriel.” I lifted my eyes up and saw him on the skyline, I did not move. When I tried to look away I could still see him.²³

From that point, Muhammad followed what he felt like was his calling from Allah. Brother Woods reports Muhammad’s first convert was his wife, the second his cousin, Ali, the third Abu Bekr, who became his most devoted follower and successor at Muhammad’s death.²⁴

His success was minimal at first. Years passed with only a few people being converted, even though, he preached on street corners concerning the resurrection and the coming judgment. The “revelations” continued to come to him and these were written and recorded in the Koran, the holy book of the Muslims. They were not written, however, until years later because Muhammad himself was not educated. The Koran is the collection of the passages allegedly revealed to Muhammad during the 22 years of his prophetic office (610-632). It is divided into 144 chapters (surahs) which are not equal in length. The shortest of these chapters contains three verses and the longest 306 long verses.²⁵

After ten years his wife, Khadijah died and within a year, he had remarried. Actually, he married two women

within the first year of his former wife's death. These two women became converts to his teachings. The people of Mecca did not accept Muhammad and his new teachings very well and he came under criticism and persecution.

According to Mattox when Muhammad announced his plans to overthrow the three hundred sixty idols of Mecca, such opposition was raised he had to flee to Medina. This flight was made on July 16, 622 and had such an impact on the religion of Islam, it became the beginning date of the Muslim calendar of events.²⁶ This migration or hijrah marks year one of the Muslim era. Muslims count their years A.H., or after the hijrah.²⁷

Arriving in Medina and by eloquent preaching, Muhammad converted the majority of the city, becoming the dictator. Those who did not submit to his teachings were killed. The men fought with zeal and fervor, because Muhammad taught them that if they died fighting for his cause, they would have a place reserved in paradise.²⁸ It was in Medina that he first tried to get Jews and Christians to follow his teachings. He referred to himself as a "prophet" and an "apostle." He tried to appeal to the Jews through the use of "prophet" and the Christians with "apostle." He taught them to pray to Jerusalem, but they refused his teachings, so he rejected them and taught his followers to pray to Mecca unto Allah. He continued to receive new revelations. He taught he had been commissioned to loot and steal from caravans which passed through. Often he and his men would loot and steal from the caravans and then kill the men. The Koran reports over 66 battles, killing tens of thousands of men.²⁹

In 630 Muhammad set out against Mecca, traveling with an army of 10,000 men. Upon arriving at Mecca, one of the leaders was captured and brought before Muhammad. The leader begged for the sparing of the city and Muhammad told him he would spare it, if the

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city would follow his teachings. The city responded and very little blood was shed in his taking of Mecca.³⁰ He destroyed the images in the Kaaba and made a pronouncement that the ground between Medina and Mecca was holy ground. Nonbelievers were not to touch this ground. Muhammad began to persecute the Jews and reduced the Christians to dependency. He unified Arabia and molded the pattern for his successors who captured three more continents before losing their zeal. His success was due in part to his personality and in part to the fact he could tell his visions as if they were actual events. Mattox details one such vision and it is remarkable indeed:

“Gabriel came one night and woke him up and told him he was sent to conduct him to the divine presence of God. They went out to get on Alborah, and he began to kick and buck. Gabriel told him to be still and let the prophet of God mount. After Muhammad told Alborah that he would have a place in heaven, he let him mount and they sailed through the air to Jerusalem where they briefly stopped and then went on to the first heaven. There they tied Alborah to a stone and began to climb the stairs to the gate where they found Adam. He embraced the prophet with great tenderness and thanked God that He had given him so great a son. He also saw the stars hanging from the roof on golden chains. This first heaven was pure silver. They then went on to the second heaven. At the rate of travel on earth it would have taken five hundred years, yet they reached it in an instant. It was pure gold. Here he met Noah. The third heaven was of precious stones and Abraham stayed here. He was a very large man. The distance between his eyes was seventy thousand

days' journey, and his height was five million, forty thousand or four times as high as all his heavens put together. Joseph dwelt in the fourth heaven which was made of emerald. The fifth was the residence of Moses, and in the sixth was John the Baptist. In the seventh he found Jesus Christ and a very remarkable angel who had seventy thousand heads. In each head were seventy thousand tongues, and each tongue spoke seventy thousand distinct voices at once. Muhammad then came within two bow shots of the throne of God and had his face covered with seventy thousand veils. Here he received things that were not lawful to utter, and he was told that he was the greatest man on earth. He returned to the rock where Alborah was tied and presently found himself at home. The next morning he related this to his followers, affirming that it was not just a vision, but it was real. His followers accepted it and believe it until this day.³¹

Definition of Islamic Terms

In defining this religion we will examine and explain the various components which comprise Islam. The word "Islam" literally means "to surrender," but as a religious term in the Koran, it means "to surrender to the will or law of God."³² Dr. Arthur Arberry, the head of Mideastern Studies at Cambridge University (and one of the great Arabic scholars), said this:

Islam is a peculiarly Arabian religion because Islam is a religion *and* culture. It must be understood in terms of its essential identification with seventh-century culture.³³

Islam not only regulates the worship of its followers,

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but it imposes strict regulations on their day-to-day lifestyles in every facet of their lives. Carlson and Decker go on to say:

Islam poses its seventh-century Arabian culture in its political expression, in its family affairs, in its dietary laws, in its clothing, in its religious rites, and in its language. Muslims are religiously compelled to impose seventh-century Arab culture on the rest of the cultures of the world.³⁴

Again we read:

Because there was no concept of personal freedom or civil rights in the tribal life of seventh-century Arabia, Islamic law today does not recognize freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, or freedom of the press. This is why non-Muslims (such as Christians) are routinely denied the most basic of human rights and are often physically attacked or jailed.³⁵ Islam understands itself fundamentally as being “natural religion,” in that every created thing exists in dependence upon God, in obedience to his creative and sustaining power and with the purpose of expressing adoration to God.³⁶

George Fry and James King write concerning the meaning of Islam:

Islam is a ‘system of meanings’ or a ‘set of significances,’ a vast assemblage of beliefs, commitments, duties, social organizations, hopes and fears, goals, institutions, patterns of work and education and child-rearing, moral codes, laws and literatures, traditions, saints and

sinners...Islam is a religious faith that permeates every nook and cranny of a believer's life, entering into virtually all of the experiences from which he derives a sense of meaning."³⁷ They also write: "Islam also comes to mean, blameless, faultless, established, proven, and it takes on as well a number of vaguely related meanings: to forsake, to drop, to deliver up, to surrender, to declare oneself committed to obedience to the natural laws which govern the world, to submit to the will of God, to embrace Islam, to be a Muslim...and when all these meanings interact, we derive the meaning of `a surrender to God by which personal well-being is achieved."³⁸

Followers of Islam are called "Moslems" or "Muslims" which means "those who submit." "Muhammadan" is not used by Muslims and is as offensive to them as being called a "Campbellite" is to a member of the Lord's church.³⁹ Because the name Muslim is given in the Koran itself to the followers of Muhammad (Koran 22:78), Muslims resent being called Muhammadans, which implies a personal cult of Muhammad, forbidden in Islam. They also object to the spelling "Moslem" as a distortion of Muslim.⁴⁰ Exact statistics are not available, but the Muslim world population is estimated at between 850 million and one billion. Muslims account for about 1/6 of the world's population. Carlson and Decker report:

When most people think about Muslims, they immediately think of the Middle East or North Africa, but in fact only 20 percent of the world's Muslims live in those two areas; most of them live in other countries. The largest Muslim country is Indonesia, with 154 million Muslims. The total Arab world, including all of the Middle East and North Africa, has about 144 million

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Muslims. Bangladesh has 90 million and Pakistan another 90 million. India has about 70 million Muslims, approximately 11 percent of its population.⁴¹

The Muslim population in China is nearly 63 million and more than 41 million Muslims live in the southern tier of the former Soviet Union which includes Afghanistan, Iran, Syria and Iraq. In Turkey about 46 million Muslims make their homes and Iran's Muslim population is nearly 40 million.⁴² Being almost nonexistent thirty years ago in the United State, today Islam is a flourishing religion with nearly 5 million followers.⁴³ Carlson and Decker warn: "Today the five million Muslims in the United States add up to more than all the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Christian Scientists combined. An extremely militant proselytizing program is under way in many cities and in every state university we have visited. The Muslims are going to make the Mormon missionary effort look pale by comparison."⁴⁴

The Muslims are divided into three primary groups. A great struggle for control was commenced when Muhammad died. Abu Bekr was chosen as the first leader, but was killed two years later. Thus the new religion divided into three major divisions, and each of these subsequently divided into smaller sects.⁴⁵ The largest Muslim sect is the Sunnites who recognize the first four caliphs (title given to the spiritual and political leader who took over after Muhammad's death) as Muhammad's rightful successors. The Shiites compose another sect who reject the first three caliphs, recognizing only Ali. They are the more radical sect. The third party or sect is known as the Sufis, who are philosophical mystics who have

basically adapted and reinterpreted Islam for themselves.⁴⁶

The Koran is the Islamic holy book. According to the Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia:

Muslims regard the Koran as the speech of God to Muhammad, mediated by Gabriel, the angel of revelation; they believe that God himself, not Muhammad, is the author and therefore that the Koran is infallible.⁴⁷

According to McDowell and Stewart the Koran is “said to be the final and complete inspired word of God transmitted to the prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel.”⁴⁸ Stephen Neill makes these comments in reference to the Koran:

It is well known that at many points the Qur’an does not agree with the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Therefore, from the Muslim point of view, it follows of necessity that these Scriptures must have been corrupted. Historical evidence makes no impression on the crushing force of the syllogism. So it is, and it can be no other way. The Muslim controversialist feels no need to study evidence in detail. The only valid picture of Jesus Christ is that which is to be found in the pages of the Qur’an.⁴⁹

The sacred sayings of Muhammad, handed down by oral tradition, for generations after Muhammad’s death until finally transcribed are called Hadith.⁵⁰ These are not generally held to be infallible, like the Koran (Qur’an). The Microsoft Encarta has this to say about the Sunna, which is part of Hadith:

The second substantive source of Islam, the Sunna, or example of the Prophet, is known through Hadith, the body of traditions based on what the Prophet said or did regarding various issues. Unlike the Koran, which was memorized—either in whole or in part—by many followers of Muhammad during their lifetime and which was compiled in written form quite early, the transmission of Hadith was largely verbal, and the present authoritative collections date from the 9th century. Unlike the Koran, Hadith is not considered infallible. In the early Islamic period, whether or not the Prophet himself was infallible (apart from the revelations in the Koran) was a point of controversy. Later, however, the consensus of the Islamic community was that both he and the earlier prophets were infallible. Because Hadith was mainly transmitted orally, however, it was conceded that error could enter into the human transmission. Hadith, therefore, is a source secondary to the Koran, although it is almost equally fundamental for most Muslims. Recent research, not yet accepted by the large body of Muslims, has demonstrated that much of Hadith was not derived from the Prophet but represents the opinions of the early generations of Muslims, opinions that were subsequently attributed to the Prophet. In some cases a genuine statement of the Prophet was preserved, but additions to it were later made by Muslims who wanted to advance certain theological or legal opinions.⁵¹

J. Christy Wilson writes that these were records of what Muhammad did, what he allowed and what he enjoined. He goes on to say that the mass of tradition was becoming almost hopeless when about the middle of

the third century in the Muslim era the Sunnah or orthodox traditions were codified. Six of these collections were finally accepted, and even these contain many traditions that are contradictory to one another.⁵²

The Pillars of Islam

These are five obligations each and every Muslim must meet. These are known as the Five Pillars of Islam.

(1) “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.”⁵³ One must state this aloud to become a Muslim and is repeated constantly by the faithful.⁵⁴

(2) The Muslim must pray five times daily, prostrate, and facing Mecca. The Muslims must recite the prescribed prayers (the first surah and other selections from the Koran) in Arabic while facing the Kaaba in Mecca five times a day (upon rising, at noon, in midafternoon, after sunset, and before retiring). The call to pray is sounded by the muezzin (a Muslim crier) from a tower called a minaret which is part of the mosque.⁵⁵

(3) The giving of alms to the poor was practiced and encouraged by Muhammad and continues as a work of merit. The legal alms that are prescribed by the Islamic code consist of a certain portion of income, the amount of which is determined by a rather complicated system.⁵⁶

(4) Observing the ninth month (Ramadan) of the Muslim lunar year as a month of fasting. The requirement includes abstinence from drinking water or any other liquid and from smoking, with

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the fast beginning at dawn as soon as a white thread may be told from a black man's arm's length and lasts until dark when the one may not be distinguished from the other. In most Islamic cities a cannon is fired at dawn to mark the beginning of the fast and in the evening when eating and drinking may begin.⁵⁷

(5) A pilgrimage is to made at least once in a Muslim's lifetime to Mecca who is physically able and can afford the trip (unless he is a slave).⁵⁸ The selected days of the pilgrimage are from the first till the twelfth day of the last month of the lunar calendar, with the seventh till the tenth as the three special days of ceremony.

(6) To this list some have added a sixth "pillar." This sixth pillar is known as The Holy War (Jihad). Carlson and Decker write: "In the early years of Islam, and even often today, the intent is the spread of Islam by force. Islam regards itself as the universal religion. Jihad is viewed as service in the spread and defense of Islam. Today many Muslims who are schooled in Western values take Jihad figuratively to mean the spread of Islam through evangelism."⁵⁹ Muslims are taught if one dies in a Holy War, he is guaranteed a place in paradise.

Five Articles of Faith

These five articles of faith are the central doctrines of the Muslims. Each Muslim must believe these doctrines.

(1) There is only one true God and his name is Allah. No statement about God seemed to

Muhammad more fundamental than the declaration that God is one, and no sin seemed to him so unpardonable as associating another being with God on terms of equality. God stands alone and supreme. He existed before any other being or thing, is self-subsistent, omniscient, omnipotent ('all-seeing, all-hearing, all-willing').⁶⁰

(2) The existence of angels is a basic doctrine to every Muslim. The greatest angel is considered to be Gabriel who appeared to Muhammad. Al Shaytan is the devil and most likely a fallen angel. Jinn are those creatures between man and angels which can neither be good or bad. Each person has two "recording angels" who record every deed good and bad.⁶¹

(3) There are four inspired books recognized in the Islamic faith. These are *The Koran*, considered the greatest of the four, infallible and Allah's final revelation to mankind; the *Law of Moses*; *The Psalms of David* and *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*. Muslims teach the last three have been corrupted by Jews and Christians.

(4) Allah has spoken to man through many prophets. Brother Rutherford writes that the Shiites claim God has sent at least 124,000 prophets, others saying 144,000. Twenty-eight prophets are mentioned by name in the Koran; 22 of these are from the Old Testament and 3 from the New. Even Alexander the Great is considered by Muslims to be a prophet. The six greatest prophets are considered to be: Adam,

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Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, the last and greatest.⁶²

(5) The last day will be a time of resurrection and judgment. Those who follow and obey Allah will go to Paradise and those who oppose him will go to be tormented in hell. “The day and hour is a secret to all, but there are to be twenty-five signs of its approach. All men will be raised; the books kept by the recording angels will be opened; and God as judge will weigh each man’s deeds in the balances.”⁶³

In addition to the above, in our definition of Islam we need to notice some facts presented by Mattox. He writes:

Friday is the day of public worship with every Muslim acting as his own priest. There is a strict moral code that allows no gambling or the use of wine. Pork is not to be used as food. Muhammad would allow no images. Children were to reverence their parents. Protection was to be given to the widows and orphans and charity extended to the poor. Kindness was to be shown to slaves and animals. Wives were treated as property and the husband was allowed ‘only’ four at a time but there was no objection to making changes.⁶⁴

Defeating Islam

Having defined in detail the tenets of Islam, we will now show the error of such under the light of the Bible. Truth is not contradictory, and since Islam and

Christianity clash, one must be wrong. In his book on world religions, brother Rod Rutherford showed the error of Islam concerning God, the Koran and Jesus Christ. We will notice the main points he highlighted in his third lesson on Islam.

Allah Versus Jehovah

Muslims believe in only one God, but their idea of God is much different from what the Bible teaches. Muslims never think of God as “Father.” However the Scriptures teach: “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (Matt. 6:9). Muslims do not love God, but they fear Him and think of Him as a judge. The Scriptures teach us that God is love: “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:8). There is no grace in Islam as salvation is totally by works. The Bible teaches the doctrine of salvation by grace. It was through God’s grace we received His word:

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

We also learn it was the grace of God that Jesus died for all:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man (Heb. 2:9).

Paul revealed we are saved by grace, but it requires

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our faith (obedience): “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

Muslims believe God is arbitrary and the cause of both good and evil. They believe in fate or predestination which they call “Kismet.” No matter what happens, they say, “It is Allah’s will.” The Koran reveals that Allah deceives people on purpose:

Allah leads astray whom he pleases and guides whom he pleases and no one knows the host of the Lord save himself. And every man’s destiny have we fastened upon his neck.

Muslims have very little incentive to improve themselves because they feel as they cannot change things, seeing Allah will do what he pleases no matter the human’s will.

Muslims misunderstand the Godhead. They accuse Christians of believing in three gods: the Father, Jesus the Son, and the virgin Mary. The Bible clearly reveals there is one Godhead, but is composed of three distinct individuals. Paul wrote:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: (Rom. 1:20).

He claimed the Gentiles should have seen the creation and known it was evidence of the work of the Godhead. God the Father designed the universe (Gen. 1:1); God the Word was the active agent in creation (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16; Rev. 3:14); and God the Holy Spirit

garnished the heavens (Job 26:13).

Koran versus the Bible

“Koran” means “to recite,” or “the thing read.” The Koran is divided into 114 chapters organized from the shortest to the longest. Part of it was written in Muhammad’s lifetime and the rest was written after his death. The “hadith” contains other “traditions” and additional sayings of Muhammad. The Muslims believe the Law of Moses, Psalms of David and the Gospel of Christ are additional revelations from God, but have been corrupted by the Jews and Christians. They teach that translating a book corrupts it, so the only pure Koran is in the original Arabic. To be able to convert a Muslim one needs to be aware of the inspiration of the Bible and to be able to give sufficient evidence of that inspiration.

Muhammad Versus Jesus

Muslims reject the idea God had a son and that son died for all of mankind, although Scripture clearly teaches that He did (John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:21). There is simply no contest between Muhammed and Jesus. Please notice the following chart and observe the severe contrast between Muhammed and Jesus, in light of the Bible:

MUHAMMAD	JESUS
1. The Koran presents Muhammad as the last and greatest of prophets.	1. However, the Bible presents Jesus as the prophet who was to come and to whom all should give heed (Deut. 18:15-19; Acts 3:18-26; Heb. 1:1-3).
2. Muhammad admitted he was a sinner - the Koran speaks of his confessing his sins.	2. The Bible teaches Jesus never sinned once: (1 Ptr. 2:22; Heb 4:15).

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MUHAMMAD	JESUS
3. Muhammad admits he was only a man.	3. Jesus claimed equality with God (John 8:58,59; 10:30).
4. Muhammad declined the worship of men.	4. Jesus accepted worship, seeing He is God: (Rev. 4:11).
5. Muslims teach man can only come to God through acceptance of Muhammad as his prophet.	5. Jesus is the only way to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:11,12).
6. Muslims say Muhammad is God's last spokesman to man.	6. The Bible says Jesus was (Heb. 1:1-3).
7. Muslims deny Jesus was crucified. The Koran says: They slew him not, nor crucified him, but it appeared so to them... (Sura 4:157). Muslims believe Judas was crucified instead.	7. The Bible reveals the apostles labored to preach only the crucified and resurrected Christ: (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2; Acts 17:3).
8. Muslims believe Jesus will one day return to earth, marry, have children, propagate Islam throughout the world, be killed and raised again.	8. The Bible teaches Christ will no more come in the flesh and that His second coming will be to raise the dead, judge the world and destroy the earth (1 Thes. 4:13-18; 2 Ptr. 3:9-10; John 5:28-29).
9. Muhammad died and remains dead.	9. Jesus died, rose again and is alive forever more: (Rev. 1:18). ⁶⁵

The Muslims have a distorted concept of heaven also. They believe heaven is a continuation of earth with all its sensual pleasures and the absence of sin. They believe marrying and childbirth will continue in heaven with each faithful male Muslim possessing a harem of beautiful ladies.⁶⁶

Christians must be armed and ready (spiritually) for the battle which lies ahead. Islam presents a great challenge to the Lord's church in the future. The threat of violence and persecution certainly looms ahead for the soldiers of the cross. Men such as Malcolm X and Louis Farrakhan have done much over the past few years to promote the religion of Islam in the United States. Malcolm X was killed February 21, 1965 as he spoke in Harlem. He had been a person who promoted violence and he died a violent death. However, he inspired many to follow his path. Louis Farrakhan is the leading spokesman for the Nation of Islam today. The conversion rate to Islam is estimated at about 135,000 per year. Using these figures by the year 2010, Lord willing for time to continue, there will be about 10-16 million Muslims in the United States.

The faithful soldier of the cross must be aware of the potential for the radical Muslims to try and force their religious views. Especially when the numbers become larger will the threat increase. The predominant group among Muslims in the United States are Afro-Americans. The immigrant communities, which come from a great variety of countries stretching from Eastern Europe to Cambodia and virtually every country in between, comprise the next largest group.

Conclusion

Islam is a religion foreign to the Scriptures. It is perhaps the only world religion which poses serious

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physical danger to Christianity. While other religions are content to coexist with Christianity, the nature and background of Islam centers in on being zealous for Allah and if it takes violence to accomplish this, then so be it. We would do well to remember the fact the Lord has always purged His people when they forsook Him. As we look at the Lord's church today, we truly see the forsaking taking place. Could it be this is the tool which the Lord will use? Only time will tell, but we need to prepare and be ready so we can defend Christianity and defeat the forces of evil. That which is in the balance is the souls of men. We need to remember the words of our Lord: *"Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest"* (Matt. 9:37- 38).

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Chapter 15

New Ageism

Gary Summers

In the fall of 1980 I was asked to speak on the subject of the New Age Movement for a preachers' meeting in Moline, Illinois. Prior to that time I had neither read nor studied the topic at all. Having purchased the only offerings available at the local bookstore, I began what has turned out to be a continuing journey in coming to understand New Ageism. From three books, enough material was gleaned to present fifty minutes' worth of information, and the preachers seemed appreciative of my efforts. I presented the same material one Sunday evening at my home congregation and thought that would be the end of it.

A year-and-a-half later the topic surfaced in casual conversation, and I mentioned my familiarity with the subject (as outlined above). Surprisingly, I was asked if I would be willing to put together enough material for an entire workshop. After getting more acquainted with Shirley MacLaine than anyone could ever wish to be (by studying two of her books), I presented six lessons on the New Age movement in October, 1993, at High Springs, Florida. After every session someone would talk to me and explain how he or she had just been involved in a situation similar to what had been described. (A real estate lady, for instance, had been approached by a young couple who were going to write children's books—as “the spirit” moved them!)

The population of High Springs is under 5,000, but my wife made an interesting and appropriate discovery. Taking a break from shopping at the several craft stores in the community, she visited a place called “Sophie’s Cafe.” Glancing at the menu, she was stunned to find in a prominent position that this particular establishment was a “woman-owned business, operated along matrifocal lines—where love, communication, cooperation, and a desire to serve in harmony with the Earth are the ‘bottom line.’” The word *matrifocal* was defined on the menu as referring to ancient cultures in which “women owned their bodies, their children, and their living properties” and made the “vital decisions affecting the survival and well-being of their people.” This New Age cafe served to emphasize the inroads this philosophy is making even in small-town America.

In fact, interest in New Age ideas is soaring. Waldenbooks and B. Dalton Booksellers now have New Age sections in their stores, and the number of New Age or “metaphysical” bookstores has doubled from 1984-1989.¹ Celebrity supporters include George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Shirley MacLaine, and Oprah Winfrey.²

Last year the material of my six original lessons was revised and taped for World Video Bible School (at the suggestion of a friend), but this is the first time it has been made available in written form. Our goal is to provide the reader a thorough sampling of the various elements of New Ageism. The chapter may seem a bit long; it should not, however, prove uninteresting.

Defining New Ageism

When the moon is in the seventh house
And Jupiter aligns with Mars,
Then peace will guide the planets,
And love will steer the stars.
This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius.

When James Rado and Gerome Ragni wrote the words to this former number one song (last three weeks of April, first three weeks of May, 1969), they had no idea that just a decade later a book summarizing New Age philosophy would be written and entitled *The Aquarian Conspiracy*.³ The song is steeped in astrology, a practice which is certainly in harmony with New Age thinking. The book, written by Marilyn Ferguson, sets forth the tenets of the New Age. She explains the derivation of the second word in the title by citing two instances in which the word *conspiracy* is used in a positive way.⁴ Then she recounts the reason for her choice of the word *Aquarian*:

Conspire, in its literal sense, means “to breathe together.” It is an intimate joining. To make clear the benevolent nature of this joining, I chose the word *Aquarian*. Although I am unacquainted with astrological lore, I was drawn to the symbolic power of the pervasive dream in our popular culture: that after a dark, violent age, the Piscean, we are entering a millennium of love and light—in the words of the popular song, “The Age of Aquarius,” the time of “the mind’s true liberation.”⁵

There is nothing secretive about this “conspiracy”; Ferguson and her “coconspirators” are quite willing to share their “insights” with others. So what is the New Age all about? She describes it as a “leaderless but powerful network”⁶ of loosely-affiliated individuals into which are “tens of thousands of entry points.”⁷ New Ageism “promotes the autonomous individual in a decentralized society.”⁸ The “search for meaning that becomes an end in itself”⁹ becomes the focus of attention, which involves “a transformative process.”¹⁰ The author

adds:

Once this journey has begun in earnest, there is nothing that can dissuade. No political movement, no organized religion commands a greater loyalty.¹¹

Douglas Groothuis defines the New Age movement as “a variety of people, organizations, events, practices, and ideas.”¹² He defines its adherents as:

a constellation of like-minded people and groups all desiring a spiritual and social change that will usher in a New Age of self-actualization.¹³

Elliot Miller summarizes this “ism” in the following manner:

The New Age movement then is an extremely large, *loosely* structured network of organizations and individuals bound together by common values (based in mysticism and monism—the world view that “all is one”) and a common vision (a coming “new age” of peace and mass enlightenment, the “Age of Aquarius”).¹⁴

D. A. Carson presents the following description:

The aim is not to be reconciled to a transcendent God, who has made us and against whom we have rebelled, but to grow in self-awareness and self-fulfillment, to become self-actualized, to grow to our full potential, until we are rather more at one with the god/universe than we would otherwise be. The focus, in short is self...¹⁵

The news magazine, *Time*, featured New Ageism

in their December 7th, 1987 issue. Their conclusion on page 62 was appropriate:

So here we are in the New Age, a combination of spirituality and superstition, fad and farce, about which the only thing certain is that it is not new.¹⁶

History Of The Modern Movement

Constance Cumbey explains that “the New Age Movement received its modern start in 1875 with the founding of the Theosophical Society by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky,” who “worked in ‘telepathic communication’ serving as a ‘fulcrum’ for the masters...”¹⁷ Joining her “society” were a Buddhist high priest, a swami, Thomas Edison, and General Abner Doubleday (the founder of baseball).¹⁸ Helena wrote two books under the direction of the “masters” (which is the alleged means by which much of their material is written): *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*.¹⁹

After Blavatsky died, Alice Ann Bailey wrote more than twenty books in an effort to provide foundational instructions for the New Age to come. “Alice showed tenacious hatred for orthodox Christianity and fierce loyalty to the cause of occultism and Eastern mysticism.”²⁰ In other words, she was not unlike today’s typical college professor. “Lucifer Publishing Company was established in 1922 to help disseminate her works. The name was shortened the next year to Lucis Publishing Company...”²¹

In the latter half of this century others have come to the forefront. David Spangler, author of *Revelation: Birth of a New Age*, joined the Scottish community of Findhorn in 1970, eight years after its founding, but in 1973 he left it to form the Lorian Association, which is presently headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin.²² Many other individuals and groups have since become loosely linked

together to advance New Age ideas, one of whom is Marilyn Ferguson (already mentioned), who prior to her landmark book began publishing her *Brain/Mind Bulletin*, a twice-monthly newsletter, in 1975.²³

Since New Ageism consists of a loose federation of individuals and groups who hold only some views in common, it is not unusual for one segment to isolate itself or find itself stranded. Fifteen years ago, for example, Benjamin Creme thought he was receiving telepathic communications (turned out they were **telepathetic**) from someone called the “Lord Maitreya.” He took out newspaper advertisements in over twenty cities worldwide to announce this Lord’s imminent coming. This Lord Maitreya was to be the second incarnation of Christ, the Messiah of the Jews, the Fifth Buddha, the Imam Mahdi, and Krishna—all rolled into one. And he was to make a worldwide television and radio broadcast within two months of the publication date of April 25, 1982.²⁴

Unfortunately, the Lord Maitreya never materialized, which is a shame since he was going to show all of us “how to live together peacefully as brothers.”²⁵ Creme’s branch of the movement swiftly withered, but due to the structure (or non-structure) of New Ageism, this failure made no appreciable difference.

Actress Shirley MacLaine is undoubtedly one of the most well-known spokespersons associated with New Ageism. She has written several best-sellers, such as *Out on a Limb* and *Dancing in the Light*. Her television miniseries (also called *Out on a Limb*) is replayed periodically throughout the land, and her influence cannot be denied. She has popularized the teachings of the New Age movement and embodies just about all of its facets.

The latest New Age book to achieve great success is *The Celestine Prophecy* by James Redfield. Please read

Appendix A for a review of that book.

The Teachings of New Ageism Monism, Pantheism

Monism is the idea that one is all and all is one. Not only are we part of the universe, but it is part of us. Annette Hollander explains monism in her book, *How To Help Your Child have A Spiritual Life*:

The more we can experience our interconnectedness [oneness], the less willing we will be to destroy each other and the world.²⁶

Shirley MacLaine, however, provides a vivid description of how monism works.

My whole body seemed to float too, not only my arms, but all of me. Slowly, slowly, I *became* the water, and each tingling bubble was a component part of the water.... I felt the interconnection of my breathing with the pulse of energy around me. The air itself seemed to pulsate. In fact, I *was* the air. I was the air, the water, the darkness, the walls, the bubbles, the candle, the wet rocks under the water, and even the sound of the rushing river outside.²⁷

Of course, most people think this outlook tends toward flakiness, and such ideas are so bizarre that they readily invite themselves to humorous comments, such as was done in the *Funky Winkerbean* comic strip, in which the title character tells Mr. Montoni that someone just ordered a large Zen pizza—one with everything.

Pantheism follows right on the heels of monism. It is but a brief modification to affirm that God is all, and

all is God. Shirley helpfully explains this principle:

The same divine will was in all living things. We were part of it, and it was part of us. The task was to find that divinity in ourselves and live by it.”²⁸ “Hence the answers are all within the self.”²⁹ “Look into yourselves, explore yourselves, *you* are the universe.”³⁰

One marvels at Shirley’s theological syllogisms. Observe the following deductive (?) process found at the conclusion of *Dancing in the Light*.

I *know* that I exist, therefore I AM.
I *know* that the God source exists. Therefore,
IT IS.
Since I am a part of that force, then *I AM* that *I AM*.³¹

If only Rene Descartes and John Locke could be reincarnated to straighten her out on knowledge and logic! Shirley has, perhaps inadvertently, identified herself as the one who spoke to Moses in the burning bush (Exod. 3:14-15). Previously in the same book she had further explained:

The ancient Hindu vedas claimed that the spoken words *I am*, or *Aum* in Hindi, set up a vibrational frequency in the body and mind which align the individual with his or her higher self and thus with the God-source. The word God in any language carries the highest vibrational frequency of any word in that language. Therefore, if one says audibly *I am God*, the sound vibrations literally align the energies of the

body to a higher atunement. You can use *I am God* or *I am that I am* as Christ often did, or you can extend the affirmations to fit your own needs.³²

One never knows when reading this Hollywood luminary what useful information may next be forthcoming. Pantheism, as the above quotations serve to illustrate, seeks to exalt mankind to the status of deity (or seeks to demote deity to the level of men, depending on your point of view). In the world of pantheism, God did not create the world; He **is** the world. Men were not made in the image of God; we **are** God. Mankind thereby exalts himself. Interestingly, man's first sin involved the desire to become like God, which the serpent promised would occur (Gen. 3:5). New Agers have merely replaced idols of wood and stone with those of flesh.³³ Perhaps if there are any New Agers among Planned Parenthood personnel, they could write a book called *Our Idols, Ourselves*.

Monism and pantheism are alternative ideas to the truth that the Bible sets forth—that God created man in His own image (Gen. 1:26). We are a little lower than the angels, but we have dominion over the works of God's hands—including the animals (Psm. 8:5-8). The albatross and the whale are not our brothers (as stated in the song "Cool Change" by the Little River Band). Man is **over** the creation, not equal to it. Likewise, God is **over** man, not equal to him. His ways and thoughts are above ours (Isa. 55:8-9), and we do not share equal rights with Deity (Job 38-41; Rom. 9:20-21). The twin concepts of monism and pantheism may sound exotic to the Western mind, but they have long been the staples of backward and failed Eastern societies.

Evolution

Darwin's theory of evolution fits hand in glove with the two concepts discussed above— and even better with some that follow. Since the overall thrust of New Ageism

is self-discovery, it only makes sense to imagine that we have reached our high state of development through evolution—and that we can advance even further with just a little cerebral development. Shirley MacLaine (who seems to reason best when she's all wet), comments:

As I lay in the tub thinking, I wondered how long it would be before scientists would find ways to verify the evolution of the soul in the same way that they had verified the evolution of the body.³⁴

The following excerpts from *The Celestine Prophecy* demonstrate evolution's complete integration with New Ageism.

I perceived everything to be somehow part of me.... I experienced the entire universe looking out on itself through me.... The realization was present that my life did not, in fact, begin with my conception and birth on this planet. It began much earlier with the formation of the rest of me, my real body, the universe itself.... I watched as the first matter exploded in the universe....³⁵

What follows is an imaginary description of the formation of the universe from the author's fertile mind. He intentionally refers to evolution as a science, which it is not. Shirley mistakenly thinks the evolution of the body has been proved, but why should she question it when it fits in so well with her beliefs? Actually, no one knows how evolution is supposed to work. The possible mechanisms which Darwin described have all been discredited, and the missing links are still missing. The latest rage is the punctuated equilibrium theory, in which it is alleged that the gradual changes in the species have

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been interrupted by radical and sudden transformational jumps. [Sounds like “a leap of faith,” does it not?] There is as much evidence for this hypothesis as there was for Darwin’s ideas—none.

Although New Ageism stresses one’s personal development, the potential danger that has always characterized evolution remains—many people, when they figure out that evolution means that there is no sovereign Deity Who will call mankind to account for their actions (and pantheism certainly does not), will react the same way that Elliot Miller did:

The week before I started eighth grade I convinced my parents to let me return to the public school, and in my science class that year I was first exposed to the theory of evolution. Like a “domino effect,” the following conclusions fell upon my mind in their turn: no Adam and Eve. No infallible Bible. No God. No hell. Freedom!³⁶

These sentiments may also help to explain the popularity of evolution (in the absence of proof) and New Ageism—**there is no moral accountability within the system**. Perhaps not so coincidentally there is also a lack of moral character in evidence among New Agers (at least, as the Bible defines morality), but this shortcoming will be dealt with in a later section.

Reincarnation

If the human spirit is evolving, the doctrine of reincarnation and its twin sister, *karma*, make appropriate additions to the family. Shirley MacLaine was intrigued by these ideas and went to check them out in her encyclopedia. Unfortunately, she did not cite her source, but she happily shares with her readers the results of

her exhaustive research.

The encyclopedia said that the doctrine of reincarnation went back as far as recorded history. It consisted of belief in the connection of all living things and the gradual purification of the soul, or spirit, of man until it returned to the common source and origin of all life which was God. It was the belief that the soul was immortal and embodied itself time and time again until it morally worked out the purification of itself. It said that the companion subjects of karma—that is, working out one’s inner burdens—and reincarnation—were two of the oldest beliefs in the history of mankind and more widely accepted than almost any religious concepts on earth.³⁷

The book of Genesis is recorded history, and it says nothing about reincarnation. The reader of Shirley’s encyclopedia would also be forced to question the wide acceptance of the doctrines. They may be accepted in India and some other Asian nations, but do they predominantly characterize residents of Europe, North and South America, Africa, or even Russia? As for the ancient status of these teachings, they are no more validated by being old than are astrology, witchcraft, or the practice of violence (Gen. 6:11). However, according to Brad Bromling’s tract, *Reincarnation and the Bible*, acceptance of reincarnation in this country has increased from 23% to 30% since 1982.

The encyclopedia claims that the source of the soul is God; if factual, the obvious question arises, “Why did God create such rotten souls that they must continually inhabit bodies to purify themselves?” Christianity has an answer to that question. God created the souls of men

and women pure—but with the ability to choose good and evil. But when they choose evil, an infinite number of lifetimes would not be sufficient to reach perfection. Christians attain righteousness and holiness through the redemptive and atoning work of Jesus (Rev. 1:5). Reincarnation, however, fails to provide answers.

Shirley (and/or her encyclopedia) neglected to mention the fact that there are many versions of reincarnation. According to F. LaGard Smith:

...the most basic teaching is that each soul is immortal, having always existed from the very beginning....³⁸

The compelling question in this version of reincarnation is: “Why is that which is immortal so corrupt and in need of perfection (especially since the soul is at one with god and the universe)?” Shirley also glossed over the fact that she is only trumpeting a Western version of this idea.

The early reincarnationists, and still the majority of all present-day reincarnationists, believe that the soul also incarnates into non-human forms, such as rocks, frogs, or trees.³⁹

Surely, Shirley’s encyclopedia would have pointed out this fact. Americans much prefer having inhabited human bodies over being an ant, a cow, or poison ivy. Besides, it is far more glamorous to have been Cleopatra in a former life than a slime-covered rock in the bottom of a stream.

The idea of karma has been gaining acceptance, having found its way into Joe South’s 1970 song, “Walk a Mile in My Shoes.” He sings: “And the law of karma says you’re gonna reap just what you sow.” [John Lennon’s

“Instant Karma” (1970), Culture Club’s “Karma Chameleon” (1983), and Willie Nelson’s “Just a Little Old-Fashioned Karma” came later.] Once again, “The doctrine of karma teaches that each soul is working its way to perfection by overcoming imperfections in previous lives.”⁴⁰ Shirley adds a comment about the atoning aspects of karma:

It was up to us to get in touch with ourselves spiritually so that we might achieve some insight as to what our purposes in life are. For every act, for every indifference, for every misuse of life, we are finally held accountable.⁴¹

One wonders how an impersonal god determined this law, enforces it, or dispenses justice of this magnitude.

Shirley’s friend David adds to the mystique of karma: “All our previous lives are what have molded us. We are the product of all the lives we have led.”⁴² Is it not irresistible to point out that, if it has taken so many incarnations just to get this far, some of us must be slow learners? David continues: “We don’t live by accident—you know there are no accidents. There is a higher purpose going on.”⁴³ [This is precisely the first insight of Redfield’s *The Celestine Prophecy* (see appendix A).]

Into what does this line of reasoning evolve? Consider this conversation between Shirley and her mother from *Dancing in the Light*:

And I think that our family, and every family for that matter, is a group of souls very closely connected because we have been through many incarnations together. I think we *choose* to be together, to work out our drama. We choose our parents, and I think the parents choose the children they want to have before they ever come

into an incarnation.⁴⁴

So all these disembodied spirits are sitting around somewhere and diligently deciding who would help advance them! Obviously, some parents chose their children to help them learn patience (their name is Legion). This sentimental notion works well for upper and middle class families, but why would anyone have wanted to have Susan Smith as a mother? Why would any soul choose as a mother a woman who would abort it or let her drug-addicted boy friend torture it to death? Reality slaps hard the faces of those gazing at the fanciful theories of men.

Incredibly, some attempt to find Scriptures to support the idea of reincarnation. John the baptizer is accused of being the reincarnation of Elijah (Matt. 11:8-14), even though the Scriptures teach that John went “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). Furthermore, John was asked point blank, “Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not” (John 1:21). Perhaps when some of those making these weak assertions return to a new incarnation, they will have evolved to the point of understanding figurative language.

An appeal is also made to John 9:1-3. Jesus was asked, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Reincarnationists believe it is possible that karma is involved here and that the blindness is a burden to be borne from a previous life. Calvinists would say that the child is capable of sin—even in the womb. But neither of them can prove what they affirm. It could simply be the case that they were posing a false dilemma to the Lord.

If He answers, “The child was punished for his own sins,” they would ask, “How can that be, since we learn from David that children are sinless?” (2 Sam. 12:23). Remember that God also allowed Jeroboam’s son, Abijah, to die “because in him there is found something good

toward the Lord God of Israel” (1 Kings 14:13). If He answers that the parents sinned, then they could contradict Him by pointing out that “the son shall not bear the guilt of the father” (Ezek. 18:20).

Of course, they are making the same false assumption that the friends of Job made: they are assuming that all suffering is the result of some sin. Jesus told them, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned” (John 9:3). The above scenario need not be true to refute the idea that the Jews believed in reincarnation. All that needs to be done is to show one plausible alternative to the allegation of reincarnation.

Those tied to this doctrine are so desperate for Scriptural support that they even cite “the new birth” (John 3:1-7) as proof of it. They twist other assorted Scriptures in a vain effort to support doctrines which conflict with the Bible. What irony for them to seek the blessing of that which they do not accept and will not abide by! They likewise try to get Jesus in their corner. James Redfield cites Jesus and the New Testament as being friendly to the philosophy of *The Celestine Prophecy*.⁴⁵ Shirley’s friend David told her:

Christ was the most advanced human ever to walk this planet. He was a highly evolved spiritual soul whose purpose on Earth was to impart teachings of a Higher Order.⁴⁶

Oh, really? Jesus taught that His purpose in coming was “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), to “bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37), and to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). One of the truths to which He bore witness is: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).⁴⁷ Will David accept that truth—that there is no other way to come to God than through Jesus?

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While some New Agers are busy cozying up to the Bible and Jesus, others delight in tearing them down. Shirley's favorite trance channeler, Kevin Ryerson, postulates:

But then the Bible says nothing about reincarnation either and it's quite well known that the Council of Nicea voted to strike the teaching of reincarnation from the Bible.

"How do you know that?" I [Shirley, gws] asked.

Well, the most serious metaphysical students of the Bible know that. The Council of Nicea altered many of the interpretations of the Bible.⁴⁸

F. LaGard Smith effectively refutes these absurd charges:

No responsible historian, taking into account all of the records available to us, will agree with Kevin that reincarnation had anything to do with either the council, the original content of the Bible, or the soundness of church doctrine. Even the logistics of such a conspiracy strain one's credulity. How could the church have gotten access to all the copies of Scripture which had come into existence over the prior two centuries? How could we account for the manuscripts we possess which were composed before then, and which match the text we have today, but which have no mention of reincarnation?⁴⁹

One needs no further proof that in the New Age movement the right hand neither knows nor cares what the left hand is doing. One claims that all vestiges of

reincarnation were deleted from the Bible by a church council, but another cites Scriptures to prove that the Bible teaches the concept. Both of these claims cannot be correct, but dealing with contradiction is not a priority of New Ageism.

Jesus said: “Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit” (Matt. 7:17). What is the fruit of the doctrines of karma and reincarnation? The consequence is fatalism, typified by the expression, “It was meant to be.” What about those six million Jews suffering at the hands of the Nazis? They deserved to suffer as a result of a previous life; they were just working out their karma. This attitude opens the door to self-righteousness. Prosperous Americans can look at the downtrodden in other countries and conclude:

They deserve to be where they are (lower down on the human evolutionary scale), and I deserve to be where I am (since I am more highly-developed).

The reincarnationist could rightly pray:

O pantheistic god, I thank you that I am not like other men—hungry, ruled by tyrants, and poverty-stricken. I meditate twice in the week and give tithes of all that I possess to my personal guru.

What motivation would anyone have to offer compassion to someone in need? What motivation would anyone have to advance beyond squalor? “If the reincarnation wheel actually exists, the future is not bright, optimistic, and exciting. It is bleak, pessimistic, and depressing.”⁵⁰

India is a nation in which reincarnation reigns.

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Consider this description of it.

I have not forgotten the beggars, the filthy holy men, the gauze masks over the mouths and the noses of the Jains to prevent their inhaling insects that might be their grandmother, the cardboard shanties set up on the dirt sidewalks, the sacred cows wandering everywhere, the thousands of gods and gurus, the burning fires where the dead are cremated, the people bathing in the Ganges River, and the children—many of them dirty, naked, and hopeless.⁵¹

But these tragic conditions are all right; they will all work themselves up to a higher plateau eventually. In the final analysis, everybody wins—“even Attila the Hun, Adolph Hitler, Idi Amin, Colonel Gaddafi, and the Ayatollah Khomeini.”⁵² Reincarnation moves far beyond the doctrine of “second chancism”; it is the doctrine of “infinite chancism.” And what is the upshot of all of these lives working out one’s karma to achieve perfection?

Some believe that the soul ends up in a cosmic oneness, a kind of divine, all-encompassing spiritual soup. Some use the word “nirvana” to describe a state of eternal existence. For them, the ultimate desirability is *absorption* into the cosmic ether, no longer enduring karma’s wheel of suffering. On the other hand, many see nirvana as eternal *extinction*....⁵³

Say, what an enticing doctrine! At the end of all of the suffering experienced during countless incarnations, human beings get to be either absorbed (like a delicious steak into the digestive system) or made extinct. The doctrine of Jehovah’s Witnesses is far more appealing if

extinction is our destiny: we only have to live once and can be as evil as we desire.

Some may protest: "What about all of those people who have discovered past lives? Why, I have a neighbor who was once Napoleon!" Many have used hypnosis or a medium (now called "a trance channeler") to recall events from one's childhood or past life experiences, but what is in operation really besides the power of suggestion? In "mentalist" Kreskin's autobiography he devotes approximately half of the book to this phenomenon.

At one point in my concerts I discuss my beliefs that there is no special state of "hypnosis," no need for fabricating a sleeplike trance.... I then attempt to explain to them what is known of suggestibility, in which no trance is involved, and how we are all extremely prone to it.⁵⁴

It is perhaps through the power of suggestion that "psychologists" have helped women discover "repressed memories," such as that their fathers molested them when they were young (whether such occurred or not). Gary R. Collins reminds us of the attention that Bridey Murphy received a number of years ago. Under hypnosis a Colorado housewife named Virginia Tighe "would speak in an Irish brogue" and tell "detailed stories of her past life as an Irish woman living in Cork in 1806."⁵⁵

After much publicity about this "past life," the truth was discovered.

Mrs. Tighe was remembering what she had learned as a child in Chicago. A lady whose maiden name was Bridey Murphy had impressed the young girl with stories about Ireland. She had taught Mrs. Tighe the Irish jig she danced during her hypnotic trances. In

addition, it was found that an aunt who spoke with a brogue had taught the young girl about Irish ways and had given her a great love for the Emerald Isle.⁵⁶

Collins states unequivocally: “Pure hypnotic age regression, like hypnotic reincarnation, does not exist.”⁵⁷ The mind is clearly open to the power of suggestion, and some become convinced of things that never happened. Sometimes, reincarnation adherents trip over their own shoelaces. Edgar Cayce, called the sleeping prophet because he slipped into a trance-like state from which he dispensed medical advice about people’s ailments and predictions about the resurfacing of Atlantis, lost track of his “begats” when he informed the world that Jesus had been incarnated as Adam about 12,000 B.C.⁵⁸ and then came back as Enoch. The problem is that both men lived at the same time!⁵⁹ Adam lived 930 years; Enoch was born in the 622nd year of Adam’s life. Only 57 of Enoch’s 365 years were lived after Adam’s death (Gen. 5:1-24). This strange feat would not be *reincarnation* but *dual* incarnations.

The Bible does not support the idea of reincarnation. Job rightly said: “He who goes down to the grave does not come up” (Job 7:9) and “For when a few years are finished, I shall go the way of no return” (Job 16:22). Solomon stated correctly that “the dead know nothing” and “nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun” (Ecc. 9:5-6). David did not err when he deduced that his infant child would not return to him (2 Sam. 12:23). Jesus was not mistaken when He talked about the innocence and humility of children (Matt. 18:1-5). But Dr. Rodney D. Romney is mistaken (flagrantly) when he writes the following in his book, *Journey to Inner Space: Finding God in Us*:

There is no such thing as pure innocence, even in a tiny babe. Every soul carries within it the scars of centuries of wrong thinking and wrongdoing.⁶⁰

The day of judgment contradicts the ideas of karma and reincarnation. Citizens of earth should be more concerned about approaching the judgment seat of Christ than about nirvana (2 Cor. 5:10). God has appointed a day “on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained” (Acts 17:31; John 5:27-29). The rich man would have given anything for another incarnation (Luke 16:19-31), but one opportunity is all that we receive; afterward is the judgment (Heb. 9:27).

Trance Channeling

If we have labored through previous lifetimes, it would only be natural to want to find out the details. And if those can be discerned, then what about other people’s past lives? What about loved ones who have left the earth plane and “crossed over”? Human beings need help in tracking down all of this information. Hang on to your sanity as the roller coaster descends into the “twilight zone” of Spiritism.

Many of the practices in which people are participating today were condemned in the Scriptures; so they have been practiced from ancient times. Often credited with beginning the modern movement is John Fox from Hydesville, New York. In 1848 people flocked to his house to hear “rappings” that presumably came from a peddler who had been murdered on the premises and buried beneath the house. For some reason he allegedly had messages for the living, and the gullible fed on the possibilities. Seances became popular as heartsick souls craved to hear a message from beyond the grave.⁶¹

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Alice Ann Bailey (mentioned earlier) both participated heavily in

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Spiritism, even channeling their teachings from the “masters” or “Mahatmas” allegedly living in the Himalayas to the written page.⁶² Edgar Cayce (1877-1945) supposedly produced a great amount of material from his subconscious (hence, “the sleeping prophet”). Arthur Conan Doyle, brilliant author of the Sherlock Holmes mysteries, delved heavily into Spiritism. A number of spiritist bibles have been published, such as *A Course in Miracles*, *Oahspe*, *Cosmic Consciousness*, and *The Spirit’s Book*. A description of the largest one follows:

The Urantia Book was received via automatic writing by anonymous individuals in the 1930s. It is 2,100 pages long and details a vast aggregate of ascending universes and evolving beings, and purports to disclose previously unknown information about the histories of the earth (“Urantia”) and Jesus.⁶³

The latest surge of popularity began with Jane Roberts in 1963. While writing poetry one evening, she had her first visionary experience. She and her husband began experimenting with a Ouija board and learned that an entity named “Seth” wanted to speak through her while she was in a trance-like state. She was a fast learner; soon she had published two books full of his knowledge: *The Seth Material* (1970) and *Seth Speaks* (1972). “Seth” promised he would never speak through anyone else, but since Mrs. Roberts’ death in 1983, others have claimed communication from him.⁶⁴ Some spirits, it seems, just cannot refrain from telling all they know.

Do people believe the Spiritist concept and claims? Are snails slow? From 1973 to 1984 the number of Americans who claimed contact with the dead increased from 27% to 42%.⁶⁵ Trance channeling has become so

popular that, whereas fifteen years ago there were only two in Los Angeles, now there are over 1,000. Due to the general public's great interest, more and more are learning to channel for fun and profit—at \$100 or more per hour.⁶⁶

What do you get for your money? Randall Baer spent a number of years in the New Age movement, writing two best-sellers under the influence of crystals. Concerning the channelers he wrote:

In my years as a New Ager, I went to many channeling sessions, and have heard the alluring words of high cosmic wisdom of multitudes of spirits claiming to be an “Ascended Master,” a spirit-God, an extraterrestrial visitor, a dolphin, the Council of Twelve, and others....

On stage, the medium goes into a trance and often twitches involuntarily as the spirit takes over the body and the medium relinquishes control. In many cases, virtually a total change of posture, overall demeanor, voice tone, speech style, and general bearing occurs as the spirit's presence manifests itself through the medium's body....

The audience is spellbound as the veil between heaven and Earth ostensibly is parted, and the gods from above are about to impart their celestial dewdrops to the elite privileged in attendance.⁶⁷

Whereas the initial fascination with mediums was to hear a message from a departed loved one, the focus of the message from today's trance channelers may be upon a variety of matters. One may receive promises of future

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love and happiness, wealth, and (for those spiritually discerning) deeper secrets and wisdom of the universe. An inquiry into the well-being of a lost loved one invariably prompts a comforting message of assurance that all is well. Apparently, no one ever joins the rich man in torment; Abraham's bosom must be getting crowded.

Below are listed a few of the more well-known trance channelers.

Ramtha communicates through a housewife (thrice divorced) named J. Z. Knight from the state of Washington. Ramtha purports to be a former warrior king (seven feet tall) who became more enlightened in India. On stage (in ballrooms boasting crowds upwards of 500 people) Ramtha remains highly animated for hours with no signs of fatigue.⁶⁸

Lazaris (with emphasis upon the second syllable) channels himself through former insurance supervisor Jach Pursel. Shirley MacLaine called him to public attention in her 1987 book, *It's All in the Playing*. Supposedly, his wife Peny (now divorced) heard Lazaris speaking through Jach while he was asleep and tape-recorded him. Jach was initially frightened by the experience, but he learned to accept it.⁶⁹ Many men get in trouble when they talk in their sleep, but Jach turned it into a fortune. One of his messages is:

We want to talk to you of love. We want to blend with you—we want to blend our energy with yours so we can touch each other—so we can work together.⁷⁰

Lazaris sounds so friendly that one wonders if he is related to Casper.

TOM McPHERSON, a former Irish pickpocket from Elizabethan items, speaks through Kevin Ryerson, but so

do John, an Essene scholar from the time of Jesus, and a few others. Shirley MacLaine catapulted his personalities into the limelight in *Out on a Limb*. Tom is charming, but his brogue is not nearly as good as Bridey Murphy's. Those who channel through Kevin are spirits between incarnations; generally, they just want to make the world a better place.⁷¹

There are lesser luminaries, and new ones begin to shine on a daily basis. How do people become enamored by these "entertainers"? Shirley MacLaine reminds her readers that she is cynical and tough to convince on anything so strange; she has even demanded that proof be given. But she has no concept of how to test charlatans. Why does she not pose a few personal and difficult questions to one channeler (perhaps about some of her past lives) and then travel to another city and ask the same questions of another. Their answers should match because all of the disembodied spirits can access the Akashic records, which are "imperishable records of every person's every word, thought or act inscribed in the earth or spirit realms."⁷²

Anyone who can contact a spirit should be able to provide accurate information about nearly any subject. Furthermore, the information provided by any two channelers ought to be harmonious (since they are all tapping in to the same source), as it is with researchers obtaining their information from the same library or computer operators linked to the same database. No matter who makes the inquiry, the answer should be the same. So tell us, Ramtha, Lazaris, Tom McPherson: who really assassinated President Kennedy? Did Oswald act alone? What about the "pristine" bullet? Perhaps Oliver Stone did ask several channelers and for that reason came up with practically everybody being a part of the conspiracy.

Trance channelers able to read the Akashic records

could have a thousand useful purposes. Think of the crimes they could solve! They could clear up the strange details of the Vince Foster “suicide” and make lie detectors obsolete. When witnesses testifying before a Senate committee “have no recollection” of nearly anything, hey, no problem. Just ask Tom McPherson or Lazaris what was said and done.

If Shirley applied some of her fertile imagination to devising tests to determine legitimacy, she would have learned much more about these “trance channelers.” F. LaGard Smith asked Kevin Ryerson to interpret the same dream on two occasions four months apart. He received two different interpretations of the same dream from the same “psychic.”⁷³ Marilyn vos Savant summed up this channeling business well in the August 29, 1995 *Parade Magazine*, when asked, “Are the abilities of channelers real?” She responded:

“Channeling” is an act staged by people who pretend to “channel” the spirit of an ancient or mystical figure through themselves. Then they speak words designed to make others think the imaginary figure is speaking. In my opinion, only their ability to deceive innocent people is real (14).

She might have added: “And their ability to fleece them.” Ten years ago J.Z. Knight was charging \$400 per person for a group session. Jach Pursel had a two-year waiting list even though he charges \$93 per hour. Kevin Ryerson charges \$250 per session and is so busy that he is referring customers to other channelers.⁷⁴ Lazaris (Jach Pursel) justifies these exorbitant rates:

Therefore, if we did workshops for nothing, if we did other things for nothing, we would be robbing people because we would be giving them

the idea that what we have to offer is worth nothing. And, therefore, they would not avail themselves of the opportunity to listen, and that would be a great injustice to them.⁷⁵

Baer comments: “To give truth free-of-charge is, as Lazaris teaches, an ‘injustice and a robbery.’ Evidently Jesus was not aware of this.... Virtually everything has a price attached.”⁷⁶

God forbade His people to engage in attempts to communicate with the dead. Listed as abominations were soothsayers, mediums, spiritists, and those who call up the dead (Deut. 18:9-12). One defiles himself with them (Lev. 19:31). Such an attitude reveals a lack of trust in God. Even king Saul, as evil as he was (persecuting a righteous man and killing God’s priests) did not seek answers from a woman with a familiar spirit until he was desperate (1 Sam. 28:15). Endeavoring to find answers from occult and illegitimate sources is equivalent to walking by sight. The faithful child of God will trust in Him for the future and eschew all these forms of foolishness.

Other New Age Manifestations

New Ageism has spilled over into various realms such as music (probably the least harmful of all its influences) and psychology. “One of the founding fathers of New Age psychologies is Carl Jung,”⁷⁷ whose name will be recognized by many. Like Elwood P. Dowd, Jung had an invisible friend who he eventually admitted was a spirit entity. “At times he seemed to me quite real, as if he were a living personality,” wrote Jung. “I went walking up and down the garden with him, and to me he was what the Indians call a *guru*.”⁷⁸

Many New Age psychology courses have been developed, and some of them have been mixed with

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Eastern mysticism such as “Werner Erhard’s the Forum (formerly est) and John Hanley’s Lifespring.”⁷⁹ The course called “Transformational Technologies” (also from Erhard) has been used by a number of major corporations. Judith Hooper commended some of these programs’ infiltration into the business community in an issue of the New Age publication, *The Omni Whole Mind Newsletter*:

But today many Fortune 500 firms are having their right brains recharged, their alpha waves enhanced, their paradigms shifted, and their cultures ‘transformed.’ In California, the hotbed of transformation, over 50 percent of company owners surveyed by the magazine *California Business* said they used some form of ‘consciousness-raising’ technique to motivate employees.⁸⁰

Even sports teams have encouraged their players to use meditation techniques to sharpen performance, but so far mysticism has not been a viable replacement for skill.

Achieving altered states of consciousness has been a frequent goal of many New Agers. Often these states are achieved through physical control (yoga, breathing exercises, acupuncture), psychological manipulation (meditation, trances), and even chemical means (drugs, although this option is rarely exercised). But New Ageism emphasizes getting inside oneself. Toward the conclusion of *Dancing in the Light* Shirley MacLaine is having conversations with her Higher Self, whom she can also see. It tells her:

I have always been here. I’ve been with you since the beginning of time. I am *never* away from you. I *am* you. I am your unlimited soul. I am the

unlimited you that guides and teaches you through each incarnation.⁸¹

Many New Agers see auras around humans (as well as plants and trees), their Higher Selves, or some other visual effects. Many people in denominations attribute these to the devil, but there are other possible explanations—such as the power of suggestion discussed earlier.

Gary Collins describes the brain as

a collection of between 10 billion and 100 billion neurons. Each neuron is as complex as an entire small computer.... The number of contact points...may be as high as 1 quadrillion.... All of this is so complex that the brain cannot even begin to understand its own complexity.⁸²

How do we know, then, what the mind is capable of creating within itself? Is it not susceptible to suggestibility? Why could it not visualize conversations with a Higher Self or imagine astral projection? Why could it not feel “at one” with the universe or invent an out-of-body experience? Why cannot the subconscious produce writings as if from someone else, “speak in tongues,” feel as if it were “baptized in the Holy Spirit” (although the Bible never describes such a feeling), or deliver messages from ancient “masters”? Why, the mind might even convince the body that it had been abducted by aliens—which brings us to another New Age belief.

“Would you believe that more than 75 percent of New Agers hold a completely unshakable belief in the reality of UFOs?”⁸³ Singer John Denver claims to have come originally from a place near the Lyra nebula (which gives new meaning to the use of his phrase, “Far out”), Shirley’s friend David had spoken to an alien woman named Mayan,

and Randall Baer convinced himself that his celestial home was Orion (before he left New Ageism).⁸⁴

Trance channeler Kevin Ryerson, in his John persona, told Shirley that extraterrestrials had been visiting this planet for hundreds of years.⁸⁵ Her friend David told her that they had been mining minerals from the Andes mountains for years. When Shirley asked if the local residents had seen these extraterrestrials, David replied, “Shirley, everyone I’ve talked to up here has a flying-disc story. *Every single one.*”⁸⁶

Marshall Herff Applewhite had a flying-disc story too. He convinced members of the Heaven’s Gate cult that if they would all commit suicide, their souls would be free to ascend at exactly the right moment to meet with a UFO which would be trailing the Hale-Bopp comet. The following message remains on this cult’s web site:

The joy is that our Older Member in the Evolutionary Level Above Human (the “Kingdom of Heaven”) has made it clear to us that Hale-Bopp’s approach is the “marker” we’ve been waiting for—the time for the arrival of the spacecraft from the Level Above Human to take us home to “Their World”—in the Literal Heavens (WWW.heavensgate.org).

One can find a host of strange and bizarre sites on the Internet. There are chat rooms for those who wish to discuss the principles set forth in *The Celestine Prophecy* although the author of the book has disassociated himself from them. One can also order from a number of catalogs various New Age products and paraphernalia. The book, *Inside the New Age Nightmare*, contains an appendix of “Some New Age-Oriented Journals, Magazines, Resources and Newsletters” and one for New Age workshops.

An article appearing on pages 44-54 in *Maclean’s*

(October 10, 1994) entitled “The New Spirituality” unites several of the elements already discussed:

The range of options is formidable—crystals, meditation, homegrown Hinduism, psychic counselors, and on and on. “We of the federation of the intergalactic work together,” coos trance-channeler Anne Morse to a packed center in Toronto where each person has paid \$16 to get in. “And we are willing to work with you.”⁸⁷

Many New Agers are also environmentalists. *The Celestine Prophecy* stresses having more forests and fewer children in the future. Greenpeace, frequently in the news, possesses a New Age philosophy. The author of *The Aquarian Conspiracy* writes that we now know the earth is “a jewel in space, a fragile water planet.... All countries are economically and ecologically involved with each other, politically enmeshed.”⁸⁸ She also postulates: “The global village is a reality.”⁸⁹ Shall we expect a new bestseller soon entitled *It Takes a Global Village*?

An Earth “goddess,” usually called Gaia, is venerated by many New Age feminists who believe that cultures in Earth’s ancient past worshipped her. When this practice was in vogue, men and women allegedly formed peaceful partnerships in which neither men nor women were ranked above each other but coexisted as equals.⁹⁰ This goddess represents not only an egalitarian society but an environmental adoration of the earth as well—our evolutionary parent.

This does not mean that the Goddess has no existence at all. It *does* exist, but *not as a separate being*. Rather, the Goddess is identified with all being (in a kind of pantheistic sense), or with the life force or spirit that animates all

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being (in a kind of panentheistic sense). The deity is not a transcendent Being, but is immanent in all being. The Goddess is the world, the universe.⁹¹

Other New Age ideas include belief in “power objects” such as crystals, which contain healing and energizing properties,⁹² and the seven chakras (nerve centers) of the body through which “a mysterious fire of love” rises up (during meditation) within the individual in his cerebrospinal system known as *kundalini shakti*.⁹³ This power affords him “expanded consciousness” and “exposure to greater forms of cosmic energy.”⁹⁴ New Agers also refer to the “third eye,” “an occult belief that a center of psychic powers is located at the forehead between the two (physical) eyes.”⁹⁵

With all of these magical, mystical powers swirling in, through, and around us, the one who has never suspected that he possesses any of them (and has not discovered any of them) is made to feel a trifle dull and cosmically inept; he would feel as much an outcast as one who has never “spoken in tongues” at a “charismatic” conference. Christians ought not to feel deprived, however, since God has “given us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3) and has “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). God has withheld nothing from us that is crucial to our salvation—not so-called “superior” wisdom, nor the “deep things of Satan” (Rev. 2:24).

New Age Morality

Because the emphasis of New Ageism is a subjective one, it does not possess a moral code. The New Ager, like the atheist, is adrift in a sea of uncertainty. He has nowhere to drop anchor because first of all he does not believe in anchors, and second he would not be able to tell

a safe haven from a pirate cove. In a nutshell, everything is permitted. After all, a system that emphasizes “create your own reality” invites the corollary “create your own morality.”

An article that appeared on July 1, 1986, in *The Dallas Morning News* describes a meeting of 150 “Seth” devotees (they came together to bend spoons) which typifies this philosophy. “We literally create our reality through the beliefs we hold, so by changing those beliefs, we can change reality.”⁹⁶

The fundamental error of this philosophy is that reality is not created; it is recognized. Jesus pronounced Peter blessed because he recognized the reality of His Deity (Matt. 16:13-17); He did not praise him for inventing something meaningful to himself. On the day of judgment no one will be allowed to say, “This is not my reality; please excuse me.” “He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained” (Acts 17:31) whether we are prepared for that reality or not. Undoubtedly, the rich man devoutly wished he could create his own reality. When will people learn the difference between fanciful games and truth?

So what kind of morality do New Agers possess? While it would be presumptuous to speak for all of them, nevertheless, it is instructive to consider what some of its most popular adherents think. Randall Baer, once a strong proponent of New Ageism, comments on the poor quality of family life:

I often came across New Age parents who either didn't live with their children or who had left them. Often the parents did so out of preference, not necessity. When one is so busy exploring his own glorious potential, kids just get in the way.⁹⁷

Anyone who reads Shirley MacLaine's books will

notice that she feels free to use foul language, to blaspheme, and to engage in sexual relationships (fornication). Many attend New Age workshops on weekends “not just to receive new knowledge but also to find new casual sex partners.” Divorce is not uncommon, either. After all, some reason: “We must have worked through all our *karma* together—now it’s time to move on to another *karmic* relationship.”⁹⁹ Baer’s personal assessment of New Age marriages is that they are “often unstable and unfulfilling,” with a divorce rate that is “unusually high.”¹⁰⁰

There is no real basis upon which to condemn homosexuality or bisexuality—if such is the reality someone wishes to create. Perhaps an attraction for a particular gender has simply accompanied someone to this incarnation. It is a wonder that no one has written to Ann Landers, claiming that past life experiences make homosexuals what they are. She and Abby are so desperate for the public to accept homosexuality they might just publish such a letter!

As for abortion, there probably won’t be many New Agers joining the picket line. “For if a soul is immortal and continuously reincarnates, then abortion is no problem because that soul will recycle itself into another body at some later time, no harm done.”¹⁰¹ This kind of attitude may offend many sensitive souls, but New Ageism represents a brand of fatalism which concludes that whatever happens is meant to be; karma is being worked out, and cosmic justice is being served. Whatever might go awry in this lifetime will be worked out in the next. Someone trying to comprehend reincarnation as it relates to abortion might well ask, “Why would a disembodied spirit choose a mother (or a family) that would kill it before it ever had the opportunity to advance spiritually?” Doctrines that can be reduced to an absurdity are false.

Someone might protest that many of the observations

about New Age morality reported thus far constitute nothing more than opinion. To demonstrate that these assertions are indeed harmonious with New Age doctrine, we will consider the teachings of the “ascended master” Ramtha, who channels bits of spiritual knowledge through California housewife J. Z. Knight (mentioned previously). The statements listed below are Ramtha’s teachings as set forth in the 1987 book, *Voyage to the New World*. Dick Sztanyo listed these in his chapter on the New Age movement in the excellent Shenandoah lectureship book, *Embattled Christianity*.¹⁰²

The page numbers listed at the end of each quotation are from Ramtha’s book.

“Relinquish guilt...do not live by rules, live by feelings” (149). Although this may be the dominant psychology of the day, it is not correct either in counseling or in religion. But it does typify New Age morality, which has no use for the strict statements found in the Bible, such as “flee fornication” (1 Cor. 6:18) or “Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt. 19:6). Certainly New Agers are not interested in lists of sins (Gal. 5:19-21, e.g.); in fact, sin (for them) is not even a valid concept. Ramtha says: “There is no such thing as evil” (60), and Shirley MacLaine’s “Higher Self” confirmed this doctrine: “Until mankind realizes that there is, in truth, no good and there is, in truth, no evil—there will be no peace.”¹⁰³

“Living by feelings” means “doing your own thing” (to borrow a phrase from the sixties). “Living by feelings” means doing what is right in your own eyes (Judg. 21:25). The only problem is that “the way of man is not in himself” (Jer. 10:23); the way that a man chooses for himself (based on his feelings or his own judgment) “is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12). Furthermore, the truth is “He who trusts in his own heart is a fool” (Prov. 28:26). Besides: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;

who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9).

Ramtha foolishly states: “For 2000 years we have been called sinful creatures but we are all equal with God or Christ” (180-81). The Jews determined to kill Jesus when He made that statement (John 5:18). When He admitted to being the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, they accused Him of blasphemy and delivered up to Pilate (Mark 14:61-62). Jesus was not guilty as charged because He spoke the truth; He was the Word made flesh, but any human being who would make such a claim today is guilty of blasphemy.

Many brethren would probably enjoy Ramtha’s plan of evangelism: “Do not preach to this world...the world doesn’t need saving—leave it alone” (130). This advice is directly opposite to the command that the Lord gave to His apostles (Matt. 28:18-20). New Ageism is not interested in the salvation of men’s souls or moral reformation. The church needs to be careful and ask itself whose commands are we most closely following—Jesus’ or Ramtha’s?

Ramtha has advanced the “you-don’t-have-the-right-to-judge-me” spirit of this age to the next level: “God has never judged you or anyone” (62). Perhaps Ramtha should check the Akashic Records for information about the FLOOD! The whole point of the books of Judges, Kings, and Chronicles (not to mention Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) is that God judges and punishes sin! But according to New Ageism God is not allowed to either define or punish sin, a precedent set with Adam and Eve (Gen. 3) which will culminate before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

Ramtha has tapped into another popular idea in our culture by seeking to eliminate the ultimate punishment for immorality. “No, there is no hell, and there is no devil” (252). No one will tremble when hearing this message as Felix did when Paul spoke of the “judgment to come” (Acts

24:25). “The devil is not really evil,” the ancient warrior elaborates, “because he is really God...who else would he be?” (251). “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil” (Isa. 5:20). With such a topsy-turvy ideology, is it any wonder that moral principles are absent?

But the worst moral philosophy ever uttered is yet forthcoming:

Every vile and wretched thing you do broadens your understanding.... If you want to do any one thing *regardless* of what it is, it would not be wise to go against that feeling; for there is an experience awaiting you and a grand adventure that will make your life sweeter.¹⁰⁴

The experience awaiting the practitioner of this philosophy is called trial by jury and imprisonment. What sin, even the most heinous one, does this statement not justify? Did not Jonadab play the role of Ramtha as he counseled Amnon on how to violate his sister Tamar (2 Sam. 13:3-5)? If there is no evil, no devil, no judgment, no hell, and I should do every vile and wretched thing, *regardless* of what it is, in order to make my life sweeter, have I not justified rape, incest, child molestation, and even murder?

I have created my own truth. In my reality I do not count anything I do as wrong or immoral; there is no evil. I want your wife, Mr. New Ager. I have no right to her, and she doesn't want me, but why should I deny myself a sweet experience? I'll just wait until you leave her alone and then force myself upon her. Maybe I have some friends who would like to enrich their experience, too, and we all decide to gang up on her. Now, Mr. New Ager, you wouldn't call the police, would you? I'm just working out my karma (and maybe hers). If you counter that my actions were wrong and violent (as the Scriptures which you reject teach), I will just say, “So what? That's just your truth,

and *you shouldn't try to impose your morality on me!*"

Or suppose you have a son. I like little boys; I'm a charter member of NAMBLA. I'm going to invite your son over after school while you're at work to play a little "game" with him. You won't report me, will you? I'm just loving him in my own way. Besides, maybe he chose you as a parent knowing that you would help him survive the experience. Maybe your son and I have had a past karmic relationship that needed a little more work. Besides, I am god. What right do you have to criticize a fellow deity?

Suppose my role model is Jeffrey Dahmer? Would it be all right for me to imitate his actions? Or suppose (like Mordecai to Haman), you just rub me the wrong way. If I murder you, would your blood (like Abel's) cry out from the ground, or would it just sigh, "Oh, well; that's karma"? The point of all these scenarios is that theoretically a person might do anything that enters his mind if he really follows the precepts of New Ageism because its main goal is to exalt SELF. It is the amusing "Ramtha" (as Shirley MacLaine describes him)¹⁰⁵ who encourages people: "Love yourself...live in the moment, to exalt all that you are" (149) and "Now to become enlightened is to make the priority of enlightenment first—the priority of love of Self **first**" (227).¹⁰⁶

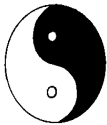
The Bible at every turn takes people outside of Self. It declares unto us that our first obligation is to God (Matt. 22:37-38). We are not equal to Him; His thoughts and ways are far above ours (Isa. 55:8-9). He is our Creator and worthy of our praise and adoration. Human beings are next to show love and concern toward others (Matt. 22:39; Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 10:24). Even the commands given toward husbands and wives, children and parents, servants and masters are aimed at what each *owes* the other—not what they can expect to *receive*.

New Ageism, on the other hand, puts human beings

at the pinnacle of the universe, equal with god who is everything. New Agers are devoted to the thrilling pursuit of Self. There can be little room for seeking the welfare of others when the subject of a person's veneration and worship is himself. New Age morality can be accurately summed up by asking the question, "What morality?"

Symbols of the New Age

A symbol which may turn up in a variety of places (even in jewelry) is the Yin Yang (pictured below).



YIN & YANG SYMBOL
Represents male &
female spirits

What does this symbol mean? Shirley MacLaine explains:

I had made a kind of study of male and female energy. The female energy was the yin energy, residing in the right hemisphere of the brain. It controlled mystical, receptive, intuitive, artistic characteristics. The left hemisphere of the brain (the yang side) controlled assertive, logical, active, and linear characteristics.¹⁰⁷

New Ageism emphasizes the intuitive right side while denigrating the logical left side. Consider the following quotations. John (Kevin Ryerson) tells Shirley: "You must learn to trust your feelings more and refrain from approaching so many issues in life from strictly an intellectual perspective. Intellect as a marvel is limited. Feelings are limitless. Trust your heart..."¹⁰⁸ A few pages later John adds: "One does not need intellect to know God.... The path to inner peace is not through the intellect but through the inner heart. Within the inner heart one finds God, peace, and oneself."¹⁰⁹

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Shirley herself warns that people must guard against allowing “*intelligence* to block our free-flowing creativity.” She and a friend who is “basically an intellectual” knew what that “meant to creativity. It meant *blockage*.” “Once again we would then agree that creativity required living in the moment. Too much thinking was simply a handicap.”¹¹⁰ Shirley even begins to advise others: “Just listen to your feelings and trust them.”¹¹¹

The instructions given to Shirley on getting in touch with her “Higher Self” are themselves instructive. A woman named Chris lectures her about the mechanics and value of acupuncture: “Let your mind go. Don’t evaluate. And don’t let the left brain judge what you are doing. Give your right brain more space. As a matter of fact, don’t think.”¹¹²

Just what society needs—more people who cannot think! American culture is already being bombarded with a de-emphasis upon logic and with education curricula that have replaced basic thinking and learning skills with mushy multi-culturalism and testing techniques that do not require precise answers. Although there remain many excellent teachers in the public school system, many people are wondering what the goals of modern schools are. Benjamin Bloom, the so-called “father” of Outcome-Based Education, shares with us his aim in his book *All Our Children Learning*: “The purpose of education and the schools is to change the thoughts, feelings and actions of students” (180).¹¹³ When did education’s purpose cease being to change students’ level of knowledge by increasing it?

One New Age item is an Indian medicine pouch, which some fourth graders are now learning to make. One teacher in Iowa was teaching her students how to make one as well as to fill it with special items like red stone,

symbolizing the child's place on the medicine wheel astrology chart.¹¹⁴ A Minnesota mother, visiting her child's school, "found magic dream catchers in every classroom, mystical drawings of a spiritualized earth, and a ring of stones in the schoolyard for medicine wheel ceremonies."¹¹⁵

Infiltration of New Age ideas into the public school system is not a recent innovation; it was in the early part of this century Alice Ann Bailey wrote the book, *Education in the New Age*. Many of these ideas have obviously taken root. Over a decade ago Phyllis Schlafly published a collection of unnerving experiences parents reported in hearings. Joan Lauterbach from Mexico, Missouri, went to an orientation for parents of gifted students. She had several questions about this program, and, after discovering how it would operate, she withheld her daughter from participating in it. Reproduced below is her testimony:

No. 5: What is the ME Center? The answer was that the object is to learn self-awareness, self-concepts, to learn about their own feelings, their own values, and to develop healthy and realistic attitudes toward self. No. 6: What are relaxation techniques? The answer that I was given was, "We teach them yoga to attain peace, harmony and self-awareness."¹¹⁶

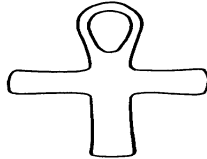
What better way to bring about change in society than to target the best and brightest students! This is neither an isolated incident nor a mere accident. Randall Baer, once a New Age insider states:

Personally, I recall quite a few conversations with teachers who would boast of how they were using their position to insert various enlightened

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New Age ideas into their curriculum, and how easy they found this task to be in many cases.¹¹⁷

Not only are some New Age concepts finding their way into various school systems, but many also permeate society in general. It is scarcely uncommon to find “Christians” wearing crosses around their necks, but a cross which has an elliptical loop at the top is not a “Christian” symbol at all; in honor of the Egyptian god Ra it is an Egyptian cross called an *Ankh* (see accompanying picture).



ANKH CROSS
Worship Egyptian god Ra
Not Christian!

Also included among New Age paraphernalia are some older ideas, such as tarot cards, rune stones, and ouija boards. Attempts to read palms, tea leaves, and other forms of divination remain popular, as well as astrological charts, readings, and horoscopes. Then there is the new popularity of crystal and pyramid power. And who knows how much money the Psychic Hotline is raking in? New Ageism is inclusive of nearly anything from ancient occultism and Eastern mysticism to the modern fascination with UFOs and the use of pop psychology. What it cannot tolerate is the monotheistic religion and rigid morality taught in the Word of God.

The Dark Side of the Force

Much of what is termed New Ageism is upbeat, uplifting, and inspiring. Various beliefs could be classified as blatantly bizarre or downright daffy, but even these weird concepts are relatively innocuous. What happens to those who resist the ideology, who refuse to be dissolved

into the melting pot of monism, pantheism, and mysticism? Many New Agers simply would not care at all. They might consider unyielding monotheists as unenlightened and narrow-minded, short-sighted individuals who were robbing themselves of great insights and experiences, but that would be the extent of their annoyance.

Some, however, are more openly hostile. Constance Cumbey tells of a conversation with a woman deeply committed to New Ageism. She was critical of the Bible even though she had not read it because it tended to “confuse her.” During dinner the following conversation occurred:

It’s just not right—not right. That book should not be allowed! It’s too misleading!” Unable to believe my ears, I asked what book she was referring to and she exclaimed: “The Bible!”¹¹⁸

“Ramtha” clearly feels antagonism towards Christianity:

Devil? I looked far and wide for the creature... I found him nowhere (but) I found him thriving in the hearts of frenzied entities in a fervor of madness to save the world from its sins... That is where he is. (Do) you understand (252-53)?¹¹⁹

So the individual who possesses evangelistic zeal is inhabited by the devil; otherwise, Satan has no existence. [Please, brethren hardly need any more excuses to avoid personal work!] What an illustration of putting darkness for light (Isa. 5:20)! But for some, this kind of thinking is only the beginning. From this point on, the plot not only thickens; it turns diabolical. From a number of sources Doug Groothuis put together the following composite doctrine:

Yes, the New Age of peace, light and love awaits us, but . . . we must first experience a “cleansing” or purgation of planetary problem spots. These blots on the biosphere are typically described as those “less evolved” souls who do not see “all as one” or “all as God,” and who cling to “old age” notions such as sin, human finitude, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the need for external redemption.¹²⁰

These thoughts are not limited to one or two individuals. John Randolph Price has written at least two New Age books and is on friendly terms with a spirit-guide named “Asher,” who confided to him that:

Nature will soon enter her cleansing cycle” in which individuals with “lower vibratory rates” (monotheists like Jews, Christians and Muslims) will be “removed from the planet during the next two decades.”¹²¹

Does this “cleansing” of the “blots on the biosphere,” these metaphysically-challenged souls with “lower vibratory rates,” refer to murder? Such seems to be the case; of course it would be done only for the advancement and positive evolution of mankind. Certainly, such “cleansing” would not violate New Age tenets. Shirley’s mentor David told her: “I mean that six million Jews did not really die. Only their bodies died.”¹²² We would do well to remember that there are no victims in the system of karma, and all of those massacred will have more incarnations.

Is there any real danger from those in a hurry for the New Age to be established? There is no overt threat *at the moment!* But the elements for catastrophe, which may all be lying dormant at the moment, could be activated

in a short period of time. New Ageism is a fatalistic system, which means the majority may be resigned to whatever occurs. Death is not regarded as the end of anything; in fact, the murder of monotheists could be regarded as helping them to a higher spiritual plateau. A convincing, charismatic leader could instigate a bloodbath unlike anything yet witnessed—in the name of progress.

Impossible? Sirhan Sirhan was heavily influenced by New Age thinking. After killing Robert F. Kennedy, the first book he asked for (after being incarcerated) was Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*.¹²³ Jim Jones and his People's Temple were patterned after a man who called himself Father Divine (a bit presumptuous but consistent with the idea that all is god). George Baker (his real name) and The Unity School (founded in 1891) were both "heavily influenced by Hinduism and Theosophy" (Blavatsky again), which teaches that man "is essentially deity."¹²⁴ Men like these are dangerous because they elevate themselves above the Bible. Jones, for example, would quote from the Bible, but then "throw it on the ground and kick it" to show that his authority was "superior to the written word of God."¹²⁵

The most frightening example of philosophy gone berserk, however, is Adolph Hitler! Although it is a popular practice to link his name to any ideology or group that someone despises, in this instance there is just cause to do so. Consider the following information.

While Hitler was in Vienna pursuing a career as an architect and artist, he spent his spare time in occult bookstores and libraries.... Transcendent states of consciousness and mind expansion fascinated him.... Yoga, astrology...proved too slow for his ambitions...he decided to accelerate the process by supplementing meditation with drugs.

Mescaline was used to transport him to the highest state of consciousness where he could look into what New Agers and occultists call the “Akashic Record”—a demonic version of historical and future events.¹²⁶

Extermination of Jews and gypsies was not called a killing. It was called a “cleansing action.”¹²⁷

The parallels between Nazi ideology and New Ageism are striking. As part of his government, Hitler even had a Bureau of the Occult.¹²⁸ Apparently, he had no qualms about mixing religion and government. When the Allies conquered Berlin, “they were surprised to find the corpses of over 1,000 Tibetans.”¹²⁹ Philosophically, Hitler was willing to go in any direction to achieve knowledge—the occult, mysticism—anywhere but the Bible. But such is hardly a startling fact. Those who reject the Bible have already demonstrated that they are willing to go in any or all other directions. Even Shirley MacLaine admits that violence belongs to “the negative side of the Force.”¹³⁰

The Appeal of New Ageism

Having explored the several facets of the New Age movement, one question many Christians may have is, “What’s the attraction to this fantasy-laden religion?” One advantage is the so-called appeal to freedom, which is the way many characterize the absence of restraints (or self-control). False religious teachers even within the bounds of Christianity were promising “liberty,” only to make their followers in their own image—“slaves of corruption” (2 Pet. 2:19-22). How much easier is it for those not tied to an objective system of morality to enhance their doctrine with ideas of liberation from moral codes. Of course, not everyone enticed by New Ageism is looking for approval

to be immoral, but many consider being released from the accountability inherent in Christianity quite a relief.

A second appeal of New Ageism is the inner peace that it promises. The world does not offer any. Numerous conflicts devastate countries; monstrous crimes are inflicted upon the innocent daily. Even in nations at peace with one another there are personal battles within, such as the “drug war,” hostile corporate takeovers, city councils whose members cannot treat one another civilly, and such like. And in the Lord’s church? How often has the Lord’s body (God’s house) been used by ungodly, faithless men and women as their personal arena in which to play “politics” and exercise control over others, as Diotrephes of old? Sometimes factions emerge to fight against each other, or maybe they gang up to get rid of the preacher attempting to mediate between them. And then some New Age guru comes along, expressing the sentiments of “The Great Invocation,” and we wonder why people are attracted to it!

The Great Invocation

From the point of light within the Mind of God
Let the light stream forth into the minds of men.
Let light descend on the Earth.
From the point of love within the Heart of God
Let love stream forth into the heart of men.
Let Christ return to Earth.
From the centre where the Will of God is known
Let purpose guide the little wills of men—
The purpose which the Masters know and serve.
From the centre which we call the race of men
Let the plan of love and light work out.
And may it seal the door where evil dwells.
Let Light and Love and Power restore the Plan
on Earth.

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Lofty sentiments often capture the imaginations of people. At the end of the advertisement for the “Lord Maitreya” (who failed to materialize on cue) were these three lines:

Without Sharing There Can Be No Justice;
Without Justice There Can Be No Peace;
Without Peace There Can Be No Future

The relaxation techniques, the emphasis on new and different ideas, and the focusing of the attention on one’s inner self (always a popular topic) all serve to draw devotees.

A third allurement is the promise of power. People often feel battered by many of life’s problems over which they have no control. How wonderful to hear that one is a god with unlimited power! Evidence to support such a conclusion can be slight; a little imagination can supply a whole host of vivid memories. Elliot Miller describes his state of New Age euphoria after he had imbibed freely from the esoteric wells of his spiritual superiors:

I was surging with power. It was raining, and so I decided to put my new power to a test. Based on the belief that all reality is one Mind, and that a Christ is so connected to that Mind that he can control external reality (as Jesus did with His miracles), I looked up at the completely overcast sky and confidently commanded the rain to stop and the sun to shine. *Immediately*, the clouds parted and the afternoon became sunny and dry. My “power surge” continued to accelerate.¹³¹

Promises of liberty, peace, and power form a

potent trio of temptations, not unlike “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:15). Liberty allows a person to experience whatever fleshly desires accost him; the pride of life is precisely the appeal of power (in thinking that mere man can be God). As far as “the lust of the eyes” is concerned, the New Ager has just turned them inward and has become infatuated with all that he sees there (or thinks he sees).

Lest anyone think that only kooks are attracted to New Ageism, consider what the author of *The Aquarian Conspiracy* has confided about the matter:

The Aquarian Conspirators range across all levels of income and education, from the humblest to the highest. There are schoolteachers and office workers, famous scientists, government officials and lawmakers, artists and millionaires, taxi drivers and celebrities, leaders in medicine, education, law, psychology. Some are open in their advocacy, and their names may be familiar. Others are quiet about their involvement, believing they can be more effective if they are not identified with ideas that have been all too often misunderstood.¹³²

New Ageism Versus the Bible

Though appealing in some respects, the philosophy of the New Age should be rejected for a number of reasons, particularly because it contradicts the Bible at every measurable point. The inspired Word of God contains lofty morals and ethics, calls upon all people to be responsible for their actions, and promises a day on which they shall be judged; New Agers tell us that we are gods, allow us to commit any immoralities that we see fit, and promise

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that we have millions of years to reincarnate and work out our karma. The destiny of the obedient believer of the Bible is heaven and eternal blessedness; the destiny of the New Ager is uncertain—either absorption or extinction. But even on a lesser scale, New Ageism is full of contradictions and **misinformation**.

As long as New Agers remain in the realm of subjectivism, they function pretty well, but once they return to the factual, they have a difficult time—and are subject to scrutiny. David, Shirley MacLaine’s early “spiritual” guide, for example, implies that Jesus taught reincarnation in connection with sowing and reaping.

That’s what Christ was trying to tell us. Everything we do or say in our lives every day has a consequence and where we find ourselves today is the result of what we’ve done before. If everyone felt that, understood it in their gut, the world would be a better place. We shall reap what we sow, bad or *good*, and we should be aware of it.¹³³

In the first place, if Jesus ever said those words, the Scriptures did not record them (though obviously He is in agreement with them); it was Paul who wrote: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7). Second, neither Jesus nor Paul ever taught reincarnation. When Paul penned this verse, he was not in the midst of a discussion on reincarnation. Furthermore, the next verse makes clear that the reaping is at the judgment, not in a future incarnation: “For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Gal. 6:8).

Similarly erroneous was this allegation made by

David: “Christ said it: ‘Know thyself.’ And then be true to it.”¹³⁴ “Know thyself” has usually been attributed to Socrates (sometimes Plato, Pythagorus, or the oracle at Delphi).¹³⁵ Jesus never said anything even remotely akin to such a sentiment. “And then be true to it”? David is apparently confusing the Bible with Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Jesus with Polonius who advises his son:

This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man
(Act 1, Scene 3, Lines 78-80).

The Bible teaches us to be faithful to God and His Word, to obey God rather than men, but never does it command us to be true to ourselves.

Even though Shirley makes it a point to read the Bible, she is obviously not as familiar with it as she thinks. In a meeting with trance channeler Kevin Ryerson, the persona John keeps repeating the phrase, *as such*. Shirley reasons: “As such . . . I guessed that meant okay. I remembered Kevin had said one of the spiritual entities spoke in a biblical lingo.”¹³⁶ Which verses contain that “biblical lingo”?

Other misconceptions concerning the Bible abound, as well as historical inaccuracies. Already mentioned was the Biblical error of Edgar Cayce, in which he affirmed that Enoch was the reincarnation of Adam—even though both men lived during the same time period. Cayce also blundered in his historical predictions. Thirty years ago this author bought and read the book, *Edgar Cayce—The Sleeping Prophet*. One paragraph from the chapter, “At Last, Atlantis,” appears below.

And Poseidia,” he said, “will be among the first portions of Atlantis to rise again. Expect it in sixty-

eight and sixty-nine [’68 and ’69]. Not so far away.¹³⁷

Those two years came and went—no lost continent appeared. Two decades arrived and departed—still no Atlantis. Apparently Cayce spoke presumptuously, since the prophecy failed (Deut. 18:22). Once again, the question deserves to be asked, “If New Agers cannot be trusted with verifiable, objective facts, how can they be trusted in the realm of the subjective?”

Below is a list that summarizes New Age doctrines which contradict the Bible.

1. **Evolution** of the body and the mind, both here and on other planets, is refuted by “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1) and the fact that God created man in His own image (Gen. 1:26-28).
2. **Reincarnation** is the doctrine of “a second chance,” which Hebrews 9:27-28 flatly denies. The tenor of both the Old and New Testaments forbid such an interpretation. When the patriarchs died, they were gathered to their people, not preparing for a return trip. When King David lost his infant son, he did not sigh, “Oh, well, he’ll be back for another try at life soon.” He knew the infant would not return.
3. **Karma** is a compassionless, fatalistic doctrine which involves some sort of cosmic justice—but not the justice meted out by Jesus on the Day of Judgment (John 5:27-29). Karma’s explanation for why bad things happen to good people is—“You deserve it.” Although arrived at differently from the way that Job’s friends reached their conclusion about him, the amount of comfort is the same—none. “Miserable comforters are you all!” (Job 16:2). Karma is a doctrine of despair for all but the elite.
4. **Nirvana** contradicts the bliss of heaven and the agony of hell. Many people are eager to get rid of the idea of eternal suffering. They choose to disbelieve it because it

makes them feel uncomfortable—especially if they have sins of which they refuse to repent. Unfortunately, the willingness of the majority to reject the Biblical doctrine of hell has not changed the reality of it one iota.

5. **Spiritual Perfection** (achieved through successive incarnations) replaces the Bible's teachings regarding sin and salvation. New Ageism does not contain the concept of sin (disobedience which offends a holy God). As Ramtha demonstrated earlier for us, New Agers can become quite hostile when Christians preach about sin, the devil, or man's need of salvation. Without sin and hell from which to save us, Jesus has no useful function; most of the New Testament becomes so much prattle.

6. **The Exaltation Of Self** replaces worshipping God. The thinking apparently is, "If I have to sing someone's praises, why not let it be my own?" The very first quality Jesus gives for genuine happiness is: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). New Agers reverse this point totally. Man always seeks to exalt himself. Jesus talked about the ego of the Pharisees (Matt. 23:6-7); He even told about one who exalted himself in prayer (Luke 18:11). But for all their faults, they would never have dared to stand on a beach, as Shirley MacLaine did in her miniseries, look into the heavens, and shout, "I AM GOD. I AM GOD. I AM GOD." Jesus said: "Whoever exalts himself will be abased, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt. 23:12).

7. The suggestion that **Christ Was A Guru** is demeaning. New Agers seek to demote Jesus to nothing more than a wise man. Their imaginations run wild. Once again Shirley's inaccurate friend David imparts more misinformation. He says that:

A lot of people think that those eighteen missing years were spent traveling in and around India and Tibet and Persia and the Near East. There

are all kinds of legends and stories about a man who sounds just like Christ. His description is matched everywhere and he said he was the Son of God and he corroborated the beliefs of the Hindus that reincarnation was in fact true. They say he became an adept yogi and mastered complete control over his body and the physical world around him. He evidently went around doing all those miracles that were recorded later in the Bible and tried to teach people that they could do the same things if they got more in touch with their spiritual selves and their own potential power.¹³⁸

First of all, Jesus never had as an objective teaching people to do miracles. He spent time showing them that merely seeking miracles for their own sake was wrong (John 6). Furthermore, when Jesus did miracles, His fellow townspeople said, “Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?” (Matt. 13:54-56). If David’s hypothesis were true, they should have surmised, “I’ll bet this has something to do with those eighteen years Jesus disappeared! He’s acted a little flaky ever since he floated home.”¹³⁹

In addition to all its myriad false teachings, New Ageism is dangerous for the here and now and disastrous so far as eternity is concerned. Randall Baer, who emerged from this ideology, listed as possible consequences of close involvement with it: deep self-delusion (even hallucinations), false happiness and contentment, physical/mental/emotional breakdowns, family disintegration, frustration, and committing immoral

acts.¹⁴⁰

Worst of all, this alternative philosophy will rob one of true happiness now (John 10:10) and eternal life later. Fancying the exotic while failing to develop a love of the truth is spiritually fatal (2 Thess. 2:10). Many, however, would share the sentiments of Jeremy Rifkin, who captured much of the spirit of New Ageism:

We no longer feel ourselves to be guests in someone else's home and therefore obliged to make our behavior conform with a set of preexistent cosmic rules. It is our creation now. We make the rules. We establish the parameters of reality. We create the world, and because we do, we no longer feel beholden to outside forces. We no longer have to justify our behavior, for we are now the architects of the universe. We are responsible to nothing outside ourselves, for we are the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever.¹⁴¹

G. K. Chesterton correctly analyzed this self-exalting, God denying attitude years ago when he wrote: "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has rather been found difficult, and left untried."¹⁴²

APPENDIX A
THE CELESTINE PROPHECY: A REVIEW
Gary W. Summers

Many members of the church may never have heard of *The Celestine Prophecy* by James Redfield, but it has enjoyed great success as a hardcover book—so much so that (so far as we know) it is not even available in paperback yet. Most libraries will have two or more copies, and they are checked out more than they are on the shelves. As of May 4, 1997, this book has been on the

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New York Times' Best Sellers List for 160 weeks, which is more than three years. For most of those weeks it was one of the top ten books being sold in America.

What can explain the popularity of this book? It has its own Web Page on the Internet, and groups are being formed all across the country to discuss the contents of this work of fiction. The average work of fiction lasts nowhere this amount of time on the best seller's list. What is behind this book's phenomenal success?

It deals with mystical matters and could be classified as New Age literature. The book is copyrighted in 1994, which means that it has been a best seller practically since the day of its release. Published by Warner Books, who placed a disclaimer regarding the book's contents, it contains near the title page a quote from Daniel 12:3-4. The author does not say what translation he is using, but instead of the usual "those who are wise," the reader finds "those who have insight."

Even the NIV is not this loose in its rendering of the verse, which makes one wonder if Redfield did not just substitute the word (insight) that fits his theology. The book concerns the discovery of nine insights that were written in Aramaic in Peru about 600 B.C. (9).

The author does not elaborate or speculate on the mechanism that would allow for the manuscript to be written in a language peculiar to one part of the world, but which finds its way to a distant corner of the globe. Perhaps Thor Heyerdahl (author of *Kon-tiki*) could help us out. The Book of Mormon, after all, is theoretically an account of how Jews migrated to the Americas. Is Redfield implying that some of Daniel's friends fled to the South American continent where someone wrote these nine insights about what would happen around the year 2000? Only he knows for sure.

The story itself concerns a man who is informed about this ancient manuscript by a friend. He decides to go to

Peru to find out what he can about it only to find that there is severe hostility against it on the part of the government (which is not only suppressing the manuscript but also denying its existence). Behind this government conspiracy to do away with the manuscript stands a Roman Catholic Cardinal who deems the manuscript dangerous and a threat to their religion. The main character spends half of his time fleeing from the persecutors and the other half being taught the contents of the manuscript by various individuals he comes in contact with (many of whom are Catholic priests).

Obviously, if Redfield had just written nine insights, he probably would not have had a best-seller on his hands, but by incorporating them into an adventure story he can sustain the reader's interest, much as Ayn Rand did with *Atlas Shrugged* (still a great novel despite her unworkable and flawed system of morality). Nevertheless, the appeal of the book is the nine insights, a discussion of which follows.

The First Three Insights

The first insight occurs when we take the coincidences seriously. These coincidences make us feel there is something more, something spiritual, operating underneath everything we do (119).

At first reading, this “insight” sounds like some who have overemphasized the Biblical doctrine of Providence or the philosophy that some Pentecostals have who feel that God is directing every step of their lives by means of the Holy Spirit. The one who buys into this precept has begun a journey of subjectivism. In other words, the word coincidence becomes meaningless. Every action is part of a divine plan, and guess what? That divine plan involves ME! God is advancing me spiritually—if I have enough insight to realize it. Seems a tad egotistical, doesn't it?

The second insight involves waking up to spirituality,

to consider why we are really here (27, 119). Although this question is one that Christians frequently encourage others to consider, the solution here is not to go to the Bible to get answers. “The answers I’m talking about are coming from many different areas of inquiry. The findings of physics, psychology, mysticism, and religion are all coming together into a new synthesis based on a perception of the coincidences” (36).

These first two insights would probably seem relatively innocuous to most people, but how rational souls get beyond the third one is a mystery. The third insight “defines the physical universe as one of pure energy, and energy that somehow responds to how we think” (119).

Wow! What does that statement mean? It means that there is “an energy field hovering about everything” (44). Furthermore, you can see it! Yes, there are energy fields even around plants; the main character in the novel focuses on the plants and sees their energy fields (humans have them, also). Not only that, but several people are experimenting with the plants, projecting their energies on the plants, and (as a result) the plants grow healthier and are more full of vitamins! Now the reader knows he is reading fiction for sure, but insight #3 is an integral part of the Celestine system. Anyone who wants to see these energy fields around persons or plants should try it at sunrise or sunset, the two optimum times of the day (50).

Incidentally, a little known fact (which is an interesting sidelight) is that: “When a person has sexual thoughts, the person’s energy field sort of swirls about and actually propels outward toward the person who’s the object of attraction” (49). As if sexual harassment lawsuits were not cloudy enough already, how will a judge deal with a woman who says, “Your honor, he didn’t say anything and didn’t touch me inappropriately, but I definitely saw his energy field swirling in my direction!”?

The Fourth and Fifth Insights

Having established that human beings have their own personal energy, the fourth insight causes us to realize that we try to enhance our own energy at the expense of others. This goal is achieved by winning arguments or tearing another person down. We rob them of their energy level while increasing our own.

And the Fourth exposes the human tendency to steal energy from other humans by controlling them, taking over their minds, a crime in which we engage because we so often feel depleted of energy, and cut off. This shortage of energy can be remedied, of course, when we connect with the higher source. The universe can provide all we need if we can only open up to it. That is the revelation of the Fifth Insight (119-20).

How does one get energy from a higher source? “When you appreciate the beauty and uniqueness of things,’ he explained, ‘you receive energy!” (113). The main character has already experienced such an epiphany as he became one with nature. Everything was part of him, and he “experienced the entire universe” (98).

Part of what he experiences is the entire process of “evolution,” beginning with the “big bang” and continuing to the present day (98-100). The author tries (unsuccessfully) to tie evolution to the Bible. When the Cardinal later objects to evolution as a violation of the Scriptures, a priest tells him:

Yes, I fought against the idea of evolution as a replacement for God as a way to explain the universe without reference to God. But now I see that the truth is a synthesis of the scientific

and religious world views. The truth is that evolution is the way God created, and is still creating (236).

No, the truth is that God made Adam and Eve in the beginning (Matt. 19:4). The truth is that God created the world in six days (Ex. 20:11). The truth is that God has revealed to us “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3); mankind is not evolving spiritually. Everything we need to know has been revealed to us and available to us since the first century! Redfield is right to anticipate objections to his “Insights”; unfortunately, he does not answer them adequately.

Occasionally, the author attempts to appropriate Christian ideas for his own use. He says the shortsighted Cardinal is attempting to approach spiritual knowledge “by faith alone,” meaning that he is seeking God only through the Bible (115). Then, referring to the mystical approach, he says, “The truth shall make you free” (115). Jesus says that truth comes through a study of His objective teachings (John 8:31-32); these verses actually refute Redfield’s notions. He also asserts that praying before eating “is not just about being thankful, it is to make eating a holy experience, so the energy from the food can enter your body” (113).

The Sixth Insight and Beyond

Next we must recognize the unconscious control dramas we all act out daily. We receive these attitudes from our parents, and they determine how we behave and react in certain situations. We may interrogate, intimidate, remain aloof from others, or take refuge in being a victim (127-29). Our parents formed one of these dispositions in us, the author avers.

The seventh insight involves ridding our minds of negative images. “Love is the way we keep our vibration

up. It keeps us healthy” (174). The final two insights build on the earlier ones and intensify them. Consider this affirmation: “Whenever people cross our paths, there is always a message for us. Chance encounters do not exist” (200).

Try this system in your next discussion group: “As the members of a group talk, only one will have the most powerful idea at any one time. If they are alert, the others in the group can feel who is about to speak, and they can consciously focus this energy on this person, helping to bring out his idea with the greatest clarity” (214).

And there is much more. Visions and daydreams can foretell what is about to happen. As our energy levels increase we become lighter, and (if we eliminate fear) we can become invisible! Also, money will soon become obsolete—and voluntarily. In the near future earthlings will agree to have fewer children, and we will develop powerful forests from which to raise our energy levels. What about love? “Love is not an intellectual concept or a moral imperative or anything else. It is a background emotion that exists when one is connected to the energy available in the universe” (153). Alas, love can deteriorate into a power struggle for each other’s energy. Neither partner should be subservient to the other (194).

The Upshot?

Is this stuff a threat to Christianity? Anyone who believes these precepts might possibly be a better person (by treating others politely and with respect), and surely they are no danger to the rest of society if they want to focus on plants and raise their energy levels. But the philosophy of the entire system is wrong, just as all New Age ideas are. The overriding goal is self-development; there is no emphasis at all on morality or attempting to please God. Jesus is portrayed as only a being of higher

consciousness, not the Savior of all mankind.

Although there was no mention of reincarnation, there was this sentence: “This is your evolutionary question, your quest this lifetime” (139). Ideas such as these capture people’s fancies because they sound new and different. New Agers will be lost because of their failure to obey the gospel, but they pose no direct threat to others—unless they decide to force their ideas upon the rest of us.

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Chapter 16

Pentecostalism

Kent Bailey

The false religion of **Pentecostalism** is a powerful system of religious error with which the faithful Christian must contend and by the power of the Word of God defeat. By the term **Pentecostalism** we refer to that religious movement that falsely advocates modern day Holy Spirit baptism, allegedly speaking in tongues and continuance of miraculous activity. While indeed these particular tenets are false, i.e., they are out of harmony with Bible teaching, they are not limited to a single denominational organization. In discussing this system of error, we must always remember that we are contending with three particular movements: (1) the classical Holiness old-line Pentecostals; (2) the Charismatic Neo-Pentecostals; (3) the Vineyard Movement.

While the original Pentecostal Movement did not come into existence until the early years of the twentieth century, it is noted that its catalyst and direct antecedent was the Wesleyan Holiness Movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹ While the basic doctrines of the Wesleyan Holiness Movement would not be Pentecostal as such, this movement began upon the false and fatal view that the Holy Spirit, separate and distinct from the Word of God exercises a direct influence upon humanity. This direct operation heresy served as a means through emotionalism to develop the doctrines of ecstatic

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utterances along with modern day Holy Spirit baptism and alleged modern miracles.

No doubt the most interesting component of the Pentecostal Movement is the doctrine of “speaking in tongues”. It is emphasized at this particular point that Pentecostal “tongue speaking “ is nothing more than an emotional outburst of ecstatic utterances. When one studies the Scriptures only in a cursory manner one will correctly conclude that the first century New Testament church had miraculously endowed individuals, who spoke in languages unknown to the speaker, yet understood by certain hearers. Such speaking was for the purpose of communication (Acts 2:5-11) as well as being a source of private edification (1 Cor. 14:1-4). This is totally different than the practice of Pentecostalism. In the first century, Biblical tongue speaking was accomplished in an orderly manner (1 Cor. 14:27-40) whereas today, Pentecostals only make a great deal of noise for emotional stimulation.

Religious History And Ecstatic Utterances

The history of ecstatic utterances in religion serves as a demonstration of four important truths: (1) It is not a new phenomenon; (2) It is not a phenomenon known exclusively among Protestant denominational circles, but also in ancient paganism as well; (3) It is always associated with false doctrine and heresy giving allegedly “new revelation”; (4) It has arisen during times of great stress and/or at a time when the established religion had grown dead and/or ritualistic.²

There are many instances of the phenomenon of ecstatic utterances in paganism. Such was one of the prominent features of the Apollo cult at Delphi as well as Dionysus mystery cult. Such practices also played an important role in both native Greek religions and the mystery cults which they imported from the east.³

Jimmy Jividen lists historical records that following the death of the apostles and during the first part of the second century no mention is made regarding that of ecstatic utterances except those involved in paganism. During the mid second century the claim of tongue speaking or ecstatic utterances was common among one apostate religious group known as Montanists. This heretical group was named for Montanus (c. AD 156), who claimed to be the incarnation of the Holy Spirit.⁴ As the various periods of Church History are carefully examined, the evidence for persistent ecstatic utterances is conspicuous by its absence.

The Nicene and post Nicene period (AD 311-600) give clear refutation of alleged miraculous activity by both Chrysostym and Augustine.⁵

During the Middle Ages (AD 590-1517) with the development of the Roman Catholic Church we note the practice of alleged miraculous activity stemming from the mystic thought of the day with reference to religion in general.⁶

During the Reformation and Post-Reformation periods there were out breaks of such pseudo-miraculous activity and even that of ecstatic utterances among the various denominational groups and even the cults known as Anabaptists, Quakers, Shakers and even the Mormons.

The Holiness Movement

The most closely linked religious movement on the American continent that actually became the spring board for the modern Pentecostal Movement is that of the Holiness Movement founded by John Wesley.⁷

Wesley developed a particular slant on the concept of Sanctification that came to be known within the Methodist Movement as **The Second Blessing**.⁸ Wesley

advocated that this second blessing was a higher level of salvation that completely purged the human soul from the desires of evil and only permitted a **perfect love** to be present. This doctrine is referred to today as **Total Sanctification** and affirms that when such is received the recipient of such loses all desire to commit sin and develops the inability to commit sin. 1 John 3:1-9 is misapplied by the adherents of that false doctrine to support that particular viewpoint. The doctrine of **The Second Blessing** or **Total Sanctification** is a doctrine advocating a direct working of the Holy Spirit on the human soul separate and distinct from the Word of God. It denies the all sufficiency of the Bible (2 Tim. 3:15-17) and advocates ecstatic experience as signs of its being imparted.

It was this particular type of religious mindset that developed on the American frontier where life was lived within an undisciplined and emotional setting. Charles G. Finney, a noted Methodist preacher, during this period of revivalism developed highly emotional preaching, which in turn encouraged emotional experiences such as falling down, jerking, “holy laughter” and barking like dogs.⁹

The case being that the Holiness Movement was built upon emotionalism and subjectivism rather than the Word of God, serious problems eventually developed within the movement. Disagreement arose among leaders as to what constituted true holiness. For the most part the denominational officials among the Methodists came to distinguish between holy living and emotionalism. As the result of these divergent views, the 1890’s brought an official split among Methodists with the majority of the Methodist leadership taking an official stand in opposition to the Holiness Movement. This action resulted in the establishment of some twenty-three different Holiness denominations that for the most part continue today. While there is some difference of views regarding religious

organization and additional doctrinal tenets, the false doctrine of **The Second Blessing or Total Sanctification** is held in common by those groups today.

The Modern Pentecostal Movement

It was during the time of division among the Methodist Movement of the 1890's that Charles F. Parham began to place a new twist upon John Wesley's doctrine of **The Second Blessing** and/or **Total Sanctification**.

In 1900 Parham established an educational enterprise located at Topeka, Kansas known as Bethel College. He and his students soon came to advocate that The Second Blessing was a fulfillment of the "latter rains" as mentioned in Joel 2:23 and evidenced by alleged Holy Spirit Baptism, speaking in tongues (ecstatic utterances), followed by the performance of modern day miracles.

In 1905 Parham established another educational enterprise in Houston, Texas. One of his students, W. J. Seymour, went on to Los Angeles, California to conduct a revival meeting. He became so extreme in his Holiness doctrine that the Nazarene Church where he was preaching locked him out of their meeting house and closed out their revival services. From there Seymour went to a private residence located at 214 North Bonnie Bray Street. During his preaching on April 9, 1906 seven individuals alleged to receive "Holy Spirit Baptism" and drew a great deal of public attention resulting from all of the Pentecostal Holy-Roller type noise. The crowds began to grow resulting in a move to Azusa Street. After a three year period of daily preaching, the Azusa Street Mission was formally organized which rapidly spread the doctrine of Pentecostalism across the land.¹⁰

As the result of the influence of Charles F. Parham noted Pentecostal denominations came into existence such as the Assemblies of God, various independent groups and

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some denominational groups wearing the phrase “Church of God”. Eventually this movement divided over questions regarding the Godhead and as to whether or not only the name of Jesus was to be pronounced over those receiving water baptism.

Neo-Pentecostalism

From 1900 to 1960 the distinctive doctrines of Pentecostalism were limited to the various Pentecostal denominations. However, in the early 1960’s there came about an evolution of a new type of Pentecostalism—**Neo-Pentecostalism**. Whereas classical Pentecostalism was based upon Holiness doctrine and created a new movement among denominations of the Wesleyan background; Neo-Pentecostalism went beyond the Wesleyan Holiness Movement into varying denominational groups ranging from Modernists to Calvinists. It was during the mid to late 1960’s that false teachers arose within churches of Christ such as Pat Boone, Don Finto and others to lead some professed members of the church into apostasy.

The basic message of the Neo-Pentecostals is that of Holy Spirit Baptism, modern day miracles and tongue speaking minus the emphasis of the doctrine of the Second Blessing or Total Sanctification. As a matter of fact the Neo-Pentecostals have very little teaching against worldliness and immorality and have come under quite a bit of criticism from those of the classical Pentecostal denominations for their lack of opposition to such. Most of those identified with the Neo-Pentecostal Movement remain with their pre-Pentecostal denominations to make converts and cause trouble, or else begin interdenominational independent congregations to push their views. The event that many believe to be the catalyst for this movement took place at Van Nuys, California on April 3, 1960 when Dennis Bennett, Rector of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church announced at a worship

assembly that he had spoken in tongues. This announcement received a great deal of national publicity and has been acclaimed as the beginning of the Neo-Pentecostal Movement.

The Vineyard Fellowship And The Third Wave

In 1988, a Neo-Pentecostal book authored by C. Peter Wagner, Professor of Missions at Fuller Theological Seminary of Pasadena, California entitled **The Third Wave of The Holy Spirit** was published advocating a more radical form of Neo-Pentecostalism.

The thesis of the book maintains that there have already been two previous distinct waves of the Holy Spirit during the twentieth century. The emphasis of the third wave is on “miraculous power healing”, the exorcising of demons, raising of the dead and God conversing directly with individuals. The basis of this particular movement finds its origin in California with a Neo-Pentecostal group known as the Vineyard Fellowship Church along with its present preacher, John Wimber. Wimber defines the third wave as “power evangelism,” contending that the Holy Spirit today performs the same miracles that Jesus Christ and the apostles performed only with an entertainment flavor. There has occurred an open division in the Vineyard Movement, however. A different movement has splintered from the Vineyard group known as the Toronto Airport Blessing. This group was brought about in 1994 at the Toronto Vineyard Fellowship Church in Toronto, Canada. In January of that year, during a four day Revival meeting, “holy laughter” took control at the beginning of the first evening and continued for the remainder of the services. Wimber has since dis-fellowshipped this particular church due to getting so out of control that in addition to their “holy laughter”, some were roaring like lions and barking like dogs.

At the present The Toronto Airport Blessing has spread its heresy to Hong Kong and London, where individuals are laughing themselves to death and barking at anything that moves.¹¹

Pentecostalism: A Threat To The Lord's Church

Randy Harris, Professor of Bible at David Lipscomb University recently commended in **Wineskins** a book entitled **Surprised By The Power of The Holy Spirit**, authored by Jack Deere of the Vineyard Fellowship Church.

In 1996 Rubel Shelly spoke on the **1996 Mid-South Conference of Spiritual Renewal** conducted at Florence, Alabama. Also on this same program was Mike Bickle, founder of an organization known as the Kansas City Prophets. This group became part of the Vineyard Movement in 1990 and claims to have the gift of prophecy for our time.¹²

It is certainly obvious that those of the New Hermeneutic persuasion are in fellowship with Pentecostalism. Such will have an effect upon many with regards to additional false doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit, as well as giving greater encouragement and endorsement to unauthorized and unscriptural holy-roller activity such as shouting and hand-clapping in worship assemblies. Such serves as a case in point to demonstrate how far some are willing to digress from God's truth as well as demonstrating that there is no stopping place when the doors of personal subjectivism are opened.

The Ax Laid To The Root Of Pentecostalism

The case being that Pentecostalism in all of its forms stands in opposition to the truth of God necessitates that such must be proven to be false. In noting the teaching of the Scriptures that the Word of God is all sufficient to

meet the needs of humanity (2 Tim.3:15-17;2:15), Pentecostalism is thus demonstrated to be false, based upon its claim for latter day revelation and the continuation of miraculous activity (1 Cor. 13:8-13). God's verbally inspired and inerrant Word had once and for all time been delivered unto his saints and once and for all time confirmed as being true (Heb. 2:1-4):

A court witness is only sworn once!
A document is only notarized once!
A check is only certified once!
The Word of God is only confirmed once!
The only need for new confirmation is new revelation!
THERE WILL BE NO NEW REVELATION
(Gal. 1:6-9) !

Pentecostals have no more respect for the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures than do the Mormons. Their claims are as phony as a three dollar bill and their promises are as empty as a hollow log! The only evidence that they attempt to give for their claims are the subjective personal testimonies and loud cries comparable to that of heathen witch doctors totally void of intelligence and Biblical truth.

The only two ways that one could receive the ability to perform miracles today would be either by Holy Spirit Baptism, or Apostolic Impartation. If there are those present today, who are recipients of Holy Spirit Baptism then let them produce the signs of such:

Peter had the power over death. Acts 5:1-6
Paul made a man blind.—Acts 13:9-12
Peter raised Dorcas from death.—Acts 9:36-42
Peter and John conferred miraculous gifts

by their hands.—Acts 8:17

**Paul raised Eutychus from the dead.—Acts
20:9-10**

Those alleging Holy Spirit power resulting from Holy Spirit Baptism need to demonstrate the validity of their case by producing the proper signs of Holy Spirit Baptized individuals (Acts 19:1-16; 1 Thess. 1:5; 1 Cor. 2:4; 1 Cor. 14:22). Furthermore, if those alleging to have Holy Spirit Baptism today want to prove their case then let them follow the inspired message of Paul in standing in agreement with what he taught (1 Cor. 14:37-38).

When one denies the truth of God regarding the oneness of the church, the gospel plan of salvation, the organization, worship and work of the New Testament church one proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are **not** a recipient of Holy Spirit Baptism! When a contrast is made between true New Testament miracles and the modern pseudo miracles one cannot help but note a great difference. The miracles of Christ, the apostles, and other miraculously gifted men demonstrated control over nature, death and disease. The pretended pseudo miracles of today are easily exposed as being trickery. This writer knows of no present day Pentecostal willing to attempt to raise the dead. Let them try and I will tell the deceased to remain in the grave and then we shall see who really has the most power!

Pentecostalism denies both the design and limitation of Biblical miracles. The design of such were to confirm God's truth and to be limited in time element (Mark 16:15-20; Eph. 4:8-16). When the Word of God came to exist in completed written form, its confirmation as such was finished and miracles were brought to a close (Heb. 2:1-4). Holy Spirit Baptism was not a universal command, but rather a particular and limited promise.

The only recorded examples that we have of such are listed in Acts chapter two regarding the apostles of Christ (Acts 1:8) and the household of Cornelius in Acts chapters ten and eleven, demonstrating to the Jewish Christians that Gentiles were proper subjects of the gospel of Christ (Acts 11:1-18). Ephesians chapter four identifies that by AD 62 there was only one baptism—water baptism by the authority of Christ for the remission of past alien sins (Acts 19:1-5; 2:38). Therefore, Holy Spirit Baptism has ceased.

The second classification of first century Christians, who could perform miracles, were those who had received apostolic impartation (Acts 8:14-17; 19:6; Rom. 1:11). There are no living apostles of Christ today due to the fact that no individual can meet the qualifications (Acts 1:16-22). Therefore, there can be no apostolic impartation of the ability to perform miracles today.

It has been the purpose of our study to demonstrate the fallacies of Pentecostalism. We have noted its subjective nature, its modern origin and its doctrinally corrupt errors. It rejects the inspiration and authority of the Bible, it promotes religious confusion—it is false religion.

May God grant us the determination of mind and courage of heart to arise to the occasion out of concern for the souls of humanity, to unsheathe the sword of the Spirit and earnestly contend for the faith.

Endnotes

- 1 Edwin S. Jones, “The History of The Pentecostal Movements”, **The Spiritual Sword**, July 1994, p.4
- 2 Jimmy Jividen, **Glossolia: From God or Man** (Fort Worth: Star Bible Publications, 1971), p.59
- 3 Jividen, p.60
- 4 Jividen, pp.62-63

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5 Robert G. Gromacki, **The Modern Tongues Movement** (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1967) pp.15-17

6 Gromacki, pp.20-23

7 Robert D. Brinsmead, "Protestant Revivalism, Pentecostalism And The Drift Back To Rome", **Present Truth**, 1972, pp.23-24

8 Brinsmead, p.24

9 Brinsmead, p.25

10 Gromacki, pp.25-26

11 J. E. Choate, "Paradigms of Preference: Willow Creek, The Vineyards And The Kansas City Prophets", **Yokefellow**, April 22, 1997, p.1

12 Choate, p.4

Chapter 17

Feminism

Glenn Colley

What an honor to be included in the fine list of speakers for the 1997 Power Lectureship. My thanks to the lectureship director, B.J. Clarke, and to the elders of the Southaven Church of Christ.

By introduction, and to lay a proper foundation for our lesson, let us consider the meaning behind the Bible word “World.”

You have three enemies in life. It is always good to know who your enemies are. The three are these: the world, the flesh, and the devil. No Christian can afford to be ignorant of these enemies. To be ignorant is to be unprepared, to be unprepared is to fall and to go down in shame and disgrace and defeat. Today, as we consider the subject of feminism, let us highlight the enemy called “the world.”

The world seems so friendly, so charming, so innocuous. It often appears beautiful, helpful, harmless, but caution is in order. The Bible calls the world a deadly enemy to God’s people. What is “the world?” A quick lesson will prepare us to examine feminism.

We are not talking about the earth. *Cosmos*, (world) sometimes speaks of planet earth. The Bible says in Acts 17:24 that the Lord made “the world and every thing that is in it.” There is certainly nothing evil about the beautiful mountains and trees and lilies of the field. They are pure

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and good and given for our pleasure and benefit.

Neither are we referring to the people of the world. The golden text of the Bible, John 3:16 says that "...God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..." The world! God loves the people in the world, and we ought to love them. "Red, yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight!" God loves all five billion now living on earth. So what kind of world is the enemy of God's people? What does the Bible mean when it says, "Love not the world, neither the things which are in the world...?" (1 John. 2:15).

The word Cosmos, translated "world," means "a system" or "an order". When a woman is putting on her *cosmetics*, she is putting her face in order. We speak of the "world of sports" or the "world of finance," or the "world of industry." We are referring to an organized system.

There is a system the Bible calls "The world" which is the world of sin and wickedness, and we are plainly told not to love it. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," (1 John 2:15). What he is literally saying is this: "...for if any man love this system, this order, the love of the Father is not in him."

Observe please some characteristics of the world which the Holy Spirit describes in His word:

First, the world has a prince. John 12:31 says, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out." Satan himself rules this ungodly system. "Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (John 14:30). In John 16:8 Jesus says the Comforter will come and reprove the world... Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:11). That is why 1 John 5:19 says, "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." The word "world" here is

cosmos or system. It literally means, “the whole world lies in the wicked one.” Lieth means, “to sleep in the bosom of or lap of.”

Second, the world has a philosophy. This world, or system, has an enticing network of ideas and values that the devil has skillfully woven together to attract you as a child of God. His skill is seen in the number of church members who are weak and worldly. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:12:

Now we have received, not the **spirit of the world**, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

For the **wisdom of this world** is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. (1 Cor. 3:19).

And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the **fashion of this world** passeth away (1 Cor. 7:31) [emp. mine, GC].

It does not matter if you are in the school house, to the courthouse, from Madison Avenue to Wall Street, whether it is Hollywood or your neighborhood, there is a philosophy that is permeating all that we see out there, and it is our enemy. It is the world.

Third, the world has a purpose. The world is determined to be opposed to the will of God, and is continually hostile to the things of God. Our Lord made this clear in John 7:7 when He said, “The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.” In John 14: 17 He said, “Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive...”

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In John 15:18 He stated, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you.”

Fourth, the world has a people. Simply put, any friend of Jesus is going to be an enemy of the world. Any friend of the world is going to be an enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ. James 4: 4 teaches this:

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

Any man or woman who has become a friend of this ungodly world or *system* has become God’s foe, an enemy of God. Furthermore, when you come out from the world then you’ll have trouble from these people. They will not enjoy your departure from their approved philosophies. And yet we must depart from those philosophies. Our belief in Christ starts at a different source, follows a different course, it ends at a different conclusion. 1 Peter 1:8 says, “Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.” We are a twice-born people in a world of once born people, and when you live for Jesus you’re going to be going against the flow all the time. You will understand them, but they will not understand you. They will think of you as foolish and as their enemy. Jesus said that if they hate you that is understandable, because they hated Him before they hated you. With that in mind, consider that Paul wrote in Romans 1:26-28:

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward

another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient...

As we consider the subject of feminism, we should see that people who give up knowledge and appreciation of God tend to lose their identity. That is because God gave us that identity. The world which rejects God may therefore subscribe to homosexuality, men leaving the natural use of the woman for other men. People of the world may exhibit this loss of identity in boys who want to look like girls and vice-versa. They may, to their own destruction, ignore the differences in men and women when organizing the country's military. And they might follow or adopt the doctrine known as feminism.

Are we like the sinful world? Pray we are not. Paul wrote:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Romans 12:1-2).

To beseech is to sincerely beg. A sacrifice suggests total commitment as we live on this earth. To be transformed by renewing or focusing our minds on God's will, is the way to avoid the pitfall of being conformed to

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this world. Paul is pleading with us not to follow the system of the sinful world.

Now, having laid that foundation, let us ask, what is feminism? The Oxford English Dictionary, Clarendon Press, Oxford offers this:

The equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and economic rights of women, and the movement associated with this.

Interestingly, Femininity is quite different:

The characteristic quality or qualities of woman; womanliness; the state or fact of being female.

Random House Dictionary, second edition, unabridged, defines Feminism this way:

The doctrine advocating social, political and other rights of women equal to those of men.

Is feminism a doctrine? Certainly so, and large numbers of people have invested their influence in the teaching of the feminism doctrine. Feminism seeks to erase, or at least ignore, the differences between men and women. However, it will ultimately fail because total equality is not possible physically, emotionally, or doctrinally.

Is the doctrine of feminism a sinful philosophy? In matters of common fairness, no. However, feminism does not stop there, and in matters wherein feminism contradicts plain teaching of the Bible it is indeed sinful.

Take for example, the Biblical roles of women in the public worship of God. Herbert Lockyer, in his book *All the Women of the Bible* (Zondervan Books, Zondervan

Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan) discusses 160 women who are named in the Word of God. Additionally, there are 10 referred to who are not named. It is interesting to observe that in all of these many texts, there is not one reference to a woman's ever having a leading role in any sort of public worship to Jehovah.

The New Testament makes God's will known in 1 Timothy 2:8 where we read, "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." Three verses before this Paul had written, "Let the women learn in silence." When saying that men should pray everywhere, Paul uses the Greek word *aner*, which is very interesting. That word is used 165 times in the New Testament. It is translated "man" one hundred fifty-six times, "sir" six times, "fellow" one time, and twice it is not translated. It is never used to mean men *and* women. There is another Greek word which serves that purpose, *Anthropos*. Yet the Holy Spirit did not use *anthropos* here. He used *aner*.

Do you begin to wonder if God, in His divine wisdom, might be indicating that women are to assume a restricted role in public worship? This is not merely an indication, this is a command. We do not read this and say, "Perhaps this passage restricts women's role in public worship," because we do not know how He could have said it any plainer. Those who advocate the feministic doctrine with reference to Christian worship should surely beware.

Some argue that in some places women could fulfill leadership roles better than the men. That is not true. It is in God's infinite wisdom that these roles exist. Therefore, trusting God, we observe that men can shepherd the flock better, they can rule the house better, they can be more effective in public teaching. The role of the women suggests similar Divine wisdom. A woman can lodge strangers better, she can keep the home better,

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and she is better suited to wear the “ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God a great price” (1 Peter 3:4). Actually, it really does not matter if we believe a woman can fill such a role better than a man. Remember that our mission is not to be where we can be the most impressive, but where we can be the most submissive to our heavenly Father.

Sadly, the doctrine of feminism has also borne fruit in our homes.

In her book *Simple Abundance*, Sarah Ban Breathnach wrote:

For centuries young women have learned how to run a home, how to cook, and how to raise a family by tying themselves to their mother’s or grandmother’s apron strings. In 1965, the rumblings of the feminist movement were starting to be heard across the land. In the mid 1960’s you didn’t prepare your daughter for life as an adult by teaching her how to make a bed, sort white from colored laundry, organize a closet, or make a meat loaf. Instead, many mothers handed out copies of *The Feminine Mystique* after they had finished reading it themselves.

Now, three decades later, women know how to start successful mail-order companies, launch banks and new magazines, walk in space, trade securities on Wall Street, close million dollar movie deals, get elected to national office, anchor the nightly news, write Supreme Court decisions, and win Nobel Prizes. We can secure financing, create, innovate, delegate, and negotiate. But we’re also running to the grocery store on our way home from work with tired, cranky children in tow, washing the laundry when everyone in the family

has run out of clothes to wear, and searching for a place to sit down comfortably at the end of a long day in the midst of overwhelming pandemonium. Many women today run businesses but don't have a clue how to run their own households competently, which is one of the reasons we are run ragged.

The doctrine of feminism has borne fruit in some of America's religion. According to *World* magazine, March 29th, 1997, the producers of the NIV, preferred translation for 35% of US Bible buyers, have developed a version which is gender neutral. "He" "Man" or "Mankind" is replaced with person, people, and humankind. The version is already being sold in England titled the *NIV Inclusive Language Edition*. Zondervan will publish both for a while, but the NIV controlling body is determined to replace the current version altogether by 2000 or 2001.

We cannot determine what we think or the positions we will take on matters such as these by conforming to the world. So, clear your mind now. Empty your heart and let's fill it with God's truth. Let the "word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col 3:16). God's Word says in Titus 2:3-5:

The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

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Consider five instructions given in this powerful passage for married women.

First, women are to think soberly. Soberly comes from a Greek word *sophronizo*, meaning “restore one to his senses, to moderate, control, curb, disciple.” There are two things involved in thinking soberly: Being serious and mature about serious matters, and accepting that which is obvious and of common sense.

With reference to personal assessment of ourselves we are to be sober:

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith (Romans 12:3).

With reference to living ready for the judgement day we ought to be sober. 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 says:

Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

The elders of the church must be sober to be qualified for their office:

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach (1 Timothy 3:2).

Deacon’s wives must be sober:

Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers,
sober, faithful in all things (1 Timothy 3: 11).

Christian women will be sober when selecting the clothing they will wear in public. They will dress modestly:

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works (1 Timothy 2:9).

Second, our text teaches that women are to love and obey their husbands. Does Paul really mean to teach that wives are to *obey* their husbands? The Greek word Paul used which we have translated obey is *hupotasso*. According to Strong's Concordance, it means:

To arrange under, to subordinate; to subject, put in subjection; to subject one's self, obey, to submit to one's control; to yield to one's admonition or advice; to obey, be subject.

Strong's goes on to say that this is a Greek military term meaning "to arrange (troop divisions) in a military fashion under the command of a leader." In nonmilitary use, it was "a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden." The English word "obey" is certainly a fitting translation, and Paul makes the teaching of God crystal clear.

The God-designed roles of the home are unmistakable to the Bible student.

Colossians 3:18 says that wives are to "submit themselves." 1 Peter 3:1 says wives are to be in subjection

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to their own husbands. Ephesians 5:33 says that the wife is to reverence her husband. Ephesians 5:22-23 says that wives are to submit to their husbands as unto the Lord, and that the husband is the head of the wife. Our problem is not in understanding these words but in obeying them. What do we mean when we say that Joe Smith is the head of General Motors? Do we understand that? What about when we say that Fred Brown is head of Dupont? What does God mean when He says that the husband is the head of the wife?

Consider that a faithful Christian wife doesn't submit to her husband because he is stronger. She does so because of her conviction that this is God's will. Most women have within their power to control and manipulate their husband if they choose to do so, and women of the world wield their emotional, sexual, and sometimes physical control over their husbands. A Christian woman chooses to obey God and submit to her husband's authority. She submits to her husband because she has submitted to God.

Wives are also to love their husbands. Greek words are interesting when considering the sweet love between a husband and a wife. In Ephesians 5:25, we learn that a husband is to have *agape* for his wife; caring, providing, protecting love. He is to possess love which seeks the best for her. But now look to Titus 2:4 where Paul teaches wives to love their husbands. Observe that the Greek word for her love is different. It is not *agape*, but rather a word which is from *Phileo*. This Greek word communicates a friendship type of love. While of course wives are to also seek the best for their husbands, this verse underscores the fact that wives are to be friends to their husbands.

Wives are to love their children. We would take this for granted, but remember that the Bible says that people who leave the Lord lose natural affection (Romans 1:31). As our text will reveal, loving our children involves more

than words. It involves dedicated commitment, and the Bible is not ambiguous when revealing what God desires from today's parents.

Wives are to be discreet and chaste with reference to her sexuality. The Greek word for discreet is *Sophron*. It means, "Curbing one's desires and impulses, self-controlled, temperate."

The Greek word for chaste is *hagnos*, meaning:

Pure; Pure from carnality, chaste, modest; pure from every fault, immaculate; clean.

Women must never lose the ability to blush over private matters. She keeps herself for only her husband. Remember that Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:9:

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array.

Shamefacedness means "A sense of shame, honor, modesty, bashfulness, reverence and regard for others. Respect." Far too many of our girls and women are failing to dress in a way which is modest and which reflects sober thinking! Our pulpits should be ashamed if they do not teach truth in this matter. Our elders should be rebuked if they refuse to counsel our girls and women who dress immodestly.

Wives are to be keepers at home. "Keepers at home" translates one Greek word, *oikouros*. This is the only time the word is found in the Bible. It means:

Caring for the house, working at home... the watch or keeper of the house... Keeping at home and taking care of household affairs... a domestic.

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It is interesting that right after “keepers at home” the list includes “good”. “Good” in the Greek (*agathos*) means “of good constitution or nature.” Another definition included is “good, pleasant, agreeable, joyful, happy.” Another is “excellent, distinguished.”

There are two major ideas today about the best way for mothers to rear their children and to prepare the children for life. There is the Hillary Clinton method: Get them in public care as quickly as possible and get on with career. Then there is the Bible method: Stay at home with them while their young and fill them with truth and love.

Some pundits of our time are awakening to the rightness of God’s old design. In *Newsweek Magazine* for example, on May 12, 1997,(pg 62) the lead article was entitled, “*The Myth of Quality Time,*” by Laura Shapiro. Here are some excerpts:

1. The careerist’s most treasured rule of parenting is this: “It isn’t how much time you spend with your kids, it’s how you spend the time.”

2. Ronald Levant, psychologist at Harvard Medical School:

I think quality time is just a way of deluding ourselves into shortchanging our children. Children need vast amounts of parental time and attention. It’s an illusion to think they’re going to be on your timetable, and that you can say, ‘OK, we’ve got half hour, let’s get on with it’.

3. Consider the following comments regarding Arlie Hochschild’s new book, “*The Time Bind*”:

...Just published and already hovering in the nightmares of anyone who has ever such a lullaby over the phone. Her most chilling insight is our

complicity in depriving our children...Many working families are both prisoners and architects of the time bind in which they find themselves.

Home and office have changed places. Home is a frantic exercise in beat-the-clock, while work, by comparison, seems a haven of grown-up sociability, competence and relative freedom. Quality time has been a crucial component of this transformation. Instead of nine hours a day with a child, we declare ourselves capable of getting the 'same result' with one, more intensely focused, total quality hour.

Newsweek goes on to say that underlying at least some of the criticism of Hochschild's work is the fear that to acknowledge problems with our kids is to invite a backlash against women's working.

The article goes on:

In light of this data, one way to start solving the problems posed by quality time seems obvious: guys, go home...it's not a women's issue, it's a family issue.

4. "Today it's not even clear what most people mean when they use the term. ("Quality time," GC) Is playing patty-cake supposed to be a higher-quality activity than driving to ballet lessons? Does family dinner count if the TV is on? Very softly? All we reliably know is that whenever time with kids is in short supply, calling it 'quality time' makes parents feel better.

5. What about teens? Listen to Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, a developmental psychologist at Columbia University:

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One of the functions of parents is monitoring—you monitor their homework, their friends, what they're really doing in their spare time. I don't think we've said enough to parents about how the demands on them change when early adolescence hits, and kids may start to engage in drugs or sex. Monitoring is critical.

6. Kevin Dwyer, assistant executive director of the National Association of School Psychologists, says teachers are reporting increases in discipline problems and classroom disruptions:

One of our concerns is that parents are not spending enough time with their kids. Most of the parents we see are really drained at the end of the day." The result is inconsistent discipline and all the problems it spawns. "There's a tremendous amount of research showing that inconsistency leads to kids' being more aggressive, more deviant and more oppositional.

In her book *Simple Abundance*, (Warner Books, copyright, 1995., May 3.) Sarah Ban Breathnach wrote:

During the nineteenth century the home was viewed as 'heaven on earth,' a hallowed haven in an uncertain world. When man, woman, or child crossed the threshold they were safe, 'not only from injury,' wrote John Ruskin, 'but from all terror, doubt and division.'

Today many of us cast a nostalgic glance backward. The Victorian era seems so calm, gentle, and gracious — so completely opposite from our own. Yet the four decades spanning the Civil War to the turn of the century were among the

most politically, socially, and economically turbulent years in our history. Why, then, should a period of such profound upheaval come down to us not only as an age of innocence but as one of stability and tranquillity?

I believe, in large part, it is because of a legacy of love left to us by our great-grandmother who reigned over their hearths as surely as Victoria did over her empire. Victorian women may not have had the vote or the trappings of power (including personal disposable income and independence) but they were the moral, spiritual, and physical center of the home, responsible for creating a welcome retreat of beauty, comfort, and contentment that would protect, nurture, and sustain those they loved. To achieve this, ordinary middle-class women elevated the pursuit of domestic bliss to an extraordinary art form, from white-linen Sunday dinners to blue-checked gingham Independence Day picnics. Women approach the domestic arts—cooking, decorating, gardening, handicrafts, and entertaining—not as burdens but as a form of personal expression and a means of persuasion. Traditions that celebrated the joys of home and family life acted as the mystical mortar that held bodies and souls together in a tumultuous society that was changing at the speed of light.

“Home is where we start from,” T.S. Eliot observed. Today, a century after he was born, ‘Home’ is the place where many women are longing to return, if not literally, then figuratively. Begin believing that the time, energy and emotion you

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invest daily in the soulcraft of home caring—carving out a haven for yourself and those dear to you—is a sacred endeavor. Life holds no more guarantees for us than it did for our Victorian foremothers. Yet they faced the future with full hearts, determined to create a lasting work of art; a happy, secure, and beautiful retreat of love and laughter. We can too.

For what is the purpose of cleaning this room? Is it simply to pick up the trash and dispose of yesterday's newspaper? Or is some inspired action at work here? In the process of transforming this room into a safe and serene haven where my family can come together to enjoy the comfort of each other's company, am I not changing the perception of my work? We are all given a choice each day. We can react negatively to the demands made on us or we can choose to live abundantly, to transform the negative into the meaningful. Attitude is all. If I do not endow my life and my work with meaning, no one will ever be able to do it for me. If I don't recognize the value of what I am doing here in this living room, certainly no one else can. And if home caring is not sacred, then forgive me, for I truly have no conception of the Divine.

What will women do if they love God and want to follow His will for their lives? The answer is simple. It may not be easy to carry out in our lives, but it is simple. 1 Timothy 5:14 declares:

I will therefore that the younger women marry,

bear children, guide the house, give none occasion
to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

Breathnach continued:

The time has come for us to look deep within. Reconsider how caring for our homes can be an expression of our authenticity. It's not too late for us to rediscover the sacred soul craft of homecaring. Creating a comfortable, beautiful, well-run home can be among our most satisfying accomplishments as well as an illuminating spiritual experience. Like sweat equity, channeling your time and creative energy closer to home will produce a big emotional return for yourself and those you love.

May God help us all as we sincerely strive to obey Him and fulfill His desires for our lives.

Chapter 18

Annihilationism

Dub McClish

The doctrine of annihilationism cannot be discussed without discussing the Bible doctrine of Hell. The Bible depicts Hell as a place where sinners who die in their sins will suffer uninterrupted torment forever (Matt. 5:22; 10:28; 25:46; Mark 9:43, 47–48; et al.). Humans love the pleasure that comes from gratifying their fleshly lusts in forbidden ways, and few can be persuaded to forsake such (Matt. 7:13–14). Men not only seek pleasure, but they also seek to avoid pain and suffering as much as possible. This being so, they reason that a place and state of **eternal torment**, as described in the Bible, constitute “cruel and unusual punishment” as a consequence for merely enjoying “the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:25).¹ They want to be able to live with impunity in rebellion against God and His will. We should therefore not think it strange that various means of escaping the awful sentence, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), have been invented and eagerly embraced. The doctrine of annihilationism is one of the several attempts to escape the Bible doctrine of eternal damnation for sin.

Annihilationism is a form of materialism which denies the immortality of the human soul—man is merely mortal, physical, material. The doctrine holds that the wicked will be atomized, snuffed out of existence—annihilated, either before or after the Judgment, rather

than being consigned to punishment in a fiery Hell that never ends. While the doctrine itself is heresy, the equally-great sin may be the attempt by its purveyors to so contort the Word of God as to claim that it teaches their doctrine. Contrariwise, this doctrine is rooted in sheer human emotion and feeling, wishful thinking, a subjective view of what is fair and unfair, and an utter rejection of the consistent message of God's inspired men, rather than in the immutable Will and Word of God.

Seeds and Soils of Annihilationism

The nearest thing to annihilationism in the first century was the teaching of the Sadduceean sect of the Jews. They were the theological modernists and ultra-liberals of their day, described by Luke as those who "...say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit" (Acts 23:8; cf. Luke 20:27). They had imbibed pagan philosophy, and it destroyed their faith in fundamental realities and doctrines pertaining to the nature of man and his eternal destiny.

While they were fatally and egregiously wrong, ironically, they were more consistent than the modern-day annihilationists. The Sadducees **denied immortality for all** in their denial of the resurrection and of the existence of angels and spirits. The annihilationists of our time are highly selective; they willingly embrace Heaven and immortality for the righteous, but utterly reject Hell as the depository of immortal wicked souls. Such theological "supermarket shopping," wherein one selects from God's revelation only that which pleases him, would be most convenient were it possible. However, eternal bliss of Heaven and eternal misery of Hell, following the Resurrection and the Judgment, stand as inseparable doctrines in the Word of God:

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Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28–29); And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life (Matt. 25:46).

Note it well: For good and evil alike there will be (1) a resurrection, (2) a judgment, and (3) an eternal existence. Men may **reject** the teaching of Jesus on these subjects (as most do), but they cannot honestly **misunderstand** it! Therefore, one cannot logically and consistently (based on the teaching of the Son of God) deny immortality in Hell for the wicked without likewise denying it for the righteous in Heaven: Eternal life and eternal torment stand or fall together as one doctrinal entity in Scripture.

The Pharisees (the rival sect to the Sadducees) were sorely deficient in many ways, both in doctrine and character, but they held to the Truth concerning the Resurrection and the immortal nature of man (Acts 23:8b). In these doctrines the Lord and the Pharisees were one. The foregoing statements of Jesus’ teachings are but samples of many others in which He maintained the reality of the universal (1) resurrection of the dead, (2) Judgment, and (3) immortality and eternal destiny of man. He also taught the existence of Heaven and Hell as the respective realms in the spirit world for the righteous and the unrighteous. Moreover, He taught these things in very literal, unambiguous, and plain words, and did so frequently. He actually taught and warned about the Judgment and Hell far more than He did about Heaven. (This is ironic in light of the annihilationist’s acceptance of Heaven and utter rejection of Hell!)

The inspired men through whom Jesus revealed the New Testament, constantly and consistently reinforced the Lord's teaching as outlined above. There cannot be the slightest doubt about the meaning of their teachings. As did the Christ, they repeatedly taught these doctrines with clarity. In spite of the plethora of apostasies and digressions from the Truth following the apostolic era, the Biblical doctrines of the immortality of the soul and the eternal punishment of the wicked in Hell at the hands of a just God remained an almost universally settled conviction throughout Christendom during the first sixteen centuries of the Gospel Age.²

We can better understand the doctrine of annihilationism if we know some of the historical and philosophical perspective out of which it has arisen. As previously indicated, annihilationism relates directly to the doctrine of Hell. More specifically, it relates to and has emerged from man's revulsion at and rejection of the doctrine of eternal punishment. To study one we must study both.

While Hell has fallen on hard times (as far as Biblical teaching is concerned), history amply demonstrates that the outright denial of Hell to any significant degree, or its companion, loss of belief in Hell, are relatively recent phenomena. The only significant ancient dissenter to the Biblical view of Hell was Origen in the third century, who was eventually condemned by two ecumenical councils for his heresy. (Rare though it was/is, the councils got things right on those occasions!) With the approach of the Renaissance (c. A.D. 1500) man's emphasis became less and less God-centered and more and more man-centered. Humanism, which placed man at the center of all things as the be-all, do-all, and end-all, began to displace God. The more men promoted mankind, the more they demoted God. Eventually man (even the "theistic" humanist)

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counted himself so precious and valuable that he could not abide the thought of eternal punishment or retribution, or of a sin grievous enough to warrant it. Jon Braun well describes this philosophical development:

From the sixteenth century on, God's judgment was a constant target for attack by humanists both within and outside the church [i.e., Protestantism and Catholicism, DM]. Hell and humanism didn't mix; they can't mix and never will mix. It just won't do to have highly exalted man experiencing the torments of hell eternally. First, it is presumed that the precious creature couldn't possibly do anything bad enough to warrant such punishment. And even more significantly, the humanists are convinced that God could not bear the eternal loss of even one of the marvelous man-creatures.³

In more recent years certain radical liberal theologians have fully embraced and brazenly espoused universalism, one of the most popular anti-hell philosophies. John A. T. Robinson, Bishop of the Church of England, made a career out of blasphemy on several fundamental doctrines, including the doctrine of Hell. In 1949 he wrote an article in which he said the following:

Christ, in Origen's old words, remains on the Cross as long as one sinner remains in hell. That is not speculation; it is a statement grounded in the very necessity of God's nature. In a universe of love, there can be no heaven which tolerates a chamber of horrors, no hell for any which does not at the same time make it hell for God. He cannot endure

that—for that would be the final mockery of His nature—and He will not.⁴

Note well Robinson's authority—not Christ and the apostles in the first century, but Origen the heretic in the third century! Only eighteen years following his article cited above (1967) the bishop wrote a book entitled, *But That I Can't Believe*. He apparently thought that he had convinced everybody that Hell belonged to the realm of fable, mythology, and the superstition of the Dark Ages:

There are still a few who would like to bring back hell, as some want to bring back birching and hanging. They are usually the same types who wish to purge Britain of horror comics, sex, and violence.⁵

Apparently, Robinson loved horror comics, sex, and violence as much as he hated Hell!

Emil Brunner, one of the darlings of liberal theologians in this century, obviously agreed with Robinson's universalism, as his following statement from 1954 demonstrates:

That is the revealed will of God and the plan for the world which He discloses, a plan of universal salvation, of gathering all things into Christ. We hear not one word in the Bible of a dual plan, a plan of salvation and its polar opposite. The will of God has but one point, it is unambiguous and positive. It has one aim, not two.⁶

Brunner's glasses must have been tinted or fogged over when he read the Bible (Why do such infidels bother to read it at all?). Aside from the insistent Scriptural theme of judgment against and eternal punishment for

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unforgiven transgressors of God's law, the very existence of a plan of salvation (which Brunner feigns to believe in) necessarily implies "its polar opposite"—damnation! The will of God is "unambiguous and positive" all right, but about the **existence** rather than the nonexistence of a Final Judgment and of eternal retribution for sin in a place called Hell!

The Legacy of Anti-Hell Theology

The Hell-denying heresy of Robinson and Brunner and their ilk has trickled down even to small-town pulpiteers as the abnormal has now become normal. Those once considered radicals have gradually become "mainstream." For a century or more the sectarian seminaries have been dominated by professors who are theological liberals of the most rank and radical sort. Many of them had/have no stomach for anything unpleasant, guilt-provoking, foreboding, or "negative" connected with their brand of religion and their concept of God. Their primary assumptions all but categorically ignore Divine Justice and Divinely-administered retribution for sin, if not immortality. Over several decades these schools have turned out hundreds of thousands of infidel ecclesiastics who have incessantly vomited their weekly poison of unbelief upon their Biblically-ignorant, defenseless denominational flocks.

The basis of their theology is an overemphasis on and perversion of the love, grace, mercy, kindness, and longsuffering of God. This has been accompanied by an obvious de-emphasis (in many cases total avoidance and/or denial) of the balancing traits of God's justice, law, wrath against sin, and the corollary implication of these verities—**retribution in eternal Hell for impenitent sinners**. The centuries-old Biblical "orthodoxy" concerning Hell has been so watered-down that even so-called

“Evangelical” denominations, usually morally conservative, have come to freely accept such things as divorce for any cause, sexual indulgence, and social drinking as things which are compatible with a “Christian lifestyle” and the hope of Heaven. Furthermore, such influential Evangelical leaders as Philip Hughes and John Stott (“the pope of the Evangelicals”) have succumbed to annihilation dogma.⁷

The aforementioned theistic humanism that emerged from the Renaissance has spawned at least five schools of Hell-denial:

1. **Atheistic Humanism**—the doctrine that man is the ultimate form of life and correspondingly, the denial of the existence of God. That which brings pleasure, joy, and happiness to man is all that matters. Since there is no God, there is no absolute right nor wrong, no Judgment, no Heaven nor Hell, no existence except physical, earthly life. The humanist is an absolute materialist.

2. **Universalism**—the doctrine that all mankind will eventually be “saved.” This doctrine is the child of the presupposition that Hell could not exist as an eternal state because God is too loving and benevolent to allow anyone to suffer forever in such a place. Robinson and Brunner, cited above, are obvious advocates of this view. The Unitarian/Universalist Church is the corporate promulgator of this deadly philosophy, but it has many fellow-travellers and sympathizers scattered throughout the denominational world.

3. **Liberalism**—a term loosely applied to the philosophy that while Hell may exist and some may go there, no sin is bad enough nor sinner wicked enough to really deserve it. It differs little from universalism in its final outcome. Liberalism may actually be defined as a thinly-disguised form of universalism.

4. **New Ageism**—an umbrella term that covers all

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sorts of pagan, weird, off-beat, occult, mystical, imaginary, nonsensical, anti-Biblical philosophies.⁸ One of its primary emphases is self-esteemism (shades of humanism!). To New Age devotees the root of all human problems is lack of or low self-esteem. Where did men get such a low opinion of themselves? Why from the “traditional” (translation, “Christian,” as they perceive it) view of things, of course. All of this preaching about sin and Hell has produced guilt-ridden personalities and has just ruined man’s self-esteem! To the New Ager, “Acknowledging oneself as a sinner destroys a human being. His solution to this is simply to define sin out of existence and declare man sinless.”⁹ Of course, this also conveniently defines Hell out of existence.

5. **Annihilationism**—the doctrine that the wicked will be punished by cessation of consciousness and existence. Thus “Hell” is defined by them as cessation of existence rather than eternal torment at death. There are two principal versions of annihilationism: (1) Some (e.g., the “Jehovah’s Witnesses”) allege that men are wholly mortal and that the wicked absolutely cease to exist at death (“absolutists”). (2) Others (e.g., the Adventists and an increasing number of “evangelicals”) likewise aver that man is not created immortal, but that the righteous will be granted immortality for eternity with God at the resurrection, while the wicked will be raised with a “conditional” immortality to suffer a time of punishment commensurate with their wickedness, after which they will be annihilated. This view is sometimes called “conditionalism,” but in both versions (absolutism and conditionalism), the result for the wicked is the same—eventual annihilation.

Annihilationism and the Church

Has all of this had an effect on any of our brethren?

Sadly, yes, and over a span of many years. The Christadelphian sect was begun in 1844 by Dr. John Thomas, a British physician, who deserted the church. A cardinal tenet of this sect is that unbelievers will remain eternally dead.¹⁰ In 1852 the popular, dynamic, and charismatic Jesse B. Ferguson caused all manner of confusion in the church in Nashville, Tennessee by his pronouncements on the fate of the wicked after death. While we have not found a statement from him explicitly advocating annihilation of the wicked, he clearly denied believing that the wicked would be punished after death.¹¹ We hardly see how his comments could imply anything other than annihilationism. After being strongly opposed and exposed, he found refuge in denominationalism, but not before doing grievous injury to the church in Nashville.

So far as I know, the first one among us in recent times to espouse annihilationism has been Edward Fudge. He has for several years been an elder in the Bering Drive Church of Christ in Houston, Texas, long known for its advocacy and toleration of extremely liberal theology and practice. In 1984, I invited brother Fudge to speak on the Third Annual Denton Lectures, hosted by the Pearl Street Congregation in Denton, Texas, which invitation he accepted. I specifically invited him because he had written and published a book in 1982 in which he vigorously argued the annihilationist position.¹² The purpose of the invitation was to allow him to present his theology so that it might be placed in sharp contrast with and refuted by the Truth of God's Word, which Gary Workman did in an effective way.¹³ The very wording of Fudge's topic for his lectureship manuscript and lecture summarizes the thesis of his book: "The Judgment of God Against Sinners Will Be Eternal Extinction Rather than Unending Conscious Torment."¹⁴ He classifies himself as a "conditionalist" (per the Adventists, as previously

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described) and labels all those who accept the teaching of the Bible as “traditionalists.” A denominational scholar, Robert Morey, responded to Fudge’s book with a book of his own in 1984.¹⁵ In this ringing refutation, Morey averred that Fudge merely summarized *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, a large work by the Adventist, Leroy Froom.¹⁶ Another denominational author, John Gerstner, has likewise exposed and refuted Fudge’s views in his book, *Repent or Perish*.¹⁷

In this day of doctrinal freaks in the church we should not be surprised that some brethren have found Fudge’s views attractive. Perhaps among the first to jump on Fudge’s bandwagon was Al Pickering who became known to many through his “Sharpening the Sword” Seminars over the past several years. In a phone conversation with Wayne Jackson in 1987 he pontificated that it is “a slap in the face of God” to teach that the wicked will be in conscious eternal torment in Hell.¹⁸ F. LaGard Smith, the Pepperdine law professor and popular author and lecturer, has also publicly endorsed Fudge’s views. In a series of lectures on “A Christian Response to the New Age Movement” at Pepperdine University Lectures in April 1988, he advocated “soul-sleeping” and strongly argued that the souls of wicked men will be utterly consumed rather than punished. Concerning the soul, he averred that God “will destroy—not punish it, not dangle it, not torture it—destroy it.”¹⁹ Apparently, Smith’s comments whetted the appetite of officialdom at Pepperdine for the annihilationist doctrine, so they invited Edward Fudge himself to present his “conditionalist” views in their 1991 lectureship. John Clayton, the liberal, agnostic, evolutionist lecturer that some brethren refuse to be warned about, has enthusiastically endorsed Fudge’s book, declaring: “I have never been able to be comfortable with the position that a person who rejected God should suffer

forever and ever and ever.”²⁰

Besides these is the large number of brethren whom we might describe as **practical** annihilationists, as demonstrated by their loose and latitudinarian approach to grace, baptism, the identity of the church, fellowship, worship, marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the nature of God, Biblical authority in general, and yes, what the Bible teaches about the Judgment and Hell. Some preachers have had the audacity to announce to the congregation that they will no longer preach on Hell because it does not fit in with their “make-’em-feel-good-at-all-costs” agenda. Such brethren seem to have great difficulty identifying any doctrine as heresy or any practice as sinful, however outrageous and unscriptural. They will not oppose or expose any teacher or preacher as false or his/her doctrine as damnable, regardless of how contrary to Gospel Truth it may be (including the doctrine of annihilationism, I would suppose). They embrace in their fellowship those who are not in fellowship with God. They have found devilish and ingenious ways of contorting the Bible and of redefining ordinary words so as to create loopholes whereby they promise God’s approval to practicing adulterers and drunkards, and to heretics of every stripe and hue.

Without question, the denial (or even the mitigation) of the Bible doctrine of Hell is very appealing. If human lust and selfish gratification are one’s major pursuits, who would not be attracted to the concept that denies (1) the reality of consequential sin, (2) ultimate accountability for behavior, (3) that a Supreme Being Creator has imposed a code of conduct, and (4) the existence of a final, inescapable, horrible eternal retribution for rebellion against Divine law?

Does not the prevalence of the denial of hell offer at least a partial explanation for the unconscionable rampant

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crime, the animalistic sexual behavior, the rising tide of anti-Christian sentiment, and the rapidly-vanishing reverence for spiritual Truth in a society whose founding fathers were unabashed theists? It is beyond contradiction that multiplied millions, in one way or another, have rejected the reality of Hell. But shall we surrender its existence to the infidels, the skeptics, the liberals? Or, shall we, as the Lord's church, continue to warn people about it and help them avoid it if they so choose?

What Did Jesus Teach?

There are many lines of argument that can be followed in setting forth the teaching of the Bible on this subject. Obviously, I will not be able to examine them all in this brief chapter. I will, therefore, primarily confine my examination of annihilationism to the teachings of Jesus, the Christ, only occasionally noticing passages from other inspired writers. I believe the following premise to be unassailable: *The existence of Hell as a place of eternal punishment for the wicked cannot be denied without denial of the Christ Himself.* Thus, annihilation theology involves the even more fundamental issue—**belief in the Christ Himself!**

In spite of all of the avowals of annihilation and denials of Hell, there is still the stubborn, nagging, undeniable, and repeated teaching of Jesus that must be considered. He said much more about Hell than Heaven. Certainly, He used the term far more than did any other New Testament teacher. However, there is far more in His teaching about Hell than merely the statements in which the word *Hell* appears. When rightly perceived, every warning about the Judgment, every prohibition of evil, every encouragement to righteousness, and every declaration about sin has the concept of eternal damnation behind it and embedded in it. Otherwise, they are so many

empty warnings. In fact, Jesus' earthly sojourn and the stated purpose of His coming are rendered vain and unnecessary apart from the reality of the eternal damnation of the souls of men because of their sins. In fact, setting aside the clear teaching of Jesus about Hell for the moment, the very coming of Christ from Heaven to earth and the sacrifice of Himself upon the cross for the sins of mankind are the ultimate arguments for the reality of eternal damnation—Hell itself! Now, from the teaching of Jesus, let us see why we must continue to warn people about Hell, whether or not they want to hear it.

Man Has an Immortal Soul

The immortality of the soul is a major battleground in any discussion of annihilation claims. For there to be a Hell, a place of eternal punishment for the wicked, man must survive death as a conscious personality—that is, he must possess immortality. Annihilationists allege that man does not innately possess an immortal soul, but that immortality is conferred (upon such as receive it) at the resurrection: “Immortality is inherent in God alone.... Believers, now being mortal by nature, receive immortality from Jesus Christ as a gift conferred at the resurrection of the last day.”²¹ To the “absolutists” the wicked never receive it and are thus never resurrected, but are annihilated upon dying physically. For the conditionalist, “immortality” is conferred on the wicked only for the appropriate time of their punishment, after which their “immortality” runs out and they are annihilated (some “immortality”!).

Jesus taught unequivocally that man is immortal, that he is more than flesh and blood:

And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but
are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him

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who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell
(Matt. 10:28).

The context is one in which Jesus is warning the newly-appointed apostles that they will suffer severe persecution (vv. 16–27). Even if they are killed for His sake, He tells them it will be only the body that dies. Men will not be able to kill the soul—it will survive physical death, demanding immortality. Clearly, Jesus’ language demands that the immortal soul is **co-existent** with the mortal body—immortality is not something to be later conferred. If the apostles possessed no unkillable soul at the time of their bodily death, the words of Jesus are superfluous at best and nonsense at worst. Obviously, even the most violent killer could not kill that which did not exist!

But the annihilationists argue that this passage supports their contention—“destroyed” equals “annihilated.” They thus claim that the Lord here is teaching that God will annihilate both soul and body of the wicked in Hell. However, even the most elementary Greek word study proves otherwise. “Destroyed” is from *apollumi*, which is used in numerous passages in which “annihilation” cannot possibly be the meaning: (1) The wineskins “burst” (Matt. 9:17). (2) The sheep was “lost” (Luke 15:4–9). (3) The prodigal son was “perishing” (v. 17). Neither these nor a host of other occurrences of *apollumi* can bear the meaning of “annihilation.” Jesus also used the noun form of *apollumi* (i.e., “destruction”) in reference to Hell (Matt. 7:13). W. E. Vine says this word “...signifies to destroy utterly; in Middle Voice, to perish. The idea is **not extinction** but ruin, loss, **not of being**, but of well-being.... So of persons...; of the loss of well-being in the case of the unsaved hereafter (Matt. 10:29; Luke 13:3, 5; John 3:16...) [emp DM].”²² Note that Vine’s definition precisely contradicts and falsifies the contention of the annihilationists.

The comment of J. W. McGarvey on Jesus' use of "destroy" in this passage is instructive:

Materialists are wont to catch at the word *destroy* in this place, as proof that the soul can be annihilated. But in doing so they ascribe to the term *destroy* a sense which it does not bear, and they overlook the fact that this passage utterly refutes the doctrine that the soul dies with the body. Jesus says, "Fear not them who kill the body, *but cannot kill the soul* ;" but if the soul dies with the body, then he who kills the body kills the soul too, and cannot avoid killing it. To destroy, is not to annihilate, but to bring to ruin; and the soul and body are brought to ruin when they are cast into hell.²³

It is significant that Joseph Henry Thayer, the renowned Greek lexicographer, was a Unitarian who did not believe in eternal punishment, yet his knowledge of the meaning of this word and his personal integrity as a scholar forced him to define *apollumi* as "to be delivered up to eternal misery."²⁴ Robert Morey makes the following strong statement:

In every instance where the word *apollumi* is found in the New Testament, something other than annihilation is being described. Indeed, there isn't a single instance in the New Testament where *apollumi* means annihilation in the strict meaning of the word.²⁵

Thomas B. Warren commented as follows on the Lord's teaching in this passage:

Thus, it is clear that Matthew 10:28 teaches the

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persistence of human personality after physical death (the immortality of the soul).²⁶

The idea of being “destroyed” in Hell is that one will suffer utter, irreclaimable loss and ruin forever.

There Is a Realm in the Spirit World Called “Hell”

In Matthew 10:28, Jesus referred to Hell in such a way as to indicate His knowledge of and fullest confidence in its reality. He threatened “the hell of fire” for those who curse their fellows as fools (Matt. 5:22). He referred to Hell as a real place into which men would be “cast down” as retribution for their sin (29–30). He further taught that one who causes another to sin will be cast into “the hell of fire” (18:9).

When Jesus referred to Hell, what did He mean by it? Space forbids a thorough study, but a brief history of the word will perhaps be worthwhile. First, it is important to notice that the KJV consistently uses “Hell,” when, in fact “Hades” (transliterated from *hades*, unseen, referring to the unseen realm of the dead, i.e., departed spirits, whether wicked or righteous) is actually under discussion (e.g., Matt. 16:18; Luke 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; et al.). Our English word *Hell* is correctly translated from *gehenna*, which appears twelve times in the Greek New Testament (used eleven times by the Lord [counting parallels], once by James). The word *gehenna* is actually a reference to the Valley of Hinnom (aka “the valley of the Sons of Hinnom”) near Jerusalem. This place is first mentioned by Joshua (15:8) strictly as an innocent landmark. Centuries later, Judah had become so corrupt that the valley of Hinnom had become the place where the corrupt kings Ahaz and Manasseh burned their children alive in homage to the pagan god, Molech (2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6).

Josiah, the righteous restorer king, abolished this

heinous practice (2 Kings 23:10), and the valley thenceforth became a place of abomination and abhorrence. As early as the second century B.C., uninspired Jewish literature used *gehenna* as a figurative expression for the final, eternal punishment of sinners. The Son of God placed His stamp of Divine approval upon this usage and applied this word in the very same way. He used the name of the earthly and material valley of abomination and abhorrence to refer to the place of ultimate and eternal abomination and abhorrence.

The Descriptions of Hell

Consider the following descriptive terms for Hell:

1. As seen above, the original use of *gehenna* by the Jews as a name for the place of eternal punishment related to the fire that was used in the abomination of sacrificing children to Molech. The Lord perpetuated this thought connection by describing the final, eternal *gehenna* as a place of fire. He twice called it “the hell of fire” (Matt. 5:22; 18:9). He twice referred to it as “the furnace of fire” into which the wicked will be cast after the Judgment (13:42, 50). He twice called it “unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:43, 47–48). The Hell thus described by Jesus is correctly identified with the “baptism” (plunging, overwhelming, immersion) in unquenchable fire mentioned by John (Matt. 3:11–12) and with “the lake of fire” into which the devil, the beast, the false prophet, and all those not found written in the book of life will be cast for **eternal torment** (Rev. 20:10, 15; 21:8).

2. The Lord did not stop with his identification of Hell with unquenchable fire, but coupled it with the extremely graphic description of a place “where their worm dieth not” (Mark 9:47–48). On the figures of unquenchable fire and undying worms, A. T. Robertson commented: “

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It is thus a vivid picture of eternal punishment.”²⁷ Thayer says that the Greek phrase referring to unquenchable fire and undying worms signifies that “their punishment after death will never cease,” with the worms perhaps symbolizing the loathsomeness of the penalty.²⁸ J. W. McGarvey saw the same vivid application of Jesus’ words: “The image is taken from Isaiah 44:24, and is that of worms feeding on the dead carcasses of men. Applied to the future state, as it unquestionably is in this passage, it represents those who shall be cast into hell as being in a state of decay and rotteness, while unquenchable fires are burning them but never consuming them.”²⁹ (Note that McGarvey speaks of the fire that burns, but **never consumes** the wicked, in contrast to the entire thesis of Edward Fudge’s book, *The Fire That Consumes!*)

Warren well sums up the teaching of Jesus here:

It is clear that Jesus has taught, in the passage at hand, that the personality of man persists beyond physical death. According to Mark, Jesus has here taught that the wicked are to suffer acutely. This implies that they will be conscious for one cannot be described truly as suffering while he is not even conscious. From this implication, it follows that man is to be conscious after death. There can be no consciousness without persistence of personality. Not only is the punishment to be acute, but it is also to be unending. Thus, it follows that the persistence of man’s personality beyond death will be unending. The passage under consideration teaches that such will be the case for those who are “cast into hell.”³⁰

3. Jesus said Hell is a place in which its occupants

will be “destroyed” (Matt. 10:28) (see comments above for the significance of “destroyed”).

4. The Christ referred to Hell as a place of eternal “punishment” in His description of the Final Judgment (Matt. 25:46). “Punishment” is from *kolasis*, referring to torment, torture, suffering, chastisement. It is the word behind “torment” which the rich man experienced in Hades (Luke 16:23, 38). Concerning Matthew 25:46, M. B. Riddle and Philip Schaff said: “The word ‘punishment’ expresses positive misery, not ‘annihilation’.”³¹

The apostle John also teaches the fact of torment, punishment in Hell (Rev. 14:10–11; 20:10). Attention to the word *eternal* in relation to Hell and punishment will be given below under the sub heading, “The Duration of Hell.”

5. The Hell of which Jesus warned is a place of separation from God, Christ, and the redeemed of the ages—banishment from Heaven itself. The lost are “**cast** into hell” (Matt. 5:29). Jesus will say to those who are lost at the Judgment, “**Depart** from me” (7:23; 25:41). He taught that Hell is a place of “**outer** darkness” (8:12; et al.). He said that the wicked would be “**cast forth without**” the eternal kingdom of God (Heaven) (Luke 13:28). Other inspired writers echoed these declarations (Eph. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 22:15, 18; et al.) (emp. DM.).

6. The Lord taught that those in Hell would not be by themselves. While God apparently created Hell originally for the devil and his angels, all those who are lost will at the Judgment be consigned to the same terrible place (Matt. 25:41). John taught the same thing (Rev. 20:10, 15; 21:8). Thus, part of the grief and anguish suffered by the residents of Hell will derive from their inescapable association with wicked men and women.

The Lord is rather specific in His preview of the populace of Hell:

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- Those who are self-righteous and egotistic and who deprecate others as fools (Matt. 5:22).
- Those who are unwilling to give up whatever causes them to sin or to sacrifice whatever will keep them from serving God (vv. 27–30).
- Those who are false prophets/teachers (7:15–20; 15:13–14).
- Those who confess Christ, but do not respect God’s authority, even though they sincerely claim to work for Christ (vv. 21–23).
- Those who reject the messengers, thus the message, of the Christ (10:14–15).
- Those who persist in unbelief in the face of overwhelming evidence for the authenticity of the Christ and His Truth (11:20–24).
- Those who profess godliness but who practice evil (hypocrites) (23:13–36).
- Those who are wicked, wasteful, murmuring, blaspheming, lazy servants of Christ (25:14–30; Luke 19:12–27).
- Those who are selfish, stingy, cold, unkind, uncompassionate, unsympathetic (25:41–46; Luke 16:19–31).³²

Additionally, Paul, Peter, and John identified the populace of Hell:

- Paul listed the full gamut of wickedness and depravity to which men can stoop, called these evils “the lusts of the flesh,” and said that those who so behave (whether alien sinners or Christians) are Hell-bound (Rom. 1:18–32; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Gal. 5:19–21). He also warned that the “lawless one,” those who receive not the love of the Truth, those who make “shipwreck concerning the faith,” those who are deceived by riches, and those who are heretics or factious will be residents of *gehenna* (2 Thess. 2:4–12; 1 Tim. 1:19–21; 6:9–10; Tit. 3:10–11).

• Peter identified **brethren** who are false teachers (who themselves are overtaken by evil and who entice others to follow their wicked doctrines and practices) as those who will be lost in Hell (2 Pet. 2:1–22).

• John consigned not only Satan, the beast, and the false prophet to Hell, but also all men who had followed them in wickedness, evil, and immorality of all sorts and whose names are therefore not written in the book of life (Rev. 19:20; 20:10,15; 21:8; 22:15).

Imagine the misery and terror of being imprisoned with the likes of Ahab and Jezebel, Herod the Great, Nero, Domitian, the popes, the Spanish Inquisition administrators, Charles Darwin, Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Charles Manson, and like monsters (not to mention the multiplied millions of lesser-known evil-doers and false teachers) with no hope of relief or escape. This would be all but unbearable, even if there were no fire, no worms, no outer darkness!

The Duration of Hell

Jesus not only taught the reality of Hell (which conditionalists concede), but the eternity of it (which they most certainly deny). When He concluded His description of the Final Judgment, Jesus said, “And these shall go away into **eternal** punishment: but the righteous into **eternal** life” (Matt. 25:46 [emp. DM]). Obviously, if eternal life is a reference to Heaven, eternal punishment is a reference to Hell. But there is more: The unrighteous will be cast into “**eternal** fire” (Matt. 18:8; 25:41; et al [emp. DM]).

Paul echoes: Those who “know not God” and “obey not the gospel...shall suffer punishment, even **eternal** destruction” (2 Thess. 1:8–9 [emp. DM]).

John teaches the same thing. The rebels against God described in Revelation 14:10–11:

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shall be tormented with fire and brimstone...and the smoke of their torment goeth up **for ever and ever**; and they have no rest day and night....

John described the destiny of Satan in similar language:

And the devil...was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night **for ever and ever** (20:10 [emp. DM]).

Annihilationists, realizing the force of *aionios* (“eternal,” “for ever and ever”) in these contexts, are wont to argue that it “...is a qualitative rather than a quantitative word.”³³ However, reputable authorities do not agree. Vine says of *aionios* (“eternal”):

Moreover it is used of persons and things which are in their nature, endless, as, e.g., of God (Rom. 16:26); of His power (1 Tim. 6:16), and of His glory (1 Pet. 5:10); of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 9:14); of the redemption effected by Christ (Heb. 9:12), and of the consequent salvation of men (5:9); ... and of the resurrection body (2 Cor. 5:1), elsewhere said to be “immortal” (1 Cor. 15:53), in which that life will be finally realized (**Matt. 25:46**; Tit. 1:2 [emp. DM]).³⁴

According to Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, when referring to the future, *aionios* means “without end.”³⁵ TDNT says that *aionios* is used “as a term for the object of eschatological [end of the world] expectation” and that if it has the “full sense of divine eternity” when used in reference to rewards, then in reference to fire, punishment, and destruction (Matt. 18:8; 25:41, 46; 2

Thess. 1:8–9; et al.), it has...only the sense of ‘unceasing’ or ‘endless’.”³⁶

Workman correctly points out on Revelation 14:10–11 that “it is not the smoke of *annihilation* but the ‘smoke of their *torment*’ that will go up forever.... The only logical conclusion is that the torment will last as long as the smoke.”³⁷ Since the smoke goes up “for ever and ever“ (an emphatic phrase denoting unending ages) so does the punishment —requiring the existence of personality and consciousness. However, the eternal duration of Hell is likewise seen in the fate which Satan will suffer; he will be “tormented day and night for ever and ever” in the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:10). Here we have not just the “smoke” of torment, but **the torment itself** continuing without interruption and unendingly. It will not do for the annihilationist to say that this refers to the devil, rather than to men, for men who are not recorded in “the book of life” will suffer the same fate (vv. 14–15; 21:8).

The experience of being cast into Hell (“the lake of fire”) is identified by John as “the second death” (20:14–15; 21:8; cf. 2:11; 20:6), which annihilationists would have us believe is another literal death that results in extinction or annihilation of the wicked. However, this cannot be. The “first death” that men experience is that of the physical body: “It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Notice that this death is involuntary—it is an appointment that men cannot escape, and it occurs before the Judgment. Men can kill the body, thus causing it to literally die (because it is mortal), but the soul does not die with the body (Matt. 10:28).

The “first death,” which is the final enemy of Christ (and of men), will itself be abolished when the Lord comes (1 Cor. 15:23–26). The simultaneous resurrection of all men from the dead (Matt. 25:31–32; John 5:28–29; Acts

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24:15; Rev. 20:11–12) at the coming of Christ (1 Cor. 15:20–23; 1 Thess. 5:16–17) will constitute the deathblow to death itself, marking the utter defeat and abolition of physical death. Then will death be “swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54b). Thus, nevermore shall men **literally** die for they will have been given a “spiritual” body (vv. 42–44) which is “incorruptible” and “immortal” (vv. 50–54) for the habitation of the “unclothed” immortal soul (2 Cor. 5:3–4). Thus, following the resurrection, all will possess both an immortal soul **and** an immortal body, neither of which can literally die. Following the Judgment, all will either be welcomed into the bliss of endless life or be sentenced to torment and misery of the same duration (Matt. 25:46).

Literal, physical death itself will have been destroyed at the coming of the Lord **before** the Judgment (Heb. 9:27), but the “second death” will occur **after** the Judgment (Rev. 20:11–15). The annihilationist therefore has the “grim reaper” still doing his work after the Lord has put him out of commission! Upon their resurrection, the departed spirits of Hades will be called forth to be judged (v. 13). Both death (the state of separation of body and soul—Jas. 2:26) and Hades (the realm of spirits thus separated—Acts 2:27, 31) are personified, judged, and symbolically cast into the lake of fire, signifying that their reign over man and against God has ceased (v. 14a). This hurling of death and Hades into the lake of fire is called the “second death” (v. 14b).

The “second death” must be a figurative or non-literal death, since death and Hades would not be affected by literal or physical death. Yet, the same “second death” is assigned to wicked men. And so the “second death” men will suffer in the immortal state is a figurative death—a term for the awful condition of the lost in a hopeless, never-ceasing, conscious experience of torment and woe, rather

than extinction. The basic connotation of the word *death* is instructive just here, that being **separation**. In the “first death” the body and spirit are separated (Jas. 2:26). In the “second death” man is forever separated from God. Vine has an excellent summary statement:

Death is the opposite of life; it never denotes non-existence. As spiritual life is ‘conscious existence in communion with God,’ so spiritual death is ‘conscious existence in separation from God’.³⁸

Only if Hell is endless can its fire be “unquenchable” (Matt. 3:12; Mark 9:43, 48). No one can believe the words of Jesus and believe in the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory, the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ materialistic doctrine of absolute annihilation, nor the “conditionalist” concept of temporary punishment for the wicked, followed by extinction. No one can consistently (or Biblically) believe in an endless Heaven while denying an endless Hell.

Conclusion

On the one hand are the annihilationists (along with the Humanists, the Universalists, the liberal theologians, the New Agers, and all the other no-Hell advocates). Arrayed against them in stark contrast is Jesus the Christ, the Lord of Heaven and Earth. **None can question the fact that He taught the reality of immortality and of Hell as a place of eternal punishment of the wicked.** Men may accept or reject the teaching, but they cannot deny that He did teach these things. Ironically, those who reject His teaching (on this or any other subject) will themselves be rejected at the Judgment and confined to the very place, the existence of which they denied (John 12:48)!

The dogma of annihilation is a powerful

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demonstration of how far from the Truth men can be led when they allow their own thinking to father their doctrine, rather than allowing the doctrine of Christ to father their thinking! Men cannot “see” how a loving God can allow even wicked men to suffer in Hell forever. It is not “just” or “fair” for men to be tormented unendingly with no hope of relief. “Therefore” some way must be found to warp, twist, contort, or outrightly deny what God has revealed about the nature of man and of his eternal destiny! Many have become amazingly adept at this practice. As with those who wrest the words of Paul, so with all who wrest the words of the Savior—they do so “unto their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16).

We have it directly from the mind and the mouth of the Only Begotten of the Father, Jesus the Christ, concerning (1) the immortality of the soul, (2) the fact of the resurrection of all the dead, and (3) the reality, nature, and duration of Hell. Further, we have the consistent “Amens” in the teaching of the other New Testament writers throughout.

After quoting in his book, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, several passages in which the Lord set forth the doctrine of Hell as a place of eternal punishment for the ungodly, Jon Braun observed:

Does any question remain as to whether or not Jesus declared the eternal punishment of the wicked? All the authority of the almighty God is present in the Words He spoke about hell. Jesus had more to say about hell than any other speaker or writer in the Bible. If He was mistaken in what He said, then the almighty, eternal, and everlasting God was mistaken. And that is not the case. Indeed, if it comes to a disagreement: “Let God be true and every man a liar.” ...What more could Jesus have said? There

is absolutely no way the clear impact of His words can be brushed aside, and the assertion made that there is no eternal doom for the ungodly, unless of course, we join the critics who arbitrarily determine that Jesus didn't really say these things at all.... Jesus, the One who is coming again to judge the living and the dead, expressed Himself clearly and without room for doubt about it. The rest of the New Testament writers followed His lead to the letter. Retribution for the ungodly is eternal, without end.³⁹

Heaven and Hell stand or fall together, both in reality and duration. If Heaven is real, so is Hell. If Hell is denied, so must Heaven be. If Hell exists, but is only brief, Heaven must be also. However, if Heaven is eternal, Hell cannot be otherwise. They are both as real as the God Who made us and Who gave us the inspired revelation concerning Himself, His Son, and their marvelous plan of salvation. It is not because God is mean, but because He is merciful, that He has warned us of Satan, sin, the Judgment, and Hell. God sent His Son into our world in the flesh that we might have a road, a path, a way to Heaven and to God, a destination otherwise unreachable (John 1:1–2; 3:16; Phil. 2:5–8). Jesus the Christ is Himself that road, the **only** road, that leads to God and Heaven (John 14:6). If we pass through the narrow gate and then stay on the straitened way it opens to us, it will lead us to life eternal (Matt. 7:13). Jesus' own simple summary of entering that road to Heaven is as follows: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Let us never flag in our efforts to preach and teach the one message that is the "power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16).

Hell as depicted by Jesus is so frighteningly, horribly, terribly unimaginable that He boldly challenges all men

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to make whatever sacrifice is necessary to escape its horrors (Matt. 5:29–30; 6:19–25, 33; 8:18–21; 10:28, 37–38; 13:44–45; 16:24–26; 19:21–22; et al.). Surely this is the course of wisdom. If eternal Hell exists as the Bible teaches, the doctrine of annihilationism is utterly and damnably false!

Endnotes

1 All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated or included in quotations from others.

2 Parts of this chapter were originally published in a similar form in “The Churches of Christ Salute You in Your Desire to Miss Hell,” **The Churches of Christ Salute You**, ed. Gary Colley (Austin, TX: Southwest Church of Christ, 1997), pp. 354-371.

3 Jon E. Braun, **Whatever Happened to Hell?** (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1979), pp. 35-36.

4 John A. T. Robinson, “Universalism--Is It Heretical?” **Scottish Journal of Theology** (June 1949), p. 155.

5 Robinson, **But I Can't Believe That** (New York, NY: The New American Library, 1967), p. 69.

6 Emil Brunner, **Eternal Hope** (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1954), p. 182.

7 Jackie M. Stearsman, “Is Eternal Punishment Justified?” **Whatever Happened to Heaven and Hell?** ed. Terry M. Hightower (San Antonio, TX: Shenandoah Church of Christ, 1993), p. 75.

8 See chapter by Gary W. Summers on New Ageism elsewhere in this book.

9 Johanna Michaelsen, **Like Lambs to the Slaughter** (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1989), p. 298.

10 Wayne Jackson, “Denial of Eternal Punishment,” **The Spiritual Sword** (April 1997), p. 35.

11 Earl I. West, **The Search for the Ancient Order** (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1949), 1:264.

12 Edward William Fudge, **The Fire That Consumes** (Houston, TX: Providential Press, 1982).

13 Gary Workman, “The Judgment of God Against Sinners Will Be Unending Conscious Torment Rather than Eternal Extinction,” **Studies in the Revelation**, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1984), pp. 492-508).

14 For a good summary of Fudge's basic arguments in his own words, see this chapter in **Studies in the Revelation**, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1984), pp. 475-491).

15 Robert Morey, **Death and the Afterlife** (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1984).

16 Wayne Jackson, "Changing Attitudes Toward Hell," **Whatever Happened to Heaven and Hell?** ed. Terry M. Hightower (San Antonio, TX: Shenandoah Church of Christ, 1993), p. 64.

17 John Gerstner, **Repent or Perish** (Soli Deo Gloria Pub., 1990).

18 Wayne Jackson, "Debate Challenge Withdrawn," **Christian Courier** (December 1987), p. 31.

19 Jackson, "Changing Attitudes...", pp. 65-66.

20 John Clayton, **Does God Exist?** (September/October 1990), p. 20, as quoted by Wayne Jackson, "Denial of Eternal Punishment," *The Spiritual Sword* (April 1997), p. 35.

21 Robert L. Whitelaw, ed., **Resurrection/The Witness** (January-April 1997), p.2 . This quote comes from the statement of editorial aim of this periodical, on the back cover of which Edward Fudge's book is advertised.

22 W. E. Vine, **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966), 1:302.

23 J. W. McGarvey, **The New Testament Commentary on Matthew and Mark** (Des Moines, IA: Eugene S. Smith reprint, n.d.), p. 93.

24 Joseph Henry Thayer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament** (New York, NY: American Book Co. reprint, n.d.), p. 36.

25 Robert A. Morey, **Death and the Afterlife** (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Pub., 1984), p. 90.

26 Thomas B. Warren, **Immortality--All of Us Will Be Somewhere Forever** (Moore, OK: National Christian Press, 1992), p. 32.

27 A. T. Robertson, **Word Pictures in the New Testament** (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers Pub., 1930). 1:346.

28 Thayer, p. 580.

29 McGarvey, p. 322.

30 Warren, p. 48.

31 M. B. Riddle and Philip Schaff, **The Gospel According to Matthew** (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879), p. 207.

32 The account of the rich man in torment describes the state of departed spirits in the intermediate Hadean realm (cf. 2 Pet. 2:4;

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Jude 6), rather than in the final, eternal abodes of the souls of men. However, the respective states of Lazarus (in comfort) and the selfish rich man (tormented, in anguish in flames) prefigure the respective eternal final destinies (Heaven and Hell) of each, and, representatively of all after the Judgment. Incidentally, this account is the strongest kind of evidence that each person--whether good or evil--possesses an immortal soul that does not even sleep (in unconsciousness, per Adventist dogma), much less die, when the body dies.

33 R. V. G. Tasker, **Tyndale New Testament Commentaries-Matthew** (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1961), p. 240, and Fudge, p. 49.

34 Vine, 2:43.

35 Walter Bauer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature**, trans. by William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 28.

36 Gerhard Kittel, ed., **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**, trans. Geoffrey. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981),1:209.

37 Workman, p. 504.

38 Vine, 1:276.

39 Braun, pp. 146, 163.

Chapter 19

Premillennialism

Billy Bland

Introduction

Do current world events indicate an imminent return of Jesus Christ? Are you ready for the rapture? Does Revelation 20 depict a literal 1000 year reign of Jesus Christ in the city of Jerusalem? What did Israel's becoming a state on May 14, 1948 have to do with biblical prophecy? Does the return of some Israelites to their ancient "home-land" indicate that Jesus is on the verge of establishing David's throne in Jerusalem? Who is the Antichrist? What is the "great tribulation"? When God raptures the church, will you be left behind?

All of the above questions are based on a false system of doctrine known as "Premillennialism". Anyone who has been active in the religious world has at one time or another been confronted with (or asked himself), some of these questions. It has been estimated that 70% of Christendom believes in the doctrine of Premillennialism.

This materialistic doctrine of the second coming of Christ is zealously taught by means of television, videos, radio, books, tracts, etc... Some of its more well-known advocates today include such men as Hal Lindsey, Jack Van Impe, Billy Graham, and multitudes of others. Since this false doctrine is so widely spread and crosses most all denominational lines, Christians need to be aware of

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this doctrine and be “set for the defense of the gospel” (Phil. 1:17).

Premillennialism Defined

“Premillennialism” is a very complex and involved doctrine. Although very complex and involved, one should not conclude that it is too difficult to answer. In fact, Premillennialism can be (and has been) easily defeated by way of pen as well as by public debate. Because it has been defeated, however, does not mean it has died. As one will see under the section “History of Premillennialism,” this false doctrine has had a resurgence time after time.

Technically, “pre” means “before” “millennial” indicates “one thousand years” and “ism” means “doctrine or system.” Thus “Premillennialism” is that system of doctrine which teaches Jesus Christ will return to this earth just prior to a one thousand year reign (millennium) on the earth. It is thought by advocates of this doctrine, that Revelation 20 is where this reign is described. Although not a part of this lecture, there are at least two other forms of “Millennialism.”

Whereas “Premillennialism” teaches that Christ will come before a literal one thousand year reign on earth, “*Postmillennialism*” teaches that the one thousand years is a figurative expression which indicates a long period of time in which the world will be “Christianized” and that following this millennium, Christ will come. Thus, Christ, according to this doctrine, comes after (“post”) the “millennium.” “*Amillennialism*” is the doctrine that does not believe that there will be a millennium of worldwide peace or righteousness.

Premillennialist themselves are divided into various groups because of their differing views of order of events that will occur associated with Christ’s return. Basically, however, there have been two groups. There is “Historic

Premillennialism” which is the older form and does not carry the idea of the rapture, etc.

Then there is “Dispensational Premillennialism,” also known as “Dispensationalism.” The seven dispensations are divided accordingly:

- (1) Innocence: Creation of Adam to the Fall.
- (2) Conscience: The Fall until the Flood.
- (3) Human Government: The Flood until the call of Abraham.
- (4) Promise: The call of Abraham to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai.
- (5) Law: The giving of the law through most of Jesus’ public ministry.
- (6) Grace (or Church Age): Closing days of Christ’s public ministry until the second coming of Christ.
- (7) Kingdom: The Millennium (the 1000 year reign of Christ on earth).

It is taught that we are **presently** living in the dispensation of Grace (also known as the “Church Age”), and that events indicate that Jesus will soon descend from heaven. When He descends, He will resurrect the dead saints (only) and they along with the living saints will be raptured to meet the Lord in the air. These will be transported to heaven for a period of seven years. While the saints are raptured, there will be a seven year period on earth which is divided into two three and one half periods. In the first half of the seven years, all the Jews will return to Jerusalem and Israel. The Old Testament temple will be rebuilt. A world leader will arise and demand worship. However, at the end of the first three and one half years, he will be revealed to be the Antichrist. Anyone who does not worship him will be put to death. During the last three and one half years there will be a

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great tribulation upon the world. All those converted during these seven years will be put to death. When it appears that the Antichrist is completely victorious, Christ will descend (with the raptured saints), and a literal battle of Armageddon will take place, at which time Christ will be victorious over the Antichrist and will establish the Davidic throne in the city of Jerusalem and will rule the world in righteousness for a literal one thousand years. All those that were converted to Christ during the tribulation and were killed will be resurrected at this time, just prior to the 1000 reign. At the end of this one thousand years (Kingdom Age), the wicked will be resurrected and the great white throne judgement will take place, at which time the wicked will be cast into Hell and the righteous will be taken into Heaven.

History of Premillennialism

Premillennialism is neither new nor novel. In fact, misconceptions related to the reign of Christ and the kingdom go back as far as the Jews' misunderstanding relative to the first coming of the Messiah. The Jews looked for a Political Messiah who would reign upon the throne of David in the city of Jerusalem. Jesus Christ, of course, did not come to be a political Messiah, but rather a redemptive Messiah. His kingdom was not political but spiritual in nature. Many of the Jews misunderstood the true nature of the kingdom (or simply rejected such), and therefore rejected Jesus Christ. This, however, did not postpone the great plan of God. The kingdom was established just as foretold by Daniel and other inspired prophets, and those who were born again became citizens of such (see John 3:3-5, Col. 1:13, Heb. 12:28, Rev. 1:9).

Church history reveals that some Premillennial views were held early. Among those who held premillennial

views were; Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia (60-135 A.D.), a group of montanists (about 156 A.D.), Irenaeus of Lyon, Justin Martyr, Cyrian, Cerinthus and Lactantius (all in the second century). There was also opposition to the views of Premillennialism in this period.

Premillennial views had somewhat of a re-birth during the reformation movement. Some Jews contended for a kingdom on earth (Zionist movements). Christadelphians and the Plymouth Brethren were premillennial in thought. In fact, John Darby, a leader in the Plymouth Brethren, was among the first to set forth Dispensational Premillennialism in about 1830. The Scofield Reference Bible, though it notes, has popularized Dispensationalism. Many sects have since this time accepted and advocated Dispensation Premillennialism.

The church of Christ has not been immune to the influence of Premillennialism. R.H. Boll, front page editor of the Gospel Advocate, promoted premillennial views in the early 1900's. In fact, he and H. Leo Boles had a written debate on this subject. The Lord's church in Louisville, Kentucky had serious problems with this doctrine. In 1933, Foy E. Wallace, Jr. and Charles M. Neal met in Winchester, Kentucky to debate this issue. It has been stated that this was the death knell of Premillennialism in that area. Brother Foy E. Wallace, Jr. did much to help halt Premillennial views in the church of Christ by way of pen and debate. His book "God's Prophetic Word", is still a classic on the subject of Premillennialism.

The Land Promise

Central to the doctrine of Premillennialism is the land God promised to Abraham. The Bible records the following related to the land promised to Abraham.

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, get thee out

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of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house unto a land that I will shew thee (Gen. 12:1).

After Lot's separation from Abram, God said to Abram:

...Lift up thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed for ever (Gen.13:14-15).

Later, Moses records:

In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates (Gen. 15:18).

The passage just cited defines the boundaries of the land promised to Abraham and his seed. It would be from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates. This promise that was made to Abram was later repeated to Isaac (Gen. 26:1-3).

The mistake that the Premillennialist makes is not recognizing that God did indeed fulfill the land promise made to Abraham. One must also keep in mind that what was promised to Abraham was repeated to his seed.

Moses informs Israel that if God gave them the full extent of the land, then He would give them six cities of refuge. Read carefully the following verses relative to the cities of refuge and see how they disprove the Premillennialist contention that all the land promise has not been fulfilled:

Wherefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt separate three cities for thee. And if the Lord thy

God enlarge thy coast, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, and give thee all the land which he promised to give unto thy fathers; If thou shalt keep all these commandments to do them, which I have commanded thee this day, to love the Lord thy God, and to walk ever in his ways; then shalt thou add three cities more for thee, beside these three: (Deut. 19:7-9).

Note that if God gave Israel “all the land which he promised...” then they were to add “three cities more,” to the three cities he had given them. In other words, if they received all the land there would be six cities of refuge.

If it can be shown that Israel was assigned six cities of refuge, then there is proof positive that Israel received “all the land which he promised to give unto thy fathers.” The simple, plain truth, is Israel was assigned six cities of refuge. Joshua listed Kedesh, Shechem, Kirjatharba, (Hebron), Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan as the six cities of refuge (Josh. 20:7-8). Israel, therefore, received all the land that God promised their fathers!

Relative to Israel receiving all the land promised them, words could not be clearer than stated in the following:

And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which He sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein (Josh. 21:43).

There failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel: all came to pass (Josh. 21:45).

Samuel informs us that David, “went to recover his border at the river Euphrates” (2 Sam.8:3). How could David recover this border if Israel never possessed it?

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The fact is, Israel did possess such. The land promise (the full extent) was fulfilled!

Nehemiah says God fulfilled His promise to Abraham (his seed) because He (God) “is righteous.”:

Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham: And foundest his heart faithful before thee, a madest and covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittite, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give it, I say, to his seed, **and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous:** (Neh. 9:7-8 (emp. mine, B.B.).

Another matter related to Israel occupying the land is that the “land promise” was conditional. God warned Israel that if they turned away from Him, then He would drive them off the good land that He had given them (see Deut. 6:10-15, 8:18-20, 30:17-18, Josh. 23:13).

But what about the land being given to Abraham’s seed “forever?” The word “forever” at times has a limited meaning. It means “forever” throughout an allotted time. Such terminology is used with reference to circumcision (Gen. 17:13), the Passover (Exod. 12:14), and the Levitical priesthood (Num. 25:13). Yet, all of these have been abolished.

What about the passages that refer to Israel being restored to their homeland? It is true that there are Old Testament prophecies foretelling Israel that they would be restored to their homeland. The prophecies, however, were made either prior to Israel’s captivity or while they were in captivity. All of these were fulfilled when Cyrus allowed all Israel that so desired, to go back to their

homeland (See 2 Chron. 36:22-23, Ezra 1:1-4). There isn't one promise, after the captivity, that the Jews will return to Israel as God's people. The fact is, God's people today are in the church. All, both Jew and Gentile, are reconciled to God in one body (Eph. 2:16), which is the church (Eph. 1:22-23).

The Kingdom To Be Set Up At The Revelation of Christ

Premillennialists have a materialistic view of the kingdom of Christ. It is thought by them that when Christ comes (after the rapture), He will set up a physical or material kingdom, which headquarters will be in literal Jerusalem.

But, did not Jesus come to establish His Kingdom the first time He came to earth? The Premillennialist answers, "indeed, He did, but the Jews rejected it and so Christ did not set it up, but will return at a later time to establish such." This is known as the "Postponement Theory." So instead of the Kingdom being established, Jesus set up His church instead and the kingdom will be established later.

The Bible knows no such thing as a "postponement" of the establishment of the kingdom. It was established right on divine schedule. In fact, Paul wrote, "but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law," (Gal. 4:4). Premillennialism implies that God was off in His timing! In reality, God however was right on time! The word of God clearly teaches that the Kingdom of Christ was set up on the day of Pentecost following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

Daniel, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, foretold that God would set up the Kingdom of Heaven during the days of Roman rule (Dan. 2:44). John the

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Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples all taught that the Kingdom was “ **at hand**,” during their life.

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, And saying, Repent ye: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt. 3:1-2).

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt. 4:17).

And as ye go, preach, saying, The Kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt. 10:7).

Question: Were all these mistaken? Did they preach something that would not actually take place? Keep in mind that all these were inspired and one of these preachers was Jesus Christ!

The fact is, the Kingdom of heaven was established. Jesus told His disciples that some of them standing in His very presence would see the Kingdom come with power before they died (Mark 9:1). Two important facts are noted in this passage. **First**, these disciples would not see death till the kingdom was established. **Second**, the kingdom of God would come with “power.” If a person can find when the “power” came, he will know when the kingdom came. The Bible also records that the “power” was to come when the Holy Spirit came. Jesus informed His apostles:

And , behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Keep in mind that the kingdom was to come “with power” (Mark 9:1), and the power was to come when the

Holy Spirit came (Acts 1:8). Therefore when the Holy Spirit came, the power came, and the kingdom came. But when did the Holy Spirit come? The Bible records the following:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them, **and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost**, and began to speak with other tongues, **as the Spirit gave them utterance** (Acts 2:1-4). (emp. mine)

The above passages prove that the kingdom came with power on the day of Pentecost. Until this time, the kingdom was future. However, after the day of Pentecost, the kingdom is spoken as a reality. The Christians in Colosse had been delivered from the power of darkness and had been translated “into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). How could the Christians in Colosse be “in the kingdom of His dear Son,” if the kingdom did not exist? The Hebrew writer affirmed that we have received “a kingdom which cannot be moved” (Heb. 12:28). How could we have received a kingdom if it doesn’t exist? And, how could this kingdom be moved to give way to a “millennial kingdom,” if we have received a kingdom which **cannot be moved**?

The Apostle John was “in the kingdom” as he penned the book of Revelation. As stated previously, the kingdom was established right on time. There was no postponement due to a rejection by the Jews. In fact, God knew all the time that the Messiah would be rejected. Isaiah, the Messianic Prophet, pictured Jesus as “despised and

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rejected of men” (Isa. 53:3). This being true, there was no “unexpected rejection” of Jesus.

When Jesus returns, He will deliver up the kingdom to the Father (I Cor. 15:24). The Premillennialists teach that Jesus is coming to “**set up**” the kingdom, whereas the word of God teaches that Christ will **deliver up the kingdom**. The church and the kingdom are the one and same institution. Jesus promised to build His church and gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:18-19), thereby showing they are the same institution. Peter used the keys of the kingdom to unlock the doors of the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:36-47). The new birth places one into the kingdom of God (John 3:5). Yet, the same new birth puts one into the church of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). Therefore, the church and the kingdom are the same. It is called the “church” (the called out) in relationship to the world, and it is called the “kingdom” as to its form of government.

Christ on David’s Throne

It is taught by the Premillennialist that Christ is not yet reigning on the throne of David. Although Christ came to occupy this throne, Premillennialists teach that the Jews rejected Him, therefore, He will come at a later time in which He will occupy David’s throne in Jerusalem.

Is Christ on David’s throne? Or, will Christ come back to earth later to occupy this throne? To understand the question and give a scriptural answer, one needs to see the promise as well as the fulfillment of Christ sitting on David’s throne.

David had a great desire to build a house for Jehovah (2 Sam. 7:1-5). God, however, would not permit David to build Him a house, but gave David the following promise:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee” (2 Sam. 7:12-15).

After David was asleep, God would set up his seed after him and establish his kingdom. This passage finds fulfillment in Christ. The reason we know this, is because the Hebrew writer quotes 2 Sam. 7:14 in Hebrews 1:5 and makes application to Jesus Christ. This promise to David was also continued throughout the Old Testament. The psalmist wrote: “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven” (Psa. 89:34-37).

Isaiah prophesied that Christ would be “upon the throne of David” (Isa. 9:6-7). Gabriel announced to Mary that she would have a Son, “and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his Father David” (Luke 1:32).

Promise Fulfilled

This promise to David found its fulfillment in the resurrected Christ. On the day of Pentecost Peter preached that such was fulfilled!

Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God

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had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither did his flesh see corruption (Acts 2:30-31).

Peter affirms that Christ was raised to sit on David's throne. Just as certainly as Christ was resurrected, He is sitting on David's throne! To state it another way, if Christ is not on David's throne, He is not resurrected. If, however, He is resurrected, He is on David's throne. Christ is resurrected, therefore, He is on David's throne.

Not to Reign on Earth

The Bible teaches that Christ will not reign on David's throne on the earth. Concerning Coniah, God through Jeremiah, stated:

O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah (Jer. 22:29-30).

Note the force of this promise. No man of the seed of Coniah shall prosper sitting upon the throne of David ruling in Judah. Jesus Christ is of the seed of Coniah (see Matt. 1:12 and Luke 3:27). Therefore, according to Jeremiah, Christ will not reign upon the throne of David **in Judah**. Christ is on the throne of David, however, not in Judah, but in heaven (Psm. 110:1).

Christ - A Priest While on the Throne

Zechariah foretold that while Christ was on the throne, He would also be a priest (Zech. 6:13-14). He would be a king and a priest at the same time. The Hebrew writer, however, affirms that Christ will not be

a priest upon the earth (Heb 8:4). If Christ is not a priest upon the earth, then neither is He to be a king upon the earth, for while He is priest, He is king at the same time. The Word of God affirms that Christ is our High Priest presently, and it is after the order of Melchisedec, and it is unchangeable (Heb. 7:1-28).

God's Promise to David Un-Altered

It is amazing that Premillennialist say that Christ came to set up His kingdom, reign on David's throne, but was rejected and therefore God altered (postponed), His kingdom and will establish it later. It is amazing in view of the fact that God said, "my covenant will I not break, **nor alter** the thing that is gone out of my lips" (Psm. 89:34). This is stated with reference to the promise made to David. God said He would not alter it, the Premillennialist says He did! God is correct, however, and the Premillennialists are wrong!

The Rapture

Perhaps one of the most popular tenants of Premillennialism is the doctrine of the "Rapture." Its advocates teach the secret coming of Christ whereupon all the dead saints will be resurrected and along with the living saints, will be raptured into heaven for a period of seven years. This "coming" of Christ is to be distinguished from the "revelation" of Christ. The "revelation" of Christ (it is taught), will be after the seven year rapture period. This coming of Christ for the saints is also referred to as the "first phase of the second coming."

Dispensationalists try to make a distinction between the "coming" and the "appearing" of Christ by different Greek words. It is argued that the "parousia" is the coming of Christ, (or the "rapture") then the "appearing" or "manifestation" of Christ (which

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supposedly takes place at the end of the rapture), is supposed to be described by the Greek word, “epiphany.” The truth of the matter, however, is that these words do not fit the Premillennialist use of them. For example, Paul wrote:

To the end that He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the **coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” (1 Thess. 3:13). (emp mine)

The word “coming” is the word “parousia” which is suppose to be when He comes “for” His saints. However, the text says He is coming (parousia) “with all His saints.” This “coming” (according to the rapture theory), should have been coming “**for**” his saints, not “**with** all his saints.” At times the “parousia” and the “epiphany” are used in the same passage. Paul wrote, “And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the **brightness** of his **coming**” (2 Thess. 2:8).(emp. mine) The word “brightness” is the word “epiphany”, and the word “coming” is the word “parousia.” This, of course, does not fit the rapture theory. These two expressions describe the same event!

In the rapture theory, the dead saints are resurrected 1007 years before the wicked. The Dispensationalist teaches that there will be 7 years of the rapture, followed by a 1000 year reign of Christ on earth. At the end of the 1000 year reign, the wicked will then be resurrected. This, however, contradicts plain passages that teach both the righteous and the wicked will be resurrected at the same hour.

Jesus taught:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his

voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29).

Jesus says all will be resurrected at the same “hour,” not 1007 years apart! Matthew 25:31-46 likewise teaches one resurrection for all (righteous and wicked). Jesus taught that both the righteous and the wicked will be resurrected on “ **the last day**” (John 11:24 and 12:48). Obviously, all will be resurrected and judged on “the last day!”

Perhaps, the passage most misused to teach the rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Herein, Paul is comforting the Christians in Thessalonica concerning the future of their dead loved ones in Christ. He says there is hope for them. Death was not the end of their existence. When Christ comes their bodies will be resurrected and they will be with Christ for ever. Premillennialists assume that the wicked are not resurrected and judged at that time. They, however, are wrong in their assumption! The dead in Christ being raised first are in contrast to the living saints not the resurrection of the wicked. The Bible clearly teaches that all are raised in the same “hour.” All will be judged on “the last day.” The Bible does not teach the rapture theory!

The One Thousand Year Reign

It is thought by Premillennialists that Revelation 20:1-6 teaches a literal 1000 year reign of Jesus Christ with His headquarters located in Jerusalem. It is highly interesting to see what all is read into Revelation 20 that isn't actually there. The purpose of the Bible student is to “exegete” (bring out) the text, not to “eisegete” (read into) the text. Premillennialists such

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as Jack Van Impe and Hal Lindsey are very skilled in the field of eisegesis (reading into) God's word.

The book of Revelation was written to the early Christians who were undergoing tremendous persecution. It is written in apocalyptic form which is highly figurative. The basic message is one of victory. It shows that through Christ, Christians will be triumphant.

Before reading what **is** found in Revelation twenty, it is enlightening to see what **is not** found in Revelation twenty.

Things Not Mentioned In Revelation 20:1-6

- (1) Christ's second coming is not mentioned.
- (2) The establishment of Christ's kingdom is not mentioned.
- (3) An earthly reign of Christ is not mentioned.
- (4) Christ coming to sit on David's throne is not mentioned.
- (5) We who are alive today are not mentioned in Revelation 20:1-6. John saw **disembodied spirits** who had been beheaded for the witnesses of Jesus.
- (6) The Jews' return to Palestine is not mentioned in Revelation 20:1-6.

All of the above things **not** mentioned in Revelation 20:1-6 are essential to the Premillennial scheme. Of course, skilled eisegetes can read all of those things (and more) right into the text. Strict warnings relative to adding to or taking away from God's word seem not to bother these manipulators of God's word.

What does one find in Revelation 20:1-6? One reads that Satan is bound for a thousand years. Consequently his power is curtailed. John also sees "the souls of them

that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus.” These “lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” This is called “the first resurrection.” Note carefully that this passage does not say that Christ reigned a thousand years, rather **they** lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. It doesn’t mention the beginning nor the end of Christ’s reign. If one worked with a person for ten years, it doesn’t imply that the person with whom he labored worked at the same job only ten years. Likewise, this text doesn’t imply that Christ reigns only a thousand years.

It is my conviction that the background of Revelation 20:4 is found in 6:9-11. In this passage John saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. They were crying out to the Lord that their blood might be avenged. They were given white robes and told to “rest yet for a little season until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.” Now in Revelation twenty they are reigning with Christ. The cause was victorious!

Conclusion

The speculative theory of Premillennialism is false. Many have been deceived by its promoters. When Christ comes the second time it will not be to set up His kingdom upon the earth. In fact, the earth and the works therein will be burned (2 Pet. 3:1-12). The kingdom will be delivered up to the Father at Christ’s coming (1 Cor. 15:24). The kingdom of Christ was established on the day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus Christ **is** King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim. 6:15). May we honor Him as such.

Chapter 20

Mormonism

Bill Bryant

It is indeed a great privilege and honor to be given this opportunity to contribute to this great lectureship. What lover of truth would not be thrilled at the opportunity to associate with such great men and participate in such a worthy endeavor to prepare precious souls for eternity. My humble gratitude is also expressed to Southaven's exemplary preacher, B.J. Clarke, and its great elders, Bill Pierce and Coleman Simpson, for the wonderful Christian example they set before me daily while I serve this congregation as one of its preachers. This lectureship is only one of many great efforts that come from their willing hands and compassionate hearts each year. This congregation is blessed indeed!

Commendation is also due B.J. Clarke, the lectureship director, in selecting this year's theme. In a day and age when tolerance is revered by so many in religion as the greatest virtue, it is encouraging to know that our brotherhood is blessed with such men of faith who are more concerned with the purity of the church than its popularity in the world. Some will view this book as an unkind attack on religious groups full of sincere people who long for heaven. But in reality, this book is sent out from love-filled hearts that truly seek heaven for its readers. Who would not think it criminal to fail to wake up a friend and neighbor asleep inside a

burning house. It is likewise tragic and criminal not to warn the same when they have embraced falsehood in religion that will doom them to eternal fire. False love withholds the truth for fear of offending. True love warns and pleads that souls might be saved.

Mormonism Defined

The religious cult known as Mormonism is one of the fastest growing religious groups in the world. The Mormon church has more than 26,000 active missionaries and is growing at the rate of 200,000 conversions each year.¹ Mormons are officially known as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Their headquarters is located in Salt Lake City, Utah. A second “Reorganized” group, much smaller in size and influence, has its headquarters in Independence, Missouri.

Mormons are generally respected in this country because of their zeal and high moral standard. They avoid alcohol and tobacco and are well known in recent years for their extensive “family oriented” advertising. A Mormon source recently indicated that between free Public Service TV ads and their paid advertising, including regional newspaper inserts and national magazine advertising, the Mormons expect to spend over 100 million dollars in annual advertising costs in the 1990’s to get multiple messages of their religion into every North American home.² They diligently strive to be perceived as a caring and sensitive church whose main goal is to do the Lord’s work in these latter days.

The cornerstone doctrine of the Mormon church is that Joseph Smith, Jr., was a prophet of God and that God revealed *The Book of Mormon* to him. Without this book, they claim, no one possesses the fullness of God’s revelation to mankind. *The Book of Mormon* is, supposedly, the record of some of the Israelite

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descendants, the Nephites, who migrated to North America after God stopped the work on the Tower of Babel. The book tells the story of how Christ came to America after His resurrection and planted the gospel in its fullness. The books that make up *The Book of Mormon* were supposedly written by prophets here in America. The prophet Mormon placed the story on brass and gold plates and buried them. Many centuries later in 1827, God directed Joseph Smith to find the plates and then to translate them into English with the help of a peepstone. The finished product, *The Book of Mormon*, serves as the foundation of the Mormon religion. Joseph Smith also produced, under the claim of inspiration, other books such as *The Pearl of Great Price* and *The Doctrines and Covenants*. These three books are considered to be a central part of the divine record and help to provide the Mormon standard of faith and practice for everyone.

Please do not allow the word “everyone” mentioned in the last sentence to go unnoticed. The Mormon religion does not ask to be considered as one of hundreds of religious groups who will make it to heaven on their own self-chosen path. They claim to be the true church that belongs to Christ. All other religious groups and beliefs are condemned and considered corrupt. Are they right? Is *The Book of Mormon* the completion of divine inspiration or is it the product of the fertile imagination of man? Is Joseph Smith the last great Prophet or is he another addition to a long list of impostors who have deceived the ignorant and misinformed? This is the challenge that stands before us in this chapter. In essence, the whole Mormon movement stands or falls on the answer to one basic question, “Is Joseph Smith truly a prophet of God?” Mormon leaders readily admit the implications of such a claim. Orson Pratt, a Mormon apostle, said:

This book must be either true or false...If false, it is one of the most cunning, wicked, bold, deep laid impositions ever palmed upon the world, calculated to deceive and ruin millions who will sincerely receive it as the Word of God, and will suppose themselves securely built upon the rock of truth until they are plunged with their families into hopeless despair. The nature of the message in *The Book of Mormon* is such that, if true, no one can possibly be saved and reject it; if false, no one can possibly be saved and receive it. Therefore, every soul in all the world is equally interested in ascertaining its truth or falsity...If, after a rigid examination, it be found an imposition, it should be extensively published to the world as such; the evidences and arguments on which the imposture was detected should be clearly and logically stated, that those who have been sincerely yet unfortunately deceived may perceive the nature of the deception and reclaimed, and that those who continue to publish the delusion may be exposed and silenced...by evidences adduced from Scripture and reason.³

It will be our desire to prove *The Book of Mormon* to be false in this chapter. The evidence is too overwhelming from Scripture and from reason. But let us first continue to define Mormonism and its many heresies.

Any religion willing to propagate claims that are far removed from plain Bible teaching must rely heavily on special revelation or else few would hear them who have any semblance of respect for God's Word. The Book of Mormon defends its existence with the following verses:

And because my words shall hiss forth—many

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of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible... Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible... Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written” (2 Nephi 29:3, 6, 10).

Thus, the door of special revelation is announced as open for Mormon leadership to supplement God’s Word. An overview of their fundamental doctrines will show how far removed Mormonism is from the typical error we usually confront in mainstream denominationalism. You will be astonished at their incredulous departures from plain Bible teaching. Ron Carlson and Ed Decker in their book, *Fast Facts on False Teachers*, provide an excellent overview of doctrines taught by various Mormon leaders over the years, all of whom claimed divine inspiration:

Mormonism teaches that trillions of planets scattered throughout the cosmos are ruled by countless gods who once were human like us. They say that long ago on one of these planets, to an unidentified god and one of his goddess wives, a spirit child named Elohim was conceived. This spirit child was later born to human parents who gave him a physical body. Through obedience to Mormon teaching, death, and resurrection, he proved himself worthy and was elevated to godhood as his father before him. Mormons believe that Elohim is their heavenly Father and that he lives with his many wives on a planet near a mysterious star called Kolob. Here the god of Mormonism and his wives, through endless celestial sex, produced billions

of spirit children. To decide their destiny, the head of the Mormon gods called a great heavenly council meeting. Both of Elohim's eldest sons were there, Lucifer and his brother Jesus. A plan was presented to build planet Earth, where the spirit children would be sent to take on mortal bodies and learn good from evil. Lucifer stood and made his bid for becoming a savior of this new world. Wanting the glory for himself, he planned to force everyone to become gods. Opposing the idea, the Mormon Jesus suggested giving man his freedom of choice, as on other planets. The vote that followed approved the proposal of the Mormon Jesus, who would become savior of the planet Earth. Enraged, Lucifer cunningly convinced the one-third of the spirits destined for Earth to fight with him and revolt. Thus Lucifer became the devil and his followers the demons. Sent to this world in spirit form, they would forever be denied bodies of flesh and bone. Those who remained neutral in the battle were cursed to be born with black skin. This is the Mormon explanation for the Negro race. The spirits that fought most valiantly against Lucifer would be born into Mormon families on planet Earth. These would be the lighter-skinned people, or "white and delightsome," as *The Book of Mormon* described them.

Early Mormon prophets taught that Elohim and one of his goddess wives came to Earth as Adam and Eve to start the human race. Thousands of year later, Elohim in human form once again journeyed to Earth from the star base Kolob, this time to have physical relations with the Virgin Mary in order to provide Jesus with a physical

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body. Mormon apostle Orson Hyde taught that after Jesus Christ grew to manhood he took at least three wives: Mary, Martha, and Mary Magdalene. Through these wives the Mormon Jesus supposedly fathered a number of children before he was crucified. Mormon founder Joseph Smith is supposedly one of his descendants. According to *The Book of Mormon*, after his resurrection Jesus came to the Americas to preach to the Indians, who the Mormons believe are really Israelites. Thus the Jesus of Mormonism established his church in the Americas as he had in Palestine. By the year 421 A.D., the dark-skinned Israelites, known as the Lamanites, had destroyed all of the white-skinned Nephites in a number of great battles. The Nephites' records were supposedly written on golden plates buried in the Hill Cumorah by Moroni, the last living Nephite.

About 1400 years later a young-treasure seeker named Joseph Smith, who was known for his tall tales, claimed to have uncovered the same gold plates near his home in upstate New York. He is now honored by Mormons as a prophet because he claimed to have had visions from the spirit world in which he was commanded to organize the Mormon Church... By maintaining a rigid code of financial and moral requirements, and through performing secret temple rituals for themselves and the dead, the Latter-Day Saints hope to prove their worthiness and thus become gods. The Mormons teach that everyone must stand at the final judgment before Joseph Smith, the Mormon Jesus, and Elohim. Those Mormons who are sealed in the eternal marriage

ceremony in LDS temples expect to become polygamous gods or their goddess wives in the Celestial Kingdom, rule over other planets, and spawn new families throughout eternity. The Mormons thank God for Joseph Smith, who claimed that he had done more for us than any other man, including Jesus Christ. The Mormons claim that he died as a martyr, shedding his blood for us so that we too may become gods.⁴

As you can readily see, Mormon doctrine goes far beyond the slick image of a quaint, quiet religious group that would like to help draw your family closer together by drawing strength from the Bible and its supplement, *The Book of Mormon*.

Mormon Beliefs Concerning God

Documentation will be a helpful tool in discussing these explosive issues with Mormons. The following summary statements are provided on the Mormon doctrine of God beginning with comments made by Joseph Smith in a funeral sermon in Nauvoo, Illinois on March 9, 1844, two months before he was killed. The sermon was heard by over 18,000 people. It was taken down by five Mormon scribes and published in an official Mormon publication:

God was once as we are now, an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens. I say if you were to see him today you would see him like a man in form like yourselves in all the person and image of man. I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil. God was once a man like us

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and dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ did, and you have got to learn to be gods yourselves the same as all gods before you. Namely by going from one small degree to another, from a small capacity to a greater one.⁵

Brigham Young also said, “The Lord created you and me for the purpose of becoming gods like himself. We are created to become gods like unto our father in heaven.”⁶ Page 577 of the book, *Mormon Doctrine*, also contains a quote concerning Brigham Young’s view of the Godhead:

Gods exist and we had better strive to become one with them... A plurality of gods exist, indeed this doctrine of plurality of gods is so comprehensive and glorious that it reaches out and embraces every exalted personage. Those who attain exaltation are gods.

In the event that some think this was a doctrine believed initially and later rejected, please note the comment that appeared on September 9, 1989 in the *Church News*, the official weekly news publication of the Mormon church:

The prophet Joseph Smith also made a significant contribution to the world’s limited understanding of the Godhead. Perhaps one doctrine that most distinguishes Latter-Day Saints from other denominations is the conviction that all worthy men and women can become gods and goddesses.

The following quotes are also provided to document the teaching of the Mormon church on the concept of God:

Remember that God our heavenly Father was

once a child and mortal like we are, and rose step by step in the scale of progress, and in the school of advancement has moved forward and overcome until he has arrived at the point where he is now.⁷

The universe is filled with vast numbers of intelligences, and we further learn that Elohim is God simply because all of these intelligences honor and sustain him as such—if He should ever do anything to violate the conference or ‘sense of justice’ of these intelligences, they would promptly withdraw their support, and the “power” of God would disintegrate—He would cease to be God.⁸

In the heaven where our spirits were born, there are many Gods, each of whom has his own wife or wives, which were given to him previous to his redemption while yet in his mortal state.⁹

The appointment of Jesus to be the Savior of the world was contested by one of the sons of God. He was called Lucifer. This spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the Savior of mankind.¹⁰

Jesus was the bridegroom at the marriage of Cana of Galilee... We say it was Jesus Christ who was married, to be brought into relation whereby he could see his seed.¹¹

It needs to be mentioned that not all of the doctrines set forth by early Mormon leadership are presently embraced. A case in point is the Adam-God doctrine that Brigham Young authored and advanced. He introduced

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the doctrine in a sermon that was delivered on April 9, 1852. He said:

Now hear it, O inhabitants of the earth, Jew and Gentile, Saint and sinner! When our father Adam came into the Garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is Michael, the Archangel, the Ancient of Days! about whom holy men have written and spoken—He is our father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do.¹²

Brigham Young taught this doctrine for many years as did the Mormon church throughout the 19th century. However, present day Mormons usually deny this doctrine. The “Living Prophet” and LDS president, Spencer W. Kimball, referred to it as false doctrine and warned the church against it. He said:

We warn you against the dissemination of doctrines which are not according to the scriptures and which are alleged to have been taught by some of the General Authorities of past generations. Such, for instance, is the Adam-God theory. We denounce that theory and hope that everyone will be cautioned against this and other kinds of false doctrine.¹³

Mormons prefer that people believe that Brigham Young was misquoted and misunderstood, but such is not the case. He continued to preach this doctrine for over twenty years. He was quoted as such in a number of Mormon publications and had ample opportunity to correct the misquotations. He failed to do so simply because he

believed this doctrine to be true. The Adam-God doctrine devised by Brigham Young led to a number of other false doctrines such as the teaching that Adam was the literal father of Jesus as a result of sex relations with the virgin Mary.

Other Significant Mormon Beliefs

Space considerations prevent us from discussing fully the broad range of peculiar beliefs that are distinctive to Mormonism. However, we do want to include several comments regarding the founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, and then document his teaching on polygamy. When studying the origin of some of the well-known denominations in America, one quickly notes the tendency on the part of people to hold tremendous respect and admiration for their religion's founder. This reverence and respect, however, pales in comparison to that rendered to Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon church. Joseph F. Smith, the nephew of Joseph Smith, Jr., wrote that which has been recorded in the book, *Doctrines of Salvation*:

The day will come—and it is not far distant, either—when the name of the Prophet Joseph Smith will be coupled with the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Son of God, as his representative, as his agent whom he chose, ordained and set apart to lay anew the foundations of the Church of God on the earth.

Some might ponder what would lead him to make such a preposterous statement. Perhaps if one was to read Joseph Smith's own inflated view of himself, it would make sense. Joseph Smith boasted on one occasion:

I have more to boast of than ever any man had.

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I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole have stood by me. Neither Paul, John, Peter, nor Jesus ever did it. I boast that no man ever did such a work as I. The followers of Jesus ran away from Him; but the Latter Day Saints never ran away from me yet.¹⁴

It is hard to imagine that such words could flow from the pen or the lips of anyone who claimed any familiarity at all with the Bible. The Bible shows God using men who were clothed in humility who possessed a confidence based on God's strength, not their own. It is inconceivable to me that God would use one filled with such pride and arrogance to complete His revelation for mankind and be the one through whom He would lead His church in the world. Thankfully, evidence clearly shows that Joseph Smith is not a prophet of God, but an imposter.

Mormonism is also well known for its practice of polygamy in its early history. Tracing its development is indicative of how problems are resolved when a specific Mormon practice meets formidable opposition. Most Mormons believe that Joseph Smith received this doctrine by divine revelation. This claimed divine revelation, entitled, "*A Revelation on the Eternity of the Marriage Covenant, Including Plurality of Wives,*" is recorded in *Doctrines and Covenants* 132:1-66. The following quotes outline the doctrine:

For behold! I reveal unto you a new and everlasting covenant; and if ye abide not that covenant, they ye are damned; for no one can reject this covenant, and be permitted to enter into my glory (132:4).

If any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent; and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then he is justified; he cannot commit adultery, for they are given unto him (132:61).

And if he have ten virgins given unto him by law, he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him, and they are given unto him, therefore he is justified (132:62).

Polygamy was also embraced by Mormon leaders who followed Joseph Smith, namely Brigham Young and Orson Pratt. This doctrine was certainly not always popular with Mormon women and even less popular with outsiders. Eventually the practice was suspended when a “revelation” was received by the Mormon President, Wilford Woodruff. Joseph F. Smith recorded the event:

While the Saints were in the midst of all these difficulties and afflictions, President Wilford Woodruff sought the Lord for relief. In answer to his earnest pleadings and constant petitions, the word of the Lord came to him in a revelation suspending the practice of plural marriages.¹⁵

Once again we see in Mormonism a radical change from the manner in which God deals with those who desired to change His divine will as seen in the Bible. In the Bible, from beginning to end, we see mankind commanded to conform to the wishes and desires of God. God knew what was best and, therefore, did not have to change His mind. Latitude was not given to accommodate unwillingness on the part of any people.

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Not so with the history of Mormonism. “Revelations” were received on the practice of polygamy, and a number of other controversial matters, until men could be content with the answer. People were expected to ignore contradictory revelations.

There are a number of other Mormon doctrines that amaze and astonish because they are so far removed from plain Bible teaching. It is not necessary, however, to spend an inordinate amount of time hacking at the branches of Mormonism. The root doctrine of the tree of Mormonism is that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that God revealed The Book of Mormon to him. Therefore, when Joseph Smith is defeated, his religion is defeated.

Mormonism Defeated

There are a number of arguments that may be offered that will lead to the demise of Mormonism. Even though many of their specific doctrines can be shown to be in direct contradiction to the proven standard of authority, the Bible, we will limit our discussion to major arguments that pertain directly to Joseph Smith’s claim to be God’s prophet and *The Book of Mormon* to be God’s special revelation for the church in the latter days.

1. The Book of Mormon should be rejected because there is no need for it. Mormonism operates under the basic premise that the Bible is not a complete and sufficient revelation from God. They affirm that God has revealed additional truth to certain prophets in modern times. All must accept this truth to be pleasing to Him. G. B. Hancock clearly states the issue in these words:

We have before us another book that claims to exist by virtue of inspiration from God. It’s called the Book of Mormon. What have we in it? Inspiration, as we have seen, is not at the

option of man but governed wholly by the will of God. If *The Book of Mormon* be an inspired production there must be a purpose in the economy of grace that it was designed to accomplish—a purpose above and beyond what could be accomplished by the inspiration afforded Christ and the apostle...

If *The Book of Mormon* answers any purpose in the divine economy, it must connect at some point with the Bible, and at that point there must be an incompleteness, a vacuum, that could not have been filled without its appearance. If there be such point it must be found in the New Testament, for there is not a prophecy, an allegory or type in the Old Testament, that directs the mind of man beyond what we have in Christ... Where in the New Testament economy, the economy that has the provisions for that better hope, is there a vacuum to be filled by a production through Joseph Smith? Echo answers— where?

Revelation was progressive, never retrogressive. The inferior surrendered to and was followed by the superior. Mormons claim that a new development was made through Joseph Smith; hence that with him a new period began. This being so it must be a progressive, a superior one. This being true God's will did not reach it's perfection in Christ.¹⁶

Knowing this assessment by G. B. Hancock to be entirely true, Mormons need to be asked the key question, "Do you truly believe the Bible?" They will more than likely answer in the affirmative, but the very existence of the Book of Mormon denies the claims of

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the Bible. What claims? The Bible claims that God's will attained its perfection in Christ and that revelation was completed with the New Testament.

The apostle Paul wrote of Christ's preeminence in the first three chapters of the book of Colossians. In Col. 1:14-23, he wrote of Christ's preeminence relative to God and creation. Relative to God He is the image of the invisible God (1:15). Relative to the Universe He is creator (1:16), preexistent (1:17a) and sustainer (1:17b). Relative to the church, His spiritual creation, He is its head (1:18). Relative to deity, He is the fullness of the Godhead (1:19; 2:9). Relative to man and sin, He is the reconciler (1:20-23). Paul proceeds by identifying Christ as the mystery of God revealed (Col. 1:24 -2:2). He is also the treasury of wisdom and knowledge (2:3). There is no need to search any further than Jesus Christ, the fountain of wisdom.

A number of warnings are then given throughout the remainder of Colossians 2 to the Christian not to be deceived by false religion. The temptation is to think that Christ is not sufficient. The key lesson revealed in the book of Colossians is that we are complete in Him (Col. 2:10). Philosophy can add nothing to the completeness in Christ (2:8). No powers are available that can conquer the Christian because Christ has been victorious over them (2:15). There is nothing that the law of Moses can contribute (2:16-17). Angel worship nor modern revelation can add a thing to the fullness available in Christ (2:18-19). Nor is the Christian helped by following a life of asceticism (2:20-23). Knowing this, the Christian will place the very purpose and affection of his life on things above, where Christ is (Col. 3:1-4).

The book of Colossians has as its theme the fullness of the Godhead summed up in Christ Jesus. The book of Ephesians discusses as its theme the fullness of Christ in the church. Considering this evidence alone would be

enough to conclude rightly that there is no vacuum in the New Testament that would warrant additional revelation. Beyond that is the weight of New Testament Scripture that shows the all-sufficiency of Scripture.

Jude 3 admonishes the Christian by saying:

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

The Greek word translated “once” in the last phrase of the verse is defined by Thayer as “once, one time... never need repetition,” and “once for all.” Therefore, the point Jude makes is that Christians should earnestly contend for the faith which has been delivered to the saints “once for all times.” This passage was written in the 1st century, over 1700 years before Joseph Smith claimed special revelation to complement the standard of faith. Faith did not include *The Book of Mormon* then; neither does faith include it now.

2 Peter 1:2-3 tells us:

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.

This passage clearly shows that **all things** needed to live the Christian life are available through the knowledge of Jesus **that was present** when the New Testament was written. No further revelation was

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needed then. Nor is any required now. God's Word is sufficient!

Jesus promised the apostles during His public ministry that the Holy Spirit would come and "guide them into all truth" (John 16:13). This promise was fulfilled beginning on the Day of Pentecost as recorded for us in Acts 2. A standard for the early church was needed and was provided. By the time the 1st century was complete, the New Testament had been provided. Of that divine standard Paul wrote in 2 Tim. 3:16-17:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

If the Scripture available to us in the Bible is sufficient to make, if followed, the man of God "perfect," what need is there of additional revelation? There is none! The Bible is a perfect guide, complete in every way!

To the surprise of many in religion, God has issued a severe warning to those who would tamper with His divinely inspired, perfect pattern of faith and practice. Paul wrote of it in Galatians 1:8-9:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

It is a serious charge to tamper with any portion of God's perfect standard. This is so because of the truth contained therein knowing that the greatest mind of the

Universe is behind it. It is what man needs to resolve his greatest problem, the problem of sin. Every word is placed in the Scriptures for a reason and is intended to remain there to accomplish its desired end. To change or alter it in any way presupposes the change agent believes he knows of something better. He does not. Man's thoughts are of no comparison to God's thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9). Regretfully, changing the message of the New Testament will bring about a change in the way that people will respond to God's marvelous plan of redemption that has been summed up so well in Christ. Relaxing commands will grant freedom to sin. Adding commands will place one's time and emphasis on things unprofitable to the child of God. God would have all know that to dare to preach any other gospel will result in a state of condemnation for the offender.

Mormonism is defeated, first of all, because there is no need for additional revelation. God has provided the world with a pattern that must be followed as long as people will require God's gracious and merciful plan of redemption. 3,000 souls were saved the first day it was revealed. It continued to save others in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then to the uttermost parts of the earth as it followed the Lord's plan (Acts 1:8). If it was sufficient to save souls in the first century, then why is it not sufficient now?

2. Joseph Smith should be rejected because he is a false prophet. God has provided an unerring test for His people to determine the authenticity of a prophet. It is found in Deut. 18:20-22:

But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in

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the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

Please note that it required only one false prophecy to certify an individual as a false prophet. By Old Covenant law, the false prophet was worthy of death for presuming to speak that which God had not authored. A true prophet of God was not allowed the option of missing a certain percentage of his prophecies, he had to be correct every time. The Lord God is certainly capable of instilling men with the truth every time the situation calls for it. Let us see if Joseph Smith's claim to be a prophet meets the standard for a prophet as defined by the Scriptures.

a. Joseph Smith prophesied that the Mormon church would have their own city in a land that flowed with milk and honey, the New Jerusalem. A temple would also be built in this holy city. Supposedly by revelation, Joseph Smith determined the exact spot in Independence, Missouri. He prophesied that all of it would be built in his generation.¹⁷ The prophecy did not come to pass. There is no New Jerusalem today. In fact, the headquarters for the Mormon church is not even found in Missouri, it is found in Salt Lake City, Utah.

b. Joseph Smith prophesied that a boarding house, to be called "Nauvoo House" would be built for weary travelers that they might find health and safety while they contemplated the word of the Lord. This house was to

belong to the Smith family “forever and ever.”¹⁸ The prophecy did not come to pass. Joseph Smith was killed in 1844. The Mormons were driven from Nauvoo and the house no longer belongs to the Smith family.

c. Joseph Smith and the Mormons did not fare well with governmental authorities throughout most of the 1800’s. There was constant conflict and tension. As a result, a number of Smith’s prophecies were aimed toward these governments. Smith prophesied on May 18, 1843:

Unless the United States redress the wrongs committed upon the Saints in the State of Missouri and punish the crimes committed by her officers, that in a few years the government will be overthrown and wasted, and there will not be so much as a potsherd left.”¹⁹

The government still stands which makes Joseph Smith a false prophet. Our national government may fall eventually, perhaps even in the lifetime of some living in the church today, but it will not fall as a result of discord with the Mormon church.

We also need to note the spirit of Joseph Smith regarding his adversaries in comparison with the spirit of Christ in the face of persecution. Jesus taught His followers in Matt. 5:44:

Love our enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.

Joseph Smith exhorted his followers to do the opposite in a sermon in Nauvoo, IL:

If any citizen of Illinois say we shall not have our

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rights, treat them as strangers and not friends, and let them go to hell and be damned! If we have to give up our chartered rights, privileges, and freedom, which our fathers fought, bled, and died for, and which the Constitution of the United States, and of this state, guarantee unto us, we will do it only at the point of the sword and bayonet.²⁰

How can one imagine, for even a moment, that God would use such a one to be a leader of His church in the latter days who would cry out for such war and bloodshed?

d. A final Smith prophecy that we will consider deals with “moon inhabitants.” A devout and dedicated Mormon associate of Joseph Smith, Oliver B. Huntington, quoted Joseph Smith describing his revelation concerning the inhabitants on the moon:

The inhabitants of the moon are more of a uniform size than the inhabitants of the earth, being about six feet in height. They dress very much like the Quaker style and are quite general in style, or the one fashion of dress. They live to be very old; coming generally near a thousand years.²¹

Needless to say, this prophecy has been proved wrong. Joseph Smith is, therefore, a false prophet. He has failed repeatedly to pass God’s simple test for determining the authenticity of a prophet. He should be rejected by all!

3. The Mormon record should be rejected because of the vast number of errors, contradictions and absurd statements contained therein.

Does the Mormon divine record (the fundamental books are *The Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price*) bear the marks of divine inspiration? What are the results when these standards of Mormon authority are held to the same standard of examination and trial that the Bible successfully meets? The conclusion from overwhelming evidence is that the Book of Mormon does not meet the criteria of inspiration.

a. The Bible we know has come from God. *The Book of Mormon*, it is claimed, also came from God. If God is the author of both, they must harmonize. This is not the case. There are a number of contradictions between the Bible and *The Book of Mormon*. For example, the Bible teaches that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1). *The Book of Mormon* teaches that Jesus was born of Mary at Jerusalem (Alma 7:10). Even though Bethlehem is in close proximity to Jerusalem, they are still not the same. It is not the nature of those who penned the Scriptures under inspiration to only be close. It was essential that they be 100% accurate in everything.

The Bible teaches that the name Christian was first given to the Lord's disciples in Antioch (Acts 11:26). This was approximately 40-43 A.D. *The Book of Mormon* contradicts this by stating that the wearing of the name Christian occurred much earlier (Alma 46:15). The footnote in *The Book of Mormon* at the bottom of the page where Alma 46:15 is found gives the date at 73 B.C. Whom do you believe? Luke or Joseph Smith?

The Bible teaches that there were three hours of darkness at the death of Christ (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). *The Book of Mormon* teaches that there were three days of darkness (1 Nephi 19:10). Whom do you believe? The New Testament writers or Joseph Smith?

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If both were written under inspiration, there should not be a contradiction.

One key area of contradiction between Mormonism and the Bible is in the concept of the Godhead. Mormonism teaches that God was subject to the law of progression, that certain powers were developed over time which made Him God. Even though this does seem to contradict some of his early writings, Joseph Smith eventually embraced this view. This, of course, contradicts a number of Bible passages. Gen. 21:33 refers to God as “the everlasting God.” Psalm 90:2 exclaims, “from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.” Mormonism teaches that God is a physical being. Joseph Smith wrote, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s.”²¹ But the Bible teaches that God is a spirit (John 4:24) and that spirits do not possess flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). Brigham Young taught that Christ was conceived as a consequence of a sexual union between Adam-God and Mary. This contradicts the plain teachings of Matthew 1 and Luke 1. Mormonism endorses the doctrine of polytheism, the belief in many gods. Apostle Orson Pratt wrote, “In the Heavens where our spirits were born, there are many Gods.”²² But the Bible teaches that God is one (Deut. 6:4; James 2:19). Contradiction after contradiction is found between the Bible and Mormon standards of written authority. Both cannot be true. The Bible has withstood critical examination and instilled faith in its readers. Mormon standards of authority fail on both counts.

b. Joseph Smith identified *The Book of Mormon* as “the most correct of any book on earth.”²³ If this was true, then why have thousands of changes been made in grammar, punctuation and word structure since the first edition was printed in 1830. The Reorganized LDS Church has the corrected handwritten manuscript that

went to the printer and also microfilms of part of the original manuscript as dictated by Joseph Smith. A comparison of just one page of material revealed eighty changes between the two manuscripts. They estimate the total number of changes to reach as high as 35,000. Joseph F. Smith, sixth president of the Mormon church, declared:

Joseph did not render the writing on the gold plates into the English language in his own style of language as many people believe, but every word and every letter was given to him by the gift and power of God.²⁴

It is inconceivable to me that anyone would think that God would author something containing thousands of errors that would have to be edited and corrected by man. The Bible depicts a God whose wisdom cannot be compared with man's (Isa. 55:8-9).

c. Other absurdities abound in a critical analysis of *The Book of Mormon* that help to prove its earthly origin. For example, *The Book of Mormon* is guilty of extensive plagiarism of the King James Version of the Bible. Mosiah 14 is an exact reproduction of the KJV translation of Isaiah 53. It even includes italicized words from the KJV without the italics being so indicated in *The Book of Mormon*. It is amazing to see phrase after phrase of "the King's English" used in a book that was supposedly written 1200 years before the KJV was produced. It is also surprising to see the inclusion of the French word *adieu* used in Jacob 7:27 of *The Book of Mormon* knowing that it was supposed to be written by a Jew in Egyptian hieroglyphics in the fifth century B.C.

d. Finally, archaeology has been a great friend of the Bible establishing further evidence of its heavenly

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origin. The same cannot be said of *The Book of Mormon*. William Brodie Crouch states the situation forcefully when he writes:

It is strange that if *The Book of Mormon* be indeed an ancient record of inhabitants upon the American continent, as the book claims, archaeology has not been able to confirm its truth as has been true of the biblical record. To date the most that can be said is that archaeology has proved the land to be inhabited—and faithful Mormons continue to hope that some shred of directly confirming evidence will one day break into view. There has been no scroll, parchment, nor plate discovered bearing the name of one single person or place mentioned in *The Book of Mormon*. Many names have been uncovered, to be sure, but they are the names of the Incas, the Mayas, and other primitive tribes. They are not the names *The Book of Mormon* says were used by the ancient peoples at the time.²⁵

The Bible has been served well over the years by archaeology. It has provided clear evidence of the Bible's divine origin. The lack of such for *The Book of Mormon* is one more nail in the coffin in its claim of divine inspiration.

We shall conclude our comments by reviewing again a profound statement by Orson Pratt, a Mormon apostle, regarding *The Book of Mormon*:

This book must be either true or false... The message in *The Book of Mormon* is such that, if true, no one can possibly be saved and reject it; if false, no one can possibly be saved and receive it. Therefore, every soul in all the world

is equally interested in ascertaining its truth or If, after a rigid examination, it be found an imposition, it should be extensively published to the world as such; the evidences and arguments on which the imposture was detected should be clearly and logically stated, that those who have been sincerely yet unfortunately deceived may perceive the nature of the deception and reclaimed, and that those who continue to publish the delusion may be exposed and silenced...by evidences adduced from Scripture and reason.²⁶

This invitation to investigate *The Book of Mormon* and Joseph Smith, its author, has been taken seriously. I am well aware that the eternal destiny of souls are at stake. Much more could be said, but enough evidence has been presented to help one answer truthfully the question, “Is *The Book of Mormon* from God or man?” *The Book of Mormon* is the product of the fertile imagination of man (or perhaps men). God did not provide for future revelation beyond the Bible. God’s plan was that all things were to be summed up in Christ. Christ finished every aspect of the work that He intended to do. His words, as recorded in the New Testament, will save and strengthen souls, if obeyed. His words will one day be our final judge. We have endeavored to set forth available evidence plainly, yet with firmness. True love directs us to warn men when their religion is built on shifting sand. Those who seek the truth will not be disappointed.

Endnotes

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3 Orson Pratt, **Divine Authority of the Book of Mormon**, introduction, a series of pamphlets published in 1850-51. Quoted by Arthur Budvarson, **The Book of Mormon—True or False?** (Concord, California: Pacific Pub. Co., 1959).

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6 **Journal of Discourses**, volume 10, page 223.

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8 W. Cleon Skousen (BYU Professor & Founder of Mormon-based Freeman Institute), **The First 2,000 Years**, page 355.

9 Bruce McConkie (Apostle), **Mormon Doctrine**, page 516.

10 Milton R. Hunter (First Council of Seventy), **The Gospel Through the Ages**, page 15.

11 Orson Hyde (Apostle), **Journal of Discourses**, volume 2, page 82.

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13 **Church News**, October 9, 1876

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15 Joseph Fielding Smith, **Essentials in Church History**, 493-494.

16 G. B. Hancock, **Mormonism Exposed** (Shreveport, LA: Lambert Book House, 1969) 8-10.

17 **Doctrine and Covenants** 57:1-3, 84:1-5, 101:20, 124:51-52.

18 **Doctrine and Covenants** 124:56-60.

19 **The Desert News**, September 24, 1856, Vol. 6, No. 29. See also Nephi Lowell Morris, **The Prophecies of Joseph Smith And Their Fulfillment** (Salt Lake City, UT: Desert Book Company) 113, 115.

20 **Journal of Discourses**, Vol. II, 165-166.

21 **Doctrines and Covenants** 130:22

22 Orson Pratt, **The Seer**, (1853-1854), I, 37.

23 **History of the Church**, Vol. IV, p. 461, cited by Scott, p. 55.

24 **Journal of Oliver B. Huntington**, p. 168. Typed copy at Utah State Historical Society.

25 Crouch, 46-47.

26 Orson Pratt, **Divine Authority of the Book of Mormon**, introduction, a series of pamphlets published in 1850-51. Quoted by Arthur Budvarson, **The Book of Mormon—True or False?** (Concord, CA: Pacific Publishing Co., 1959).

Chapter 21

Seventh Day-Adventism

Gary McDade

Seventh-day Adventism is a smaller part of the larger subject of denominationalism. Of the “Dangerous ‘Isms” confronting the church of Christ today, none surpasses the threat posed by denominationalism. Lack of Bible study which produces faith and conviction about God’s eternal truth has yielded timidity and cowardice among Christians to the extent that a denominational proponent can knock them over with a feather.

In large measure today brethren do not want gospel preachers to call denominational names and refute denominational error. When this degree of departure from the truth surfaces the attending reason is all too apparent. Our own brethren believe that one may have hope of salvation outside of the body of Christ which is the church of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23). Most Christians have become so refined and proper that they assert that any confrontation with error can be avoided. Denominational error may be studied by the new converts’ class in a back hallway of the church building or the subject may be taken up in private, but the pulpit cannot ring out the clarion call of the gospel in defending the truth and defeating error for fear of offending visitors, family members, or friends.

The reality of the matter is that no significant defense of the truth is being given in most congregations.

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There is no refutation of the denominational errors that are invading the church in those congregations where the preacher is prohibited from being precise in his exposition of Sacred Scripture.

Franklin Camp viewed denominationalism as “one of the major problems of our day.” He wrote:

The hope of the world today and of the generations of tomorrow is the simple religion of Christ, honestly believed and sincerely practiced. Yet in spite of this need, one of the major problems of our day is the matter of denominationalism. It is next to impossible to get people to think about religion without thinking of it in the framework of denominationalism. One has to fight for his life to keep from being “penned up in some denomination.” Some in the church have given over to denominational theology and are now saying that the church is just another denomination. But I refuse to give up the fight and be “pushed into a church of Christ denomination.” Some brethren (?) may join one and preach for one but I want no part of it.¹

G.K. Wallace was a highly respected defender of the truth. He wrote regarding denominationalism:

In this day and age one not only needs to know the truth but he also needs to know the arguments made by denominationalists. To be a successful worker one needs to know how to meet the objections offered against the gospel of Christ. It is a fact that no church has ever gone wrong that was properly indoctrinated. Too, no church has ever gone right that was not properly grounded in the truth. It is very vital

therefore that church workers be guided in the study of the problems that they will face.²

In a series of addresses delivered in the Music Hall in Houston, Texas in January of 1946, Foy E. Wallace, Jr. presented material refuting the dogmas of Catholicism and Protestant denominationalism. In those lectures he said:

The subjects that have had to do with denominational dogmas and doctrines involve issues and controversies that have been debated through the years; but concerning which the younger generation has not had the advantage of the thorough indoctrination, such as had our fathers before us, under the early preachers of the church, preachers under whom some of you were reared, and under whose preaching I was tutored. They indoctrinated us. We knew what it was all about. I am firmly convinced that the rising generation should have the opportunity of hearing these issues thoroughly discussed and debated, that they may be anchored to the truth and able to meet “every wind of doctrine” in modern forms of error.

I was brought up under the preaching of men in Texas well known to many of you, who baptized many more people than are being baptized today; men who debated; men who “called names,” whether in the polemics of debate or preaching in the pulpit. They were men of fervor and faith. We should not forget their crusading spirit! I want to see their spirit revived. Like the spirit of Elijah in John the Baptist, and the spirit of Huss in Luther, I want to see the spirit

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of the early gospel preachers revived in the young men of today. They put power in their preaching. They moved men. They did not preach sermonettes; they were not preacherettes.

I can remember when preachers wore cuffs attached to the sleeve by a device of some sort, stiffly laundered cuffs. That way the preacher could wear the same shirt the whole meeting, just change the cuffs! In these difficult days of the rationing of laundry it would be rather convenient for that system to be in vogue. But some of the early preachers preached with such force that they would send a stiffly laundered cuff sailing out over the crowd! It is a bold contrast with some of the Milquetoast elocution heard in pulpits today.

A young man once came to A.J. McCarty, and asked him how to go about making a preacher. Jack McCarty said, in all the bluntness that characterized him, “Young man, get brimful and running over with the word of God and it will come out”! And it will come out. It may be spontaneous combustion, but it will “bust” everything it hits. That is the preaching needed today, rather than this “go away around by the Joneses” sort of a preaching; this speak softly, tread lightly, step carefully, kind of preaching. I do not believe in croaking out insults against people, but I do believe in the kind of preaching that draws the issue, and draws the blood when the occasion requires it.³

One of the last times Foy E. Wallace, Jr. preached was at the Knight Arnold church of Christ in Memphis.

In one of his sermons that week he expressed concern for the younger generation of preachers coming up in much the same way he did thirty years before as reflected in the above quotation. Brother Wallace saw the need to thoroughly teach or indoctrinate Christians with the truth. He devoted three hours to his closing lesson that week during the Memphis School of Preaching lectureship, and it was a masterpiece.

The Southaven church of Christ is to be commended for presenting this series of lectures on “Dangerous ‘Isms” confronting the church today. The apostle Paul wrote, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8).

Seventh-day Adventism needs to be studied because it presents a significant religious influence. The *Adventist News Network* claims, “Seventh-day Adventists are considered to be among the world’s fastest growing denominations.” Their website says they number almost five million around the world. The Seventh-day Adventist church operates 155 hospitals and sanitariums around the world. Additionally, it operates 276 dispensaries and clinics. They claim that in a recent year nearly six million people were treated at Seventh-day Adventist facilities.

Seventh-day Adventists operate the largest Protestant school system in the world. They have approximately 4,400 kindergarten and elementary schools, 927 secondary schools, and 92 colleges, specialized schools, and university education on every level. Total enrollment in a recent year was 657,035. 185 out of the 215 countries listed by the United Nations have a Seventh-day Adventist presence. They communicate their message in 604 languages. They have fifty publishing houses that print material in 175 languages. Seventh-day Adventists boast more than 24,000 organized churches around the world.

The Origin of Seventh-Day Adventism

Seventh-day Adventism originated from the prophetic studies of William Miller. Miller was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in 1782 and reared in Low Hampton, New York. As a young man, Miller was a total skeptic. He rejected the Bible as the inspired Word of God. After a term in the army he became a farmer and a respected community member. In 1816, ostensibly converted from his skepticism, Miller began to study Old Testament prophetic passages that dealt with elements of time.

In 1818, he incorrectly concluded from Daniel 9:24-27 which contains Daniel's seventy weeks that Christ would return to the earth between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844. Miller did not, however, publicly avow his views until 1831 and then upon the urging of a friend. His peculiar views obtained opportunities for him to speak. In 1834, he became a full time Baptist preacher whose hobby was prophecy and the second coming of Christ.

The Millerites, as his followers were then called, expected the second coming of Christ March 21, 1843, but when it did not occur they expected it March 21, 1844. Missing it twice, with Miller's approval a Millerite leader named Samuel S. Snow began to promote the view known as "the seventh month movement." This was the idea that the return of Christ would indeed occur in 1844 but instead of in the spring it would happen on October 22, 1844, to correspond with the Jewish day of atonement for that year. The Jewish day of atonement was the tenth day of the seventh month, the month Tishri. As the date approached groups of Millerites gathered in homes and meeting places expecting the return of Christ. When Christ did not return the Millerites were devastated. October 22, 1844, is referred to by them as "The Great Disappointment." William Miller lived and died a Baptist. Although the

admitted founder of Seventh-day Adventism, he was never a Seventh-day Adventist. Miller died in 1849 confessing his miscalculations and acknowledging his disappointment but never recanting his view that the second coming was imminent.⁴

The seventh-day feature of Seventh-day Adventism emerged from the influence of Joseph Bates. Joseph Bates was a leader in Seventh-day Adventism from 1839. After reading an article on the Sabbath by Thomas M. Preble entitled *Hope of Israel* written February 28, 1845, Bates believed that the Sabbath should be observed by Christians. The Sabbath day emphasis was borrowed from the Seventh-day Baptists. A Seventh-day Baptist named Rachel Oakes challenged an Adventist preacher named Frederick Wheeler to keep all the commandments, including the fourth. Wheeler accepted the observance of the Sabbath in March of 1844. Bates met with Wheeler and other Adventist leaders in Washington, New Hampshire and became more resolute in his position on Sabbath keeping. These were the first Adventists to promote Sabbath day observance.

Three Millerite Adventist groups headed by Hiram Edson, Joseph Bates, and Ellen G. White came together to form the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. In 1860, the name Seventh-day Adventist became the official name. In 1863, the first general conference officially organized the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. In 1903, the general conference headquarters was Takoma Park, a suburb of Washington, D.C. Today the world headquarters is located in Silver Springs, Maryland.⁵

Crucial Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism

Extra Biblical Revelation

In 1840 and 1842 Ellen Gould Harmon (1827-1915)

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and her family heard William Miller lecture on his prophetic themes in Portland, Maine. Upon accepting Miller's views, the Harmon family was disfellowshipped from the Methodist Church. She claimed to have her first of some 2,000 visions after "The Great Disappointment" in 1844. She began preaching shortly thereafter. She married James White, an Adventist preacher who was active in the Millerite movement, on August 30, 1846. Ellen G. White claimed to receive direct communication from God through visions, dreams, and messages.

An incident in her childhood is held up as proof that she received extra biblical revelation. When she was nine on her way home from school another child threw a stone and hit her in the face breaking her nose and leaving her face disfigured. She was in a coma for three weeks. As a result of her injury she was unable to continue her education past the third grade. Seventh-day Adventists make much of Ellen G. White's disability as shown from excerpts from "The *Real* Ellen G. White Website." They say, "Over her lifetime this lady with a third-grade education wrote 55 books and 4,500 articles." Again, "How did a woman with a *third-grade education* know the following?" And, again, "Sister White had only a third-grade education. She was taught by God."

D.M. Canright, a Seventh-day Adventist himself for twenty-eight years and well acquainted with James and Ellen G. White, wrote *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* in which he said:

Mrs. E.G. White, wife of the late Elder White, leader of the Seventh-day Adventists, claims to be divinely inspired as were the prophets of the Bible. This claim is accepted by the whole denomination. They defend her inspiration as earnestly as they do that of the Bible. Year after

year, in their State and General Conferences, ironclad resolutions have been unanimously adopted, endorsing her revelations in the strongest manner.

Time and again I have seen these resolutions adopted by a rising vote of the whole congregation, myself with them. 'The Visions of Mrs. E.G. White, A Manifestation of Spiritual Gifts According to the Scriptures', is a book of 144 pages published by them defending her inspiration.

They point to her and her visions as the sign and proof that they are the only true church. Rev. 12:17. Hence it can be seen that this is a vital subject with them.⁶

Since the testimony of D.M. Canright dates to the time of Ellen G. White, one more significant quotation should carry great weight in proving just how strongly Seventh-day Adventists believe in the extra biblical revelations Ellen G. White claimed. Canright wrote:

Her visions or 'testimonies,' as they are called, are so inseparably connected with the whole Seventh-Day Adventist doctrine that a person cannot consistently accept the one without accepting the other. Besides, they are so constantly urged upon their people in every possible way, that a person cannot long feel comfortable among them unless he, too, accepts them. Any one who rejects or opposes them is branded as a rebel fighting against God.⁷

Therefore, since Ellen G. White based her teaching

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on the work of William Miller, the entirety of Seventh-day Adventism is founded upon a falsehood. William Miller predicted that Christ would return to earth by March 21, 1844. The Lord Himself said, “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (Mark 13:32). Christ did not return as Miller said He would by 1844. Moses gave the test for a prophet in Deuteronomy 18:20-22:

But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

The Millerites staked everything upon the second advent of Christ in 1844. The Millerites and their offsprings the Seventh-day Adventists have always condemned those who did not accept their false prognostications. Today, Seventh-day Adventists say of Christ that “soon He will return to this earth in power and great glory. His coming will be literal, personal, and visible to all.”⁸ When they say “advent” they mean “literal, personal, and visible to all,” yet by their standard or definition the “advent” of Christ did not occur in 1844 because Jesus did not come “literally, personally, and visible to all.” The Seventh-day Adventists have been saying for 153 years now that the return of Christ is

imminent, and they have based their doctrine on the claim of Ellen G. White for extra biblical revelation. How much more proof should a person need to see to be convinced of the error of Seventh-day Adventism?

The Bible teaches that God's revelation to man closed with the words of inspired John from Patmos in A.D. 96. He wrote:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18, 19).

The crucial belief of Seventh-day Adventism in extra biblical revelation goes down world without end!

Sabbath Observance

Another crucial belief of Seventh-day Adventism is Sabbath observance. G.K. Wallace observed, "The heart and center of Seventh Day Adventism is sabbath observance."⁹ Ellen G. White claimed that in one of her visions she was taken up into heaven where she saw the Old Testament ark of the covenant. Jesus opened the two tables of stone, and she saw the fourth commandment which says, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." (Ex. 20:8). In *The Early Writings of Mrs. White* she said, ". . . A halo of glory was all around it. I saw that the sabbath was not nailed to the cross." The apostle Paul said that he knew a man who was caught up into the third heaven, that is, into paradise, and this man "heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to

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utter” (2 Cor. 12:1-5). Ellen G. White said she was taken up into heaven, saw the fourth commandment glorious, and could not wait to write articles and books, teach, and preach everywhere about what she’d seen. Paul said it was not lawful for a man to utter what he had seen there, but Mrs. White cared little for the writings of Paul for he also taught that a woman was to “keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law” (1 Cor. 14:34).

Mrs. White insisted that the Sabbath day observance was not “nailed to the cross,” and here again she is in opposition to the inspired writings of the apostle Paul. For Paul wrote:

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days (Col. 2:14-16).

When Christ died He nailed the law which contained “the sabbath days” to the cross. Seventh-day Adventists must choose between a woman who apparently never fully recovered from being hit in the head with a brick when she was a child, who had an over active imagination, and who had a flagrant disregard for the Sacred Scriptures, and the beloved apostle to the Gentiles who taught women their proper role in the church, who was chosen like one born out of due time to bear the name of Christ to the Gentiles, and who wrote more books of the New Testament than anyone else. The Seventh-day Adventists cannot have

both, for Ellen G. White taught the opposite of what the apostle Paul did on far too many crucial doctrines.

Seventh-day Adventism is inconsistent on the observance of the Sabbath. On the one hand it makes Sabbath observance the paramount test of acceptability before God, and on the other hand it does not observe the Sabbath in accordance with the Old Testament teaching. As already presented, they follow their prophet, Ellen G. White, not the Bible. And, this is the reason why they are inconsistent in their doctrine. Seventh-day Adventists say things like the following:

Seventh-Day Adventists believe, and teach, that the observance of any other day than the seventh as the Sabbath is the sign of that predicted apostasy in which the man of sin would be revealed who would exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.¹⁰

Further, Seventh-day Adventists teach:

That just prior to the second coming of Christ this earth will experience a period of unprecedented turmoil, with the seventh-day Sabbath as a focal point. . . . We expect that world religions including the major Christian bodies as key players will align themselves with the forces in opposition to God and to the Sabbath.¹¹

Observe that it is not the Sabbath that is the “focal point” in their prophetic views but only the seventh-day Sabbath. Why the emphasis on just the seventh-day Sabbath? For example, the day of atonement was a Sabbath but it was always on the tenth day of the seventh month no matter upon what day of the week it fell (Lev.

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16:29-31). Also, the first day of the seventh month was a Sabbath no matter upon what day of the week it fell (Lev. 23:23-25).

Additionally, the feast of tabernacles involved two Sabbaths, the first day of the seventh month and the eighth day of the seventh month, again, no matter upon what day of the week they fell (Lev. 23:39-44). In Exodus twenty-five, Moses taught that every seventh year was a Sabbath year. The land was to have rest, that is, they were neither to plant nor reap the seventh year. And, every year following the seventh Sabbath year being the fiftieth year was the year of jubilee, so for two years in a row the land had rest. In Deuteronomy fifteen, Moses taught that every seventh year was a year of release wherein debts were forgiven. Are any Seventh-day Adventists in the banking or loan business? That is one Sabbath they for sure do not keep.

Furthermore, domestic slaves had the option to be compensated and released in the seventh year. When Moses wrote, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy," the principle applied to all the Sabbaths about which Moses taught not just the seventh-day Sabbath. The children of Israel did not practice the release of Hebrew slaves continually down through the years evoking the disapproval of the prophet Jeremiah in the sixth century B.C. Now, notice the language Jeremiah used. He said God made a "covenant" that pertained to that particular matter and the people had broken God's "covenant" (Jer. 34:8-22). This language is significant because the Seventh-day Adventists believe that all the Sabbaths except the seventh-day Sabbath were not a part of the covenant God made with Israel.

Seventh-day Adventism is charged with additional inconsistencies in their efforts at Sabbath keeping because the Sabbaths under the law of Moses usually required

various offerings, specifically animal sacrifices. How could someone pretend to keep the Sabbath/Sabbaths today and not offer animal sacrifices? Seventh-day Adventists answer that the Old Law had moral laws and ceremonial laws and that the ceremonial laws were “nailed to the cross” but not the moral laws. Well, if people living today are not under the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, then why do Seventh-day Adventists enforce the Jewish dietary laws? (See Leviticus 25). In Mrs. White’s *Testimonies to the Church* she forbids the eating of “unclean meats” including pork and even cheese. A Seventh-day Adventist will be insulted if offered barbecued spare ribs and equally offended if offered so much as a grilled cheese sandwich! If you think those are strong words, listen to Ellen G. White herself speak on this point, “It is just as much sin to violate the laws of our being as to break one of the Ten Commandments.”¹²

Additional inconsistency in the Seventh-day Adventists observance of the Sabbath emerges as the matters of travel on the Sabbath day and of work on the Sabbath day are brought up. Travel restrictions appear in the words of Moses:

See, for that the Lord hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day (Ex. 16:29).

The extent of travel allowable is explained by Acts 1:12 where Luke comments, “Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey.” That distance is about a thousand yards.¹³ When a Seventh-day Adventists

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drives several miles to church on Saturday he has violated the very Sabbath which he holds as the pinnacle of signs or marks of acceptability before God. Also, Seventh-day Adventists have been known to violate with impunity the work restrictions imposed by Sabbath observance. Moses wrote:

Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: everyone that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death (Ex. 31:14, 15).

Numbers 15:32-37 records a man being stoned to death for picking up a few sticks on the Sabbath day. Awareness of inconsistencies like these among people who are trying to keep the Sabbath brings to mind the words of the apostle Peter when he said, "Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10).

It is important to bear in mind that the covenant that God made which contained Sabbath observance was a covenant between God and Israel. Moses wrote, "The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day" (Deut. 5:2, 3). The patriarchal or father ruled age existed for about 2,500 years, and during all that time those who lived and died under that arrangement were not under the law of Moses. The provisions of the law of Moses, including the observance of the Sabbath, were a part of

the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai. The law of Moses was in force for about 1,500 years. Since the establishment of the church of Christ on the first Pentecost after the resurrection, all men have been amenable to the New Testament (Matt. 28:18-20, John 12:48). Christ took the Old Law away (Heb. 8:7-13).

Since the Seventh-day Adventists have a peculiar way of defining the law, see from Paul's writing to the church of Christ at Rome the fact that the law which included the ten commandments and, therefore, the Sabbath has been taken away. Paul discussed the subject by giving the analogy of a married couple. They are bound to one another as long as they live, but when the man dies the wife is free from the law to her husband. So, if she remarries, she is not an adulteress even though she is married to another man. Christians are dead to the law of Moses, that is, not under the law of Moses.

But, is there a distinction to be made that would omit the ten commandments from the discussion? Absolutely not because in verse seven within the same context Paul said, "I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Romans 7:1-7). To what law were Christians now dead? The law that said, "Thou shalt not covet." And, what law is that? The law containing the ten commandments. "Thou shalt not covet" is the tenth commandment (Ex. 20:17). But, the fourth of the commandments in that law taught keeping the Sabbath day holy. Therefore, the law that was taken away included the ten commandments and Sabbath observance.

A person will search in vain to find Sabbath observance before the Exodus from Egypt and after the establishment of the church. There is not one example of the Sabbath being kept by either the patriarchs or the Christians. No one in the patriarchal age or the Christian age was ever charged with violating the Sabbath.

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The Seventh-day Adventists like to say that Sabbath observance was taking place before the law of Moses was given, even in the garden of Eden. And, since Sabbath observance was prior to the law of Moses it succeeds the removal of the law of Moses. Seventh-day Adventists teach that following six days of creation on the seventh-day God sanctified and hallowed the seventh-day, and the faithful have been keeping it ever since. There is no argument that God blessed and sanctified the seventh-day (Gen 2:1-3). The point of difference is this: When did God sanctify the seventh-day? Let it be known that whatever day God did that on, it was not on the seventh day because on the seventh day the Bible says God rested. That means He ceased from His work. The time when God sanctified the seventh-day was not until the day when He gave Israel the fourth commandment.

As proof, please consider the fact that Nehemiah said that when God came down on Sinai and gave the law it was at that time that He “made known unto them thy holy sabbath” (Neh. 9:13, 14). Therefore, the patriarchs could not have known the Sabbath because God did not even make it known until the events which took place at Mount Sinai. And, with that Seventh-day Adventism goes down world without end!

Endnotes

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3 Foy E. Wallace, Jr., **Bulwarks of the Faith**, (Fort Worth, TX: Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Publications, 1951), 245, 246.

4 Anthony E. Hoekema, **The Four Major Cults**, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 89-92.

5 Hoekema, **Four Major Cults**, 95.

6 D.M. Canright, **Seventh-day Adventism Renounced**, (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, reprint ed. 1978), 134.

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12 Ellen G. White, Testimonies to the Church, 70, in Foy E. Wallace, Jr., **The Gospel for Today**, (Fort Worth, TX: Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Publications, 1967), 339.

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Chapter 22

Legalism

Terry Joe Kee

God's people have always been beset by problems. The "isms" that face the body of Christ are no different than those faced by the church throughout the centuries. From the beginning man has been tempted to turn from God's divine way and follow Satan. It began with Eve taking the forbidden fruit and eating it and will continue until the Lord returns. Jesus came into the world and faced the "isms" of the first century. The Jews had forsaken God's ordained way and established their sects. "Phariseeism" and "Saduceeism" were the prominent "isms" in first century Israel. There seem to always be those who are willing to set themselves up as the authority for faith and practice. These Jewish "isms" had turned the Jews from their intended direction and led them into apostasy.

Judaism had such a stronghold in the world that the church was influenced by it. Judaizing teachers influenced the early church to demand circumcision on any Gentile converts. The early church came together with the apostles and elders to meet this "ism." Acts 15 is a record of such an "ism" plaguing the church and how they dealt with it. Even after the apostles and elders had met and an inspired answer was given to meet this problem and defeat it, it continued to influence churches throughout the world. Paul's letter to the Galatians is an inspired defense of the truth against such an influence

besetting the churches of Galatia.

Churches faced paganism in their efforts to expand the borders of the kingdom. The worship of idols and service to them had its influence on the church. Christians were forced out of business because they refused to worship the emperor of Rome and give allegiance to him. The gnosticism of the first century also plagued the church and hindered its influence for good in the world.

Were the problems of the churches of Asia “isms?” The churches at Ephesus and Pergamos faced “Nicolaitanism” (Rev. 2:6, 15). In Pergamos they also faced “Balaamism” (Rev. 2:14). And what about the problems in Thyatira with Jezebel? Was this “Jezebelism?”

Today the church faces her “isms,” but they are no different than those faced by the church from the beginning. It is good to study these “isms” and understand what they are and how they influence the church of Christ in the world today. With a better understanding of these “isms” we can stand in the gap and defend the bride of Christ against all these onslaughts.

A study of legalism should begin by pointing out that neither the term “legalist” nor “legalism” is found in the scriptures. If we are to identify these terms we must look to the standard dictionaries. Legalism is “strict literal, or excessive conformity to the law or to a religious or moral code. A legalist is “an advocate or adherent of moral legalism”” (Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, page 482). Others define legalism as “1: strict, often too strict and literal, adherence to law, 2: in theology, the doctrine of salvation by good works.” Whenever a term like this is applied to someone today, there is an effort being made to prejudice honest minds and keep them from investigating the issues which divide us.

Charges made against brethren are not new. When Stephen came preaching, the Jews accused him of

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speaking “blasphemous words against Moses, and against God, against this holy place and the law” (Acts 6:9-13). The Jews accused Jesus of having a demon and of being insane (John 10:20). Paul was accused of heresy (Acts 24:14).

Anyone today who has convictions and stands firmly defending the faith is labeled in some way. When one cannot defend his false teaching in the face of truth, he will often resort to name-calling. This is commonly the only defense one can or will offer. He mocks and makes fun of those who are “five-steppers,” because he has abandoned the gospel plan of salvation. Terms such as conservative, ultra-conservative, neo-anti-ism, traditionalists, hard-line, unbending, commandment keepers, and Pharisee are used as a smoke screen by those who desire to open the flood gates to every innovation known to man. These epithets or monikers are used intending to dissuade anyone from listening and studying the issues before us. No one wants to be identified with unloving, rabid, contentious brethren.

“Legalist” is such a moniker. You are identified as a legalist if you insist on a pattern. Such is heard whenever one mentions the “steps” or a “plan” of salvation. When gospel obedience is insisted upon or dependence upon a standard is regarded as imperative, you are classed as a legalist. If you suggest there are limits of fellowship and lines which have been drawn which can be understood and identified, you are called a legalist.

Are we guilty of legalism? If legalism is defined as “strict adherence to law” then, yes, we are legalists. Through the years men have risen arguing that there is no law today. Therefore whenever someone demands obedience to law, he is a legalist. BUT, there is law today! The gospel is law. Paul called it the “law of faith” (Rom. 3:27). In the same epistle he later calls it the “law of the

Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2). To the churches of Galatia Paul called it “the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). James refers to the gospel as the “perfect law of liberty” (Jam. 1:25) and the “law of liberty” (Jam. 2:12). James said we would be judged by the “law of liberty.” Paul said judgment would be according to the gospel (Rom. 2:16). Jesus said we would be judged by “my words” (John 12:48). The “law of liberty,” the “gospel” and “my words” all refer to the same inspired record, the New Testament. Only someone who denies the New Testament would try to argue we are not under law today.

If we are not under law, can there be sin? John said sin is the transgression of law (1 John 3:4). Paul said he would not have known sin except by the law and that where there is no law there is no sin (Rom. 7:7; Rom. 5:13). If the fear of being marked as “legalists” causes us to forsake the Bible teaching of law-keeping, we then teach there is no sin. If there is no sin, why do we need a Savior? If there is no need of a Savior, why did Jesus come to earth and die on Calvary? If there is no law, to what are we calling for men to comply?

If demanding strict adherence to law makes one a legalist, is God a legalist? Our loving, gracious, merciful, longsuffering, kind heavenly Father demands strict adherence to His law. A world, save for eight souls, was destroyed because it would not comply to the will of the Father (Gen. 6). Nadab and Abihu’s only offense was that they offered up “strange fire” before the Lord, but such disobedience caused fire to go out from the Lord and consume them (Lev. 10:1,2). The anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah and he smote Uzzah where he stood because he did not comply to the law of God concerning the touching of the ark (2 Sam. 6:6,7). The only sin Achan committed was taking from the spoils of the city of Jericho when God had demanded they not do so (Josh. 7). Achan,

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along with his family and possessions, was burned and a heap of stones placed over him as a reminder of God's displeasure with disobedience. God has demanded strict adherence to his law from the beginning. God had given law to Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:15-17). All that Eve did was to take and eat a piece of fruit from a tree forbidden by God (Gen. 3). In these and multiplied other examples which could be given, God demanded strict adherence to His law. When that strict adherence was not met, man was severely punished.

Jesus came into the world because of God's love for lost man (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Strict adherence to law makes Jesus a legalist. He came to do the will of the Father (John 6:38). He gave strict adherence to all that God had said. Jesus said, "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). The prayer of Jesus was, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). From the cross Jesus uttered the words, "It is finished" (John 19:30). What Jesus had finished was the strict adherence to all He had been given to do.

Does Jesus demand legalism when he demands of his followers, "If ye love me keep my commandments" (John 14:15)? He said his friends were those who "do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:13). No one loves the Savior who does not give strict adherence to His Word. It is the lips of Jesus which utter, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John 14:21). These passages demand that love for Christ be shown by giving strict adherence to commandments.

Was the apostle Paul a legalist? To the Romans Paul said:

For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou

shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself (Rom. 13:9).

To the Corinthians Paul said, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Cor. 7:19). Paul said the prophet or spiritual among them should acknowledge that the things he had written “unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). He said he had given the Thessalonians the commandments of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:2). Paul exhorted Timothy to “keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 6:14). If legalism demands commandment keeping and strict adherence to the law of Christ, then Paul was a legalist.

John is the apostle of love, but was he a legalist? No one can read his three general epistles without knowing that John demanded commandment keeping. The way to know we know him is by keeping his commandments (1 John 2:3,4). God dwells in those who keep his commandments (1 John 3:24). Notice the emphasis John places on commandments in two short verses, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:2,3). No one loves God without keeping his commandments. In his second epistle John said loving God meant walking in his commandments (2 John 6). The apostle of love was a commandment keeper and demanded this of those who would follow the Lord. If legalism is demanding strict adherence to the law, then John was a legalist.

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What New Testament writer did not demand strict adherence to the law of Christ? Matthew (Matt. 7:21), Mark (Mark 10:19; 12:29), Luke (Luke 6:46), John (John 14:15), Paul (Rom. 3:27; Gal. 6:2), Peter (2 Pet. 2:20-22), James (Jam. 1:25), and Jude (Jude 3) all demanded strict adherence to the law of Christ and the keeping of the commandments. Some cry out that the New Testament is only a love letter from God, but do not forget that this “love letter” is filled with demands of strict adherence to the commandments of the Lord.

If preaching steps of salvation and a plan to be saved makes one a legalist then we find ourselves in the good company of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and all the New Testament writers, preachers, and teachers. If being set for the defense of the gospel and contending for the faith (Phil. 1:17; Jude 3) makes one a legalist, then let us stand with Paul and Jude.

If legalism is to be defined as “the doctrine of salvation by good works,” then let us oppose legalism with every fiber of our beings. The Old Testament is filled with those who believed that by simply keeping a set of rules they could please the Lord without regard for the condition of their hearts. God gave Israel instructions concerning the offering of gifts and sacrifices in the law. However, when they did no more than “go through the motions” in their offerings, God condemned them. Isaiah condemned Israel for her “legalism.” Look at his words to them:

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain

oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it (Isa. 1:11-20).

Isaiah dealt with Israel's "legalism," that is, the idea that salvation came as a result of doing the deeds. They believed as long as they followed the rules they would be blessed by God. During the days of Jeremiah the Jews thought that as long as they had the temple and kept it they could live like they wanted and no evil could come to them (Jer. 7:1-16). Even in the days of Amos, as he preached to the ten Northern tribes they had been deceived into believing that as long as they went through the motions of singing and offering sacrifices, God would be pleased (Amos 5:21-27). Even after the severe destruction and loss of being carried away into captivity and suffering seventy years, they came back and again tried to please God with an outward show of ritual and rule keeping (Mal. 1:7,8).

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Jesus faced these same attitudes among many in the first century. A Pharisee came into the temple to pray and boasted of all the deeds he had done (Luke 18:9-14). He had the attitude that having done these deeds he was justified before God. Jesus spoke of those who came near to him with their mouths and honored him with their lips, trying to gain favor by outward actions and deeds (Matt. 15:8,9). Seven times Jesus condemned the Jews calling them “scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites” because they sought God’s favor by serving him with the outer man (Matt. 23). Paul strongly warns us against trying to be justified by “works,” when it is “by grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves” (Eph. 2:8,9). Paul told Titus that salvation comes:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Tit. 3:5).

Saul of Tarsus had been trying to save himself by works when he persecuted the church and sought to destroy it (Acts 26:9-11; Gal. 1:13).

We must be careful today lest we are drawn to extremes. An overemphasis on law-keeping may lead one to believe that keeping the rules is all that is important in saving his soul. From this kind of emphasis rises Roman Catholicism with its doctrines of salvation by works and deeds. The other extreme is just as damaging when we believe that keeping law and rules has nothing to do with salvation. This extreme leads to the Calvinistic doctrine of salvation by grace alone without man having any active part in the salvation of his soul.

The truth lies between these two extremes. Salvation

is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-10). Every soul which enjoys salvation has been saved by grace. Paul's letter to Ephesus demands that salvation is by grace. BUT, it is not by grace alone! That grace must be met with man's faith. This is not man devising his own means of salvation, but complying to the law given by a gracious, loving heavenly Father. The same ones who will use Ephesians 2:8,9 as their proof-text for salvation by grace without works do not read verse ten. Paul said:

For we are his **workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus unto **good works**, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in **them** (emphasis mine TJK).

This passage plainly cries for us to be workers, walking in good works. Salvation demands it. We are not under the law of Moses or the law of our own works, but we are under the law of Christ. We must keep the law of Christ and strictly adhere to its principles in order to be saved.

The ingredient commonly left out is the heart. What God needed from his Old Testament followers were their hearts. Their sacrifices needed to come from broken hearts and consecrated lives. Hosea cried for obedience from broken and contrite hearts (Hos. 6:6). The Psalmist plainly identifies the attitude which joins obedience to the heart felt actions of believers when he says:

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased

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with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar” (Psa. 51:16-19).

The lament of the Savior over those who came honoring with mouths and lips only was that their “heart is far from me” (Matt. 15:8,9). When the eunuch desired to be baptized, only one thing stood between him and the water—he had to believe with all his heart that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 8:36-39). The only obedience to the law of Christ which will bring glory to God and result in the salvation of a soul is that obedience which is offered with the whole heart. Jesus said the great commandment is, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:37).

Such love for God will result in willing submission to the law of Christ and strict adherence to it as we seek to please the Lord in all that we do.

Chapter 23

Liberalism

Bobby Liddell

What Is Liberalism

Liberalism is an attitude toward God and His Word which denies divine authority, rejecting the idea of a standard or pattern in religion, in order to do one's own will, instead of His. As Roy Deaver stated:

Liberalism believes in God, but not in the God of the Bible. Liberalism believes in Christ, but not in the Christ of the Bible. Liberalism believes in inspiration, but not in the inspiration the Bible claims for itself. Liberalism believes in "truth," but not in "truth" as presented by the Bible.¹

In his book, *Liberalism's Threat to the Faith*, published in the early seventies, by the then faithful, but now apostate Rubel Shelly, he said, "To put it bluntly, liberalism is something altogether different from Biblical Christianity and would destroy it."² He then listed six characteristics of liberalism:

First, liberalism holds that there is no way to authenticate and prove as true any one version of the Christian faith....Second, liberalism rejects the Bible as being the actual Word of God to man....Third, liberalism restates the doctrine of Christ to show his utter humanity....Fourth,

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liberalism denies that the Bible has any inherent moral authority over men....Fifth, liberalism denies that mankind is lost and under the condemnation of sin....Sixth, liberalism has no concern with the New Testament concept of the church.³

Just at this point it should also be observed that an individual does not have to subscribe to every one of the tenets of liberalism in order to be a liberal...neither does a preacher, teacher or member of the church have to be liberal in every possible matter in order to be correctly termed a liberal.⁴

Liberalism is a real threat to the church of Christ, and will steal the souls of those whom it influences.

Liberalism And Compromise In The Name Of Toleration

Liberalism operates on the basis of compromise, tolerating what God will not, compromising the Truth of God with the doctrines of men (Mat. 15:9). “‘Tolerance’ is the ignoring of doctrinal error and an unwillingness to deal with sin in the manner prescribed by the Bible.”⁵ While proudly boasting of being motivated by “love,” liberalism tolerates **almost** anything. However, God’s definition and demonstration of love is far different from the proudly proclaimed “love” of liberalism.

God is love (1 John 4:8; John 3:16), yet the God of love requires that we keep His commandments (John 14:15, 21, 23-24; 1 John 1:6-10; 2:3-5; 5:3). True love is shown by obedience, as Jesus demonstrated (John 14:31), not by the disobedience of liberalism. How dare anyone claim to be motivated by love, yet disobey God, and mock His faithful, obedient children? Accordingly, God will show

forth His wrath, and, in His righteousness, will severely punish the disobedient.

Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off (Rom. 11:22).

God, through Paul, promised the certain exercise of His wrath upon all who “know not God, and that obey not the gospel” (2 Thess. 1:6-10). His wrath is always right, and should cause man to seek to please Him (Heb. 10:26-31; 12:29). Likewise, God’s Word is filled with examples of His severity in punishing the disobedient (casting Adam and Eve out of the Garden—Gen. 3; destroying the world with a flood—6-9; consuming wicked Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone—19; sending fire to destroy Nadab and Abihu—Lev. 10:1-2; having the man stoned who violated the sabbath—Num. 15:32-35; having Achan and all of his stoned and burned with fire—Josh. 7:1-25; taking the lives of Ananias and Sapphira—Acts 5; et al).

Finally, God has prepared Hell for all those who refuse to obey Him (Mat. 25:41; Rev. 14:10; 20:10; cf. Luke 16:19-31; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Hell is evidence of the Creator’s godly jealousy over His people, and His righteous anger against all who spurn His love, rebel against His will, and disobey Him. Let us love Him, for He first loved us, and in loving Him (contrary to the teaching of liberalism), keep His commandments that we might know Him. By knowing Him, we know His goodness, and escape His wrath (1 John 4:19; Rom. 5:8-9; 1 John 2:3-4).

Liberalism tolerates almost anything, but the one thing which liberalism simply cannot seem to tolerate is a faithful brother who is, truly, preaching the Truth, in love (Eph. 4:15; 2 Tim. 4:2). Liberals call such stalwart

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soldiers of the cross anti's, knuckleheads, legalistic, tradition bound, narrow minded, dogmatic, radical, unloving, ignorant, unenlightened, hateful, arrogant, mean spirited, sectarian, and intolerant. Some of the most scathing denunciations this writer has ever received were at the hands of "loving" liberals. My usual response is to let them unload their "loving," and "tolerant" denunciation and name calling, then ask, "Have you not just done the very thing of which you have accused another?" Friends, liberalism is a hateful doctrine devoid of true love. Children of God must hate every false way, including liberalism (Psa. 97:10; 101:3; 119:104, 113, 128, 163):

A man does not love God in any real and full sense if he is soft and compromising with the gospel. He does not love his fellowmen if he allows them to go on believing, teaching and practicing error without calling that error to their attention. Why have we allowed ourselves to be deceived into thinking there is something unChristian about opposing error?⁶

Liberalism And Change

Liberalism calls for unauthorized change, and often uses unloving, caustic criticism to seek to accomplish it. The apostate, Rubel Shelly, said, "God doesn't change, but the church must change."⁷ Having made that pronouncement, Shelly reveals several reasons why, he says, "The 'baby boomers' dropped out of organized religion in their 20's," including, "They heard tedious preachers delivering threadbare speeches on insignificant themes." Those who love the Lord and His church deny Rubel's affirmations.

According to Rubel, the boomers dropped out in their 20's and are now in their 30's and 40's; thus, the

time he considers involves ten to twenty years. I cannot speak from his experience; i.e., concerning the preaching he has heard in the last twenty years, but I can speak from my own. In that time, I have heard over a thousand sermons (by preachers other than myself), including several by Shelly. Admittedly, some were better than others. However, the words “tedious,” “threadbare,” and “insignificant” fit neither the sound brethren I have known, nor their preaching.

The preachers I have heard (with rare exceptions, including the few who taught error, as does the present-day Rubel) have been men of great faith whose lives have been given to proclaiming the Gospel. Their love for God and His word motivated them, and their diligent study showed in their presentations. With great fervency, they sought to persuade men to come to Jesus and His way, for their souls were burdened at the thought of men lost in sin. They sacrificed the things of this world to reach men for eternity. They suffered persecution and denigration, even at the hands of brethren (and now, at the hands of our erring brother, the apostate, Shelly). Yet, lovingly, they continued to call all men to follow Christ, with them.

Their lessons were great fountains bubbling forth plain, understandable instructions full of hope. They called their hearers to open their Bibles and read for themselves as they quoted passage after passage and gave the application. They did not prepare sermons from some German theologian’s book or quote the latest philosophical and psychological word of men. When they sat down, the Good News of Jesus Christ had been preached, God had been uplifted before men, and sin had been exposed for what it is.

Threadbare speeches? Children of God have thrilled to hear the same old story (almost 2,000 years old) over and over again. “Tell me the old, old story,” we sing.

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Who could ever hear it enough? What Christian would tire of hearing the “Wonderful story of love”? Instead, we say, “Tell it to me, again.”

Insignificant themes? No Bible theme is insignificant. Would Rubel deny anyone preached the Bible in the Lord’s church in the last ten to twenty years? Would he say most did not? If men preached the Bible, regardless of their lack of eloquent speech or educational attainment, the message was significant. If the boomers missed that, then, shame on them.

Liberalism And Matters Of Faith

Liberalism fails to recognize the difference between matters of faith and matters of option (judgment or opinion). Matters of faith are matters that are essential to our salvation. As the pioneers said, “In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things, love.” Liberalism treats matters of faith as matters of option. For example, some have called for a “core” or “bulls eye” gospel, and they have identified certain matters of faith as not essential to salvation. For example, Max Lucado, celebrated author^s, and another apostate brother, is reported to have given these instructions to his radio audience:

All you have to do is to say “yes” to the Father....And all you have to do is to call Him Father. Just call Him Father. Just turn your heart to him right now as I am speaking....”Father, I give my heart to you. I give you my sins, I give you my tears, I give you my fears, I give you my whole life. I accept the gift of your Son on the cross for my sins. And I ask you Father, to receive me as your child. Through Jesus I pray. Amen”....I’d like to give you a word about the next step or two. I want to

encourage you to find a church, I want to encourage you to be baptized, I want to encourage you to read your Bible. But I don't want you to do any of that so that you will be saved. I want you to do all of that because you are saved.⁹

Of Lucado's part in the annual Jubilee, a gathering in Nashville, with speakers which include the liberals of note, Shelly wrote:

Max...will be the nighttime keynote speaker at Jubilee '97, an annual event sponsored by Churches of Christ. But we want to spread the word by means of this luncheon that Jubilee '97 is intended for the larger Christian community of Nashville. No one is doing a better job of communicating the basic message of Christ to his generation than Max Lucado.¹⁰

Liberalism And God's Authority

Liberalism dares to put itself on the throne of God, rejecting God's authority, thus, making men equal with God. Yet, Jesus claimed all authority (Mat. 28:18), and rightfully so (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23; John 12:48). Liberalism ignores the standard of authority, loosing where God has not loosed (Mat. 18:18; cf. 16:18-19). Satan, spiritual father of liberalism, loosed where God had bound. God said Adam and Eve could eat of every tree of the garden:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen 2:17).

Tempting the woman, the serpent said, "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:1-6; cf. 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13-14).

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How narrow minded was God in not letting them eat of the one tree, and punishing them because they did? A good friend says of himself, "I am so narrow minded that if a gnat were to land on my nose, he could kick out both of my eyes with one foot." We ought to be just as narrow minded as God, but no more. We ought not to make laws where God has not made them; that is, we ought not to bind where God has not bound. That is the greater problem of anti-ism. So, we have no right to restrict, or to redraw the boundaries God has set. While we are not law makers, we must not be law breakers (Gal. 6:2)! We must be no more broad minded than God, loosing where He has not loosed.

Liberalism forsakes the distinctive Truth for an uncertain sound. Liberals claim, "You misunderstood me," whenever confronted with their false doctrine. Or, they might say, "We are arguing over words," when words are the basis of our communication. It seems one could, if he really wanted to do so, use words to communicate what he really means to say, in a way even the simple could understand. It is possible to be misunderstood, even when we do our best to be understood, and every preacher has had to deal with that; but none should deceive brethren by saying, "Oh, you misunderstood me," when they have understood exactly what that one said. "One of the great dangers of liberalism is its inherent dishonesty."¹¹ Dishonest men will preach one thing in one place, and another in another, but honest men will not. "Oh, for an honest false teacher," Shelly once said.

Liberalism affirms we cannot "know," and that truth is not absolute. God's Word teaches: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3; cf. v. 4; 1 Cor. 2:9-13; Eph. 3:3-4; 5:17). Liberalism looks to the "New Hermeneutic" for support, reminiscent of denominationalists, who, unable to find

support for their beliefs in the Bible, say God must accept what they believe because that is the way they like it. Liberalism looks to modern mis-translations or versions for support. What liberal approves of and recommends the King James Version or the American Standard Version?

Liberalism And Fellowship

Liberalism welcomes, defends, upholds, and applauds the enemies of the Truth:

Liberal elements within the churches of Christ have made great strides toward turning the church into a denomination. Although many brethren seem not to have realized it, we are being influenced to abandon our distinctiveness and extend fellowship to all who profess Christianity.¹²

Liberalism chooses to be politically correct, and accepted by men rather than to be Biblically correct and accepted by God. Some still love the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42-42). Verily, they have their reward (Mat. 6:2, 5, 16). Our desire should be to be accepted of God: "Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him" (2 Cor. 5:9).

Liberals appear to desire fellowship with denominations rather than with faithful brethren. Liberals praise men who are leading folks to hell!! They arrogantly condemn men who are willing to give themselves to save souls. We must be in fellowship with, and encourage those who, courageously, are standing in the gap (Eze. 22:30; 1 John 1:6-10; Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9-11). "Truth cannot fellowship error."¹³ We must uphold, and defend those who are going into the battle,

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determined to win the victory for the Lord (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:1-4; 4:6-8). How dare one claim to be a faithful soldier, and refuse to join the fray? How dare he help the cause of the enemy, and treat God's army as if it were the enemy? Such a man would be a traitor! How can we say we are concerned about the church when we stand by and let the cause of Truth suffer? To do so would be cowardly! Let us act like men (1 Cor. 16:13), and take a stand, without wavering, for what is right. Tomorrow may be too late! There is no time to waste. Silence, when we ought to speak, will condemn us!

Is It Wrong To Expose Liberalism And Warn By Naming Names?

Consider the following quotation from the Rubel Shelly of yesteryear:

Although some today would discourage the exposure of false doctrines among brethren, it should be remembered that the apostle Paul exposed error and called the names of those teaching it. (Cf. 2 Tim. 2:16-18).¹⁴

Some truly believe they would serve God better, and help the situation more by refusing to name ANY names of false teachers, apostate churches, and tools of liberalism, such as lectureships, magazines, etc., used in the furtherance of its false doctrines. While we can appreciate one's desire to do no wrong, and to seek to bring back, with sincere love, one who has gone into liberalism, we disagree that calling names, when needed, is wrong, or that not calling names is the way that best works. We have responsibility to sound the warning.

Seven times, as recorded in Matthew 23:13-29, Jesus said: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees,

hypocrites!” Five times, the Son of God declares them to be “fools and blind,” “blind guides,” or “blind.” Their hypocritical doctrine was a matter of convenience, fulfilling their desires, and filling their pockets. Though they pretended to be the religious leaders of the followers of God, they were blindly going into an eternity of punishment, and taking with them all who would blindly follow. To these hypocrites, Jesus said: “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Mat. 23:33).

Too many times, uninformed, unsuspecting brethren have invited preachers/teachers into their pulpits, only to find out too late, that they have welcomed the fox into the hen house. Souls are lost, led away from the Lord, and churches are divided or destroyed. Would it not be far better for those brethren to have been warned that brother _____ was a false teacher? Friends, one soul is worth more than all the world (Mat. 16:26), and one soul is worth more than seeking to preserve some false teacher’s “good” name.

Certainly, it is better to be warned the bridge is out, than to find out the hard way. It is far better to see “Poison” on the bottle, and to take the necessary precautions, than to suffer, or die, because of not being warned. Some might not realize the danger, without the warning, until too late. The great prophet Ezekiel received word from God, foretelling the dreadful consequences to the watchman who failed to warn (Eze. 3:17-21).

Jesus warned: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Mat. 7:15). False prophets/teachers lead the unwary away from God. Their blind direction takes their blind followers away from Christ, His church, the Truth, spiritual life, fellowship with the faithful, and all blessings in Christ (Mat. 15:14; Eph. 1:3). Finally, they will lead

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the spiritually blind away from heaven itself, and into the ditch of disobedience, dismay, destruction, and eternal death. However, false teachers usually appear to be other than what they really are, often seeming sincere, pious, concerned, and loving. “They are careful to appear humble, pious, analytical and in search of freedom from dogma and tradition.”¹⁵ All the while, they are devouring souls (cf. Eze. 22:25). Like ravening wolves, they destroy with fierceness, having no compassion for those who suffer because of their wicked deceptions. They satisfy themselves, and care not what God says, or what man thinks, or what price the thoughtless, careless followers of their false teaching must pay.

Error taught sincerely is still error. A lie spoken through the smiling lips of the hypocrite loudly extolling his deep love is just as much a lie. False teaching of liberalism, propped up by out of context, misapplied, and New Hermeneuticized Scriptures is still false teaching—even when it sounds good to the hearer with itching ears (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Eloquence of delivery and education (too often received at the feet of denominationalists who neither respect God’s authority, nor believe His Word) do not change soul-damning deception into soul-saving doctrine. Pseudo-scholarship, bowing at the feet of modernistic theologians has never saved one soul, but has cost many their salvation.

The honest inquirer can understand why Jesus would warn against false teachers. There is a real danger, and a danger we MUST avoid. Instead of blindly accepting whatever men say, we are to “try” (test or prove) teachers (1 John 4:1). Testing the teaching of one implies a standard by which his teaching must be measured. We must compare what is taught with the Word from above, the Truth of God (John 17:17; 12:48). Jesus’ teaching was put to the test. Are those liberals today, who claim to be

teachers, above our Lord, that their teaching should not be proved? Is it wrong to demand an accounting of their teaching? Should men accept whatever is taught just because a “brother” teaches it? Are elders right who do not guard the pulpit, and the classroom, that the souls over which they watch might be taught the Truth, and not liberalism (Heb. 13:17)?

Apparently, some delude and deceive, teaching error for material gain. If error sells books, ensures big salaries at large congregations, appointments at liberal schools, or fellowship with “important” men, some seem willing to sell their souls to get the earthly reward. Paul, in writing of the grave responsibility of elders to stop the mouths of gainsayers, wrote of the appeal of “filthy lucre” to those setting forth false doctrine (Tit. 1:9-14; cf. Peter’s inspired words in 2 Pet. 2:1-3).

Defeating Liberalism

Strong elderships could stop liberalism in its tracks, today! How? By determining not to support liberals, and fellowship them, but rather, to mark and avoid them. We, if we would serve our Lord, faithfully, must take a stand for what is right, and against what is not. The former (faithful) Rubel Shelly gave this admonition to the Christian who would oppose liberalism: (1) stay informed, (2) react to what is happening, and (3) support faithful teaching.¹⁶ We, as the children of our heavenly Father, must oppose error with true love, and without fear or fainting. We must do good and shun evil, holding onto that which is good, regardless of who opposes, holding fast our profession (1 Thess. 5:21; Heb. 4:14).

Conclusion

Liberalism is not a valid option. One may not embrace liberalism with impunity. Liberalism is not

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without danger. One may not ignore liberalism and pretend he has no responsibility. We must take a stand for what is right. Standing against liberalism is not pleasant, but God is against liberalism; therefore, should not we be? Now is the time to stand. Who will stand? Will you?

God, through His inspired Word, forewarned about departures (Mat. 24:10-12; Acts 20:28-31; 2 Thess. 2:1-5; 1 Tim. 4:1-3). Therefore, recognizing God's warnings were given before the fact, none should be surprised that what God predicted came to pass. We must not alarm unnecessarily, but we must make aware, or we will be liable. Brethren need to be alerted to what is happening. However, we must not become paranoid, that we see liberalism under every rock, behind every tree, and on every corner.

When it comes to false teachers, some brethren simply cannot be warned! Quite often, those warned react as if the warner were the one who is wrong, but the wise will hear and take heed (cf. Mat. 2:12, 22; Acts 10:22; Heb. 11:7). Being warned, we cannot say we did not know of the danger. Why cannot some brethren be warned? Is it just a matter of inconvenience that precludes some from taking a stand against error? Is it a matter of misguided friendship, or an overly benevolent giving of the benefit of the doubt, or is it simply a matter of lack of conviction? Would we rather be lost, lead others to be lost, or allow others to be lost unwarned than to expose and oppose the false teacher? Surely not. Surely, followers of Christ are better men than that. Hell is too terrible, and Heaven is too wonderful for us to fail to sound the warnings from our Lord.

Modernistic false teachers among us who deny
that salvation is to be found only in truth are

enemies of Christ and should be openly marked and warned against as such.¹⁷

As Peter wrote:

Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness (2 Pet. 3:17).

When the blood is upon our hands, it is too late (Eze. 3:18).

Endnotes

1 Roy Deaver, **The Menace of Liberalism** (Austin, TX: Biblical Notes, 1987), 5.

2 Rubel Shelly, **Liberalism's Threat to the Faith**, (Memphis: Simple Studies Pub. Co., n.d.) 6.

3 Ibid, 6.

4 Ibid, 10.

5 Ibid, 11.

6 Ibid, 14.

7 Rubel Shelly, "God Never Alters—But the Church Must Change," **The Nashville Tennessean**, 22 July, 1991.

8 The Baptist General Convention of Texas awarded him the 1996 Texas Baptist Communications Award, in an article by J. Michael Parker, "Texas Baptists extend award to S.A. pastor-author Lucado," **San Antonio Express-News**, 17 September, 1996. In the article, Buckner Fanning, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, said he and Lucado had exchanged pulpits for two years.

9 KJAK, "UPWARDS," December 1996.

10 Rubel Shelly, letter from Woodmont Hills Church of Christ, 11 March 1997.

11 Shelly, **Liberalism's Threat to the Faith**, 11.

12 Ibid, 11.

13 Ibid, 19.

14 Ibid, 3.

15 Ibid, 7.

16 Ibid, 81-84.

17 Ibid, 14.

Chapter 24

Pessimism

Wayne Cox

When God created man, He blessed him with five senses: hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching. Of the five, most consider sight to be the most precious. With our eyes, we can see spectacular sunrises and sunsets, majestic mountains with snow-capped peaks, green grass, blue skies, and other picturesque scenes in nature. What a privilege it is to be able to see - something we often take for granted.

Sight is also used figuratively to denote seeing with the mind; “outlook” is the word used to describe this process. A pertinent question for each to consider is: “What is my outlook on life?” Some have a positive view of things; they are called optimists. They try to see the good in every situation and hope for the best. Optimists are generally happier and healthier and are a delight to be around!

Pessimists, on the other hand, view things negatively. They only see thorns, not roses; clouds not rainbows; and problems, not solutions. For the despondent, everything is dark. He anticipates failure, gloom, and doom. The creed of the pessimist is Murphy’s Law: “If anything can go wrong, it will” or “Smile. Tomorrow will be worse.”¹ While the optimist sees the glass as half full, the pessimist sees it as half empty. The optimist sees the sky as partly sunny; the pessimist, as partly cloudy. The optimist relishes an 80% chance of sunshine; the pessimist

is sure of a deluge because of only a 20% chance of rain. The optimist looks for the silver lining in every cloud, whereas the pessimist, even in the best of times, insists on finding a somber lining somewhere.

John Gardner makes these appropriate comments relative to our subject:

Most creative and forward moving action is taken by men and women who are on the positive end of the pessimism/optimism continuum. And all leaders in this country, people who are really good at it, are individuals who have almost irresistible faith in human possibilities. What a difference it makes to get up in the morning thinking that all things are possible, that this is a new day to achieve. How dreary it must be to approach life on a day-to-day basis simply trying to get through that day and not making any progress.²

Unfortunately, many choose to live their lives dreary and in despair. The result? Pessimism abounds in today's society! Slogans on T-shirts tell us, "Life is hard, and then you die." Lyrics in hit songs are often pessimistic and depressive.³ As one observes, "Pessimism is the emotional fashion of the day."⁴ The same author goes on to state:

To turn on the TV is to be assaulted by a world spinning out of control. Potential calamity seems to lurk at every turn - not just from strangers on the street, but via global warning and the deficit and rampant homelessness. Alcoholism is at epidemic proportions. So is child abuse. To find anything even resembling careless joy, one has to search for scratchy black and white movies from the 1930's.⁵

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Gloomy Guses are preoccupied with the worst possible situations. When the yoke of communism was lifted from more than a quarter of a billion people in the former Soviet Union, instead of focusing on the exciting potential of the fourteen freed republics, emphasis was placed on the violence occurring in only one. The megaphone of the media amplifies the plight of the impoverished, the epidemic of AIDS, and the surging rate of crime, while almost completely ignoring breakthroughs in neuroscience, computer education, and genetics. The reason? “Bad news means good ratings, and good news means a vast, happy tuning-out.”⁶

Consequences of negative thinking can be devastating. Pessimism is one sign of depression;⁷ continued depression becomes more intense, leading to feelings of helplessness, and in extreme cases, to suicidal thoughts and to suicide itself. After all, if my outlook on life is bleak, that the world is “going down the drain,” that life just isn’t worth living, and that there is no hope for the future, why should I continue to exist? Why should I endure life any longer? Why not just end it all?⁸

With pessimism abounding, the child of God is often affected by it. Indeed, pessimism poses a very real threat to the Christian individually and to the church collectively, thus, our assignment.

Having looked at pessimism from somewhat of a secular perspective, let’s consider it in light of Scripture. We do so with the following assigned objectives: (1) Defining Pessimism, and (2) Defeating Pessimism.

Defining Pessimism

By Way Of Definition

To some extent, we have already defined our topic, but a formal definition of pessimism is: “the tendency to

see or anticipate only what is disadvantageous, gloomy, or futile in life.”⁹ Further, pessimism is said to be:

Doctrine that reality, life, and the world are evil rather than good. Pessimism generally takes one of two forms: that of an entrenched negative state of mind, or a permanent expectation of the worst under all circumstances, and that of a philosophical system. The former instance may arise, depending on the temperament of the individual, from the reaction of a person to the difference between the world as it is and the world as it could be. In the 19th century, pessimism was elaborated into a system of philosophy by the German philosophers Arthur Schopenhauer and his successor Eduard von Hartmann. Each saw life in this world as rooted in misery, pain, and endless struggle. An unqualified pessimism encompasses the idea that all the ends and aims of life are illusory. The doctrine opposite pessimism is optimism, which approves the world as it is and embraces the feeling of hope.¹⁰

“Pessimism” - just saying the word produces negative feelings! Synonyms include despondency, gloom, depression, despair, dejection, cynicism, and morbidity.”¹¹

Granted, everyone has momentary periods of despondency, including some great people of God. It is unrealistic to think that on a scale of one to ten that every day will be a ten! Vance Havner observes that Christian experience has three levels:

First there are “mountaintop days” when everything is going well and the world looks bright. But it is unrealistic to expect - as many

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people do - that we can spend life leaping from one mountain peak to another as if there were no plains or valleys in between. "Ordinary days," therefore, are those when we work at our usual tasks, neither elated nor depressed. Then, thirdly, there are the "dark days" when we trudge heavily through discouragement, despair, doubt and confusion. Sometimes these days string out into months or even years before we begin to experience sense of relief and victory. When they persist, dark days are days of depression.¹²

However, lapsing into momentary pessimism is one thing, having a continued morbid outlook on life is another! Does not the child of God have every reason to be optimistic? After all, he has a God who loves him, a Savior who died for him, and a Holy Spirit who directs him through the word.

The apostle Paul, who had every reason to be "down and out," was admirably optimistic and said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). The Christian should strive to incorporate that mind set into his thinking.

By Noting Its Causes

One cause of pessimism is a loss of Christian perspective. When we take our eyes off God, minors become majors and molehills become mountains. Paul admonishes:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth (Col. 3:1-2).

Since my God is in heaven, and my Savior is at His

right hand, and since all the redeemed will one day be there as well, it behooves me to lay up treasures there (Matt. 6:20), for my citizenship is there (Phil. 3:20). Our sojourn on the earth is but for a short time, and we, like the faithful of old, are but strangers and pilgrims here (Heb. 11:13). Therefore, any problems I may encounter in this life, severe though they may be, pale in comparison to the grandeur and beauty of that heavenly city which will be minus any and all problems (Rev. 21:4). With that perspective, I can hold my chin up, take life by the throat, and strive to live it to the fullest by the grace and power of God. But, if I stop looking upward, I start thinking, living, and going downward.

Another contributing factor to pessimism is expecting perfection. To the perfectionist, enough is never enough. There is always room for improvement, and always something to criticize. Words like “ought,” “should,” “must,” and “more” dominate his speech and thought. One never quite measures up to the perfectionist, nor will he ever. Such an attitude saps motivation and replaces it with guilt and a negative outlook on practically everything. Preachers and members alike become pessimistic because of the unrealistic goals and unreasonable demands of a few perfectionists.

One writer explained her pessimistic view of things because of a battle with perfection. She said:

I should be a perfect hostess, parent, wife, and friend. I should not fail. I should contribute to the community by serving on committees, and making contributions to everyone who asks.¹³

She had set up high expectations impossible to achieve, and when she failed, became despondent.

History is replete with examples of those who

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failed or were considered failures by others, and yet went on to become famous - their past did not hinder their future:

Einstein was four years old before he could speak and seven before he could read. Isaac Newton did poorly in grade school. A newspaper editor fired Walt Disney because he had “no good ideas.” Leo Tolstoy flunked out of college, and Werner von Braun failed ninth-grade algebra. Haydn gave up ever making a musician of Beethoven, who seemed a slow and plodding young man with no apparent talent - except a belief in music.¹⁴

Tom Eisenman offers this wise advice:

Rethink what it means to be successful. It might help to remember, for instance, that a .300 hitter in baseball is a very good batter. But this average means that he gets a hit only three times in every ten times at bat. Some of us are trying to hit a home run every time we swing the bat. This is unrealistic. It will drive us crazy.¹⁵

Since there has been only one perfect man, Jesus, that makes the rest of us less than perfect. There is the need to recognize failures in one's life, to admit them and make correction when possible, and then to get on with life. As the bumper sticker so eloquently states: “Christians are not perfect, just forgiven.”

In a similar vein, destructive criticism can foster a pessimistic outlook. When one hears a repetitive barrage of phrases such as “There's no hope for you - no chance - no way - you're nothing but a loser - you'll never make it,” he begins to adopt that mind set. When one gets put down enough by chronic critics, he starts staying down. However, as Teddy Roosevelt stated:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who

points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.¹⁶

Indeed, many are the causes of pessimism; the Christian needs to be aware of these lest he succumb and develop a negative attitude.¹⁷

By Giving Examples

Several Bible characters either were or became pessimistic:

Sarah. A part of God's promise to Abraham was that he would have a great posterity, that he would have descendants numerous as the stars of heaven (Gen. 15:5). The only problem: both Abraham and Sarah were well up in years when the promise was made; in fact, Abraham would be a father at age 100 and Sarah a mother at 90 (Gen. 17:17). Such was so incredulous to Sarah that her response was one of levity:¹⁸

Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah

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laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? (Gen. 18:11-12).

Sarah knew that from a reproductive view, both she and her spouse were dead¹⁹ (Rom.4:19; Heb. 11:11), thus her doubt and pessimism relative to God's promise. God's response to her laughter was a question: "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14). This query evidently bolstered her faith, so that her initial laughter at the promise turned into a warm embrace of it:

Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised (Heb. 11:11).

Mrs. Job. Job, a great patriarch of patience, was described by God as "perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1,8;2:3). Satan, having heard this evaluation in an interchange with God, in essence accused God of bribery. "Job would not be nearly so upright if you weren't paying him" hissed Satan. "Remove that protective shield - take away his blessings - and then you'll see the real Job!" God agreed to allow Satan to test Job, with certain limitations.

Wasting no time, the Devil began his diabolical onslaught. He sent Sabeans to slaughter Job's oxen, donkeys, and servants (1:13-15); he issued fire from heaven to incinerate Job's sheep and more servants (1:16); he incited the Chaldeans to steal Job's camels and murder more servants (1:17). As if these were not terrible enough tragedies, he raised a ferocious wind to level the house where Job's children were gathered, killing all of them instantly (1:18-19). Job's response:

Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved

his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped. And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly (Job 1:21-22).

Job passed this test with flying colors; his spouse, however, did not fare as well. In the next challenge, Satan took away Job's health, smiting him with sore boils²⁰ which covered his body. For Mrs. Job, this was the last straw, this was more than she could endure. Perhaps out of compassion for her husband, perhaps out of grief and rage for her losses,²¹ she explodes: "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die" (Job 2:9). Her response was tantamount to saying - "commit suicide - ending your life is better than enduring it any longer!"²²

Such a pessimistic, despondent response was exactly what the Devil was looking for! In fact, Satan had spared her earlier from death to use her later; she is urging her husband to do exactly what Satan said he would (Job 1:11; 2:5). Fortunately, Job did not heed his wife's foolish counsel, and was blessed immensely by God in the end (Job 42).

The Ten Spies. Through Moses, miracles, and divine guidance, God delivered his people from Egyptian bondage; Israel gathered all together and departed in a mass exodus from Egypt. They had witnessed stunning displays of God's power: the plagues in Egypt, the emancipation by Pharaoh, the parting of the Red Sea, and the destruction of the Egyptian army. One would think that by now their faith would be bolstered to an invincible level, that they had learned complete trust in and dependence on their Sustainer, Jehovah. However, such was not the case.

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Under Moses' leadership, the Israelites arrived at the edge of Canaan - their long-awaited and much-anticipated promised land. According to the last verse of Numbers 12, they camped "in the wilderness of Paran" - right on the border of their inheritance. Twelve spies were sent on a reconnaissance mission, to bring back a report of the land, the people, and the cities. Upon returning, they had the statistics they needed:

They went and came:

...and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and there is the fruit of it (Num. 13:26-27).

However, because ten of the spies had so quickly forgotten God's incredible power, they came to a decidedly dismal conclusion:

Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight (Num. 13:28,31-32).

Since they lived by sight, rather than faith, they

had a “grasshopper complex,” a “can’t mentality,” in spite of having witnessed God’s awesome power on display! How ashamed and angry God was at their pessimistic view and at the majority of the Israelites accepting it - so much so that for forty long years they would wander in the wilderness, marking their journey by the graves they dug.

Israel vs. Goliath. Years later, after Israel had finally settled the promised land, their age-old enemies, the brutish Philistines, once again entered Israel, planting themselves on a hilltop overlooking the valley of Elah (I Sam. 17:1-2). To avoid an all-out battle, the Philistines proposed a one-on-one confrontation between their champion - Goliath, and Israel’s champion (who should have been Saul).²³

Goliath was indeed an impressive, 9’9" armor-plated-fully-loaded-Philistine-fighting-machine. He challenged Israel every day twice a day for forty days (1 Sam. 17:8-10, 16). Saul’s response? He cowered along with the rest of the soldiers in the enormous shadow of the giant.²⁴ Why the fear? Why the bleak and pessimistic outlook? Because Saul and the rest of Israel could not see God for looking at Goliath! They underestimated God’s power; they overestimated the confidence of the enemy, and were it not for optimistic David, Goliath and the Philistines would have ruled the day.

Elijah. Even this courageous prophet of God fell victim to pessimism. He had stood his ground on Mt. Carmel with Ahab and Jezebel and their Baal-worshiping prophets, winning a tremendous victory for God (I Kings 18). As a result, one would have thought his would have been a mountain of unshakable faith. However, Jezebel put a bounty on Elijah’s life - she wanted him dead the next day. Elijah, having heard her threat:

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....arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers (I Kings 19:3-4).

Elijah had lost both perspective and focus; this led to a dismal view of the situation. Instead of remembering God's victory over Jezebel's cronies, all he could hear was Jezebel's threat ringing in his ears. Since he looked down, and not up, he forgot to stop and pray and depend on God. Wallowing in self-pity, he felt he was all alone, but in reality, was surrounded by thousands of believers still faithful to God (1 Kings 19:18). After God's gentle counseling session, Elijah learned to depend on Jehovah and from then on continued to serve Him.

By Considering Its Impact On The Church

God has placed us on the earth for the primary purpose of bringing glory to Him; we accomplish this in three realms of service in the church: seeking the lost (evangelism), serving the suffering (benevolence), and strengthening the saved (edification). A pessimistic stance can undermine the production of spiritual fruit in each of these areas; a negative outlook can pervade the entire congregation, leaving members disillusioned and discouraged. Colds and chicken pox are not the only things contagious - pessimism is too!

How many potential soul-winners have never become such because of pessimism? Many have never converted a soul because they have never tried, believing all along that they just could not do it, or it was not for them. How many souls have never been saved because

of pessimism - the belief “I can’t live the Christian life - it’s too hard” or “the Lord would never forgive me?”

How many personal work plans have been shelved because of pessimism? How many visitation programs fold quickly because of pessimism? How many preachers quit preaching - teachers quit teaching - because of pessimism? How many elders become discouraged and step down because of pessimism? How much numerical and spiritual growth might otherwise occur were it not for pessimism?

How many business meetings are dominated by the “It can’t be done” or “That will never work” mentality? How many congregations no longer exist because pessimism spreads throughout the membership, causing some to leave, some to abandon Christianity altogether, and some to struggle in the congregation until the needs can no longer be met? How many problems have never been solved because of pessimism? How many brethren remain alienated from one another because of pessimism? Of paramount importance we have to ask: How many souls will be lost because of pessimism?

Brother bashing, sister smashing, and church crushing have never been more popular with some calloused critics today, who constantly clamor for change, and continually harp on “what’s wrong with the church.” Granted, the church has problems, but instead of being purveyors of doom and compromising the truth, let’s look at what is right with the church! The church is still the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, and the location of all the saved. The church still has a glorious God, a risen Redeemer, and a host of members still dedicated to extending and defending the faith!

Defeating Pessimism

The following are a few suggestions to help us get a grip on negative thinking, to effectively control it, and

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to become more positive in our outlook on life and in our daily living. We can defeat pessimism:

By Applying Scripture

God's Word can change in a positive way our attitudes and actions, but only as we know and apply It. Never minimize the power of God's Word! As David said:

O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts (Psm. 119:97-100).

We concur with Daniel Webster, who, while in the presence of Professor Sanburn of Dartmouth College, laid his hand on a copy of the Scriptures and said:

This is THE Book. I have read through the entire Bible many times. I make it a practice to go through it once a year. It is the Book of all others for lawyers as well as divines; and I pity the man who cannot find in it a rich supply of thought and rules for his conduct. It fits man for life; it prepares him for death.²⁵

By Trusting God To Keep His Promises

"God is faithful" (1 Cor. 10:13); "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise" (2 Pet. 3:9). These verses and a host of others reveal that God is true to His Word - when He makes a promise, He keeps it. God promises to care for all our needs (Matt. 6:25-34), that He will never fail us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5-6), and that He

will save us eternally if we are faithful (Heb. 7:25). Worry, doubt, and pessimism on our part indicate a lack of faith in God to do His part!

By Giving Our Problems To God

One must never underestimate the power of prayer! We are admonished to cast all our care upon Him, for He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7; Phil. 4:6-7). David underscored the value of communing with God by saying: “My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up (Psm. 5:3).

By Developing A Positive Attitude

What we think is important; we may not be what we think we are, but what we think, we are. “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7; 4:23). Let us eliminate the disposition to murmur and complain (Phil. 2:14). Let us look for the silver lining behind each cloud, realizing that blessings can actually come from trials of life, and that growth can occur by accepting rejection and failure and learning from our mistakes.

By Learning From Optimists

Though we devoted much attention to Bible characters who were pessimistic, we could give equal, if not more, space to those who were optimistic. Joshua and Caleb had no reservations whatever about defeating Canann’s inhabitants and possessing the land: “Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (Num. 13:30). Caleb had such faith in God that at age 85, he was not only climbing mountains, but conquering them (Josh. 14:6-14)! Teenager David had no doubts when it came to subduing Goliath: “The Lord . . . will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine” (1 Sam. 17:37).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego feared neither Nebuchadnezzar's raging anger nor his roaring fire, but said: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us" (Dan. 3:17).

Conclusion

Since how we live is largely determined by how we think, we ask again, "What is your outlook?" If one wants to go through life with a dim perspective of things, he will have plenty of company. So many view our existence as did H. G. Wells, who once grimly wrote: "Man, who began in a cave behind a windbreak, will end in the disease-soaked ruins of a slum."²⁶

Surely we can do better than that! The Christian has an Omnipotent Father Who, behind the scenes, is working His plan. With that perspective, we can see beyond what the majority sees, we can develop a right attitude, we can keep our focus, we can strengthen our resolve, and we can acquire an unquenchable optimism!

Endnotes

1 Arthur Bloch, **The Complete Murphy's Law** (Los Angeles, Calif.: Price Stern Sloan, 1990), 5.

2 John Gardner as quoted by Dan Angel, "The Rainbow Connection: Looking Out At the Future" in **Vital Speeches of the Day**, August 1985, 622.

3 See the article, "A New Spin on Spending" in **Psychology Today**, Vol. 25 May/June 1992, 13. The author refers to a study conducted by psychologist Harold Zullon in which he notes a correlation between downbeat lyrics and the economy. Zullon states that when "top-40 song lyrics turn sharply gloomy, there'll be a recession one to two years later. That's been the case for every recession save one since 1955."

4 Harry Stein, "Thieves of Hope: Why Must Every Cloud Have a Somber Lining?" in **Psychology Today**, Vol. 25, September/October 1992, 27.

5 Stein, **Psychology Today**, 27.

6 William Safire, "Go Ahead, Ruin My Day" in **Reader's Digest**, Vol.140, April 1992, 156.

7 Gary R. Collins, **Christian Counseling** (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1980), 84.

8 Every day in this country alone, more than seventy people take their lives. Each day worldwide, one thousand people commit suicide, with ten times that number attempting it. Paul Lee Tan, **Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations** (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance publishers, 1979), 1377.

9 **The Random House College Dictionary**, Revised Edition, ed. by Jess Stein (New York: Random House, 1982), 992.

10 **Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia**, Vol. 20, 297.

11 **Roget's College Thesaurus**, Revised Edition (New York: New American Library, 1978), 361.

12 Collins, **Christian Counseling**, 84.

13 As quoted by Collins, **Christian Counseling**, 93.

14 Alan Loy McGinnis, **Bringing Out the Best in People** (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 34.

15 Tom L. Eisenman, **Temptations Men Face** (Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 168-170.

16 Theodore Roosevelt, from the speech "Citizens in a Republic," given at the Sorbonne in Paris, France, April 23, 1910. As quoted in **The Man in the Arena: Speeches and Essays by Theodore Roosevelt**, ed. John Allen Gable (Oyster Bay, N.Y.: Theodore Roosevelt Association, 1987), 54.

17 See Wendell Winkler's excellent material in Chapters 9 and 10 of **Heart Diseases and Their Cure** (Hurst, TX: Winkler Publications, 1972), 70-74, 85-89.

18 Though Abraham had also laughed at God's promise, many consider his to have been a laugh of joyful amazement. H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Excell, **The Pulpit Commentary** (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), Vol. 1, 236-237, 242.

19 Interestingly, earlier this year, the Associated Press reported that a 63-year-old woman gave birth to a daughter and became the world's current oldest mom! Scott Lindlaw, "Giving Birth at 63 Raises Questions" in the **Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal**, April 25, 1997, 3A.

20 One commentator describes Job's affliction as "*elephantiasis* (so called because the limbs become jointless lumps like elephant's legs) . . . The disease begins with the rising of tubercular boils, and at length resembles a cancer spreading itself over the whole body, by which the body is so affected, that some of the limbs fall completely away. Scraping with a potsherd will not only relieve the intolerable itching of the skin, but also remove the matter." C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, **Commentary on the Old Testament** (reprint, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), Vol. 4, 69-70.

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21 Before one is extra hard on Job's wife, remember that she is also directly affected by the loss of wealth, and that ten fresh graves are calling out to her as well!

22 Cursing God would have brought death (Lev. 24:15-16), and in Mrs. Job's mind, an end to her husband's suffering.

23 The people expected such; Saul was the tallest, strongest man in Israel (1 Sam. 8:20;9:2).

24 Saul also revealed his cowardice and displayed desperation by offering a reward to anyone who would fight Goliath. The prize was riches, marriage to his daughter, and tax exemption for life (1 Sam. 17:25).

25 J. Oswald Sanders, **Spiritual Leadership** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 141.

26 As quoted by William Barclay in **The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians** (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 91.

Chapter 25

Hedonism

David Brown

Introduction

First of all I want to begin our study by defining Hedonism. Secondly, we want to study the historical background of our subject. Thirdly, we shall examine Hedonism in the light of reason and Biblical truth.

The doctrine of Hedonism is understood by the very meaning of the word. The word reveals to us the basic philosophy of hedonism. *Pleasure* is the meaning of the Greek word *hedone*. Therefore, the sole or chief good in life to the hedonist is the pursuit of pleasure or happiness. This simply means that a person who conducts his life accordingly thinks that only pleasure is intrinsically (in and of itself) desirable and only displeasure (pain) is intrinsically undesirable. Hence, we may refer to this doctrine and the ethics of pleasure.

Historical Background

The first great exponent of Hedonism was Axistippus. He taught that a person should engage in whatever act produces maximum momentary pleasure. Hence, one's purpose in life is to devote himself to momentary subjective physical pleasure. Epicurus later modified the approach of Aristippus. He opposed the pursuit of momentary pleasure. According to him a

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person should seek maximal long-term pleasure. Furthermore, he believed that the pleasures of a lifetime are located in long-term mental application.

Hence, the best a man can do is to minimize desire and thus minimize the pain of frustration. Love of honor and glory are sources of distress to be avoided. A wise man will see fear of death, a potent cause of pain, as ungrounded; since the body is merely a mass of atoms, it has nothing to fear from the dissolution that ends all. Social life has as its aim protection from injury and injustice-politics is best avoided.¹

Those who practiced and taught the philosophy of Epicurus became known as Epicureans. The apostle Paul confronted certain Epicurean philosophers when he preached the gospel of Christ in the city of Athens (Acts 17:18).

After hundreds of years, the eighteenth century philosopher, Jeremy Bentham made the hedonist philosophy well-known. Bentham added his own flavor to hedonism. Bentham's doctrine is best expressed in his own words:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain and pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may

pretend to abjure their empire, but in reality he will remain subject to it all the while.²

Bentham ceased to emphasize the old concept that whatever brought the greatest pleasure to the individual should be sought. In its place Bentham declared that pleasure is that which brings the greatest pleasure or happiness to the greatest number of people.

His philosophy can generally be described in the following manner. As to whether actions are right or wrong is determined by the goodness and badness of their consequences to the greatest number of people. Whether an action is good or bad is determined by whether it is pleasant or unpleasant. Therefore, the only rationale a person should employ for engaging in a certain action is determined on the basis of its resulting in more pleasure for the greatest number of people than some other action or actions.

Bentham attempted to base his philosophy on the Hedonistic idea of motivation. He allowed for only one motive for human action; the desire for one's own pleasure and antipathy to one's own pain. Thus Bentham developed the proposition that pleasure is the motive of all actions and therefore pleasure ought to be the ethical standard by which all actions are judged. In affirming this proposition he also taught that pleasures differ in quantity, but not in quality. By this he meant that in order for two different acts to produce an equal quantity of pleasure, they must be equally good. In order to determine these things, Bentham developed an intricate system to compute the amount of pleasure, pain, and excess of pleasure over pain.

John Stuart Mill was one of Bentham's leading disciples. Mill and Bentham were agreed that the only motive for human actions is pleasure. However, as

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Epicurus and Bentham had put their own “twist” to the philosophy of Aristippus, so did Mill.

Mill tried to advance this theory above the desires common to animals. He attempted to do this by positing that there are differences in *quality* as well as *quantity* in estimating pleasures. Mill taught that since the human mind is what makes man exceptional to animals, humans should choose pleasures which accompany the higher faculties. It is Bentham and Mill’s philosophy of hedonism that is prevalent in some circles today.

The utilitarians were the intellectual wing of the middle class in the expansion of its political power in England during the early part of the 19th century. Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, the leading philosophical exponents of the school, dominated intellectual movements in England for a great part of the century. Much political, legal, and economic theory itself gave systematic intellectual expression to the type of life that the activity of the middle class was fast developing. Much of common American formulation of social goals and personal ethics in relation to them still uses the language of utilitarian ethics.³

Hedonism (Utilitarianism or Any Other Kind) in the Light of Biblical Truth and Reason

In this critique I shall first examine some of the philosophical and logical problems involved therein. Following that study we shall place the doctrine under the bright light of God’s infallible word (1 Thess. 5:2 1; 1 John 4: 1).

The foundation of all hedonism is pleasure. And, it is here that one locates the philosophy’s “Achilles Heel”; *No hedonist can define pleasure in such a way as to make*

it universally acceptable. Hence, it is obvious that regardless of the “brand” of hedonism one follows it is totally subjective. What may be pleasurable to one individual or one group of people may not be pleasurable to another individual or group of people. Why, therefore, should I subject myself to another person’s definition of pleasure? Therefore, as far as a Utilitarian Hedonist is concerned, why should I *not* seek my own personal subjective pleasure or happiness above the pleasure or happiness of the multitudes? Without an absolute humanly attainable objective definition of pleasure what is to keep anyone from “doing his own thing” or concluding life with the song, “I Did It My Way”? It would certainly be absurd to assume that because each person is concerned about his own pleasure that, therefore, he would be concerned with the pleasure of the whole group. Moreover, how would anyone determine the pleasure of a multiplicity of people in the first place?

When one correctly reasons with the truth, the implications thereof are true. Hence, any doctrine that implies a false doctrine is itself false. Regarding a “logical contradiction” Copi wrote, “One statement is said to contradict, or to be in contradiction of, another statement when it is logically impossible for them both to be true.” As previously studied Hedonism is totally *subjective* (beginning in and derived from man’s mind without any objective standard) and *relative* (changes from person to person as well as from one society/culture to another society/culture). This means one person could believe that doctrine “A” is pleasurable and another person could believe that doctrine “A” is not pleasurable. The following will serve to illustrate the logical contradiction just stated. If it gave pleasure to the twisted minds of the Nazis (one society, culture, and philosophy) to torture and kill the Jews (another society, culture, and philosophy) in all sorts

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of heinous ways, would the action of the Nazis be right? Assuredly, this was not pleasurable to the Jews. Therefore, to pose the previous question is to answer it with a resounding no! Hence, Utilitarian Hedonism is false and collapses under its own weight.

The fundamental basis for Utilitarian Hedonism is found in the view that all men desire only their own pleasure and happiness and, therefore, they will at all costs seek to avoid pain. Of course, myriad are the examples found throughout the history of human conduct that contradict this fallacious view. How many parents have sacrificed their own pleasure for the well-being of their children, even to the point of giving their own lives for them? What about the multiplied accounts of sacrificial heroism involving the sacrifice of one's own pleasures for the happiness of others? Think of the soldiers and other patriots who have suffered the loss of life and limb for the happiness of others. As Mortimer Adler wrote:

But once critical questions are asked and distinctions are made, the hedonist position as popularly held ceases to be tenable. To say that the *only* good is pleasure is to say that wealth, health, friends, knowledge, and wisdom are not good. This, in turn, means that they are neither desirable nor in fact desired by anyone, for certainly whatever is desirable or desired is in some sense good. The facts of everyday life thus make it impossible to maintain that the *only* thing everyone in fact desires or regards as desirable is pleasure.⁵

Hence, the utter absurdity of the doctrine reveals its falsity and thereby “blows up” in the face of its advocates.

Hedonism is shot through and through with many philosophical and logical problems. The previous

problems have been studied to point out and emphasize that fact. In the *Warren -Barnhart Debate*, Joe E. Barnhart affirmed that “Utilitarianism (specifically as advanced by Jeremy Bentham) is superior to Christian Theism (specifically as advanced by the New Testament) as the basis for evaluation human behavior.” After Barnhart spent four nights attempting to prove his proposition brother Thomas B. Warren pointed out that Barnhart had written before the debate that Utilitarian Hedonism could not be “justified.” Brother Warren gave the following quotation from Barnhart:

In our long and involved treatment of selfishness, altruism, and self-love, we have not ‘proved’ an airtight case for utilitarianism, which is the ideal of maximum happiness for every individual. There is no way to justify this utilitarian ideal as an ideal for everyone.⁶

Before we ever consult the Bible, we can, in many cases, see how certain false philosophies collapse under the weight of their own illogical contradictions. Please remember that God created man a rational creature. Therefore, if a doctrine is irrational, it is wrong simply on that basis; and if a thing is irrational, the Bible (the all-sufficient, complete, absolute, objective, humanly attainable, final, rightly-divided revelation of God to man) cannot support it.

Hedonism Contradicts God’s Word

Knowing that the doctrine of Utilitarian Hedonism is false because it is irrational, we know that it contradicts the plain teaching of God’s Word. The New Testament system of Christianity is, therefore, God’s only objective standard by which to evaluate what is good for man (Jer.

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10:23; Psa. 119:104, 105; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). We learn from the Bible that happiness and blessedness is a gift of God only when one, as Jesus stated, shall “lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s . . .” (Mark. 8:35). For a Christian to ask blessings from God for the purpose of spending them on his own pleasures is to “ask amiss” (James. 4:3). Paul warned Timothy of those who taught such doctrines as Hedonism. He described them as being “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:4). In his first epistle Paul described such characters as being dead while they live (1 Tim. 5:6). Christians know that the joy of living is found in “not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others” (Phil. 2:4). In so doing, he often must sacrifice that which would bring him pleasure, but this is truly following the example of Christ (Phil. 2:5-1 1).

The example of the life of Christ demonstrates to the Christian how to deny self (Luke. 14:26). Persecution, and therewith suffering, often accompany Christianity. However, these do not destroy the blessedness of the Christian life (Matt. 5:10-12; 2 Cor. 6:4-10; Phil. 4:4). On the other hand, pain and suffering are understood to be a very vital part of this world, being the ideal environment for his spiritual development (Heb. 12:3-13; Psa. 119:67, 71; James. 1:3-4; etc.). Regarding this present world as an ideal place for spiritual development brother Thomas B. Warren wrote:

...since God has a morally justifiable reason for having created the world (i.e., to be the ideal environment for “soul-making”) in which evil can (and does) occur, the existence of evil in the world is not inconsistent with the existence of the infinite God of Judeo-Christian theism.⁷

Hence, Solomon taught men in the long ago where true happiness and joy is to be found. Having experimented with all types of approaches to life he concluded: “Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl. 12:13).

There are thousands of people who every day no longer “live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15). Elementary it is that men will purposely endure hardship pain and suffering in order to achieve a higher goal and often for the benefit of others (2 Cor. 4:7-14; 12:15; Phil. 2:30). Furthermore, at times people act so as to bring displeasure and pain upon themselves only because they “ought” to (Rev. 2: 1 0; Matt. 26:3 9; Heb. 5:7-9). Hence, with Mortimer Adler we may conclude that: “We ought to desire whatever is really good for us and nothing else.”⁸

The Origin of the Right

Christian conduct is found in the New Testament of Jesus Christ. The New Testament is the will of God by which man is to live in this world so as to be well-pleasing to God. The New Testament is anchored in the unchanging nature of God. God is infinitely perfect in love and justice. These attributes flow from God’s own nature, which nature derives from the very essence that makes up God or Deity. Thus, of God, the prophet Malachi penned, “For I am the Lord, I change not” (Malachi 3:6). Again, “... the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for he is not a man, that he should repent” (1 Samuel 15:29). Moreover, the writer of Hebrews tells us that it is impossible for God to lie (Heb. 6:18).

As we have seen God’s immutability revealed in the Bible, we also see his omnibenevolence revealed therein. The apostle John declare that “God is love” (1 John 4:16).

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By this statement about the substance of God, John means that the very essence of God is love. Hence, correct morality and ethics are based on the unchanging nature of our heavenly father.

We also know that God is just (Rom.2:11). Because he is just, he “so loved the world” and is “longsuffering ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9). Christian ethics, therefore, is rooted and based in God’s will. However, God’s will flows from and is always in flawless accord with his unchangeable character, loving justice, and just love.

In dealing with the problem of the existence evil and a loving just God in this present world brother Thomas Warren has affirmed twenty-two propositions relating to and having a bearing on evil and suffering existing at the same time and along side an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, and just God. I include them just here in this study because they further reveal the design and purpose of life in the flesh on earth. In studying them one can see more fully the tremendous contradistinction existing between Hedonism as a philosophy for life and Christianity. Brother Warren affirmed:

Proposition W 1: God is omnipotent.

Proposition W 2: God is perfect in goodness.

Proposition W 2a: God is omniscient.

Proposition W 2b: God is perfect in justice.

Proposition W 3: Evil exists.

Proposition W 3a: Sin (that which contradicts man’s sonship to God and his brotherhood to man) is the only intrinsic evil.

Proposition W 3b: It is not evil that there is evil.

Proposition W 3c: Evil results in every case from an abuse of the free moral agency of man.

Proposition W 4: It is not the case that good is opposed to evil in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.

Proposition W 5: It is not the case that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing (being) can do.

Proposition W 6: It is not the case that a good, omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely.

Proposition W 7: A good, omnipotent thing exists.

Proposition W 8: It is not the case that there is a logical contradiction in the conjunction of proposition W7 and proposition W3.

Proposition W 9: This world is as good as any possible world for the purpose God had in creating it (i.e., to be the ideal environment for ‘soul-making’).

Proposition W 10: Every instance of human suffering results from some condition(s) which was necessary to providing man with the ideal environment of ‘soul-making.’

Proposition W 10a: God is not blameworthy for having created a world in which both righteous and wicked persons suffer during earthly life.

Proposition W 10b: God is not blameworthy for having created a world in which there seems (to some people, at least) to be dystelcollogical suffering.

Proposition W 11: Every instance of animal pain results from some condition (s) which was necessary to providing man with the ideal environment of ‘soul-making.’

Proposition W 12: Every instance of natural

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calamities (tornadoes, earthquakes, etc.) results from some condition(s) which was necessary to providing man with the ideal environment of 'soul-making.'

Proposition W 13: Man's earthly life is a probationary period (i.e., during which his fate in eternity is settled) and it is his only probationary period.

Proposition W 14: Man is immortal (i.e., man will live on after physical death in a non-probationary 'period' which is non-ending.)

Proposition W 15: The 'stakes' in eternity (the blessings of heaven and the punishment of hell) are of such magnitude as to render all suffering in this life of no ultimate negative significance.

Hedonism, Humanism or any other "ism" that attempts to determine the conduct of human beings only on the basis of life beginning and terminating with the physical and the material cannot be correct. To affirm that whatever a person thinks is correct is right for him is to embrace subjectivism. Hence, (though we know of no one in history who has been able to consistently do this) each person becomes a law unto himself and is, therefore, subject to no standard but what his thoughts are at any given moment. In the case of the hedonist, his standard of conduct would be whatever gave him pleasure (as he defined pleasure) at any given moment. We must, therefore, conclude that without God nothing is any worse than anything else.

The fundamental difference between Christian ethics and any other is that the values thereof are determined by God. Because God is all-good and all-knowing only he is in the best position to reveal and

thereby declare what is valuable and what is not for mankind (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; James 1:25).

Conclusion

We see in the life of Jesus, the second person of the Godhead who became man and was tempted in every “point” as we are, yet without sin, our perfect example for human conduct (John 1:14; Heb. 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22). Thus, man has a flawless referent for our morality. Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the only complete moral example.

In view of Him, morality is not a mere legalistic assent to a written code; it is a dynamic relation to a living Person. The essence of morality is not the love of abstract laws; it is the love of a person, Jesus Christ, and through Him and by Him the love of all persons (Matt. 22:36, 37). The Christian ethic, then, is eminently human and personal in its manifestation.¹⁰

Of course the previous sentiments do not rule out obedience to Christ (John 14:15). To the contrary, the love of and faith in the complete, flawless, Christ will always manifest themselves in obedience to Christ’s gospel whereby man obtains salvation (Heb. 5:8, 9; Rom. 1: 16; 6:17, 18; 1 John 2:5; 5:3; James 2:24). This is the manner whereby human beings live ethical lives that are acceptable to God. As Peter wrote:

As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; (1 Peter 1:14, 15).

In direct contradiction to Hedonism the apostle Peter said of Christ and our relationship to him as

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Christians, “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). Furthermore, he wrote, “But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled” (1 Peter 3:14). Hence, concerning suffering as a result of persecution, Peter concludes, “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:16).

God’s love for man demands that an environment exist wherein man can exercise his free-will in choosing to serve God or rebel against him. Furthermore, he must live in a place that allows him the opportunity to exercise self-discipline, thereby submitting himself to the will of God. Hence, he lives according to Christian ethics exemplified in the life of Christ and taught to man in the gospel of Christ. With these points in mind we end our study and refutation of Hedonism with some observations of brother Thomas B. Warren:

The ideal environment for man must be one which allows him to be challenged. Man was placed in an environment which offered him the great challenge to learn its secrets, to “gain dominion” over it. ... If man’s environment did not provide situations in which man faced the possibility of suffering some truly terrible loss (of property, well-being, life), then it would not provide a situation in which such virtues as fortitude and courage could be developed as they now are. These facts make it clear that the ideal environment for man is one which makes it possible for man to suffer—and, not merely to suffer, but to suffer intensely. And, it must not only allow men to suffer intensely, but to suffer intensely over a long period of time.

... some of the benefits of suffering are: it allows a life of self-denial, which is the greatest life; it affords opportunity for God to “cry out” to men in the effort to lead them to become true (spiritual) sons of God (the hearts of men are either the most tender or the most bitter during times of tribulation); it affords opportunity for one to develop and grow in moral character (fortitude, virtue, courage, etc.); it affords opportunity for man’s love for God and man to be tested in the finest possible way (one must choose suffering over sin); it affords exceptional influence in bringing the wayward back to God (suffering tends to be highly conducive to leading such men to reevaluate their attitudes and actions); it affords the basic ground for growth in compassion and love for his fellowman; it helps one to better appreciate the love which he has for others and which others have for him; it helps man to better understand and appreciate the love of God for him and his own love for God; and it will help him to better appreciate the grandeur of heaven in the life to come.

For the non-son of God, the proper reaction to suffering is to be brought to God in humility and loving trust. For the son of God the proper reaction to suffering is as follows: in cases of chastening (when wayward) one should submit meekly; in cases of persecution (for righteousness’ sake), one should rejoice that he is allowed so to suffer; in all cases in which one cannot be certain whether the suffering is chastening (for a wayward son) or persecution (for being such a faithful son) one should simply trust that this world is as good as any possible world and, thus, that God has a

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morally sufficient reason for what is occurring; when the son himself is suffering, he should strive to bear his own burden; when others are suffering, one should seek eagerly to help them bear their burden; in all cases, one should cast his burden on God (trust in God for an adequate solution); and in all cases, one should strive to learn from suffering what God would have him to learn.

... It is in order to state some final conclusions in regard to suffering. It seems clear that there is no compelling reason why we should not but many compelling ones as to why we should believe: that it is in harmony with the infinity of God that man should have a probationary life in a world in which it is possible for him to experience pain and suffering, that pain and suffering are things for which we in this life should thank God, that pain and suffering are things without existence of man, then he is surely deficient in at least one (and perhaps all) of these attributes: power, knowledge, and goodness. ... Given Christian faith, then, we assume that man's life on earth is a probationary period during which his fate in eternity is settled and that man will live on after physical death in a non-probationary period which is non-ending.¹¹

In this brief refutation of Hedonism I have shown the definition of the word, the history of the movement, and the various philosophical forms it has taken down through the centuries. Furthermore, we have seen its gross irrational errors and how it contradicts God's word. Moreover, we have briefly studied the design and purpose of life. In doing so we have seen that this life in the flesh on earth is a place of preparing for eternity. It

is, therefore, probationary. Thus, in this life we are to follow the perfect ethical life of Jesus Christ in our love of and faith in him which manifest themselves in obedience to the gospel and day by day living according to the teaching of Christ. Thus, the basic proposition of Hedonism fails.

We therefore understand more fully why the Bible in that great chapter on obedient faith in God records this of Moses:

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (Heb. 11:24, 25).

Let us, therefore, see things as Moses saw them and live our lives in harmony with God's will for us as Moses lived in accordance with God's will for him.

Endnotes

1 Abraham Edel, **The Theory and Practice of Philosophy** (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1946), p.442.

2 Jeremy Bentham, **An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation** (Oxford 1822) Chapter I.

3 Edel, Op. cit. pp. 442, 443.

4 M. Copi, **Symbolic Logic** (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1954), pp. 27, 28.

5 Mortimer J. Adler, **Ten Philosophical Mistakes** (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985), p. 112.

6 Joe E. Barnhart and Thomas B. Warren, **The Warren-Barnhart Debate** (Jonesboro, Ark. National Christian Press, Inc., 1981), p. 252.

7 Thomas B. Warren, **Sin Suffering, and God** (Jonesboro, Ark.: National Christian Press, Inc., 1980), p. 272.

8 Adler, Op. cit. p. 125.

9 Warren, Op. cit. pp. 279 - 281 (A complete discussion of each proposition is found on pages 281 - 378).

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10 Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, **Introduction to Philosophy** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 369.

11 Warren, *Op. cit.* pp. 344, 345, 358, 359, 362.

Chapter 26

Alcoholism

Mark Posey

Alcoholism Defined And Illustrated

Alcohol is the physiologically active ingredient in intoxicating beverages and is made by fermentation of sugar with yeast. The term “alcohol” is derived from an Arabic word, *kuhl* or *kuhol*.¹ The alcohol in any alcoholic beverage is ethanol (ethyl alcohol), described as a clear, colorless, very mobile liquid with a pleasant odor and burning taste. It is made from starch, sugar and other carbohydrates by fermentation.²

The Federal Government classifies ethyl alcohol as a drug, and Dr. Frank Overton refers to it as a “narcotic drug”. Scientists classify drugs as (1) sedatives (2) analgesics, and (3) anesthetics. Ethyl alcohol can act as a sedative in small amounts, and as an analgesic in even smaller amounts, with its most characteristic effect being that of an anesthetic.³ In defining ethyl alcohol and its action, Raymond G. McCarthy states:

Alcohol is classified, pharmacologically as an anesthetic. The predominant characteristic is a progressive descending depression of the central nervous system. In varying dosages, alcohol may act as an analgesic, a soporific, an anesthetic, a narcotic, or a hypnotic.⁴

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It is the main drug effect of this most active element which leads persons to imbibe such beverages. People do not drink in order to produce an impairment in cortical function or to reduce their critical faculty; they drink in order to feel differently.⁵ Despite the misconception, alcohol is not a stimulant. Even small amounts of alcohol produce slower reflexes and coordination. Pharmacologically, ethyl alcohol is a central nervous system (CNS) depressant and in sufficient quantities may produce sleep.⁶ Alcohol never adds to or supplements the skill of a person. It slows down reaction, perception and coordination. Alcohol does not have to be digested. It is absorbed through the stomach and the intestines and only time can remove it from the body. For an average person, it takes hours to eliminate from the body the alcohol in one drink.

Alcoholism is alcohol dependency; a chronic, progressive, and potentially fatal malady. Alcoholism is recognized as a disease by both the American Medical Association and the World Health Association. While alcoholism is recognized by many secular authorities as a “disease”, it is more properly described as a choice. Although alcoholics can be properly described as being physically and emotionally sick, this does not excuse their sin-sick behavior. Alcoholism cannot be cured; only controlled or arrested. It does not disappear with the passage of time and will only worsen in time if left unchecked. Alcohol is the most commonly used drug in our society today. Alcohol is a drug that leads to tolerance; eventually one needs more and more alcohol to achieve the same effect. Alcoholism has been called the most serious drug problem in our society in terms of number of victims and cost to society.⁷

Generally, a person is considered to have an alcohol problem when his drinking has a negative effect on

social, business and/or family relationships. Alcohol abuse makes functioning difficult. The common symptoms of abuse include:

1. Overly relaxed, loss of inhibitions/self control.
2. Slurred speech.
3. Lack of coordination.
4. Lying or covering up the problem.
5. Use of other drugs.
6. Physical ailments such as nausea/hangover, headache and fatigue.⁸

In order to be treated successfully, alcoholism must be viewed as a complex, progressive, and grave problem that interferes with health, social and economic functioning and, if not treated, ends with few exceptions in physical incapacity, mental damage and premature death. The alcoholic is usually the last person to realize he/she has a drinking problem. Alcoholism can be treated. Recovery rates range from 65 to 85 percent in many programs in which hundreds of thousands of recovered alcoholics have participated. The family's main defense against the impact of alcoholism is gaining knowledge, support, and direction. Counseling is imperative and many programs are available to the alcoholic who is ready for recovery. [See Appendix]

Startling Statistics

One of the most sobering and astoundingly shocking views we can possibly gain from the world of alcohol and the alcoholic can be seen in an overview of how this deadly drug affects our society as a whole within the family. Consider the following startling statistics.

* Alcohol, the most widely used psychoactive drug in the United States, has unique pharmacological

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effects on the person drinking it.⁹

* Alcohol contributes to 100,000 deaths annually, making it the third leading cause of preventable mortality in the United States after tobacco and diet/activity patterns.¹⁰

* Among 8,541 deaths attributed to nonmedical use of other drugs in 1993, 40% also involved alcohol.¹¹

* In 1992, more than seven percent of the population ages 18 years and older—nearly 13.8 million Americans—had problems with drinking, including 8.1 million people who are alcoholic. Almost three times as many men (9.8 million) as women (3.9 million) were problem drinkers, and prevalence was highest for both sexes in the 18-to-29-years-old age group.¹²

* About 43% of adults in the United States—76 million people—have been exposed to alcoholism in the family: they grew up with or married an alcoholic or a problem drinker or had a blood relative who was ever an alcoholic or problem drinker.¹³

* 63% of high school seniors report that they have been drunk; nearly 30% say that have had five or more drinks in a row during the last two weeks.¹⁴

* From 1985 to 1990, the economic cost of alcoholism and alcohol-related problems rose 40% to \$98.6 billion. Reduced or lost productivity and premature death accounted for 71% of this

cost; medical care for more than 10%; and crime for nearly 6%.¹⁵

* Nearly one-fourth of all persons admitted to general hospitals have alcohol problems or are undiagnosed alcoholics being treated for the consequences of their drinking.¹⁶

* On average, untreated alcoholics incur general health care costs at least 100% higher than those of nonalcoholics, and this disparity may exist as long as 10 years before entry into treatment.¹⁷

* Studies of suicide victims in the general population show that about 20% of such suicide victims are alcoholic.¹⁸

* Alcohol is typically found in the offender, victim or both in about half of all homicides and serious assaults, as well as in a high percentage of sex-related crimes, robberies, and incidents of domestic violence, and alcohol-related problems are disproportionately found among both juvenile and adult criminal offenders.¹⁹

* Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), which can occur when women drink during pregnancy, is the leading known environmental cause of mental retardation in the Western World.²⁰

Alcohol and all other drugs deceive. In the preface to his book, *The Bible and Strong Drink*, Howard Winters says:

I hate intoxicating drink because of what I see it doing to the children, husbands, wives,

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communities, our nation, the world, the church, and even to some members of the body of Christ who have been deceived by its lures...it's use is devastating to homes, to happiness, to industry, to peace, to prosperity, to spiritual welfare. What it is, what it does, and all that its manufacture, sale, and consumption stand for is diametrically opposed to the cause of Christ.²¹

1 John 2:16 says, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” It takes very little thought to realize that drug misuse can fulfill the three prerequisites of sin outlined in the text. Some drugs, alcohol included, are promoted as sexual stimulants and appeal to the lust of the flesh. Our media bombards us with stories and beautiful and serene experiences that we may include in our lives through psychedelic drugs; fulfilling the lust of the eyes. Peer group pressure or a desire to belong is one very real reason why some fall into the chemical trap; satisfying the pride of life.²² The actions of a Christian should never portray that definition of sin. People use alcohol because they like the way it makes them feel. It is, however, an instant and temporary fix to a real and possibly fatal disease.

Benjamin Franklin once said:

Temperance puts wood on the fire, meal in the barrel, flour in the tub, money in the purse, credit in the country, contentment in the house, clothes on the children, vigor in the body, intelligence in the brain and spirit in the whole constitution.

Lack of temperance destroys all this or greatly damages

them. Addiction and dependence to alcohol brings forth a lack of temperance. A physician with a great wit is reported to have said:

Beverage alcohol gives you a red nose, a black eye, a white liver, a dark brown breath and a blue outlook.

Who wants this color scheme in life?

One has only to read and study the Bible to find abundant references condemning the drink as being evil. In fact, if a preacher is to preach the whole truth, and be fair with the word of God, he must preach against drinking. If you take Young's Concordance and other references and study what the Bible says on the subject you will find there are at least 162 verses of scripture condemning this wickedness. There is more scripture condemning alcohol than one will find on any of these subjects: lying, adultery, swearing, stealing, Sabbath-breaking in the Old Testament, cheating, hypocrisy, and pride.

Let us survey God's Word on the terrible sin of alcohol and its effects:

1. Genesis 9:20-25: Noah tilled the soil, planted a vineyard, and drank the wine. He became drunk and naked in his tent. Ham saw the nakedness and sinned and when Noah awoke from the wine he "cursed his son".

2. Genesis 19:30-38: In this case, drinking resulted, in Lot's sins with his own daughters: incest.

3. Genesis 27:25: Isaac was drinking wine when he blessed Jacob. The blessings actually belonged to the first-born, Esau. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for bread and a pottage of lentils. Rebekah and Jacob had tricked Isaac and they did this with wine as recorded in verse 25.

4. Leviticus 10:8-11: We have an expressed

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command not to drink.

5. Numbers 6:3: No Nazarite was to drink wine or liquor.

6. Deuteronomy 21:18-21: Drinking leads to stubbornness, rebellion, and gluttony by young men and brings dishonor to parents.

7. Judges 13:4-7: Samson's mother, an example to all womanhood, was commanded to drink no wine. Was alcohol recognized even then as a poison, injuring posterity in the parents?

8. 1 Samuel 1:14-15: Hannah, an example of all honored motherhood, practiced total abstinence.

9. 2 Samuel 13:28: Amnon, while in a drunken brawl, was murdered by his brother Absalom's servants.

10. 2 Samuel 11:12-15: Only with strong drink could David lead Uriah into the trap which cost him his life.

11. 1 Kings 16:8-10: While Elah was "drinking himself drunk" in his own home, one of his captains conspired against him and killed him.

12. 1 Kings 20:13-21: No drinking army can hope to win battles. While Benhadad and 32 other kings were "drinking themselves drunk" in their booths, a small band of Israel's men fell upon the Syrians and put them to flight and death.

13. Esther 1: Drink wrecks homes and separates man and wife. At a drinking party which lasted a week, a king, while drunk, desired to subject his queen to the beastly gaze of drunken nobles and thus brought on the separation of the royal husband.

14. Job 1: The children of Job were drinking wine when blown away in the cyclone.

15. Proverbs 4:17: Through drinking the wicked become violent.

16. Proverbs 20:1: No wise man will drink wine or liquor.

17. Proverbs 23:20-21: Young people should shun the company of drunkards.

18. Proverbs 21:17: Strong drink leads to poverty.

19. Proverbs 23:31: We are urged not even to look upon wine.

20. Proverbs 23:32: The word of God says it hurts everyone who drinks.

21. Romans 13:13: Paul admonishes all to walk honestly and not in rioting and drunkenness.

22. Romans 14:21: Drinking will cause a brother to stumble.

23. Galatians 5:21: Paul says that those that revel in drunkenness shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.

An unknown writer penned the following powerful and challenging words:

I am the greatest criminal in history. I have killed more men than have fallen in all the wars of the world. I have turned men into brutes. I have made millions of homes unhappy. I have transformed many ambitious youths into hopeless parasites. I make smooth the downward path for countless millions. I destroy the weak and weaken the strong. I make the wise man a fool and trample the fool in his folly. I ensnare the innocent. The abandoned wife knows me; the hungry children know me; the parents whose child has bowed their gray heads in sorrow know me. I have ruined millions and shall ruin millions more.
I AM ALCOHOL.

Alcoholism Defeated

There are three classifications of scriptures in which the word “wine” is used in the Scriptures:

1. The word “wine” is used in a neutral fashion, as

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in Daniel 5:1-4. No judgment is rendered. This is merely a statement or description of the facts.

2. The word “wine” is used to show approval and instruction.

3. The word “wine” is used to show disapproval and condemnation.²³ We will be concerned with the last two propositions.

Let us notice those passages which show and lend approval and instruction to the use of wine. First, Numbers 18:12:

All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee.

Wine was part of that which was presented at the altar as an offering to God.

Second, Genesis 27:28 reads:

Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine.

In this scripture, wine is included among those things God had given as blessings, comforts and necessities of life.

Third, Isaiah 55:1 declares:

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” In this passage, wine is the emblem of spiritual blessings.

When we think of wine we think of the beverage

by that name sold in liquor stores. In the Bible, however, the word wine is used to refer to the juice of the grape, in any form. First, it may refer to the juice still in the cluster of grapes (Isaiah 65:8). The Bible does not contain the expression “grape juice,” and the word “juice” itself is found in the Bible only once (Song of Solomon 8:2) and here the reference obviously is not to grape juice. Second, it may refer to the freshly pressed juice of the grape (Isaiah 16:10). Or, it may refer to the fermented juice of the grape (Proverbs 20:1). In every reference, it is not always possible to determine which of these three is meant by the use of the word. However, in all cases where the practice is condemned, the clear and straightforward implication is identifiable.

Next, let us notice that God’s word explicitly condemns the use of wine as an intoxicating beverage in all forms.

1. **Wine makes one unclean or unholy** (Leviticus 10:8-10).
2. **Wine is a mocker and deceiver** (Proverbs 20:1).
3. **Wine brings “woe, sorrow, contentions, babblings, wounds without cause, redness of eyes”** (Proverbs 23:29-30).
4. **Wine makes people forget the laws and pervert justice** (Proverbs 31:4-5).
5. **Wine causes men to lie, seek bad women, etc.** (Proverbs 23:30-33).
6. **Wine causes men to err, use poor judgment, confusion and visions** (Isaiah 28:1,3 &7).
7. **Wine is the cause of violence** (Proverbs 4:17).
8. **Strong drink was forbidden to the Nazirities** (Numbers 6:1-3).

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9. **Daniel was forbidden to touch wine or strong drink because it defiles** (Daniel 1:5,8,16; 10:3).
10. **Samson’s mother, the wife of Manoah the Danite, was not to drink wine** (Judges 13:4,7,12-14).
11. **Israel did not drink wine in the wilderness for 40 years while following Moses to keep their mind clearly focused on the Lord** (Deuteronomy 29:5-6).
12. **Wine takes away man’s heart and senses rendering him incapable of acting rationally** (Habakkuk 2:15).

Just as the Bible ostensibly condemns the use of alcoholic beverages for intoxicating purposes, the devastating consequences prove alcoholism equally dangerous. Notice the following consequences of this most dangerous ‘ism, not only from scripture, but society as well.

1. The use of alcohol is sinful because it destroys. Solomon said in Proverbs 31:6, “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts.” The destructive power of alcoholism comes in all shapes and sizes. First, alcoholism destroys one’s health. Notice the physical characteristics listed in Proverbs 23:29-30:

Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babblings? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; that go to seek mixed wine.

Anything that deliberately harms our body is

wrong. Paul declared this perfectly in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 10:31. Is alcohol harmful to our body? In response to that question, consider the following study conducted by *Scientific American*, December 1996:

Excessive alcohol consumption causes more than 100,000 deaths annually in the United States, and although the number shows little sign of declining, the rate per 100,000 population has trended down since the early 1980s. Accidents, mostly due to drunken driving, accounted for 24 percent of these deaths in 1992. Alcohol-related homicide and suicide accounted for 11 and 8 percent respectively. Certain types of cancer that are partly attributable to alcohol, such as those of the esophagus, larynx, and oral cavity, contributed another 17 percent. About 9 percent is due to alcohol-related stroke. One of the most important contributors to alcohol-related deaths is a group of 12 ailments wholly caused by alcohol, among which alcoholic cirrhosis of the liver and alcohol dependence syndrome are the most important. These 12 ailments together accounted for 18 percent of the total alcohol-related deaths in 1992. Mortality due to the 12 causes rises steeply into late middle age range and then declines markedly, with those 85 and over being at less than one-sixth the risk of 55 to 64-year olds.²⁴

Consumption of alcohol affects the mind (Isaiah 28:7), body (Isaiah 19:14) and the stomach (Isaiah 28:8). Not only is alcohol dangerous to the general population, but is dangerous to expectant mothers and unborn children.

While the overall prevalence of alcohol use during

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pregnancy decreased from 1985 to 1988, it remained high for those already at high-risk for poor pregnancy outcomes: smokers, the unmarried, young and poorly educated.²⁵

Still further, consider the following staggering statistics in relationship to health problems from alcohol consumption:

*The regular consumption of large amounts of alcohol (defined as more than three drinks per day) is undesirable from the standpoint of health for almost all people and drinking low-to-moderate amounts can be desirable or undesirable, depending on individual characteristics.²⁶

* Although there are fewer deaths from alcohol-related causes than from cancer or heart disease, alcohol-related deaths tend to occur at much younger ages.²⁷

* Heavy and chronic drinking:

—*can harm virtually every organ and system in the body.*²⁸

—*is the single most important cause of illness and death from liver disease (alcoholic hepatitis and cirrhosis).*²⁹

—*is associated with cardiovascular diseases such as cardiomyopathy, hypertension, arrhythmias, and stroke.*³⁰

—*contributes to approximately 65% of all cases of pancreatitis.*³¹

*—depresses the immune system and results in a predisposition to infectious diseases, including respiratory infections, pneumonia, and tuberculosis.*³²

*—increases risk for cancer, with an estimated 2-4% of all cancer cases thought to be caused either directly or indirectly by alcohol. The strongest link between alcohol and cancer involves cancers of the upper digestive tract, including the esophagus, the mouth, the pharynx, and the larynx. Less consistent data link alcohol consumption and cancers of the liver, breast and colon.*³³

*—can lead to inadequate functioning of the testes and ovaries, resulting in hormonal deficiencies, sexual dysfunction and infertility.*³⁴

*—is related to a higher rate of early menopause and a higher frequency of menstrual irregularities (duration, flow, or both) in women.*³⁵

* Each year 4,000 to 12,000 babies are born with the physical signs and intellectual disabilities associated with FAS, and thousands more experience the somewhat lesser disabilities of fetal alcohol effects.³⁶

Second, alcoholism destroys one's wealth. Solomon said in Proverbs 21:17, "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich." Individuals with drinking problems or alcoholism at any time in their lives suffer income reductions ranging from 1.5% to 18.7% depending on age and sex compared with those with no such diagnosis.³⁷ In 1990, problems

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resulting from use of alcohol and other drugs cost American business an estimated \$81.6 billion in lost productivity due to premature death (\$37 billion) and illness (\$44.6 billion); 86% of these combined costs can be attributed to drinking problems alone.³⁸

Third, alcoholism destroys one's home. Alcohol wrecks homes and families. Esther, chapter one, tells of a drinking party which lasted a week. A king, while drunk, desired to subject his queen to the beastly gaze of drunken nobles and therefore brought the separation of the royal husband and wife. We see another example in the case of Lot's daughters committing incest with their father after getting him drunk. Consider the following facts about alcohol's power to destroy homes:

About 43% of adults in the United States—76 million people—have been exposed to alcoholism in the family: they grew up with or married an alcoholic or a problem drinker or had a blood relative who was ever an alcoholic or problem drinker.³⁹ Separated and divorced men and women were three times as likely as married men and women to say they had been married to an alcoholic or problem drinker.⁴⁰ An estimated 6.6 million children under the age of 18 years live in households with at least one alcoholic parent.⁴¹

Fourth, alcohol destroys one's influence. Paul said in Romans 13:13, "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying." Also Romans 14:21, "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, not anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." Paul said to the Corinthians:

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever

ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of man, that they many be saved (1 Cor. 10:31-33).

2. *The use of alcohol is sinful because it condemns.*

Paul lists “drunkenness” as one of the works of the flesh which will condemn a person to eternal punishment and shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:21). He also said in Ephesians 5:18 the following: “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” The word *methysos* [drunkard], *methe* [drunkenness], *methyo* [to be drunk] and *methyskomai* [to get drunk] occur in the lists of vices in 1 Corinthians 5:11, 6:10; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:21 and literally mean, “to drink” or “to be or get drunk.”⁴² Paul also says:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

According to these scriptures, the Corinthians had been fornicators, adulterers, drunkards, etc., but they had changed by being washed, sanctified and justified in the name of Jesus. Without that change they would

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have not inherited the kingdom of God. Yet, what does it mean not to inherit the kingdom of God? Paul demonstrates this principle with a powerful and sobering example in Ephesians 2:12. He said:

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12).

The word, “alien” means, “estranged, alienated, separated.” Therefore, those who consume alcoholic beverages are estranged, alienated and separated from the kingdom of God until or unless they repent and turn from the sin of alcoholism (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9).

3. The use of alcohol is sinful because it deceives.

Deception is a falsehood, lie and misrepresentation of the truth. Solomon said in Proverbs 20:1: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” Alcohol deceives in every and all conceivable way. It creates a false sense of confidence, ability, happiness and security.

Alcohol deceives those who operate motor vehicles into believing they can do anything. However, the number of alcohol related deaths and accidents is continually rising. Consider the following:

40% of all traffic fatalities (the leading cause of accidental death) are alcohol-related⁴³ and alcoholics are nearly five times more likely than others to die in motor vehicle crashes.⁴⁴ Drivers under the age of 25 were more likely than those

25 or older to be intoxicated in a fatal crash.⁴⁵
Drivers aged 21 to 24 had the highest intoxication rates (33.7%) for fatal crashes in 1991.⁴⁶

One example of alcohol's deceptive power is when Jacob tricked Isaac to receive the birthright. In Genesis 27:25, Isaac was drinking wine when he blessed Jacob. The blessings belonged to Esau - the first born. Esau had sold his birthright to Jacob for bread and a pottage of lentils. However, Rebekah and Jacob tricked Isaac; and this they did with wine.

Let us now turn our attention to certain scriptures which are often times used by advocates of alcohol consumption to condone social drinking, or drinking alcohol in moderation. Previous in this discussion, we established that consumption of alcoholic beverages is not only evil, but sinful as well. Therefore, based upon the Biblical fact that consumption of alcohol in any form or amount is evil and sinful, it is simply not possible to practice evil in moderation. The only alternative is total and complete abstinence.

We will mention three scriptures that are often used in defense of moderate imbibing of alcohol or social drinking. They are: John 2:1-11; 1 Timothy 5:23 and 1 Timothy 3:3 and 8. First, John 2:1-11 tells the story of Jesus' first miracle at the wedding feast in Cana where He turned the water into wine. Yet, advocates of moderate consumption of alcohol based upon this passage are woefully disappointed based upon the following considerations.

1. If the water Jesus turned into wine was alcoholic in nature then Jesus contributed to drunkenness by supplying intoxicating beverages to a group of people who were already partially drunk.

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2. If the water Jesus turned into wine was alcoholic in nature, then Jesus contradicted Galatians 5:21, Ephesians 5:18, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, etc. and therefore became a sinner; however, the Scriptures clearly teach that He committed no sin (1 Peter 2:22).

3. If the water Jesus turned into wine was alcoholic in nature, then He rejected the powerful teachings of the Old Testament that are for our “learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

Therefore, John 2:1-11 cannot be used to condone the consumption of alcoholic beverages, whether in extreme or moderate amounts.

Second, 1 Timothy 5:23, “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.” Several affirmations must be established from this scripture to contribute to its overall explanation.

1. Timothy had obviously abstained from alcoholic beverages to be instructed to take a “little wine” for his condition.

2. The instruction to “take a little wine” for was for the express relief of his “stomach” and often infirmities.” Timothy’s physical condition is under consideration and Paul writes him a prescription to alleviate a medical condition.

3. It took the authority of an apostle to convince Timothy to take a “little wine” for his medical condition. Using alcohol for medical purposes is justifiable, when properly prescribed and

monitored. Therefore, 1 Timothy 5:23 cannot be used to condone the consumption of alcoholic beverages for social drinking purposes, whether in extreme or moderate amounts.

Third, 1 Timothy 3:3 says, “Not given to wine,” while 1 Timothy 3:8 says, “not given to much wine.” The phrase “not given to wine” in 1 Timothy 3:3 comes from the adjective *paroinos*. *Paroinos* comes from two Greek words: *para*, which means, “along side,” and *oinos*, which means, “wine.”⁴⁷ Therefore, the Elder should not be found along side of wine. Likewise, the Deacons should not be “given to much wine.” This phrase conveys the idea of turning one’s mind to, or attending to, and is used of giving oneself over completely to. Once again, the Deacon should not set his mind, attend to or give himself over completely to wine in any form or amount. Therefore, 1 Timothy 3:3,8 cannot be used to condone the consumption of alcoholic beverages, whether in extreme or moderate amounts

Christians should recall, remember and review what the Bible says about alcohol and abide faithfully to the end.

Conclusion

There are many innocent persons whose hearts are broken because of alcohol. There are many resources and abilities which are being wasted because of alcohol. There are many helpless victims whose lives have been demolished because of alcohol. The hills and vales of our great nation are being filled with the graves of those who are dead because of alcohol. The liquor traffic, which is a public cancer, is destroying the very vitals of society.⁴⁸

Dedicated Christians are diametrically opposed to the imbibing of alcohol as a mere beverage in any form and to any degree. The opportunities are many! The

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responsibility is great! The task is awesome! May God grant individuals the wisdom to recognize their opportunities, the courage to assume their responsibilities, and the zeal to press on with the task of promoting the truth in regard to the imbibing of alcoholic beverages.⁴⁹ “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; And whosoever erreth thereby is not wise.”⁵⁰

Appendix

[Editor’s Note: We do not endorse all of the beliefs of the following organizations concerning the subject of alcoholism. In fact, **certain teachings of some of these organizations are plainly unscriptural**. However, brother Posey has compiled this lengthy list and we include it here in order that the reader might have the maximum possible information available to fight this tremendous social ill].

Al-anon, Alateen Family
Group Hotline
(800)344-2666
1600 Corporate Landing Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617

Alcohol and Drug Helpline
(800)821-4357
4578 Highland Drive
Salt Lake City, UT 84117

Alcohol, Drug and Pregnancy Helpline -
National Center for Prenatal Addictions,
Research and Education (NAPARE)
(800) 638-2229 200 North Michigan Avenue, Suite
300
Chicago, IL 60601

Alcohol Rehab for the Elderly
(800)354-7089
P.O. Box 267
Hopedale, IL 61747

American Council on Alcoholism
(800) 527-5344
2522 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21218

Children of Alcoholics Foundation
(800) 359-2623
555 Madison Avenue, 20th Floor
New York, NY 10022

Families Anonymous (Families coping
with drug abuse and alcohol)
(800)736-9805
P.O. Box 3475
Culver City, CA 90231-3475

Mothers Against Drunk Driving
(800) 438-6233
511 East John Carpenter Freeway, Suite 700
Irving, TX 75062

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug
Information
(800) 729-6686
(800) 487-4889
P.O. Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20852

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug
Dependence Hopeline
(800) 622-2255
12 West 21st Street, Suite 700
New York, NY 10010

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Wisconsin Clearinghouse (Drug and Alcohol prevention educational materials and publications)
(800) 322-1468

University of Wisconsin
P.O. Box 1468
Madison, WI 53701-1468

Also, an abundance of information can be obtained from visiting the Home Pages of those institutions and organizations dedicated to helping eliminate Alcoholism. Visit the following Home Pages on the Internet:

Resources and Referral Guide

Al-Anon/Alateen
<http://solar.rtd.utk.edu/~al-anon>

Alcoholics Anonymous
<http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org>

American Society of Addiction Medicine
<http://users.aol.com/asamoffice>
Betty Ford Center
<http://www.bettyfordcenter.com>

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms
<http://www.ustreas.gov/treasury/bureaus/atf/atf.html>
Center on Addiction & Substance Abuse at Columbia University <http://www.casacolumbia.org>

Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies at Brown University <http://caas.caas.biomed.brown.edu>
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov>

Center for Science in the Public Interest
<http://www.cspinet.org>

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention

<http://www.samhsa.gov>

Center for Substance Abuse Research

<http://www.bsos.umd.edu/cesar/cesar.html>

Cocaine Anonymous

<http://www.ca.org>

Fight Back

http://http://www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/vumc/centers/varc/fightback/fight_back.html

Hazelden Foundation

<http://www.hazelden.org>

Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons And Significant Others

[http:// http://www.jacsweb.org/](http://http://www.jacsweb.org/)

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

<gopher://gopher.rwjf.org:4500>

Johnson Institute

<http://www.johnsoninstitute.com>

Join Together

<http://www.jointogether.org>

Just Say No International

<http://www.justsayno.org>

Krooz Controlled

<http://www.tiac.net/users/krooznet>

The Marin Institute

<http://www.marininstitute.org>

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Mothers Against Drunk Driving

<http://www.madd.org>

Narcotics Anonymous

<http://www.wsoinc.com>

National Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors
(NAADAC)

<http://www.naadac.org>

National Association For Children Of Alcoholics (NACoA)

<http://www.health.org/nacoa>

National Clearinghouse For Alcohol and Drug Information

<http://www.health.org>

National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Service Organizations

<http://www.cossmho.org>

National Families in Action

<http://www.emory.edu/NFIA>

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>

National Institute on Drug Abuse

<http://www.nida.nih.gov>

National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

<http://www.nofas.org>

Office of Minority Health Resource Center

<http://www.omhrc.gov>

National Women's Resource Center

<http://www.nwrc.org>

Office of National Drug Control Policy

<http://www.whitehouse.org/WH/EOP/html/ondcp.html>

Parents Resource For Drug Education

<http://www.prideusa.org>

Partnership for a Drug-Free America

<http://www.drugfreeamerica.org>

Rutgers University Center of Alcohol Studies Library

<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~cas2>

Secular Society for Sobriety

<http://www.codesh.org/sos>

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Chapter 27
**A Study Of Dangerous 'Isms
In The New Testament**

Jerry Joseph

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (Col. 2:8). There are certain beliefs, teachings and practices that are dangerous, for they can cause our souls to be lost. Any philosophy, proclamation or practice contrary to sound doctrine must be dissected, denounced and defeated (Eph. 5:11; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1). It will be our purpose in this study to do exactly that as we look at some of the dangerous 'isms in the New Testament: Phariseeism, Sadduceeism and Gnosticism.

Phariseeism

In the New Testament we read of a group known as the Pharisees. One does not read of them in the Old Testament. As one begins to study the life of Christ in the New Testament, the Jewish sects, especially the Pharisees and Sadducees, are very prominent. Christ, it seems, during his personal ministry was in almost constant confrontations with these Jewish groups. The Pharisees originated during the time between the end of the Old Testament and the birth of Jesus Christ:

From 167-63 B.C., the Jewish people enjoyed a period of relative independence (though not

altogether free of strife). During this time there developed a spirit of smoldering rivalry between the Hellenists (those sympathetic to Greek ways), the Hasidim (conservatives who were set for the defense of the law and traditional Judaism), and the Maccabeans (leaders of the Jewish revolt). These factions were the embryonic beginnings of the Jewish sects.¹

At first relatively small in number, the Pharisees came to represent, by the first century, the religious beliefs, practices and social attitudes of the vast majority of the Jewish people.²

Basically, the Pharisees began as concerned Jews who noticed that many of their fellow Jews were being influenced by Greek customs, culture and life style and not so much by the Law of Moses. These concerned Jews therefore began to call upon their fellow Jews to denounce such influences and were determined to follow completely God's revealed Law. This was certainly the right thing to do. Then over time, these concerned Jews (Pharisees) began to center in on certain laws to the neglect of others. They "left undone" some of the "major" things of the Law. They soon devised their own guidelines to what should or should not be done. They would "leave" the written Law of God to hold on to their own traditions. Their interpretations of the Law became as a law to themselves. This is what Phariseeism is all about.

Misunderstandings About Phariseeism

Is stressing obedience to the Will of God Phariseeism? To believe and teach that God has only one way to Heaven, is that Phariseeism? To call for book, chapter and verse preaching is that Phariseeism? Some would declare with

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a definite “Yes.” They would be wrong! There does exist some misunderstanding about Phariseeism. There are some things perceived as Phariseeism but are not. *Phariseeism is not:*

(1) Commitment To Sound Doctrine.

Does the Lord call for commitment? He certainly does. We must deny ourselves and follow Him and Him alone (Matt. 16:24; 6:24). Commitment to and continuing in sound doctrine is what God demands (1 Tim. 4:13, 16).

(2) Conviction That Is Strong.

We are to have strong convictions. We must not be wishy-washy concerning our belief. We must know what we believe, why we believe it and be willing to show it in our words and way of life (Rom. 16:17; 1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Tim. 1:12-13; 3:14).

(3) Courage To Stand For The Truth.

Courageously standing for the Truth must not be viewed as Phariseeism. To stand for our opinions and traditions and not the Truth is Phariseeism (1 Cor. 16:13; 2 Thess. 2:15; Tit. 1:9; 1 Cor. 15:1; Gal. 5:1; Eph. 6:11-14; Phil. 1:27; 4:1).

(4) Condemnation Of Sin.

To condemn sin wherever it is found is not Phariseeism. Sin must be opposed and exposed (Rom. 12:9; Eph. 5:11; 2 Tim. 4:2-6; Tit. 2:15).

(5) Correction Of The Sinner.

The sinner must be encouraged to come out of sin. Sin in a person’s life must not be overlooked (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 4:2-4; Matt. 18:15-17; Acts 13:8-11; Gal. 1:6-9; 2:11-14; 4:16; 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; Tit. 1:9-11).

(6) Claiming That There Is A Standard Or Pattern.

Everyone is living by some standard or pattern. Some view “pattern theology” as a symptom of Phariseeism, but the Bible is our blueprint, a pattern for our words, way of life, work and worship (2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Col. 3:17; Matt. 28:20; John 12:48).

(7) Conforming To That Standard.

To obey and keep the commandments of the Lord is not Phariseeism. The Lord did not condemn them for keeping the Law. If we conform our lives to our traditions, and neglect the Truth, then that would be Phariseeism. The Lord demands obedience to His Will (Jas. 1:21-22; Rom. 12:1-2; 1 John 2:15-17; Tit. 2:11-12; John 4:24; Luke 6:46; 1 John 1:7; Rev. 22:14).

(8) Compelling Others To Submit To That Standard.

We have the responsibility to proclaim the Truth and persuade others to obey. We do not and can not force others to obey, but with love for the Son of God, the Scripture and the souls of others we can compel them to submit to the Word of God (Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rom. 6:16-18; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 5:11; Acts 2:40; Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 2:8; Eph. 4:1).

(9) Contending For That Standard.

To stand ready to defend the Truth is the responsibility of every faithful child of God (Jude 3; 1 Pet. 3:15; Phil. 1:17; 1 Thess. 5:21). Such must not be viewed as Phariseeism.

(10) Courageously Speaking Sound Doctrine

The Truth not only must be demonstrated and defended, it also must be faithfully declared (2 Tim. 4:2-4; 1 Pet. 4:11; Eph. 4:15; Rom. 1:16-17; Tit. 2:1,8).

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Let us remember that the Pharisees were not condemned for searching the Law, studying the Law, speaking the Law, stressing the Law nor submitting to the Law. They were to do that:

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth (Deut. 28:1).

Makeup Of Phariseeism

The Pharisees had a distinct message. Their motives and methods for doing things were clearly revealed. When we examine these things we see the mistakes of the Pharisees. To understand the message, motives, methods and mistakes of the Pharisees is to understand the makeup of Phariseeism. *Phariseeism involved:*

(1) Self-Righteousness And Exaltation.

Pride was one of the major problems of the Pharisees:

But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt

himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted (Matt. 23:5-12).

There was self-exaltation on their part. Look at the attire worn and the attention they demanded. They even demanded certain titles to be used in referring to them. Does this happen today? It certainly does.

(2) *Saying And Not Doing.*

They were short on practicing what they taught. They were inconsistent because their way of life did not match up with their words. They talked a good talk but did not walk accordingly. It seems their motto was “do as I say, not as I do.”

Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers (Matt. 23:1-4).

(3) *Seeking To Entrap The Lord.*

And as he said these things unto them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things: Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him (Luke 11:53-54).

The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven” (Matt. 16:1).

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The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? (Matt. 19:3).

Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk (Matt. 22:15).

There is nothing wrong with asking questions if we are genuinely seeking the right answers. This was not true of the Pharisees. They had an ulterior motive.

Is it wrong to question one today about their belief? Absolutely not! In fact, we are commanded to put to the test the teaching of another (1 John 4:1; Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21). No one is above the Law. It doesn't matter how popular he is, how powerful he may be, how many possessions he has, what position he holds, or what kind of personality he has, **PUT HIM TO THE TEST!** Too many times people have the attitude that certain preachers, elders, congregations, publications and their editors, schools and their presidents and staff are protected from being **PUT TO THE TEST** by some unwritten "hands-off-policy." Such a policy is not found in God's Word.

(4) Straining Out A Gnat And Swallowing A Camel.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel (Matt. 23:23-24).

The Lord does not condemn them for what they did in

their tithing of these things, but he condemns them for neglecting some other things of the Law. They did not do what He had commanded. We sometimes refer to this as being partial obedience; but, partial obedience is not what God commanded then nor now. Really, partial obedience is no obedience.

We can be as the Pharisees in this as we attempt to worship God. We can be so concerned about doing and engaging in the acts of worship (which we must) that we overlook having a proper heart and attitude in worship. Then on the other hand, some are saying that there is no pattern of worship for us today, that worship is to be a time of “spontaneity,” just “let the Spirit lead you.” In baptizing others, we can be so concerned about the act itself, that we forget and fail to properly instruct concerning the real meaning of baptism.

Must we preach the Truth? Certainly, but let us not forget that it must be done with love. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:15). On the other hand, we can just emphasize the attitude in preaching and not preach the Truth. I’m afraid that we are seeing too much of that now. Some are saying, “just preach love”, or “just preach positive things”, or “preach, but do it in such a way that it does not offend anyone.” There must be a scriptural balance.

(5) Setting Aside The Written Law For Oral Traditions.

They were sometimes more concerned for their “traditions” than the written “Truth” of God. In Mark 7:1-13, we read of some of their traditions which they honored; and Jesus said in verses 8-9:

For laying aside the commandment of God, ye

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hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.

Then, in verse 13 of Mark 7, we read:

Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.

They made laws for man (Matt. 12:1-8). They sought to bind upon man that which God had not bound. We must not bind where God has loose, nor loose where God has bound (Matt. 16:19-20). We must hold on to and hold up God's Word over the word of man (2 Thess. 2:15).

(6) Shutting Up The Kingdom Of Heaven Against Men.

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in (Matt. 23:13).

The Pharisees were misguiding the people in emphasizing their traditions over the Truth of God. When preachers emphasize something other than the Truth, and the people listen to it and live by it, the kingdom of God can't be theirs.

The "change agents" today are calling for all kinds of compromises to the Truth. Changes in God pleasing worship, in God's way of salvation, and in God's work for the church are being called for and carried out in too many congregations. When those compromises are

believed, bought, and become a part of one's life, no matter how sincere one may be, he belongs not to the Lord but to Satan. We cannot preach and practice compromise of the Truth. Compromise will not get people into Heaven. Our desire for the lost should be as the Lord Himself "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

(7) *Saying Loud And Long Prayers For Pretense.*

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation (Matt. 23:14).

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward (Matt. 6:5).

(8) *Scolding The Lord For His Practices And Proclamations* (Matt. 21:23-46; Matt. 12:1-13; Matt. 9:10-13; Luke 7:30).

Today there are some that get upset if you want to take the Gospel to people of a different race or who do not measure up to their standards. Such critics will not lift a hand to teach someone nor will they even listen to the Truth. They have closed their eyes and ears to the truth (Matt. 13:15).

(9) *Scoffing At The Lord* (Luke 16:13-31; Matt.12:24-28; 11:16-19).

They were into name-calling. They used words in referring to Jesus that were not an accurate description

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of Him. The Pharisees could not justify their charges against the Lord.

When we use words to describe others we must make sure that the words fit. It is not wrong to refer to someone as they are. Is it wrong to refer to one as a child of God, if he is? Of course not. But it would be wrong to refer to one as a child of God, if they haven't obeyed the Gospel. Neither is it wrong to describe one as a false teacher if what he preaches and practices is contrary to the Scripture.

Sadduceeism

The Sadducees were another sect of the Jews in the New Testament. They, along with the Pharisees, originated in the Inter-Testament period.

The Sadducees are supposed to have derived their name from some person named "Zadok." The most prominent Zadok in history was the High Priest during the life of David (2 Sam. 8:17; 15:24). All succeeding High priests claimed to descend from this Zadok. Even in New Testament times the Sadducees were the party to whom the High priests belonged.³

They were not as large a group as the Pharisees but they did wield a great influence upon the people. In the early history of the Pharisees and Sadducees there existed a great rivalry between them as to which would claim the office of High Priest. The Sadducees won control, and the rivalry did not end because of their opposing teachings.

The Sadducees, in spite of their relationship with the priesthood and temple, must be considered as very liberal in their teachings. They differed from the Pharisees in the things they believed and taught. Let's notice some of the things the Sadducees believed and taught.

(1) **Denounced** the resurrection, angels and spirit. "...Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both" (Acts 23:8). "The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection..." (Matt. 22:23). In the Old Testament there are references to angels, spirit and resurrection (Gen. 16:7; Ex. 23:20; Psm. 31:5; 49:15; 104:4; Eccl. 12:7). Therefore, the Sadducees did not even believe what was set forth in the Old Testament.

The Sadducees were not the only ones to deny such. Some in Acts 17:32, after hearing of the resurrection of the dead, mocked that truth. It is foolishness to mock and despise God's Word (Prov. 1:7, 22).

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul dealt with some who were denying a future bodily resurrection. In verses 13-58, he clearly showed the fallacy of their thinking. There were those in Acts 26 listening to Paul's defense of himself, who denied the resurrection. Also, Hymenaeus and Philetus did not declare the truth concerning the resurrection (2 Tim. 2:17-18).

(2) **Discarded** the oral traditions of the Pharisees and demanded that only the written Law (Pentateuch) was authoritative.

Sadducees taught that only those laws written in the Pentateuch were to be regarded as binding while those laws that had not been written down were not to be observed. This brought the Sadducees into conflict with the Pharisees who taught that God had given both the written and oral law.⁴

We must discard anything that is in opposition to God's Will and demand that only that which the Lord has authorized should be accepted (Col. 3:17).

(3) **Denied** what the Scripture taught about the soul, punishment and reward. They did not believe that

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the soul continued to exist after death. Neither did they believe that people would suffer punishment or receive reward after death. They believed that punishment and reward was in this life.

We must acknowledge and accept what the Scripture says about the soul, punishment and reward (2 Thess. 1:7-9; Matt. 16:24-27; 25:31-46). We must not deny any Bible Truth. We cannot subtract from what God has revealed in His Word (Rev. 22:18-19; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Pet. 3:16).

(4) **Demonstrated** Deism in their words and way of life. They believed that God wasn't too interested in man's life. They believed that God wasn't too concerned about one doing good or refraining from evil. God has always been concerned about what man does. That's why, beginning with Adam and Eve, God has had a plan for mankind. That plan changed from one dispensation to the next, but man has always had a Law from God that he was to be subject to. Since God has given us a Law to live by that shows He is concerned. God is so concerned, that He demands obedience to His Law (Eccl. 12:13; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Jas. 1:21-22).

(5) **Determined** to discredit the proclaimers of Truth (Matt. 22:23-33; Acts 4:1-4). In this they were like the Pharisees. On occasions the Sadducees and Pharisees overlooked their differences to join forces in attacking Christ (Matt. 16:1). Even though they differed, they united in a common goal.

Today there are those who are ready to discredit the proclaimers of Truth any way they can. The false teacher cannot answer the Truth so he accuses the faithful of being too harsh and so unloving in proclaiming the Truth. The attitudes and motives of the faithful are attacked because the Truth proclaimed is "hitting too close to home." What a shame!

There are those in the church who will join forces with the denominational world in their "special services"

or regular services. A clear violation of Ephesians 5:11 and 2 John 9-11. What a shame!

Gnosticism

Gnosticism is the third and final ‘ism found in the New Testament we want to examine. This philosophy was a great threat to the faith of the faithful. In Colossians 2:8 Paul warns, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” In this verse, Paul warns about the things which threatened the welfare of the child of God and certainly Gnosticism was such.

From the Greek word “gnosis” comes the word “Gnostic” which means “knowledge.” The Gnostics, with pride, proclaimed to possess a superior knowledge to others. They claimed “special” knowledge that was not known by others. The source of their knowledge included (1) tradition, (2) parts of the Scripture and (3) the so-called wisdom of “learned” men. Gnosticism was a philosophy emphasizing that salvation was by knowledge alone and not by believing and obeying the Word of God.

To have salvation there must be “knowledge.” It is not the writings and philosophy of men that bring about salvation. Knowledge must come from the Word of God (Rom. 10:17; John 8:32; Eph. 3:4; Col. 1:10; 2 Tim. 2:15; Psm. 1:1-3; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 1:3). There must be a believing and obeying of the Truth (Rom. 1:16-17; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Matt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9). Gnosticism directed people away from the “all-sufficiency” of the Scripture just as the modernists and liberals do today. God’s Word is all-sufficient (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3).

Gnosticism has as its foundation, “all matter is evil.” This meant that according to their “superior knowledge” the “body” was evil. This belief led to wrong thinking about Christ, especially His incarnation and atonement.

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Within the Gnostics, there were different beliefs about Christ.

(1) **Ebionites** denied the deity of Christ. To them He was a mere man.

(2) **Docetics** denied His humanity. They claimed that He only seemed to have a body. He wasn't really flesh and blood. He was only visionary.

(3) **Cerinthians** held to a belief that was a combination of the other two beliefs. They separated the Christ from the man Jesus. They claimed that Christ descended upon the man Jesus at His baptism and then left Him at the crucifixion. This meant that it was Jesus the man who died on the cross.

Who is Jesus Christ? The Gnostics held to different and wrong views because they were relying on the wrong source for their information. We can come to know who Jesus Christ is by going to God's Word. The Word became flesh and dwelt among men, being both divine and human - the Son of man and the Son of God, lived a sinless life, left us an example to follow, and went to the cross to die for our sins (John 1:1-3, 14; 3:16; 5:32-42; 20:30-31; Gal. 4:4-5; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Tim. 1:15; 2:5-6; 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:9-10; 2:8; 1 John 1:1-2; 2:1-2, 22-23; 3:8; 4:2-3, 14-15; 5:6, 11-13, 20; 2 John 7). We must believe who He is and obey Him.

Gnosticism resulted in wrong thinking concerning the body, spirit, ethics and sin: (1) Since the body is evil anyway, and not that important, then what one does in the body is of no consequence. They believed one would not give account for the things done in the body. They viewed such things as having no affect upon the soul;

therefore, “eat, drink and be merry.” This sounds somewhat like the proponents of “impossibility of apostasy.” Some say it is possible for the child of God to sin but it will not affect their soul. These beliefs are certainly in conflict with the Scripture (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 9:27; Gal. 5:19-21; Jas. 5:19-20; 1 John 1:6; 2:4-6; 3:7-8).

(2) Some believed that since the body is evil, the more abuse, punishment, affliction, self-denial placed upon the body, the more righteous one became. This was the philosophy of Asceticism. The apostle Paul warned against such in Colossians 2:20-23 and 1 Timothy 4:1-3.

(3) Gnosticism also led to a belief that they were above sin. They believed that man was altogether spiritual. For them sin was not a reality. The Bible makes it clear that sin is a reality. Every accountable person has sinned (Rom. 3:10, 23; 6:23). Even those who are the children of God can sin (1 Cor. 10:12; Gal. 6:1, 7-9; James 5:19-20; 2 Pet. 1:5-11; 1 John 1:7-2:2).

Conclusion

In dealing with these ‘isms or any other teaching or practice contrary to the Scripture, what is our obligation?

- (1) We cannot “support” such by word or way of life, without becoming guilty ourselves (2 John 9-11).
- (2) We must “stand” against it (Eph. 5:11).
- (3) We must “seek” that which is good and right (1 Thess. 5:21; Jude 3).
- (4) We must “seize” the opportunities to encourage others to give-up and get-out of any false doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2-4).
- (5) We must “speak” the Truth (Eph. 4:15).

Endnotes

1 Wayne Jackson, **Background Bible Study** (Montgomery: Apologetics Press, Inc., 1986), p. 102.

2 **Encyclopedia Judaica**, Vol. 23 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House) p. 364.

3 H. Leo Boles, **Gospel Advocate**, Vol. 137, No. 9., March 1, 1945.

4 **Encyclopedia of Religion**, Vol. 12 (New York: MacMillan & Free Press) p. 563.

Chapter 28

Materialism

Mike Benson

Introduction

In his epistle to the church at Colosse, Paul warned, “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). The word rendered “beware,” (*blepete*), suggests that there is a danger, and that it is real. The Greek verb *sylagogeō*, is translated “cheat” (NKJV) or “spoil” (KJV), and is found only here in the New Testament. It comes from *syle*, “booty,” and *ago*, “carry”; literally the word means “to carry off as spoil, lead captive.”¹ It is used in the sense of “to kidnap” and the figure is that of carrying someone away from the truth into the slavery of error.²

Perhaps no “ism” has kidnapped or carried off more in the body of Christ today than that of materialism. What has brought about this abduction? The answer is simple, yet disturbing. In our affluent society, materialism has evolved into a sort of respectable sin. In fact, in some circles it has become a rather revered sin. Like those brethren in Corinth who once boasted in the immorality of one of their own (cf. 1 Cor. 5:2), many in the church have been taken in by this worldly philosophy and now glory in their materialistic exploits. In some instances, materialism has lost all identification with sin (cf. Isa. 5:20), and is now considered a virtue — virtuous

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materialism, if you please.

But what exactly is materialism, and at what point do we become guilty of such? Webster says it is, “the tendency to be more concerned with material than with spiritual values.” The answer may be best explained, however, not so much by what it is, but by what it does, and how it is observed. Simply put, *materialism sets up another object(s) of worship besides God. Materialism replaces God on the throne of one’s heart with the desire for and the pursuit of money and possessions.*³ “There is a sort of religious purpose, a devotion of the soul” to tangible, temporal concerns.⁴ James Meadows appropriately calls materialism “the gospel of the flesh.”⁵ The Biblical word for this is “covetousness” (cf. Rom. 13:9; 1 Cor. 5:11; 1 Thess. 2:5; Jas. 4:2; 2 Pet. 2:14). Consider:

Jesus said, “Take heed and beware of covetousness. . .” (Luke 12:15).

To engage in covetousness, *pleonexia*, is to engage in the greedy desire for more things.⁶

Paul said, “Covetousness ... is idolatry” (Col. 3:5; cf. Eph. 5:5).

An idolatrous person worships or bows to the inferior (cf. 1 Cor. 8:4; Jer. 10: 14); he renders ultimate devotion **to** an object of limited value.

Therefore, **materialism bows to the greedy desire for and pursuit of things and exalts such above God.**⁷

Roy Lanier states it well when he says:

... Man is bowing down figuratively to an idol when he keeps for himself much[.] It is remarkable covetousness, is listed **with** fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire; all such passions so detestable within the heart of a Christian. Yet, it is listed there evidently because it is what turns the heart of a Christian away from God! It dethrones God from His rightful place. When a man seeks happiness in things, possessions, money, etc., he has dethroned God from his heart.⁸

While our modern-day idols may share little physical similarity to their crude counterparts of wood and stone, we pay them reverence nonetheless. And although the position of our bodies may be somewhat different (in that we do not physically bow), the position of our hearts is essentially the same.

Someone inquires, “But where is the line (or the dollar amount) at which a child of God becomes materialistic? The answer may surprise some readers. In truth, materialism is not determined by income. Wealth, per se, is not an indicator of idolatry.⁹ A Christian does not suddenly become an idolater when his annual paycheck surpasses a certain figure. One can be wealthy and not be materialistic (eg. **Abraham** — Gen. 13:2; Heb. 11:8-10; **Job** — Job 1:3,21-22; **Barnabas** — Acts 4:36-37);¹⁰ conversely, one can be of very modest means and yet be very materially-oriented. We tend to equate materialism with financial prosperity; this is faulty reasoning. Materialism is not determined by financial aptitude, but rather by carnal, covetous attitude (eg. **Achan** — Josh. 7: 1ff, **Gehazi** — 2 Kings 5:20ff; **Ahab** — 1 Kings 21:1ff, **the rich young ruler** — Luke 18:18-27; **the rich farmer/fool** — Luke 12:13-21; **the rich man**

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sometimes called Dives — Luke 16:19-31; the “**prodigal son**” — Luke 15:13; **Judas** — John 12:4-6; 18:2ff; Matt. 26:15; 27:3-5; Acts 1:25; **Ananias and Sapphira** — Acts 5: 1ff; **Demetrius** — Acts 19:23ff; Felix -Acts 24:24-26; **Demas** — 2 Tim. 4: 10).

Paul told Timothy that those who are “minded,” (*boulomenoi*), (1 Tim. 6:9 ASV) to be rich fall into spiritual peril. The word “minded” has reference to the deliberate exercise of the will and is often translated “desire.”¹¹ “For the wicked boasts his heart’s desire; he blesses the greedy and renounces the Lord” (Psa. 10:3; cf. Isa. 57:17; Jer. 51:13).¹²

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, to address some of the reasons as to **Why** we bow to materialism; second, to determine **How** we bow to materialism (as well as the consequence of such); and third, **What** we must do in order to change our allegiance. These ideas will be addressed under the headings of motivation, manifestation, and mortification.

Motivation—Why We Bow

The fundamental reason we kneel before the shrine of materialism is because in so doing there is a **veneration** of self; self receives homage rather than Sovereign God. At its essence, materialism is actually an adoration of and a bowing to self — it is a self-glorification. The worship of mammon is primarily a worship of man and his self(ish) interests; materialism is “i”-dolatry. “For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous. . .” (2 Tim. 3:2 KJV; cf. Luke 12:21; Phil. 3:18-19).

But what are some of the specific reasons as to why we bow? First, we bow because we take pleasure in **self-exaltation**.

The average home of Christians today is

cluttered with things [idols!], things that will never serve much of anything spiritual, only the vanity and pride of men.¹³

Pay close attention to the commercials on television and observe what they're advertising and how virtually every word, picture, and sound is designed to pull you in, to make you dissatisfied with what you have and what you look like and who you are. The great goal is to make you want whatever it is that is being sold. But it's not just on television. ... It's going on all the time, even when you can't see it, and especially when you're not [consciously] thinking about it. It's whistling its appeal, 'Come on. Come on. You'll love it. This is so much fun. It'll make you look so good. It'll make you feel so good.' It motivates us by appealing to our pride and to that which pleases us, all the while cleverly seducing us away from God.¹⁴

We crave things we neither need nor enjoy. We buy things we do not want to impress people we do not like ... We are made to feel ashamed to wear clothes or drive cars until they are worn out. The mass media have convinced us that to be out of step with fashion is to be out of step with reality.¹⁵

(Note: While I certainly do not agree with much, or most, of what Swindoll and Foster have to say in other realms of doctrine, their assessments in this regard are essentially correct. — MB).

Pride is the problem (cf. 1 Tim. 6:17). John through inspiration warned of the danger of self-exaltation when he said:

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Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world (1 John 2:15-16; cf. Deut. 8:14; Prov. 16:18,19).

The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts (Psm. 10:4).

Second, we bow because materialism induces a certain **self-deception**. It deludes man into thinking that he alone is the source and sufficiency of life. “. . .The covetous [man] renounceth, yea, contemneth Jehovah” (Psm. 10:3 ASV). “. . .Give me neither poverty nor riches — feed me with the food You prescribe for me; lest I be full and deny You, and say ‘Who is the Lord?’” (Prov. 30:8b-9a). Note Moses’ warning to Israel:

When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest — when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God . . . then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth’ (Deut. 8:10-14a,17; cf. 32:15;).

Jimmy Clark thoughtfully points out that, “There was nothing wrong with the nation having the many things that God gave them. The problem came when they forgot the Lord and His goodness to them.”¹⁶

Note the Lord’s rebuke of the Laodicean church, “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17; cf. Hos. 12:8). Laodicea had become complacent and self-satisfied. In such condition she failed to recognize her need for God; she was self-deceived and self-deluded. May I suggest this was not only a first-century malady; it still afflicts and affects churches of the twentieth century:

The picture well describes many congregations today: they possess material prosperity, they engage in “projects” that use finances but which express no real spiritual zeal. They develop a “teaching program” more formal than productive of true inward development. They enjoy a comfortable building and a respected social position in the community, and live in worldly enjoyment that requires neither sacrifice nor effort. They feel sufficient within themselves.¹⁷

In a similar regard, materialism deceives man about what constitutes true worth. The story is told of prosperous, young investment banker who was driving his new BMW on a mountain road during a snow storm. As he made his way around one particularly sharp curve, he lost control of his car and began sliding off the road toward a steep precipice. At the last possible moment, he leaped from his car, which then tumbled end-over-end to the bottom of the ravine. Though he had narrowly escaped with his life, the man suffered a dreadful injury.

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It seems his right arm had been caught near the hinge of the door as he jumped and had been yanked off at the shoulder. A trucker witnessed the accident in his rearview mirror. He quickly brought his rig to a stop and ran over to see if he could help. He found the man standing at the edge of the road, looking down at his mangled automobile in the ravine below. “My BMW! My new BMW!” the banker cried, oblivious to his awful wound. The trucker pointed at the banker’s shoulder and said, “Mr., you’ve got bigger problems than **that** car. We’ve got to find your arm so that the surgeons can sew it back on!” The banker looked where his arm had been and **then** groaned, “Oh no! My Rolex! My new Rolex!”¹⁸ While the story is fictitious, it serves to illustrate a sobering truth. Materialism deludes to such an extent that the physical appears to be of greater duration and value than the spiritual. This explains why so many are willing to swap their souls for that which the world has to offer (Matt. 16:26).

Paul warned that, “. . . those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare [trap]. . .” (1 Tim. 6:9). The Greek word for snare, (*pagis*), reveals the deceptive nature of materialism:

It refers to the way wild animals are caught. A hole is dug in the earth and filled with sharp stakes. Then it is covered with grass. Unawares, the helpless victim plunges in the hidden hole and is transfixed on the stakes.¹⁹

The Psalmist wrote, “They served their idols, which became a snare to them” (Psm. 106:36). Materialism deceives! “And the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Mark 4:19).

Third, we bow because we enjoy **self-gratification**. The rich farmer in Luke 12 said to himself, “I will pull down barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink and be merry... (Luke 12:18-19). Note his priorities: 1) bigger, 2) more, and 3) ease. Note his pronouns: “I,” “my,” “it you,” and “if your.” The farmer mistakenly assumed that by retaining all of his produce for himself he could retire to a life of personal comfort. The Lord exposed the folly of the farmer’s self-indulgent attitude by saying, “You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” (Luke 12:20). While he had sufficient provisions for many years, the farmer did not have many years! And none of that which he had acquired could be taken with him (1 Tim. 6:7; Psa. 49:17). By pursuing a princely life of ease (cf. Amos 6:1,4-6), he had become a spiritual pauper (cf. Prov. 11:24)! “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). Are we any different from the farmer (Jas. 5:5)?

During one period in his life, Solomon held the mistaken notion that earthly objectives would bring meaning, happiness, and lasting joy to his life. He said:

I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself waterpools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings

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and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem... (Eccl. 2:4-9).

He was later to discover, despite his great wealth (1 Kings 10) that his gain only left him empty and unfulfilled (Eccl. 2:1 1; 12:8; Isa. 55:2).

He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver, nor he who loves abundance with increase. This also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them; so what profit have the owners except to see them with their eyes? (Eccl. 5: 10-11). Sidney Harris once wrote:

The most miserable people I have known have not been those who suffered from catastrophes - which they could blame on fate or accident — but those who had everything they wanted, except the power to enjoy it.

Fourth, we bow because we desire **self-preservation**. We want protection against anxiety and uncertainty. We want a physical hedge against the unknown. We cling so tenaciously to our material possessions because we fear the future; we are anxious about tomorrow. And like Ammon and Moab, we think we can find a certain security in economic strength.

Why do you glory in the valleys, your flowing valley, O backsliding daughter? Who trusted in her treasures, saying 'Who will come against me?' ... (Jer. 48:4; cf 48:7).

The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his own esteem (Prov. 18:11).

Ironically, materialism does not protect us from worry and fear; it only enhances such.²⁰ “The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep” (Eccl. 5:12; cf. Prov. 11:28).

... Riches and abundance come hypocritically clad in sheep’s clothing pretending to be security.. they secure a man ... just about as well as the wolf which is put to tending the sheep secures them ... against the wolf.²¹

Riches are vulnerable to inflation, theft, embezzlement, and devaluation (Matt. 6:19; Luke 12:33). What we own today can be swept away by storm tomorrow (Job 1:19). This is why the Bible commands not “to trust in uncertain riches” (1 Tim. 6:17; cf. Prov. 23:4), but in God, His protection (Heb. 13:5, 6), His provision (Phil. 4:19), and His promises (Matt. 6:25-33; Psm. 37:24). “If riches increase, do not set your heart on them” (Psa. 62:10).

Manifestation— How We Bow

In a general sense, we bow by means of substitution. Paul spoke of those whom God had given up “in lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for **the** lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.. .” (Rom. 1:24, 25). “They [had] turned from the worship of the true God, the God Who Is, to the worship of an idol that is not” (cf 1 Cor. 8:4; Jer. 10:14).²²

In a specific sense, we bow in innumerable ways. Consider some examples:

We bow by means of **accumulation**. Much of what we possess we do not need and only serves to complicate

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our lives. Most of us could probably throw out half of our belongings without any noticeable detriment.

By all standards of the world's history we bask in **the** blazing sunlight of a living standard higher than that of princes and kings of other lands... In our houses we have enough conveniences to equal 20 servants! Our biggest problem is bigger barns. And bigger closets for our clothes. And bigger sheds for our boats and cars. And bigger rooms for our antiques... The religion of first class is taking the place of the religion of Jesus Christ.²³

Jesus cautioned, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15). His point? Material possessions are not the primary stuff of life.

We bow by means of **acquisition**. We spend countless hours in the local Walmart, K-Mart, shopping mall, at yard sales, flea markets, auctions, etc. The time we devote to buying goods **can be** a further manifestation of our homage to mammon. Are you an idolater? Check your daytimer (cf Eph. 5:15-17) as well as your checkbook.

We bow by means of **celebration**. The holidays can be an especially perilous time. Many purchase a tree, expensive gifts, ornaments, lights, decorations, gift wrapping, food, etc., while their contribution remains the same or even diminishes. Children are given an embarrassing array of costly toys. Credit cards are used with impunity.

While a Christian can enjoy being with his family and participate in the festivities of the season, he must be careful to guard against abusing the blessings God has granted him.

Many will spend lavishly on things which they have little or no need for without giving a thought to those who are hungry and in need [inattention! The giving of gifts is a beautiful custom — but let us be wise and soberminded in the cost and number of our gifts (Matt. 25:40).²⁴

We bow by means of **contention**. “. . .When we covet things contrary to God’s law, this lust leads us to make war upon all who oppose our selfish ends.”²⁵

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain (Jas. 4:1-2).

We bow by means of **conversation**. In his excellent study of Mark 8, David Johnson notes how our “idol” talk often betrays the real object(s) of our devotion. He states:

[The] disciples remind me of the church when they get together and start talking about the church. Or better yet, they remind me of some of the conversations that take place at the typical men’s business [and elder’s] meeting. “It’s about time to paint the building again.” “What color should we use?” “When are we going to stripe the parking lot?” “Someone needs to fix the light bulb out front.” “The roof needs repairing.” “Should we run the ceiling fans on high or on low?”²⁶

Dwight Moody said, “It does not take long to tell where a man’s treasure is. In fifteen minutes’ conversation with most men, you can tell whether their treasures are on earth or in heaven.” What are the

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primary topics of discussion where you attend? Check the minutes of your business meetings; listen carefully to your prayers.

We bow by means of **desertion**. When gospel preachers forsake the pulpit for lucrative secular careers, what is this but a “bowing?”

We bow by means of **deviation**. Congregations deviate when their shepherds abdicate their spiritual responsibilities to the flock, and turn their attention and energies toward the more mundane, “hands on” concerns of the building and its maintenance. Glenn Colley’s comments are appropriate:

Elders need to act like elders and not deacons. When the eldership of a church becomes timid, or fearful, or lazy and prefer to do the work suited to deacons, they fall into a devil’s trap. God isn’t playing games in the design of the church. He sent His Son to purchase the church (Acts 20:28), and gave us His word for a pattern of instructions on how to please Him in the church. We are not at liberty to change the truth about church government any more than the Catholics are in making a pope.²⁷

The church must be fed (Acts 20:28), led (1 Pet. 5:2), and bred (cf. Eph. 4:11-14); this can only be accomplished when elders carry out their Divinely ordained responsibilities.

We bow by means of **falsification**. “Because from the least of them even to the greatest of them everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to priest, everyone deals falsely” (Jer. 6:13).

... Covetousness has caused the corruption of the doctrine of Christ. Elders have for some time

incurred debts (especially regarding buildings) that give place to the devil (Eph. 4:27). Hundreds of thousands and even millions of dollars have been and are owed by congregations. Thus, the elders become desperate not to lose any contributor. Many times the biggest money men are also the biggest in worldliness; therefore, such characters do not want the truth taught regarding the sinfulness of denominationalism, drinking of alcoholic beverages, immodesty, unauthorized marriages, mechanical instrumental music in worship, the lack of corrective discipline. When the truth is preached on such subjects as the aforementioned sins, elders are threatened with the loss of such impenitent church members. . . Such elders reveal their ungodly character in stopping the truth for the sake of keeping the worldly church member with his “almighty dollar.”²⁸

We bow by means of **occupation**. Brethren, “is it God, then job; or, is it job, then God? Do we let God send us to our business; or, do we let our business send us away from God?”²⁹

Here is a young man devoted to the work of the church. He is involved in teaching, visiting, giving, and in many ways is helping the church to go forward. He has the honorable goal of remaining faithful to the church regardless of the demands of his business. As time passes he is caught up in the exciting whirl of competition in business, and to keep abreast he must spend a good deal of time reading business manuals and magazines, and less and less time reading the Bible. The pressure of business demands he

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drop activities somewhere. Soon he approaches the elders and asks them to relieve him of his Bible teaching and visitation duties for while, and he becomes less and less involved in the work of the church ... Through the years he does not quit the church completely, but his spiritual progress has been stunted, and things eternal are not very meaningful now. He wears himself out during the week and often brings a tired and sick body with which to worship God.³⁰

Likewise, how many Christian mothers pursue careers to enhance their standard of living, while neglecting their God-given role as homemakers (Tit. 2:4-5)? How many precious children are sent to day care centers because their parents bow to materialism?

We bow by means of **subjugation**. Indebtedness may well be one of the most popular forms of mammon worship.³¹

We are materialistic to the core... Many Americans are head-over-heels in personal debt. Some have multiple credit cards “maxed out.” Who is going to pay for all of [these] expenditures? Declaring bankruptcy has almost become a national past time. Seventy percent of those who file for bankruptcy never pay back a dime of what they owe. What if you die unexpectedly? Will you leave your loved ones saddled with your unpaid bills? How does the Lord view this matter? “The wicked borrows and pays not again” (Psm. 37:21). The Bible views indebtedness as a form of servitude (Prov. 22:7); every Christian should diligently work to be free of such restrains so that he may serve the Lord with greater vigor and deeper levels of sacrifice.³²

What are the consequences of materialism? **Alienation** (Isa. 59:1-2). **Eternal condemnation** (1 Cor. 6:9; Rev. 21:8).

Mortification — What We Must Do To Change Our Allegiance

We must deal with materialism by means of **mortification**. Paul said:

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection [passion], evil concupiscence [desire], and covetousness, which is idolatry (Col. 3:5).

The Greek word for “mortify,” is *nekrosate*, which literally means “put to death.”

For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live (Rom. 8:13).

Rather than revering our possessions, Christians must tear down [mortify] the altar of materialism from their hearts, and in turn, exalt the Father to His rightful place of honor (2 Cor. 10:3-5). He is the only object worthy of our worship. He is a jealous God (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 5:9; 32:21). There is no other (Deut. 4:39; 1 Kings 8:60; Isa. 45:5-6; 46:9).

Mortification, however, is an on-going process (Rom. 7:22-25). How do we “keep on putting to death” our earthly, materialistic desires? Note:

By **examination**. “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. . .” (2 Cor. 13:5; Psa. 26:2: 139:23-24; Hag. 1:5; 1 Cor. 11:26). Consider the following questions prayerfully:

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What do you think about the most?

What occupies most of your emotional and physical energy?

How do you respond when you hear biblical messages on what God says your attitudes and actions should be regarding material possessions?

How do you respond when you feel you may need to part with some material possessions so that they could be better used to meet someone else's needs or help carry out the Great Commission?

What priorities do you have other than making money (such as worshiping, learning the Word of God, spending quality time with your family, serving others in the church, bettering the community).

What is your attitude when you give?³³

Where do you look for your security? What do you rely upon for protection? How does your accumulated wealth figure in to your estimate of your safety?

What do you hope for most in your life? What do you fear the most?

How do you define yourself? By occupation, or social class, or family status?

What are the standards by which you measure the success or failure of your life?

Upon what basis do you make decisions about where to work, where to live, and what to do with your time? What do these decisions reveal about the values in your life?

If you claim that God is the central loyalty in your life, what evidence exists for the truth of that claim in the material life you lead?

By what standard do you determine what you will keep and what you will give away? How do you distinguish between your needs and your desires?³⁴

By **lamentation**. “**For** godly sorrow produces repentance...” (2 Cor.7:10; cf Matt. 5:4). What changes and adjustments need to be made in your life?

By **renovation**. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2; Psa. 119:36).

By **instigation**. “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only. . .” (Jas. 1:22). Make a practice of doing the following:

Buy things for their usefulness rather than their status.

Develop a habit of giving things away. If you find that you are becoming attached to some possession, consider giving it to someone who needs it.

Refuse to be seduced into buying what you do not need.

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Learn to enjoy things without owning them.

Look with a healthy skepticism at all “buy now, pay later” schemes.

Shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.³⁵

By **concentration**. “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13).

Conclusion

Brethren, the danger of materialistic idolatry is ever-present, and the Word is clear, “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry” (1 Cor. 10:14). “Keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

The idolatry of things has made a heathen out of many a Christian. . . How hypocritical that the Christian may pity the poor heathen who bows before his idols of wood and stone while he allows the lust for, and enjoyment of things to keep him from the Master!... Inasmuch as we spend millions each year to convert the idolaters of foreign lands, what are we doing for the idolaters in our own gates?³⁶

Endnotes

1 Ralph Earle, **Word Meanings in the New Testament**, One-volume Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 354.

2 Fritz Rienecker, **Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 573.

3 Roy Lanier, Jr. **A Little Contribution** (Montrose, CO: Lee and Mark Hanstein, 1992), preface.

4 J. Noel Merideth, "The Beauty of Holiness and The Spirit of Praise," **The Book of Colossians** (Lebanon, TN: Sain Publications, Getwell Church of Christ, 1986), 217.

5 James Meadows, "The Menace of Materialism to World Evangelism," **Spiritual Sword**, Vol. 5, No. 4, (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, July, 1974), 30.

6 Rienecker, **Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament**, 177.

7 Materialism **can be** identified. Paul said, "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater .. not even to eat with such a person" (1 Cor. 5:11). If it is not possible to recognize materialistic idolatry, then how can a congregation carry out the command to withdraw from those who are guilty of such? By the way, when was the last time you heard of someone publicly repenting because of materialism? Or for that matter, when was the last time you heard of a congregation withdrawing from a covetous brother??

8 Lanier, **A Little Contribution**, 28.

9 "Riches are not wrong if they are honestly obtained, rightly used and properly regarded." E. R. Brannan, "The Drawing Power of the Cross," **When I Survey The Wondrous Cross** (Montgomery, AL: Faulkner University Lectures, 1992), 240.

10 "In an affluent society Christians may either give away all but what is absolutely necessary for them to live, or the surplus may be invested as long as there is the scriptural understanding that God owns it all [cf. Lev. 25:23; Psa. 24: 1; 50:10-12; Ezek. 16:17; 1 Chron. 29:14; Deut. 8:18; Hag. 2:8]. To the faithful child of God riches earned honestly simply affords more opportunities to serve God... The Bible plainly declares that Christians may enjoy the abundance of their labor as long as they do not 'worship' their material gain." David P. Brown, "Thou Shalt Not Covet. . ." Exodus 20:17, **Biblical Ethics** (Pensacola, FL: Austin McGary and Company, Shenandoah Church of Christ Lectures, 1991), 310.

11 W. E. Vine, **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1940), 299.

12 "Covetousness is a state of mind or attitude of the heart that has an inordinate desire for worldly things or acclaim. It is a greedy, avaricious, insatiable appetite that 'goes after' things material." David P. Brown, **Biblical Ethics**, 307.

13 Lanier, **A Little Contribution**, 76.

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14 Charles Swindoll, "Hope Beyond Temptation," **Hope Again** (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1996), 30.

15 Richard J. Foster, "The Discipline of Simplicity," **Celebration of Discipline** (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1978), 80.

16 Jimmy Clark, "Beware of Covetousness," **Luke** (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Publishing House, Inc., Firm Foundation Lectureship, Bellwood Church of Christ, 1988), 319.

17 Homer Hailey, "More Letters to the Churches," **Revelation** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 159.

18 Craig Brian Larson, "Materialism," **Contemporary Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Writers** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 15.

19 Mac Layton, "The Burden of Prosperity," **This Grace Also** (Chattanooga, TN: O'Neal Publishing Company, 1964), 136-137.

20 Materialism says we don't believe God is sufficient to meet our needs.

21 Kierkegaard, as quoted by Foster, **Celebration of Discipline**, 88.

22 B. J. Clarke, "Power of the Gospel, Sins of the Gentiles," **Studies In Romans** (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, Inc., Denton Lectures, Pearl Street Church of Christ, 1996), 57-58.

23 Mac Layton, "The Burden of Prosperity," **This Grace Also** (Chattanooga, TN: O'Neal Publishing Company, 1964), 136-137.

24 Layton, **This Grace Also**, 148.

25 Bobby Dockery, "Crucifying Christ at Christmas," **Hartsville Pike Herald** (Bulletin, Dec. 22, 1996), 1.

26 B. H. Carroll, as quoted by Tim Ayers, "Friends of the World, Enemies of God," **Studies In James** (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, Denton Lectures, Pearl Street Church of Christ, 1990), 170.

27 David Johnson, "Setting Priorities," **Have You Seen Jesus?** (Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1986), 12.

28 Glenn Colley, "Elders Aren't Deacons," **The Words of Truth** (Montgomery, AL: Sixth Avenue Church of Christ, June 13, 1996), 1.

29 Brown, **Biblical Ethics**, 310-31 1.

30 Wendell Winkler, "They Should Refuse to Worship Inferior Beings," **The Book of Colossians** (Lebanon, TN: Sain Publications, Getwell Church of Christ, 1986), 167-168.

31 Layton, **This Grace Also**, 136.

32 "Mortgage debt has increased 300 percent just since 1975 and foreclosures are up 25 percent over three years ago. Typically, there are more than 900,000 bankruptcy filings annually, with a new

record set every year between the years 1983 and 1992. The increase in filings in the last fifteen years is over 150 percent, with 94 percent of filings non-business personal filings ... Of all filings, 70 percent are 'total' bankruptcy, that is, Chapter 7 bankruptcy, where you have nothing left ... The typical bankruptcy [is] not a guy under a bridge or a real estate high roller but rather [a] well-educated, middle class baby boomer **with** big time credit card debt." Dave Ramsey, "Enough of Anything is Too Much," **Financial Peace** (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1997), 9.

33 Wayne Jackson, "America: A Nation Out of Control!," **Christian Courier**, Vol. XXXII, No. 10, (Stockton, CA: Feb, 1997), 37.

34 Gene A. Getz, "Jesus' Teaching in Matthew 6," **A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions** (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1990), 89.

35 Sondra Ely Wheeler, "The New Testament on the Moral Status of Wealth: Learning to Ask the Canon's Questions," **Wealth as Peril and Obligation** (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 138-142.

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Chapter 29

Satanism

Paul Vaughn

There is a war raging. It is a war between good and evil, truth and error. This war will have eternal consequences for the soul of man. The enemy is Satan, the progenitor of all that is evil. It is his purpose to alienate and separate man from God, making man his servant.

It is imperative that Christians know the enemy and be on guard against his deceptions and entrapments. Satan's devices are effective and deadly; they can destroy one spiritually. Paul warned the church at Ephesus to be prepared for battle against this enemy of the church. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:10,11).

Satan is the adversary. The Scriptures call him "the tempter" (Matt. 4:3). Jesus said that Satan:

...was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

Satan uses three allurements to gain allegiance to the world of darkness. They are "the lust of the flesh

and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). These allurements act as an enticement to convert one to Satanism. Satanism is a religion of greed. It offers sex, drugs, money and uninhibited gratification. The lust of the flesh and the eyes and the pride of life are powerful tools in a materialist society.

Those who practice Satanism worship Satan and all that he teaches. Some are more deeply involved in the occult, while for others it is just a passing fad. Jesus said, “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathered not with me scattereth abroad” (Matt. 12:30). In the gospel of John the Jews were told that they were servants of the devil. “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:44). The Jews claimed to be the seed of Abraham and servants of God, but their claim was unfounded because they rejected Jesus and His teaching and therefore, they were the servants of Satan. There are masses of people today who claim alliance with Christ, but serve Satan and worship him because they only give lip service to the Lord.

History Of Satanism

The Canaanites paid tribute to demons by making sacrifice to them. God prohibited the Israelites from following the example of the wicked people in the land:

When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer (Deut.18:9-11).

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About 538 B.C. Zoroastrianism developed as a religion and contributed to the worship of Satan. Zoroastrianism is a dualistic religion that teaches that there is a supremely good deity and a supremely evil deity. To a great degree much of Zoroastrianism was incorporated into Gnosticism. There were several groups in Gnosticism that paid homage to the devil.

Modern Satanism began in the early 1960's with a great cultural change. The Hippie movement established "free love" and traditional values became distinctly different. Dr. Thomas Altizer, a professor from Emory University, came out with the teaching that "God is dead". The cultural changes provided avenues for those who rejected the moral standard in God's Word to develop contemporary Satanism.

In April 1966, Anton Szandor LaVey formed the Church of Satan. This group is still growing with new members joining regularly. The Church of Satan is not the only satanic group in existence today. Some rebellious teenagers from small secret bands take principles from Religious Satanism and incorporate them into ceremonial and ritual practices. It is impossible to estimate how many teenagers get involved in Satanism because they keep their activity secret. Occasionally their criminal activity is brought to the lime light, such as in graffiti and Satanic symbols painted on public buildings. They may vandalize a cemetery and sometimes their meeting places will be found where animal sacrifices have taken place. Too often a few of these Satanic groups have murdered someone and this is brought to the public view. There is a subculture from rebellious teenagers, heavy metal rock bands, child molesters, and occasionally serial murderers involved in Satanism today.

Beliefs And Practices

The teachings espoused by Satanist differ greatly. Satanism is a religion that is individualistic. The

teaching and practices depend upon the greed and desires of the individual. Therefore, not all Satanists believe or teach the same thing. In this section, this writer will look at some of the teachings of organized Satanism and the doctrine recognized by most Satanists.

There are two books that are popular among Satanic groups, **The Satanic Bible** and the **Necronomicon**. **The Satanic Bible** was written by Anton Szandor LaVey, who founded the Church of Satan. It was published in 1969 selling over a half-million copies. The **Necronomicon** was developed by Howard Phillips Lovecraft. He taught that it was an ancient book written by the “mad Arab Abdul Alhazred,” but in fact, it was Lovecraft who developed it. “Apart from its blasphemies and admitted ‘abominations’, the **Necronomicon** is a primer for introducing students to the black arts.”¹

In the **Satanic Bible**, there are nine statements that sum up the teachings of Satanists. These nine statements are an effort to use satire against the teaching of Christ. LaVey is using sarcasm to ridicule and attack the principles of good set forth in the New Testament. The nine Satanic statements are:

1. Satan represents indulgence, instead of abstinence!
2. Satan represents vital existence, instead of spiritual pipe dreams!
3. Satan represents undefiled wisdom, instead of hypocritical critical self-deceit!
4. Satan represents kindness to those who deserve it instead of love wasted on ingrates!
5. Satan represents vengeance, instead of turning the other cheek!
6. Satan represents responsibility to the responsible, instead of concern for psychicvampires!

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7. Satan represents man as just another animal, sometimes better, more often worse than those that walk on all-fours, who because of his 'divine spiritual and intellectual development,' has become the most vicious animal of all!

8. Satan represents all of the so-called sins, as they all lead to physical, mental, or emotional gratification!

9. Satan has been the best friend the church has ever had, as he has kept it in business all these years!²

One can see the hatred LaVey has for God, Jesus and the Bible in these nine statements. They have a pretense of wisdom, but lack respect for true wisdom. Solomon said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7). In attacking the words of Christ, LaVey has condemned himself. Jesus said:

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:48).

Satanists have varied views about Satan. Some do not believe that Satan is real or an actual being, but the name represents a dark force of nature. There are some in the occult who refer to themselves as Satan and others who believe in Satan as the Scriptures describe him. Those who identify themselves as Satan do so "because self-fulfillment, self-indulgence, and self-gratification are the goals of contemporary Satanist."³ Thus, they worship themselves by taking the name Satan even though they may not believe in the existence of Satan.

The Bible teaches that Satan is a real being. Peter warns about Satan and exhorts Christians to be on guard

against the devil. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Satanism is a religion of indulgence and greed. Their teaching and actions will focus around their desires and become their beliefs and practices.

Teenagers And Satanism

The occult enticements have lured thousands of teenagers to dabble in Satanism. Teenagers glean their materials from different sources. It could come from books like the Satanic Bible and Necronomicon or movies, games and heavy metal music. Games based on the occult are Ouija boards, Phenomenon, the Real Ghostbusters, Tarot cards, and Dungeons and Dragons. These games will encourage teens to experiment with that which is evil.

The average teenager is bombarded with violence, death, murders and more through television and the movies. “Rosemary’s Baby” was one of the first of these horror movies. Its depicted a group of Satanists drugging a young woman, played by Mia Farrow, so Satan could rape her and have his baby. Some other movies that have influenced teenagers and adults to get involved in the occult are the “Exorcist”, “Nightmare on Elm Street”, “Friday the 13th”, “The Texas Chain Saw Massacre” and “Carrie”. These movies are usually low budget and filled with morbidity. These horror movies are seen by tens, or perhaps hundreds of thousands of teenagers. The movie Halloween was released in 1978, it cost \$300,000 to make it and by 1989 it had grossed over 55 million dollars. Horror movies make big money for the movie industry but they can be a negative force for teenagers.

Heavy metal music groups encourages Satanism in their music. Ozzy Osbourne, a former member of Black Sabbath, has made a career singing about Satanic subjects.

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“At one point, Ozzy wanted to build a black cathedral in his backyard complete with a magic circle inside.”⁴ The lead guitarist for the Led Zeppelin group, Jimmy Page, owned a bookstore that catered to the occult. “Page’s fascination with the occult has been blamed for the tragedies that plagued Led Zeppelin.”⁵

There are other Satanic groups that have their roots in rock music. Madonna Manson is one group that has a following of teenagers dabbling in Satanism. They get their name from the rock singer, Madonna, and the Satanic killer, Charles Manson. Many teenagers have let heavy metal rock groups lead them into the dark world of the occult. “Rock stars sing about death and despair. But when the concert is over, they count the cash.”⁶ Teenagers need to be on guard against the harmful music of those who sell Satan. Parents need to spend time with their children before they reach the age when heavy metal rock groups that sing of death, harm and the occult can reach them. Solomon’s teaching is just as pertinent today as it was when he wrote it:

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them (Eccl. 12:1).

Satanism On The Internet

This is an age of communication. The giving or exchange of information is as close as a computer key board. If someone does not own a computer all he needs to do is go to the public library to have access to the internet.

In doing research on Satanism, this writer found over four thousand, six hundred matches for the subject on the

internet. Some were articles warning about the dangers of Satanic cults, while others were teaching Satanism and calling for religious tolerance. One article was captioned with the saying that Satan was “not a bad dude once you get to know him.”⁷ Another article titled “My Dark Satanic Love” was very forceful in teaching hate and Satanism. It started out with “I see a red door, and I want to paint it black. I’m one of the things that goes ‘bump’ in the night. I’m a born Satanist.”⁸ It also teaches the basic doctrine of Satanism, which is uninhibited gratification. The writer goes on to say, “First, necessarily, I love myself. I’m my own God (sic), after all, and I put no Gods (sic) before me.”⁹ The writer goes on to talk about her love for the world, that it is, “no perfect a setting for my God (sic), Me.”¹⁰ At another web site there are “The Eleven Satanic Rules of the Earth”. Rule number four states, “If a guest in your lair annoys you, treat him cruelly and without mercy.”¹¹ Rule number eleven says, “When walking in open territory, bother no one. If someone bothers you, ask him to stop. If he does not stop, destroy him.”¹²

It is easily seen that most of the information that can be reached through the internet is very dangerous. Parents have a great responsibility to know what their children can access through their computers. A steady diet of reading Satanic literature is harmful to the physiological makeup of teenagers and adults. It promotes the abnormal and that which is unhealthy.

Satanic Crimes

One teenager said, “I’m seventeen now. If the devil makes me happy and gives me what I want until I’m nineteen, I’ll kill as many people as he wants after that. I’ll keep on doing it until I’m killed.”¹³ As shocking as it may seem, the words of this teenager are coming true throughout America.

Satanism

On April 6, 1997, a family of four stopped at a rest area along interstate 80 near Greeneville, Tennessee. It was at this time that this young family came in contact with six teenage Satanists. The family was taken to a state road in the hills of East Tennessee and shot. The parents and their six year old daughter died immediately and their two year old son is in critical condition at the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville, Tennessee. U.S. Customs Agents in Arizona arrested six teenagers for the crime. One of the teenagers, Natasha Waller Cornett, said that she was the devil's daughter. The night before the murders, the group stayed at a motel in Eastern Kentucky where they burned 666 into the carpet of the motel and blood was found on the carpet. In an interview in the Greenville Sun, the mother of Cornett said that her daughter and friends "dabbled in the occult and vampirism, played with Ouija boards and Tarot cards."¹⁴

Just across the border from Brownsville, Texas police found fifteen bodies of victims who were sacrificed to Satan in April, 1989. The police "discovered a caldron containing blood and bones from the bodies. The heads of some victims has been cut open and the brains removed, to be mixed in the bloody caldron."¹⁵

Organized Satanists, such as the Church of Satan, say they prohibit killing children and "non-human animals except for food."¹⁶ They teach that it is acceptable to have human sacrifices. In the Satanic Bible, LaVey wrote:

The only time a Satanist would perform a human sacrifice would be if it were to serve a twofold purpose; that being to release the magician's wrath in the throwing of a curse, and more important, to dispose of a totally obnoxious and deserving individual."¹⁷

The above example proves clearly that Satanism is a very dangerous religion. Satanists don't think anything

about killing or doing harm and then lying about it. They certainly are children of their father, the devil. Jesus gives us this description of Satan and his followers when He rebuked Jews. He said:

Ye are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murder from the beginning, and abode not in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it (John 8:44).

Both teenagers and adults need to be warned about the dangers of Satanism.

Warning!

Satanism is one of the most dangerous religions in which people could get involved. It is filled with treachery, peril, hazards and even ritualistic murder. It appeals to young and old alike because it promises power, sex and uninhibited gratification. Young people are especially vulnerable to the occult because of all it promises.

Those who practice devil worship generally keep their activities secret. They are predators seeking to rob, rape and exploit. One must be on guard against the dark world of Satanism. When a spiritual vacuum exists in the home, a door of opportunity is opened for the predators in society. Jesus rebuked the devil using the Word of God when Satan was trying to entrap Him. "But he answered and said, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). The way to overcome the occult is to know God's Word and let it be one's guide to light the way through the darkness of sin. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psm. 119:105).

Has The Worship Of Satan Infiltrated The Church?

To many this question is offensive, disgusting, and repulsive. But Christians are not exempted to the ways of the devil. Paul said, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). This writer does not believe that Satanism, the occult, has infiltrated the church. This does not mean that there are not Christians serving Satan. Jesus said, “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matt. 12:30). If one is not serving the Lord faithfully, he is serving Satan and thus worshipping him!

How does Satan attract Christians? He gradually gets them to be bored with worship and gets them interested in the material things of the world. When a Christian spends more time reading a newspaper than the Bible. The opportunity for Satan is opened. When a Christian begins to miss Sunday evening worship and Wednesday night Bible study, total apostasy is the next step and they become servants of the devil. He uses procrastination and preoccupation to lure Christians into his lair. When a Christian grows weak from the lack of spiritual food and the desire for Christian fellowship, he grows indifferent and is easily discouraged. When discouraged, he turns from God and Satan has won a soul.

Yes! there are those in the church of Christ who worship Satan. They are those who are prideful, selfish, prejudiced and lukewarm.

Conclusion

The devil is “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: (1 Pet. 5:8). He is constantly stalking his victims to destroy. No one is above the entrapments or temptations that Satan hurls. He

tempted Jesus (Matt. 4:1-11). He is after you.

The defence against Satan and those who follow him is the word of God. Jesus said, "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edge sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

Those who worship Satan are lost, their names are not in the book of life. "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15). God wants "all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). He has provided a way of salvation through Christ Jesus. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). God has also provided the weapons for His children to use in their battle against Satan (Eph. 6:10-17). Christians must actively fight the fight of faith, resist the devil and he will flee from us (James 4:7).

Endnotes

1 Bob Larson, **Satanism, The Seduction of America's Youth**, (Thomas Nelson pub., Nashville, 1989) p. 139.

2 Anton Syandor LaVey, **The Satanic Bible**, (Avon Books, New York, 1969) p. 25.

3 Bob & Gretchen Passantino, **Satanism**, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1995) p. 72.

4 Larson, p. 77.

5 Larson, p. 75.

6 Larson, p. 83.

7 Satanism, <http://search.yahoo.com/search>.

8 Magistra Peggs Nadramia, **My Dark Satanic Love**, <http://www.Satannet.com/Love.html>

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9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 **The Eleven Satanic Rules of the Earth**, <http://www.Satannet.com/rules.html>

12 Ibid.

13 Larson, p. 9.

14 Allen G. Breed, "Mother Knows Her Daughter, Friends Dabbled In Control", **The Greenville Sun**, Vol. 118, Nu. 117, April 9, 1997, p. A.3.

15 Larson, p.85.

16 Anton LaVey, **The Eleven Satanic Rules of the Earth**,<http://www.Satanet.com/rules.html>.

17 LaVey, **Satanic Bible**, p.88.

Chapter 30

Racism

Jim Dearman

Introduction

What is racism? Where did it originate? Is it a problem among the churches of Christ? Is it sinful to be a racist? Is a study of the subject even relevant to Christians? If racism is determined to be sinful, then its study is certainly pertinent to the people of God, because sin destroys the soul. Therefore, a Christian might be faithful in many areas of his life, yet lose his soul because of racial prejudice. Thus, it is the purpose of this study to examine this “Ism” with the full realization that it cannot be a part of the life of the child of God. We will study the subject under three major headings: Racism Defined, Racism Demonstrated, and Racism Destroyed.

Once racism has been defined, we will see how it was demonstrated in the lives of some Bible characters. Finally, and of vital importance, we will clearly show that this sin is destroyed in Christ, where “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Racism Defined

It may be helpful to cite the dictionary’s definition of racism. A summary of these definitions reveals racism is the belief that one is superior to another based upon

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racial differences. This conviction makes one a racist, or bigot, and inevitably leads to discrimination and partiality. We live in a highly sensitive society which has gone to extremes at times with “political correctness” in some areas. However, the reality of racial prejudice cannot be denied. Nor can it be said such discrimination is practiced exclusively by one race. What can be said is such prejudicial practice and thought must be eliminated if we are to live together as God intended. As this study proceeds, we will see that Christianity is the only sure solution to the problem of racism in the world.

Racism Demonstrated

It is not the purpose of this study to give detailed demonstrations of modern-day racism. However, it is important to note that evidence of such prejudice is far more prevalent among Christians than one would hope. There are times when we all enjoy laughing at ourselves and even poking a little fun at our friends. However, racial slurs and jokes that denigrate and demean have no place in the conversation of the child of God. Matthew 7:12 still reads: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Whatever we say *about* a person of another race, we should be willing to say *to* him. If we would be ashamed to do so, then the statement should not be made.

Additionally, there is a tendency among some to generalize about a particular race based upon the actions of a few individual members of that ethnic group. Again, the application of Matthew 7:12 would eliminate such stereotyping, because surely no one wants to be judged by the misconduct of another of his same race. There are also cultural characteristics, not sinful in themselves, which are peculiar to certain races, and which should not

make members of the race objects of ridicule. Differences should not breed discrimination. Neither culture nor color necessarily affect character. Have some lost sight of the Biblical principle set forth in 1 Samuel 16:7? "...For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." How should we answer Paul's question to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 10:7? "Do you look at things according to the outward appearance...?"

The fact of racial prejudice among God's people is not new. As one examines the Scriptures, it is evident the problem was present in both the Old and New Testaments. The long-standing hostilities between Jew and Gentile are well-documented in Scripture. The mixed race of the Samaritans was also despised by the Jews. However, in this section, we will look at two specific instances of racial prejudice, one from the Old and the other from the New Testament. The first involves Miriam, Aaron, and Moses in an incident recorded in Numbers 12:

Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. So they said, Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also? And the Lord heard it (Num. 12:1,2).

Moses' first wife was Zipporah, a Midianite. Her death is not mentioned in Scripture. However, it is assumed that she died and that Moses took another wife, this Ethiopian to whom Aaron and Miriam objected. Some speculate the greater problem was Aaron and Miriam's jealousy over Moses' favored position with God, as they viewed it. This conclusion is based no doubt on the

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questions they asked: “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?” However, the text states clearly that Aaron and Miriam voiced an objection to Moses’ marriage to the Ethiopian woman.

There is sobering significance to the statement, “And the Lord heard it.” It reminds us that nothing we think, say, or do is hidden from the Lord. “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13). The Lord hears the racial slurs, sees the racially-motivated slights today, and reacts just as He did in the time of Moses. “So the anger of the Lord was aroused against them, and He departed” (Num. 12:9). As we read further in Numbers 12, we see Miriam is struck with leprosy as punishment for her part in the sinful act. At the urging of Aaron, Moses intercedes for his sister, but the Lord still requires her to remain outside the camp for seven days before the Israelites continue their journey toward the promised land.

As we turn to the New Testament, we find an example of racial discrimination involving one of the Lord’s apostles. The incident is recorded in Galatians 2, where Paul reveals how it became necessary to confront Peter about yielding to prejudicial pressures. Galatians 2:11-14 reads:

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their

hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? (Gal. 2:11-14).

The problem was not that Peter would not eat with Gentiles at all. He had been doing so until these men came from James. However, Peter’s wrong was in yielding to the perceived prejudices of others. As a result, he ceased his former practice and played the hypocrite, and, by his actions, he influenced others to do the same. Notice how Paul characterizes the actions of Peter and his associates. He calls them hypocrites and declares “they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel.”

The actions of Peter and the others were contrary to the teaching of the gospel. The equality of Jew and Gentile in Christ was inherent in the gospel. That lesson should have been learned by the apostle. Peter stood “condemned” because of his failure to practice what he had earlier “perceived” at the house of Cornelius. Had he forgotten his words on that occasion? “...In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:34,35).

These two demonstrations of racism, and the condemnation which followed, should make clear to the objective observer that God is not pleased with such prejudice. However, as we search the New Testament, we find an abundance of teaching designed to destroy all vestiges of this sin in the professed follower of Christ.

Racism Destroyed

Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but

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the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits (James 1:9-11).

A discussion of the equality found in Christ begins, logically, with this beautiful passage from the pen of James. It depicts the gospel as the great leveler of all who submit to its commands and who share in its blessings.

The text reminds the “lowly brother,” one who does not have great material wealth, that he has been exalted to an enviable position in Christ, and can glory in that knowledge. On the other hand, the rich brother (and the context indicates a brother in Christ) should rejoice that the gospel has humbled him, making him realize that his material goods will perish and that he has chosen the better part in recognizing where his real treasure lies. Therefore, these two brothers, from radically different economic backgrounds, meet on completely level ground in the gospel.

While this text deals specifically with the dissipation of material disparity in Christ, the principle extends to the elimination of racial differences. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, neither black nor white, neither rich nor poor. In Christ, all spiritual blessings are found for all people of every race. James 1:9-11, the paradox of poverty and riches, makes this crystal clear.

There is another text in James dealing with poverty, riches, and partiality, which, in principle, relates to racism. James 2: 1-13 provides us with a sobering reminder about the sin of prejudice:

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord

Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:1-13).

In verse one of this text, "the faith" is an obvious reference to Christianity. James makes it clear that Christianity and partiality are not compatible. One cannot

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be a child of God and show partiality in his dealings with others. But what kind of partiality is under consideration? The example cited is the rich man who comes into the assembly of the Lord's people and is given a good place to sit, while the poor man is relegated to standing or sitting in an inferior place. James asks his readers, "Have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?"

In the case at hand, judgment is being made solely upon the basis of outward appearance. James says such judgment is evil! Then, in verse 5, James reminds his readers of the great truth already set forth in James 1:9-11: "Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" Again, the gospel is set forth as the great equalizer of all men, as those who obey it become heirs together in the kingdom.

In James 2: 6-7, James points out the rich were the ones who persecuted the early Christians, who generally showed no interest in the truth, and who blasphemed the name of Christ. Of course, the rich who were persecuting Christians were not Christians themselves. However, it is ironic that these brethren were showing partiality to the class of persons who, for the most part, viewed them with contempt! The "royal law" mentioned in verse 8 is love for one's neighbor, the law which transcends the Old Testament and typifies the follower of the New. "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

James drives home a sobering truth in verses 9 through 11. One who shows prejudice in his life is guilty of transgressing the law of God. While some might consider bigotry a minor flaw, God calls it sin! James makes clear the fact that one might keep all other commandments of

God and lose his soul for violating God's prohibition against partiality! One is either uninformed or blinded by prejudice who fails to see a proper application of this text to the issue of racism.

We need to heed the words of James 2:12: "So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty." The gospel, the law of liberty, will judge those who exhibit racial prejudice. James then adds: "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). Mercy for all men, regardless of race or riches, is to be characteristic of the Christian. To fail in this area will bring judgment without mercy in death. Thus, the sobering truth of this passage is clear. If one fails to appreciate in this life that the gospel is the great equalizer of all men, he will learn it too late at the judgment.

A final text which is important to any discussion of how racism is destroyed in Christ is found in the book of Luke. While James discussed the royal law of loving one's neighbor in James 2, the text in Luke identifies the neighbor. He is not only the person next door, nor is he only the person who likes us or looks like us! He is every man of every race, as our Lord's parable in Luke 10 so beautifully teaches:

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "You shall love the Lord our God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Then Jesus answered and said:

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you." "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:25-37).

What more important question could be asked than, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" It is reminiscent of the inquiry of the rich young ruler. The difference in the two situations lies in the motive behind the question. While the ruler was sincere in his search for an answer, the lawyer's motives were suspect. Attitude toward God's Word is important. It is not sufficient to know the truth. We must be willing to apply it to our lives. In the text here in Luke, Jesus guided the lawyer to answer his own question. "He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?'" (verse 26). The lawyer demonstrated his knowledge of the Law by his response.

So he answered and said, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.'

Jesus commended the lawyer for citing the two commandments upon which rested the entirety of the Law. In Deuteronomy 6:5, Moses wrote: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." Then, in Leviticus 19:18, the admonition is given:

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

These two commandments provide the basis for all of God's Law. If the lawyer, and all others living under the Old Covenant, had fully understood and obeyed these commandments from proper motives, all other requirements would have taken care of themselves.

The principle is true under the law of liberty, the gospel, today. One who comes to know God and to love Him will have no difficulty keeping the commandments of the Covenant of Christ. In fact, those basking in the sunlight of the gospel have the greatest motivation for loving God and living for Him. That motivation is supremely summarized in the "golden text of the Bible," as it is called: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). An understanding of the love of God, which culminates in Christ, will motivate one to love God, Christ, and his fellow man. The lawyer should have known not only

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the place in the law where his answer could be found, but he should have applied it in his daily living. This is what the Lord admonished the lawyer to do, as He said, "This do and you shall live." The idea conveyed here by the word "do" is continual. In other words, ongoing application of the Word of God brings eternal life.

We see something more about the lawyer's attitude in verse 29: "But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" The Scripture tells us this man was seeking to justify himself. The comment tells us that this Jew had a misconception as to the identity of his neighbor. Many of the Jews harbored deep hostility toward others outside the Jewish race. While this lawyer knew the Scriptures concerning love for God and neighbor, apparently he held the prevailing view among his people about the non-Jew. It seems this man wanted the Lord to endorse his restricted definition of "neighbor." Or, perhaps, he thought the Lord, by giving an answer differing with the dominant position of the Jews in this matter, would ensnare Himself and further alienate Himself from the people. Whatever the case, the lawyer's motives were not those arising from a heart desirous of knowing and, then, doing the Will of God.

Jesus taught a parable to help the lawyer see the answer to his question, "Who is my neighbor?" The Parable of the Good Samaritan, as it has become known, is certainly applicable to any study of racism. This "certain man," who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and who was attacked by robbers, was apparently a Jew. A priest traveling that road saw the injured man, but he passed by on the other side. The priest's duty should have been clear. He had an obligation as God's servant to render assistance.

The Law of Moses established such responsibility:

If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it (Exodus 23:4,5).

If the Law of God required a man to show compassion for the animal of his enemy, how much more feeling should have been demonstrated by this priest for a precious soul in peril? No, the priest was without excuse for his failure to help the wounded man.

Likewise, the Levite who passed by later should have known his duty under God's Law. The Levites were helpers to the priests, being of the same tribe. Luke 10:32 reveals: "Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side." One gets a picture here of the Levite stopping to survey the situation, no doubt realizing the seriousness of the man's injury. Then, he, like the priest, passed by on the other side of the road. Could there be a better example of hypocrisy than that given here in reference to these two so-called servants of God?

The parable continues with verse 33, where the Samaritan enters the scene. The origin of the mixed race of the Samaritans can be traced back to 2 Kings 17. Following the overthrow of the northern tribes by Assyria, some of the Jews were left in the land. Foreigners were brought into the country, and the intermarriage of the Jews with these strangers produced the Samaritan race. There was a bitter hatred between Jews and Samaritans. However, here the Samaritan pictured in the Lord's parable showed compassion toward the man whom the priest and Levite had ignored. How easy it would have been for those old prejudices to have prevented the

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Samaritan from assisting this soul. He could have reasoned that this injured man of another race would not want the help of a Samaritan, one who was looked upon by the Jews as a dog! However, this victim of racial prejudice himself saw beyond the skin to a precious soul created in God's image who needed his help. And he did not extend compassion with words alone. The Samaritan got involved:

So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you (Luke 10:34,35).

The Samaritan spent his time and money to save a man who possibly was a hater of Samaritans! Why? The answer lies in the royal law of love which permeates the Word of God and which penetrated the heart of this good man.

Jesus concluded His encounter with the lawyer in Luke 10 by asking: "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" The lawyer responded: "...He who showed mercy on him." The Lord's final response is an admonition that applies to each in every age: "...Go and do likewise." When the whole of Bible teaching is viewed, it is obvious that love for God and Christ is to be paramount in our lives. That love will prompt us to love our neighbor as ourselves. One is to have a proper love for himself, and he is to use that healthy self-love as a standard for his treatment of his neighbor. One's neighbor, as we have clearly seen from Scripture,

is not merely one who lives next door, or who is of the same race. All men are our neighbors. Therefore, we are to love them as ourselves.

Conclusion

One would think that no Christian could harbor ill will for one of another race, in light of the clear teaching of Scripture. Yet, such prejudice is seen in the Lord's church. Some may question whether members of certain races even possess souls. Others may grant that we must evangelize other races, but still contend they are inherently inferior in other respects. We might hear a member of the Lord's church say: "I believe we should evangelize and accept other races, but..." Dear reader, there are no "but's" where the gospel of Christ is concerned. "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Phil. 2:3). Paul did not admonish the Philippians to esteem others of their own race better than themselves. He did not qualify this call to selflessness in any way. What right do we have to limit it?

The Lord's admonition to the lawyer, "Go and do likewise," is one which destroys racism in all who follow it. All who fail to follow it are ignoring a vital part of the gospel. "But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (James 2:9).

Chapter 31
**Destructive Textual
Criticism**

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

Introduction

Ardency of appreciation is expressed to B. J. Clarke, the elders and each member of this good and great congregation for tendering to me the invitation to speak on this annual August Lectureship. Each one, to date, has been on the cutting edge of truth and this one is no different in that stately stance. Relative to errors now extant there is only ONE true stance for soldiers of the Christ—opposition or exposure. This we have impressed on us in such great Old Testament passages as Psalm 119:104,128. We cannot love truth unless we hate error. Even Jesus could not as we see in Psalm 45:6-7 and Hebrews 1:8-9.

Some Key Terms Defined

In the vast field of textual criticism, as it relates to the Bible, there are some key terms we need to keep firmly fixed in mind.

There is the term of authenticity. This touches the truthfulness of the document examined. Is the Bible a document of truth, falsehood or a mixture of both? The latter two are untenable for the Bible believer. The first is the only tenable stance for one who knows the Bible is a divinely-derived volume and not a humanly-contrived one.

There is a term of genuineness which touches

whether the claimed penman is the actual author. Did Moses write the Pentateuch or is it the work of unknown redactors? Did Mark write the last twelve verses of his gospel record or did another pen them?

Credibility is another term in this challenging field of thought. Is the Bible believable? Is it reliable? Is it accurate? Being able to prove its credibility is essential as we meet head-on those who say the Bible is filled with jarring disharmonies, helpless, hopeless and hapless contradictions, a collection of Hebrew fables or folklore in the Old Testament and apostolic myths and superstitions about one called Jesus Christ in the New Testament, filled with humanity's search for an illusive object called God and a document written long before our highly educated, deeply discriminating and remarkably accurate scientific age came into reality.

There is a term of higher criticism which seeks to deal with whether a document is true or false. Higher criticism, relative to the Bible, has frequently descended into the field of this assigned topic—destructive views leveled toward the Bible.

There is lower criticism which touches the actual words or text of a document such as the Bible. Liberal translators in our day deal with Biblical words and, more often than not, become destructive with their finished products.

Our Title Defined

Destructive textual criticism hardly needs definition. It is largely explanatory. It is textual examination that is destructive from the word go. There is no wholesome or healthy attitude at work in the hearts of those dead set on destroying people's confidence in Biblical inspiration, accuracy, adequacy, authority, power and preciousness. They are literary murderers of the world's only divine

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document—the Holy Bible. In attitude and action there is not a whit of difference between them and the Frenchman Voltaire who predicted the death of the Bible subsequent to his own death in 1778 or the whimsical wish of the American infidel, Robert Green Ingersoll, 1833-99, that the Bible would soon be in the morgue. Our beloved Bible marches on while Voltaire is largely a forgotten figure of the past. Ingersoll went to the morgue and not the Bible. Both men are now remembered for the most part due to their blatant attacks on God and His Book. Voltaire was no friend of the Bible; he hated it with a passion. Ingersoll was no friend of the Bible; he wanted it obliterated from the earth. Destructive textual critics of the Bible are no friends of God's Book; they hate it; their avowed intent is to destroy it.

Infamous Origins

One might say that the origin of destructive textual criticism is found in European rationalism of the eighteenth century and especially in Germany. Though this movement gave intense impetus to destructive textual criticism, yet the real origin goes back to a much more distant point of the past. The devil, through serpentine agency in Eden's Garden, is the beginning force of tampering with the textual truth of God's Word. We have Jehovah's textual truth set forth in these words of weight and wisdom,

Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:
But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,
thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest
thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:16-17).

In the very next chapter the serpent told tempted Eve relative to this positive, divine law of God:

Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:4,5).

Here we have the first destructive textual critic on earth and humanity's fall is the avowed intent of the whole perilous proceeding

At Sinai, the fickle Israelites did not like the text of the Decalogue and hence violated it while Moses, their own deliverer and lawgiver, was atop the Sinaitic summit (Exod. 20, 32). They were destructive textual critics.

Jehoiakim, one of the last kings of Judah, did not like the text of a prophecy by Jeremiah and thus took his penknife and cut the prophetic document into pieces. Then he cast the cut pieces into a fire burning on the hearth before him (Jer. 36). In Jeremiah 42, we have certain of the Jews who were left in the land subsequent to Jerusalem's fall in 586 B. C. come to Jeremiah requesting a message from God through the prophet about their immediate future plans. Jeremiah gave the requested message faithfully in the latter part of that chapter. Thus, they had the text of truth before them. Yet, in chapter 43, they denied that Jeremiah's words were true. They rejected this text of truth and went into Egypt when the Lord had strictly forbidden such. They were destructive textual critics for a surety. They paid dearly for such by their unauthorized pilgrimage into the Land of the Nile.

As a reader of this material, you may wonder why I have used the word "text", at times, to refer to something spoken and not yet written. Webster gives a number of definitions for the word text. One of them is "the exact or original words of a speaker." Hence, a text may refer to something written or to the oral words of a speaker.

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This destructive spirit is very much evident in the New Testament. The Samaritans, as we learn in John 4, did not know where God should be worshipped under the Mosaic Covenant. They thought Mt. Gerizim was the proper place. They rejected some 34 of the Old Testament books accepting only the Pentateuch. They rejected the very Old Testament texts that could have provided them the answer the woman at Jacob's well proposed to the Christ. They were destructive textual critics.

Pharisees in Christ's day rejected textual truth under Moses and the prophets in order that they might keep their own traditions. By such they rejected the Word of God, texts of truth, and made it void (Mark 7:7-13). They were destructive textual critics of the deepest order.

The Sadducees rejected every Old Testament text that taught the reality of man's soul, the actuality of the heavenly world and the surety of the resurrection. They preferred modernism over the precepts of the patriarch, the mandates of Moses and the proclamations of the prophets. They were destructive textual critics.

The Gnostics, both the Docetic and the Cerinthian brands, rejected textual truth in the New Testament about the nature of Jesus as touching both His humanity and Deity. John, the apostle, did battle with them during the latter part of his long, illustrious life.

Romanism, in its development and continuation, has made shambles of hundreds of texts in the New Testament. The Bible never has been safe in the hands of Roman Catholics. They have been and continue to be destructive textual critics. Every Biblical text is seen through the rose-colored glasses of the Papal system of theology.

Protestantism is no better. They began with the aim of reforming Catholicism which had gone sour. As this movement gained momentum it digressed more and more from the textual truths of the New Testament. I do not

know of a single Protestant body but what has destructively dealt with any number of textual truths of the Bible. Like their Catholic counterparts they are destructive textual critics. Look at how they deal with Mark 16:16 or Acts 2:38 for examples of handling the Word of God deceitfully (cf. 2 Cor. 4:2).

The cults and occults are destructive in their religious approach. Truth is not safe at all in their hands. They are destructive textual critics.

The Rationalist movement that centered in Germany, swept into other European countries, crossed the English Channel into Great Britain and then crossed the mighty Atlantic Ocean into the very heartland of our beloved American has majored in the infamous work of Biblical demolition. The Pentateuch became their literary butchering object of disdain. They outrightly rejected the Mosaic authorship of this stately segment of Sacred Scripture. They claimed the Pentateuch was the work of redactors or editors whom they designated as J., E., P., and D. J would be for the Jehovah document; E would be for the Elohim document, P would be for the priestly document and D for the Deuteronomic document. Prominent among these destructive critics were the names of H. B. Witter, J. Astruc, J. G. Eichhorn, A. Geddes, J. S. Vater, H. Ewald, H. Hupfeld and perhaps the most familiar name of them all was Julius Wellhausen. Noel Merideth once wrote:

So popular was the Wellhausenist construction that the critics bowed down to worship at the feet of Wellhausen.¹

In John 4:45-57, Christ declared that Moses wrote of Him. On a number of occasions Jesus quoted from the Pentateuch and gave credit to Moses as its human author.

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Even the infidelic Sadducees quoted from Deuteronomy 25 and attributed the citation to Moses (Matthew 22:24). Josephus, who was not a Christian, referred to the Pentateuch as being the “five books of Moses.” The patristic or church fathers, early Christian leaders subsequent to the apostles, attributed the Pentateuch to Mosaic authorship. So did other ancient writers.

In addition to their destructive work of the Pentateuch they rejected the inspiration of the Old Testament, the miracles and just about every fundamental of the Grand Old Book. These were destructive textual critics of infamous proportions.

Their destructive work did not end with the Old Testament. The New testament was also on their agenda of destruction. The opening three books, often called the Synoptics, have become a battleground as they sought to determine which one was written first and with the other two as mere copyists to what had already been written. They have jumbled them up into all kinds of combinations which proves they do not know anything about the matter of the one-two-three order. Throwing in the illusive Q document just compounds the problem all that much more. H. Leo Boles took notice of such and showed how utterly ridiculous and absurd the whole nefarious process is. Sagely, he wrote:

It will be observed that these theories must be largely destructive of one another. It does not matter which wrote first, as all wrote as they were guided by the Holy Spirit.”²

How refreshing to read from a real Bible scholar who knew they all wrote by the Holy Spirit’s help instead of trying to determine how much of what they wrote was by their own personal research, meditation,

interviews, etc. How far wiser it would have been if the destructive critics had spent this time in studying diligently the 68 chapters and 2,900 verses comprising these three inspired documents—Matthew, Mark and Luke—detailing our Lord’s life on earth and then practicing the same. Again, they are destructive textual critics.

With a fine tooth comb they have gone through Paul’s writings and John’s writings seeking to decide what portion of each is genuine, that is, penned by each of these two men. Not what they wrote but whether they wrote what is attributed to them is the important thing in dealing with the Pauline and Johannine writings to these destructive critics. They are destructive textual critics of the deepest order.

Now, we have some men who pride themselves on being great, renowned scholars who meet at regular intervals to decide how much of what is attributed to Jesus in the New testament was actually articulated by Him while here. They have already butchered away the greater percentage of what Matthew, Mark, Luke and John declared that He said. These four inspired biographers of our Lord knew what He said and told us what He said; these modern demolishers are whistling in the dark relative to these matters. They are a signal disgrace to the whole realm of Bible scholarship. Bible scholars **THEY ARE NOT!!!**

Destructive Textual Translators And Translations

The new Bibles, with but few exceptions, are inundated with this very spirit of Biblical destruction. They have been produced, published and promoted by men who are enemies of Calvary for a surety (cf. Phil. 3:18-19).

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The *RSV New Testament* came out in 1946 and the *RSV Bible* in 1952. Both were put out by modernists. They told us initially that they were dissatisfied with the “mechanically exact, literal word-for-word translations” of the English Revised and American Standard Versions of 1881 and 1901.³

In this modernistic volume they removed “only begotten” from John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9. Jesus becomes just God’s only son. They took a slap at Luke’s inspiration in Luke 1:1-4. They accommodated premillennialism in Matthew 19:28. They left more out of the text of Mark 16 than they left intact. According to my count they left untranslated 163 Greek words. They left in 8 verses and axed 12 verses. In Romans 11:20, they injected the unbiblical doctrine of faith only. This has not been corrected in any of their subsequent Bibles. The 1952 has it this way. So does the *New Revised Standard Version* of 1989. In the *1952 RSV Bible* they tampered with the text of Genesis 12:3, a passage very strategic in stating the Abrahamic promises. They changed it from passive to reflexive and yet in the 1989 edition changed back to the passive. Now which time was right? They could not be right both times. It ought to have remained passive all the time. Abrahamic descendants did not work out redemption’s plan. God did; and Jesus, the seed of Genesis 12:3, implemented the precious plan.

They changed virgin in Isaiah 7:14 to a “young woman” which is minus any and all justification. The *RSV* has Christ to deny He would abolish the Mosaic system and yet has Paul’s affirmation that He did abolish such in Ephesians 2:15. The *RSV* even had on its committee a Jew, Harry M. Orlinsky, who denied the New Testament a place in the Bible and declared Jesus was the product of an immoral union of Mary with some

man of her time. The *RSV* and its translators constitute the very epitome of destructive textual critics.

J. B. Phillips put out a New Testament in 1958. In his Translator's Foreword he wrote with modernism permeating every syllable:

I doubt very much whether the New Testament writers were as subtle or as self-conscious as some commentators would make them appear. For the most part I am convinced that they had no idea they were writing Holy Scripture...Paul, for instance, writing in haste and urgency to some of his wayward and difficult Christians, was not tremendously concerned about dotting the i's and crossing the t's of his message. I doubt very much whether he was even concerned about being completely consistent with what he had already written.⁴

Little wonder then why he has Peter to use gutter language in Acts 8:20 to the erring Simon of Samaria and why he rewrote 1 Corinthians 14:23, even injecting a fatal footnote as attempted justification for his atrocious actions. Being a wizard with words, as he manifestly was, he has captivated some of our own brethren who delight in using his work when they want to quote something that SOUNDS good. It would be better to quote the Bible rather than Phillips.

The New English Bible New Testament came out in 1961. It is one of the worst put out in this whole century. A few years later they put out *The New English Bible* (NEB). They tampered with Genesis 1:1-2. They changed the Spirit of God in verse 2 to a mighty wind moving or brooding upon the face of the waters. Edward J. Young said what they did with Genesis 1:1 was

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incorrect; H. C. Leupold said their rendering in verse 2 was untenable. They have Matthew 5:17; Ephesians 2:15 and Hebrews 10:9 in helpless, hopeless and hapless array. They accommodate Romanism and have Peter as the rock on which Christ proposed to build His church in Matthew 16:18. In this, they “out-poped the Pope and out-Romed Rome.” Were I a Catholic priest I would applaud this rendering to Matthew 16:18 and use it constantly with Protestant acquaintances. They have Mary a girl—not a virgin—in Luke 1:27. Girl and virgin are not necessarily synonymous terms at all! They have the Lord’s Supper observed on Saturday night in Acts 20:7—not on the first day of the week. The list could be extended almost indefinitely!

Good News For Modern Man by Robert Bratcher came out in 1966. He made shambles of the blood passages. Modernists have never been fond of the Bible doctrine of blood. He injected “faith only” into Romans and Galatians and then contradicted his own position when he arrived at James 2:24. From what he says in Acts 1,2 one could not prove who the precise recipients of Holy Spirit baptism were on Pentecost. He changed Acts 20:7 in two fatal ways—from the first day to Saturday evening as the time for the Troas meeting and the Lord’s Supper into a fellowship meal. His line drawings, at times, are confusing and misleading. He has the three wise men riding camels in Matthew 2 and Saul falling from a stallion in Acts 9. In both he has acted upon assumptions—not recorded facts.

Kenneth Taylor’s Living Bible Paraphrased is inundated with mythology, Calvinism, premillennialism and vulgarity as a reading of Genesis 6:1-4; Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:3; Isaiah 2:1-4; 2 Timothy 4:1-2 and 1 Samuel 20:31 fully exhibits. His language, at times, is far from being reverent. He adds what he wants to add and

subtracts what he dislikes. Time Magazine, July 24, 1972, said that Taylor lost his voice half-way through his paraphrase. A psychiatrist said it was Taylor's psychological self-punishment for tampering with what he believed to be the Word of God. But he went ahead and finished his pernicious product anyway! He should be ashamed, deeply so, for turning out a product this pernicious and lethal. Billy Graham did more to publicize it when it first appeared than any one other person. Graham should be ashamed of himself for such Satanic support for this outlandish book that dares call itself a Bible. A Bible it is not! An accurate translator Kenneth Taylor was not! An accurate assessor of what is a good, reliable Bible, Billy Graham is not! Taylor's product is misnamed from the beginning to finish. "The" is inappropriate; "Living" is unjustified; "Bible" should not be the title; "Paraphrased" is also inappropriate; he changed too much of the text for it to be just a paraphrase.

Before leaving Billy Graham, it should be noted that he endorsed another perverted Bible. Of *The Amplified New Testament* Graham said, "...the best study Testament on the market. It is a magnificent translation. I use it continually." This is on the front cover of this verbose book. Mr. Graham is anything but sharp and accurate in his surface assessments of modern Bibles.

The New International Version (NIV) came out during the 1970's. It has become the darling translation among many of our own naive brethren. The why of this is totally baffling to me. The main thing wrong with the RSV has been its modernism; the main thing wrong with the NIV is its sectarianism in general and its Calvinism in particular. They have David a sinner from birth and even sinful from the moment of conception in said passage. Yet when they got over to Psalm 139:14, they have this same sinfully-conceived and depraved-at-birth

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David, their contention, to praise God because “I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” The two NIV passages are in hopeless, helpless and hapless contradiction. How could David, an inspired man, thank and praise God for his being a sinner from birth, sinful from the moment of conception?

Is this the equivalent of being fearfully and wonderfully made? The Spirit of God is not to be faulted here; neither is David the writer. A group of inept translators are the flawed ones for a surety.

Calvinism again rears its ugly, infamous head in the “sinful nature” renderings in Romans 7,8 and Galatians 5,6. The NIV people were dealing with the Greek term, *sarx*. They should have translated it as “flesh” as the reliable KJV and ASV did when they came to this Greek term. Our nature comes from God and we are not sinful at conception or at birth either. Calvinism had entirely too strong a hold upon the NIV translators. Men cannot be loyal to Calvinism, as the NIV translators sought to do, and still be loyal to the truth of God which is not Calvinistic in ANY of its teachings.

More of their ineptness emerges in Matthew 5:17; Ephesians 2:15 and Hebrews 10:9. In the first cited verse, they have Jesus denying He had come to abolish the Mosaic Covenant; in the second cited passage they have Paul in affirmation that he had abolished such; in the third cited passage, they have the writer of Hebrews to say, “He sets aside the first to establish the second.” Ineptness has taken on a new dimension with the advent of the NIV translators and their perverted product. They really do not know what the Lord intended to do about Mosaic Law abrogation or its retention. What an untenable position for a group of Bible translators to assume and in which to remain!

Much more of their ineptness is observed in Acts

2:27,31 as they have Jesus going into the grave at death. This is where His body was entombed but His spirit went into Hadean comfort, Paradise or Abraham's bosom, till the precise moment of his resurrection when body and spirit were reunited. Difficulties are produced when other passages are brought into the picture. In Psalm 16:10, the NIV has grave in the text and Sheol as a footnote. The soul or spirit of Jesus did not go into the grave; it went into what the Old Testament calls "Sheol" and what the New Testament calls "Hades." The eminently accurate ASV has "Sheol" in Psalm 16:10. The NIV has Jesus to promise the dying, penitent thief on Calvary that he would be with Jesus that very day in "paradise" (Luke 23:43). Was the grave "paradise?" Jesus and the thief were not entombed together in a common grave. Jesus' body was entombed in a formerly unoccupied tomb; and when Joseph and Nicodemus placed Him there subsequent to His death, He was its SOLE occupant. The NIV should have stayed with Hades in Acts 2:27,31 as the ASV did in 1901. How utterly inept translators can be receives new emphasis with the NIV men.

The NIV leaves a question mark of doubt at the beginning of Mark 16:9-20. They say, "The two most important early manuscripts do not have Mark 16:9-20." Why were they not honest enough to mention that in one of these two there is a blank spot? What went into the blank spot and why was it left blank? Furthermore, why did they not take enough space in a footnote and give some of the staggering and overwhelming evidence in defense of Mark 16:9-20? Their handling of John 7:53-8:11 leaves much to be desired. In fact, their whole product leaves MUCH to be desired, PERIOD!!!

Were I a thoroughgoing premillennialist, I would be most happy with the NIV renderings of Matthew 19:28

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and John 5:28,29. They really butchered this latter passage changing hour to “a time is coming., There is much more elasticity in “a time is coming” than in “the hour” of reliable translations. More than a short hour is needed to get in all the premillennial baggage such as Rapture, the Great Tribulation, the battle of Armageddon, the various resurrections and the millennial reign of Christ on earth for a 1,000 years. Such is ineptness gone to seed and then some!! It is nothing short of pathetic.

Were I favorable to the usage of mechanical music in worship I would stand and applaud their handling of Ephesians 5:19. “Make music,” as they have it, allows for vocal, mechanical or a combination of both. Like Burger King advertisements, “Have it your way!”

The Solution To Destructive Textual Criticism

Such people need to realize God’s Word is not to be added to nor subtracted therefrom (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:6; Jer. 26:2; Rev. 22:18-19). They need to hide God’s Word in their hearts that they might not sin against Him (Psm. 119:11). Their hearts need to stand in awe of God’s Word (Psm. 119:161). They need to learn not to go beyond what is written (I Cor. 4:6—ASV). They need to learn, accept and abide by the sterling truth that God’s Word is inviolable-not to be violated, profaned, damaged or injured. Loving God, Christ and the Spirit supremely would produce a new and welcomed reverence and respect for the holy Word of God.

Conclusion

The destructive textual critic is on the broad way to eternal perdition himself for a surety as per Matthew 7:13-14 and will take untold numbers of the naive and pliable with him. Such is sad; it is inexpressibly sad!

Endnotes

1 J. Noel Merideth, **The Book of Genesis**, Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship, Editors—Thomas B. Warren, Garland Elkins (Lebanon, Tennessee, Sain Publications, 1985) p. 4.

2 H. Leo Boles, **A Commentary On The Gospel By Luke** (Nashville, Gospel Advocate Company, 1940), p. 14.

3 The **RSV New Testament** (New York, Thomas Nelson and sons, 1946) p. 5.

4 J. B. Philipps, **The New Testament in Modern English** (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1958), pp.8-9.

Chapter 32

Calvinism

Keith Mosher, Sr.

Thanks be to God for Bill Pierce and Coleman Simpson for their wonderful oversight of the Southaven Church of Christ and especially the **Power** Lectureship. Indebtedness and gratitude also are due B.J. Clarke and Bill Bryant for their efforts in producing this series. The brotherhood will long benefit from this effort to expose the “isms” of the world.

Introduction

John Calvin was just twenty-six years old when he began writing his “Institutes,” but his influence on the minds of professed “Christians” has leaped far beyond Calvin’s efforts to deny the works-salvation of Roman Catholicism. Nearly every non-Catholic group has to some degree, borrowed from Calvin.

Classic Calvinism is most easily remembered by the acronym, TULIP. The “T” stands for total-depravity: the idea that man inherits sin and is so deranged that he can not respond to God without supernatural intervention. The “U” stands for unconditional election: this doctrine maintains that God chooses certain ones to be saved regardless of that one’s desire. The “L” represents limited atonement: Christ is said to have died only for the elect. The “I” symbolizes irresistible grace: if one is “elected,” one can not resist God’s call. The final “P” is representative of the perseverance of the

saints: one who is saved can not fall from grace.

The Bible teaches that one does not inherit sin (Ezek. 18:20). The Bible teaches that Christ died for all men (Heb. 2:9). The Bible teaches that one has a choice in one's election (Josh.24:15). The Bible teaches that one can resist the grace of God (Acts 7:51). The Bible teaches that one can fall from grace (Gal. 5:4-6). Calvinism is diametrically opposed to the Bible.

This essay will focus on four areas of concern about Calvinism: (1) Calvin's teaching about God's grace pictures God as a "horror!" (2) Calvin's teaching about becoming a Christian falls far short of Bible truth. (3) Calvin's teaching is false concerning God's "choosing" of individuals. (4) Calvin's teaching binds one to Calvinism, not to Christ.

God's Grace Had Been Pictured as Horror!

Is God's grace a horror or a help? Some dear reader may wonder at such a question, but the persistent doctrine of Calvinism that permeates denominationalism (and even the church) leads to such an inquiry. Calvinists believe that every minute thing that happens is caused by God. Listen to Boettner:

It is almost universally admitted that God determines when, where, and under what circumstances, each individual of our race shall be born, live, and die, whether it shall be male or female, white or black, wise or foolish. God is no less sovereign in the distribution of His favors. He does what He will with His own. To some He gives riches, to others honor, to others health, to others certain talents for music, oratory, art, finance, statesmanship, etc. Others are poor, unknown, born in dishonor, the victims of disease, and live lives of wretchedness. Some are placed

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in Christian lands where they receive all the benefits of the Gospel; others live and die in the darkness of heathenism. Some are brought through faith unto salvation; others are left to perish in unbelief. And to a very large extent these external things, which are not the result of individual choice, decide the person's life course and teach us that God gives to some what He withholds from others. If it be asked why He does this, or why He does not save all, the only available answer is found in the words of the Lord Jesus. "Yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight." Only the Scripture doctrine of the fall and redemption will give us any light on what we see about us.¹

Notice that God is said to be responsible for every failure and/or success of man! According to the above, every horror in life and every help in life is the selective result of the sovereignty of God and man can do nothing to alter such events. Man can not, according to Calvinism, nee Augustinianism, and now Modernism even in churches of Christ, contribute one whit to his situation and/or salvation! Read further with Boettner:

This doctrine of eternal and unconditional election has sometimes been called the "heart" of the Reformed Faith. It emphasized the sovereignty and grace of God in salvation while the Armenian view emphasized the work of faith and obedience in the man who decides to accept the offered grace. In the Calvinistic system it is God alone who chooses those who are to be the heirs of heaven, those with whom He will share His riches in glory; while in the Armenian system it is, in the ultimate analysis, man who determines this—a principle somewhat lacking in humility to say the least.²

Please, dear reader, peruse the above paragraph long enough to become aware that those who teach that man has even one whit all to do with his salvation are said by Calvinists to denigrate the sovereignty of God and to exalt the efforts of man and are, therefore, not humble! When a Calvinist is asked why God saves some and not others, the answer is that such information belongs to His secret counsels.³ It is somewhat a mystery to those who study the phenomenon of Calvinism to note that everyone of them is one of the elect. How would they know they were elect if such belonged to God's "secret counsels?" The Calvinistic system has an answer for how one knows whether he is one of the elect—God just tells him in some convulsion or experience! Too, is one not humble who obeys God and accesses grace (Rom. 5:1-2; Heb. 5:8-9)? The theory also teaches that:

... Calvinism is nearer to the facts, however harsh and forbidding those facts may seem. When all deserve death it is a marvel of pure grace that any receive life; and who shall gainsay the right of Him who shows this miraculous mercy, to have mercy on whom He will, and whom He will to harden? This is admittedly an unpleasant doctrine. It is not taught to gain favor with men, but only because it is the plain teaching of Scriptures and the logical counterpart of the doctrine of Election.⁴

Is it not clear by now that Calvinists believe, even insist, that God, for no revealed reason, just plucks up some and puts down others? Some he condemns to evil and others to good. There is nothing man can do to escape this arbitrary system. Boettner adds:

Luther also, certainly as Calvin, attributes the eternal perdition of the wicked, as well as the eternal salvation of the righteous, to the plan of God. "This mightily offends our rational nature," he says, "that God should, of His own mere unbiased will, leave some men to themselves, harden them and condemn them; but He gives abundant demonstration, and does continually, that this is really the case; namely, that the sole cause why some are saved, and others perish, proceeds from His willing the salvation of the former, and the perdition of the latter, according to that of St. Paul, 'He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth.'" And again, "It may seem absurd to human wisdom that God should harden, blind, and deliver up some men to a reprobate sense; that He should first deliver them over to evil, and condemn them for that evil; but the believing, spiritual man sees no absurdity at all in this, knowing that God would be never a whit less good, even though He should destroy all men. He then goes on to say that this must not be understood to mean that God finds men good, wise, obedient, and makes them evil, foolish, and obdurate, but that they are already depraved and fallen and that those who are not regenerated, instead of becoming better under the divine commands and influences only react to become worse. In Reference to Romans 9, 10, 11, Luther says that "all things whatever arise from and depend upon the Divine appointment whereby it was preordained who should received the word of life and who should disbelieve it, who should be delivered from their sins and who should be hardened in them, who should be

justified and who condemned” (He quotes Luther from Praefat, K.M.).⁵

The convoluted reasoning of Luther and Calvin, above quoted as the true way in which God acts in all matters of life and salvation, teaches that God is not to be said to cause evil but that God is to be seen as selecting a few to salvation. Yet, Boettner, in the previous passage, argued that everything that took place God did! The Calvinist wants his election and his ejection to harmonize with his view of the sovereignty of God and when pressed to explain such confusion, the Calvinist says that all of this is a secret and cannot be known.

Calvinists start their argumentation with the thought that if any perfection in God’s divine (to them predestined) plan is denied then no stopping place can be found in thinking about God short of atheism. God did not need to create, says the Calvinist, but since God did create even the sinful acts of man have to be included in God’s plan! The Bible verses usually quoted to “prove” this theory by Calvinists are Acts 2:23; 4:28; Ephesians 1:4; 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:9; and 1 Peter 1:20. Those who argue for man’s part in salvation are said, by Calvinists, to deny God’s eternal purpose and to be saying further that man’s fall in the garden changed God’s purpose, and that therefore, man’s fall “drove” God to the expedient of a scheme of redemption. That is, if the crucifixion of Christ was in the eternal plan, than all the acts that made the crucifixion necessary were also planned by God, says the Calvinist, and any other teaching is atheism!

Note the following quote carefully:

The fact that the Scriptures often speak of one purpose of God as dependent on the outcome of

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another or on the actions of men, is no objection against this doctrine” (of Calvinism, KM).⁶

To the Calvinist, then, it does not matter that the Bible teaches against their doctrine of election, predestination, and the horror and help of grace! Well, it does matter and no Calvinist on earth has the authority to say that those verses that do not agree with his doctrine are just “man-talk” and not significant; that is, that those scriptures that mandate some action on man’s part in the scheme of redemption are just figurative and not literal (cf. Heb. 5:8,9; Jno. 14:15; Acts 2:38; I Jno. 2:3; 5:3; et al).

Is it a wonder, then, that one would want to reject a system where God was said to be arbitrary and a system that taught that one could not know whether one had been elected or rejected without some “convulsion” or “experience” directly from God! A child, (this writer was in Calvinism before his conversion) growing up under such teaching, lives in fear, not knowing whether God loves him or not; is the child one of God’s elect or non-elect? The grace of God becomes a “horror” rather than a help. It is a tremendous relief to learn that the Bible teaches that anyone can respond to God and that God desires all men to be saved (Matt. 11:28-30; Rev. 22:17; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). One leaving Calvinism knows well what is meant by being “transformed out of the power of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Salvation Teaching Was Short Of Truth

The creed of the Calvinistic Church to which this writer had confessed stated:

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; those whom God effectually calleth he also freely justifieth; . . . not for anything wrought in them, or done by

them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.⁷

Man, totally depraved, can not respond to God, yet is called so to do (Matt. 11:28-30; Rev. 22:17, et al) according to the creed above. So, God must call one, operate on one's heart, and give one faith in order to save one who was elected before creation to be saved! When asked, "Is not God unjust in requiring of man in God's Law what man cannot do?" the answer given is that God did create man with the ability to obey but man lost that ability in the fall of Adam and Eve. But, did not Adam and Eve obey God and leave the garden? Calvinism denies man's self-will and denies clear Bible statements. Man can obey God (I John 2:3; 5:3 etc.) and must obey God (Heb. 5:8-9).⁸

Calvinists speak of the effects of inborn sin's causing total depravity as **extensive** but not **intensive**. That is, man instinctively turns to sin because man is an alien by birth and a sinner by choice. Thus, to the Calvinist, man is a free (?K.M.) agent, but man can not originate the love of God in his heart just as a bird with a broken wing can not fly, even though she is free to do so. Calvinism's illustration does not state the case. A bird could fly at one time, but Calvin's depraved-at-birth-sinner can never, on his own volition, respond to God's love. The Calvinist will not admit the consequence of his doctrine—man has no free will!

Calvinists have serious conflicts with many Bible

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passages when total depravity is taught. For example, Timothy was told by Paul that “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse” (2 Tim. 3:13). How could one become worse than **totally** depraved? And, if one is depraved at birth and therefore must “instinctively” sin (per above), how came Adam to sin? Further, Calvin’s doctrine is that all is done **by** God and **for** God’s glory. How does man’s sin “glorify” God? Why did Cain murder Abel in light of Calvinism? Both boys, according to the theory, had the **same** corrupt nature. Why, then, was Cain more vicious than Abel? The truth is that men differ in their inclinations to sin and all are not wholly so inclined.

Further, Calvin’s theory damns every baby who dies in infancy. (However, the modern followers of Calvin are divided on this issue. Some are saying that all infants are saved “by Christ through the Spirit.”) The Christ taught that infants are not inherently evil nor totally depraved (Matt. 18:1-3; Luke 18:15-16). And, if one inherits his parents’ non-spiritual state, why do not children of Christians inherit their parents’ purity? Calvin said that the corrupt nature **remained** even in those who were regenerated (Westminster Confession of Faith). The Bible explicitly states that if a man is in Christ that man is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Calvinism conflicts with clear Bible statements.

God’s “Choosing” of Individuals Is Incorrectly Taught

Romans chapters 9, 10 and 11 are a parenthetical statement in that great treatise on the gospel by the apostle Paul (Rom. 1:16-17). Paul pauses in his defense of the new covenant to assure the Jews that God had not forsaken them, but that in fact the Jews had rejected the only message that could save anyone—the gospel (Rom.

10:1-4). All men, from Adam to this writer, are saved, if they are saved, by the gospel of Christ (cf. Heb. 9:15; Rom. 3:21-31). No one was actually righteous under any other covenant because the “blood of bulls and goats” could never take away sin (Heb. 10:4).

The teaching of the new covenant or gospel caused the Jews to question God’s selection process. (Whether unsaved Jews literally asked such or whether Paul assumed such a question would be asked is moot; Paul discussed the question in Romans 9.) The question might have been something like: “Since God chose the Jews (Rom. 9:5) to bring the Christ, how can any of God’s “selected people” be lost?” In other words, “How can God choose anyone for some purpose without affecting that person’s salvation? If God uses someone for God’s purpose, how is it possible for that person to be lost?” Romans, chapter 9, was written to answer such an inquiry. Presbyterianism misunderstands this “choosing” as did the Jews of Paul’s day.

Paul assures the Jew, first of all, that he has no personal animosity toward them. He even wishes (the original language is idiomatic imperfect, or having tentative force; i.e, what Paul wished was impossible) he could be “accursed” if such would save all the Jews (Rom. 9:1-3). One must stand in awe of a Christian who would love his fellow man to such an extent! Paul was in no sense personally opposed to the salvation of the Jews.

Paul is careful to explain that the “brethren” (Romans 9:3) for whom he could wish himself accursed were indeed chosen by God (Rom. 9:4-5). They had been “adopted” as national sons of God (cf. Deuteronomy 14:1); they were cognizant of the “covenants” (with Abraham, Genesis 12; Israel, Exodus 20; and David, 2 Samuel 7); they were familiar with the “service of God” (the priesthood, Heb. 9:1,6); and they knew the Messianic promises and the fact

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that Christ came as a Jew (Rom. 9:4b-5). Certainly the Jews had been especially chosen by God.

“Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Rom. 9:6). Whiteside noted concerning God’s process of choosing that “the selection... is regarded as having reference not to the final salvation of persons but to the execution of the purpose of God.”⁹ God did choose Israel in order to execute His purpose, but that selection did not “automatically” insure the final salvation of every Jew.

In fact, argues Paul, not even those who lived during the time of national Israel were “of Israel” (Romans 9:6b). Why? Because as concerning salvation, the purpose of God has always been to include only those persons who are “of faith” (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:16-17; Hebrews 11). Spiritual Israel today includes only those persons who have faith “in” Christ. In order to have faith “in” Christ, one must be baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27). The national Jews often argued with Christ that “they had Abraham to their father” as if mere birth in Israel insured salvation (e.g. John 8:33). Jesus’ answer to the Jews on that occasion was that since they operated by such thinking they were actually children of the devil, and not children of Abraham (John 8:44)! ***God, who is sovereign, can choose anyone for whatever purpose God has in mind; but that choice does not insure salvation to such an individual nor does that choice interfere with a person’s free moral ability to choose to obey or disobey God.***

God made choice of Isaac over Ishmael (Romans 9:7). Why? To save Isaac and to send Ishmael to hell? No! God chose Isaac to perpetuate the seed of Messiah. Someone might say, “Well, I can understand that choice, for after all, Isaac was the legitimate son.” So, Paul brings up Esau and Jacob (Rom. 9:8-13). Fleshly descent does

not insure salvation (Rom. 9:8b-9). Yet, before Esau and Jacob were born (Rom. 9:10-11) God chose Esau to “serve” Jacob (Rom. 9:12). In the personal lives of Jacob and Esau, Esau did not “serve” Jacob. The nations that proceeded from Esau later served Jacob or Israel (Mal. 1:1-4). If God’s choice of Jacob over Esau had been for personal salvation, such a choice would have condemned every descendant of Esau to hell. But, God is no respecter of persons as concerning salvation (Rom. 2:11). As individuals, Jacob gave gifts to Esau (Genesis 33) but as nations “Esau” (Edom) served “Jacob” (Israel—1 Chronicles 18:12-13).

The president of the United States will often choose someone to be on the president’s team. Such a choice does not alter the character of the one chosen, nor does such a choice insure that the selected one will still be on the team as long as the president is in office. God made many choices in the completion of God’s plan to bring the Messiah through Israel and for the world. Not one of those choices affected directly the personal character of the one chosen nor did that choice insure the salvation of the person.

God is not “unrighteous” in any choice that God makes in order to achieve His purposes (Rom. 9:14). God’s “choices” do not interfere with human “choices” and in fact the bringing of the Messiah enhanced all peoples “chances” at salvation! “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Titus 2:14). Even though Israel had been the instrument through which God had brought Messiah, Israel no more deserved individual salvation for every citizen of that ancient nation than did or does any other nation or individual (Romans 9:16).

Sometimes, God’s ancient leaders would become very discouraged about Israel. Moses, especially, was concerned about the rebellion of his people and God’s attitude after the people sinned concerning the golden calf. But God

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assured Moses that the Divine purposes would be accomplished for God is “gracious” and “merciful” to whom He will (Exod. 33:19 and Rom. 9:15).

Presbyterianism has tried to make the statement in Romans 9:15 to mean that God chooses some to salvation but not others. The context, however, has to do with God’s purposes in the future of Israel and the coming Messiah for all mankind. Individuals wanting God’s mercy or forgiveness of their personal sins should heed the following:

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy (Prov. 23:13).

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for will abundantly pardon (Isa. 55:7).

Then Peter said unto them, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).

Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee (Acts 8:22, which was said to one already a Christian).

God will always bring His plans to conclusion: “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (Rom. 9:16). The ancient promise to the faithful Abraham had been of a promised

seed (Gen. 12:1-3) which promise was fulfilled in the Jewish nation, but the Jews wanted to “will” otherwise and find their own righteousness (Rom. 10:1-3). But God is the one who is in charge and God shows that His mercy is never a product of man’s will nor man’s striving, but man must accept the mercy found in Christ whether he is Jew, Gentile, or anyone else (Rom. 3:21-27). God did choose the Jewish nation to bring Messiah, but God will show His mercy only to those who meet the conditions for faith in Messiah (Heb. 11:6; John 8:24). Even today many would rather just be “good” and “earn” their way (they think) to heaven!

No better illustration of how God can use a person to fulfill God’s purpose and yet not interfere with that person’s ability to choose or reject the salvation of God could be located in all history than Pharaoh:

For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, even, for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth (Rom. 9:17).

Pharaoh openly defied God; therefore, God’s will hardened Pharaoh (Exodus 9:16). God intended to show mercy to the Israelites through Pharaoh; but Pharaoh hearing the same messages from God that Moses and the Israelites heard, rejected God’s plan and so was said to be hardened by God and at the same time to harden Pharaoh’s own heart (Exodus 9:7,12,34). Truly the Word of God is a “two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12). God chose Pharaoh in order to exalt God’s purpose and power, but Pharaoh condemned himself by refusing to be a part of God’s plans. And the sincere Bible student will recognize that even Moses was in the same position before God when Moses was called to lead Israel (Exodus 3-4) as Pharaoh

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was when God called that ancient Egyptian to show mercy to his Hebrew slaves. Moses responded in a positive way, but Pharaoh did not. Pharaoh could have been a part of salvation's plan, but he chose to rebel. The sincere Bible student will also recognize that God would have accomplished his purposes whether Pharaoh obeyed or did not obey and that is the whole point here. God works his purposes through man, but such working does not affect man's individual choice of obedience nor rebellion (cf. Rom. 6:16-18).

"Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18). When one is involved in God's "purposing," and in a sense all men are, God's message either hardens or softens depending on how one reacts to it. It is, therefore, incumbent upon all to realize that to hear the plan of God for salvation and not to respond is to place one at risk to have one's heart hardened. This is the reason that Pharaoh is said to harden his own heart as well as God's hardening that same heart. God's Word "cuts" two ways—it will either cut the heart or prick the heart (cf. Acts 7:54 and Acts 2:37). "Cutting" the heart produces spiritual "scars" that harden, but "pricking" is said of the soft heart that responds.

God has the power to use individuals and nations as he chooses: "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour" (Rom. 9:21)? However, each person has the power to choose the character of the vessel so chosen by God. Romans 9:21 is not teaching that God chooses some to be saved (honour) and some to be lost (dishonour), but does teach that in working out God's purposes certain individuals were used.

Paul's clear claim is that God has the right to use men already sinners for God's purposes:

What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (Rom. 9:22).

This principle Paul applied to the Jews who were used by God to bring the blessed Messiah to the world, but which Messiah the Jews, for the most part, rejected (Rom. 9:7).

God used wicked nations against his people on many occasions trying to get rebellious Israel to repent of her idolatry, and such activity on the part of Deity was questioned (Habakkuk 1:13). God's answer to Habakkuk was the wicked would not go unpunished either (Hab. 2:4-19) and that all men should be made to understand that God rules in this world (Hab. 2:20—"But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.") Sinners and saints, especially saints who worship a loving God, often find it very hard to understand how God can use both groups for his purposes. Saints have learned to trust the righteous government of God, but sinners continue to question such control.

The Jewish nation, before the time of Christ, had long been "fitted" (*katertismena*, a state of readiness) for destruction (Rom. 9:22). The Jewish nation, through her leaders, had also executed the Son of God (Acts 2:36). But God "endured" (Rom. 9:22b). Why? Because God was doing exactly what God intended to do, bring in the Gentiles and those Jews who would obey the gospel—"vessels of mercy" (Rom. 9:23-24). The Jewish prophet, Hosea, had foretold of God's purposes in these matters of salvation (Rom. 9:25) and Paul uses that Old Testament passage (Hos. 2:23) as his proof-text for arguing that the intentions of God always supercede the character of the

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human vessels involved. God intended that Gentiles hear the gospel and used the Jews to bring the message. That fact never did mean that God must save every Israelite nor does God's usage of any person mean that automatic salvation is due the one so used. Everyone must obey from his own heart in order to be saved (2 Peter 3:9; Hos. 1:10; Rom. 9:26).

Is It Christ or Calvin?

The only route to having the God of heaven as one's Father is through the Christ (John 14:6). But, Calvinism binds one to Calvin's doctrine not to Christ's teaching since only "ordained" Calvinistic preachers may administer sacraments. Any person trying to come to Christ simply by obeying Scripture is told he has no ability to do so, may or may not be one of God's elect, and must be baptized (i.e. sprinkling) by one ordained a Calvinistic preacher!

The Bible records Christ as saying "Come unto me" (Matt. 11:28a)! John Calvin has had far too much influence for a twenty-six year old. His teachings **blame** God for everything and leave man unable to contribute one whit to his salvation. The Bible instructs that all desiring salvation must contribute to the process of being saved (Heb. 5:8-9; 1 John 2:3; 5:3).

Endnotes

1 Loraine Boettner, **The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination** (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974), 36.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 108.

5 Ibid., 106.

6 "The Westminster Confession of Faith 1647," (Revised 1903), Articles III and XI in Philip Schaff, **The Creeds of Christendom** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 9:623-27.

7 Ibid.

8 “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” 28: 662.

9 Robert L. Whiteside, **A New Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Saints at Rome** (Denton, TX: The Manney Company, 1945), 195.

10 “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” 9: 623-27.

11 Ibid., 27: 661.

Chapter 33

Post-Modernism

Tim Shoulders

Few events in recent history have altered the course of thought and religious conviction within a nation as occurred in 1859 when Charles Darwin released his treatise, *Origin of the Species*. I would dare say, few realized the dramatic impact it would have on peoples' perception of their world and of the God who created it. To many these were foolish musings from an overzealous bunch of intellectuals, who had little respect for God and common sense. How could anyone actually believe that man had evolved from lower life forms? Surely, this doctrine will be dismissed and little influence will be had on science and especially on religious life in America.

Well, almost one-hundred and forty years later we find ourselves living in an America that denies American children the right to hear the creation account offered as a viable explanation of our origin. Instead, a theory, lacking in detailed archeological support, has taken its place in the classroom of a country who in its conception claimed to be a nation founded on Judeo-Christian principles. A nation whose morals have eroded so rapidly, congressional action had to be taken recently to define the definition of marriage.

As man sought to “profess himself to be wise,” he has become a “fool” (Rom. 1:22). He has, “suppressed the

truth in unrighteous,” and turned to serve the creation instead of the creator (Rom. 1:25). While man’s pursuit of scientific knowledge has brought many new inventions and discoveries which make his physical life more comfortable, his soul and spirit suffers from disillusionment and sorrow. Homes are being destroyed, crime is rampant and true peace and happiness eludes this self-sufficient man.

Today the winds are blowing away from science and empirical evidence toward a new panacea, a hope for a new world order, a fresh breeze of individual freedom called postmodernism. It’s a means of embracing the moral relativity born of modernism and the inner peace found in mysticism and New Age religion: a religion where there are no absolutes, no truths, unless they are derived from my own culturally-created realities.

While modernism was blatantly anti-religion, at least it afforded us a forum of dialogue on the basis of objective observation and reason. This allowed us to show evidences of the Christian faith substantiated by science, philosophy, archeology and the internal evidences of the Holy Scriptures (1 Pet. 3:15, 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Not so, with postmodernism. Reason and objectivity are out the door, feelings and intuitions are in - “Our experience now becomes our reality. Those who try to apply reason to the world have naively missed the fact that all their reasonings are nothing but cultural language constructs.”¹ You see, the only way we perceive anything is by symbols in our minds. Those symbols take the form of words and words form into languages. “For all intents and purposes, since culture creates language, and language is our only means to perceive reality, culture creates reality.”²

Now, this doesn’t mean that my culture is right and yours is wrong, unless, of course, my reality says it’s wrong. “Relativism promises us that each of us can have reality

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our way: with or without deities and demons, virtues and vices, truth and error, holiness and depravity, progress and regress. The world is ours to shape, reshape, and reshape again to our heart's content."³

What a perfect religion and ideology for our age. Reminds us of those in the days of the judges when it says, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6)." Do you suppose they have ever read "there is a way which seemeth right to a man, but its end is the way of death (Prov. 14:12)?" Guess not!

Some of you with your western, Baconian, rationalist, Eurocentric mindset are thinking, how can one position be declared true and the diametrically opposite position not be false? Your problem is that you can't be objective. You see, nobody can be objective. We all see things differently, what you see as blue, may not be exactly what I see as blue, although, in our culture, we call it by the same name. Remember the O. J. Trial. All of America heard the same facts, but many came to different conclusions. Especially those with different cultural and language constructs.

Are you starting to get the idea of how things are rationalized by the postmodernist? Whether people agree on who killed Ron Goldman and Nicole Brown does not change the fact that O. J. in reality is innocent or guilty. Just because we can't always agree on or know the truth, does not mean that there is no truth. Can you imagine what this philosophy will do to our court system if neither deductive reasoning nor empirical verifications yield valid conclusions.⁴ In describing the liberalism guiding the ACLU, a definite postmodernist organization, F. Lagard Smith, wrote, "Liberalism is born of moral relativism in which truth can be pushed either way like a swinging door. Relativism has nothing to fear from inconsistency."⁵ People can simply use postmodernism to defend their ideas

and intuitions whether they make any sense or not. Dennis McCallum said, “Postmodernism has provided the philosophical framework that lends intellectual respectability to views and practices that once were considered superstitious or weird.”⁵

It would be helpful in our responses to postmodernism to have a set body of teachings to analyze and critique. Unfortunately, “postmodernism is not a collection of beliefs and dogmas as much as a way of viewing other schools of thought, artistic expression, and behavior.”⁷ Thus, for our purposes we will focus our attention on the areas where their “way of viewing” comes in conflict with Christianity.

Word-Centered Faith

“To postmodernists, being logocentric (“word” or “reason”-centered) is a great sin. Logocentrists are the ideologues, the cultural imperialists who attempt to subjugate others to their version of the truth.”⁸ The very notion that you would use some culture bound, sexist, western controlled, ancient literacy piece (the Bible) to enslave a poor populace and empower yourself by implying you know what’s right for them is utterly abhorrent. In the very nature of their way of thinking it’s “inappropriate to try and change someone else’s mind.”⁹

In a recent Gallup Poll, 88% of evangelicals believe the Bible is the written word of God, yet 53% surveyed say there is no such thing as absolute truth.¹⁰ Already, postmodernism has eroded the faith of some in an inerrant word. How needed is the charge of Paul to Timothy that we “preach the word” in our day and age, for men surely are not “enduring sound doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2).” How we need to be reminded of the warning given in Hebrews 2:2-3, “if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every disobedience received a just reward, how shall

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we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.”

Intentionally, or unintentionally, our own brethren fall into the web of the postmodernist, when they speak of “God-talk” and “man-talk”, how truths cannot really be communicated through words. Our Lord made us and made our language. Through inspired writing, He has communicated to us in words that we can understand (1 Cor. 2:11-13, Heb. 1:12). “Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord (Isa. 1:18).”

Religion Is A Myth

“All religions are myths, metaphors of our unconscious self - it’s something in you - something you can’t see, taking the form of a myth,”; so says Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth*.¹¹ He alleges that this power of religion (the myth) has been used by western oriented countries to control people’s minds. In Elaine Pagel’s work on the Gnostic Gospels, she reveals her assessment that many of the teachings on Biblical authority are rooted in political self interest.¹² According to her, one such teaching is the doctrine of the resurrection. The Apostles wanted authority so they made up the story about the resurrection, which they witnessed, then said only those who witnessed His resurrection could have authority. How can they be so blasphemous? If you believe that you are God , it’s not blasphemous. Deepak Chopra, postmodern advocate of self-healing said, “I know myself as the immeasurable potential of all that was, is, and will be... I am omnipresent, omniscient ; I am an eternal spirit that animates everything in existence.”¹³

The heart of the great tragedy of sin was man’s craving to be “like God” (Gen. 3:5) or to think of himself as God. King Herod learned the hard way he was not

God (Acts 12:23). The Scriptures clearly place the hope of our salvation on the resurrection. “If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith also is vain (1 Cor. 15:15).” To deny the very essence of the gospel message (1 Cor. 15:1-4) is to deny Christ Himself (Matt. 10:32-33, 2 John 9). This attitude is the pinnacle of arrogance and the character of the man of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:3-4).

Head Knowledge Versus Heart Knowledge

Can you guess by now which of these two the postmodernist considers more important? You got it: heart-knowledge.¹⁴ This is also the area where the denominational world joins hands with the postmodernist. Religion is all emotion and feelings without regard to what the Scriptures say. Our brethren who are exalting emotion over form and substance, play right into the hands of the postmodernist. While love and emotion are essential ingredients in proper Christian faith (1 Cor. 13), it must be balanced with the Truth (Eph, 4:15, John 4:24). The heart and head must be together. That balance is achieved by “doing the will of the Father” in Matt. 7:21, which includes love (John 13:34-35) and obedience (John 14:15).

How far will the postmodernist go with feeling and experience in opposition to reason and science? Don’t be surprised if school systems offer eastern mysticism and black magic as required study in our multiculturally-diverse society. Now that Christianity has been excluded from public schools, watch for science to be next. Consider this statement by P. K. Feyerabend:

Science still reigns supreme... Thus, while an American can now choose the religion he likes, he is still not permitted to demand that his children learn magic rather than science at

school... and yet science has no greater authority than any other form of life.¹⁵

Postmodernism: Family Values

As you can now freely imagine, postmodernism would have us restructure all our previous standards in regard to home and family, especially families structured according to western theology (Biblical principles). Feminist theologians are calling for a “liberation from the text,”¹⁶ which means no more patriarchal-based leadership couched in first century male chauvinism. Women are urged to reinterpret or simply reject the text (Bible passages) that from their twentieth century viewpoint is oppressive to women. How convenient, but also how amazingly similar to what many women in the church are advocating.

Along with the feminist agenda comes the cry for acceptance of homosexual union and hedonist life-style. If there are no laws, anything goes. William D. Watkins says, “the coupling of lesbianism and hedonism and feminism makes perfect sense, especially in light of the values now dominating the American Culture.”¹⁷ Carle Zimmerman writes, “The belief that human beings and human relations are sacred is the cornerstone upon which the total social structure is built.”¹⁸ If the proper order of families is destroyed, the country is soon to follow.

The Lord clearly spells out in plain language the roles of men and women in the home (Eph. 5:22-23) and they are not culture-bound, but are grounded in the creation (Gen. 1-2 and 1 Tim. 2:8-15). A chain of authority is founded in creation (1 Cor. 11:3) and is absolutely essential for an ordered society. These truths are not an accident but are in accordance with the design and purpose of our Creator.

Postmodernists Are Not Relativists

The true relativist would not object to differing views, but postmodernists decry their own plea for tolerance by being intolerant of anyone holding a different view. Make no mistake about it, the postmodernists have an agenda which is against all the institutions we hold dear and they will not relent until their voice is heard. Sadly, they are being heard, even though the postmodernism rejection of rational objectivity is self-defeating. “It either denies the plausibility of its own position, or it presumes the reliability of reason and the objectivity of truth.”¹⁹ Of course, sin has never ever worried about being consistent.

While this philosophy may not impact our world the way evolutionary theory did, it gives great cause for caution and preparation of the church. “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ (Col. 2:8).”

Endnotes

1 Dennis McCallum, “Evangelical Imperatives,” **The Death of Truth** (Minnneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1996) p. 239.

2 Jim Fidelibus, “Being of Many Minds: The Postmodern Impact on Psychotherapy,” Dennis McCallum, ed., **The Death of Truth**, p. 147.

3 William D. Watkins, **The New Absolutes** (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), p. 36.

4 Gary Saalman, “Postmodern Impact: Law,” Dennis McCallum, ed., **The Death of Truth**, p. 169.

5 F. Lagard Smith, **ACLU-The Devil’s Advocate** (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Marcon, 1996), pp. 26-27.

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- 6 McCallum, **The Death of Truth**, p. 205.
- 7 Jim Leffel, "Postmodern Impact: Literature," McCallum, ed., **The Death of Truth**, p. 86.
- 8 Leffel, "Postmodern Impact: Literature," p. 91.
- 9 S. D. Gaede, **When Tolerance is No Virtue: Political Correctness, Multiculturalism, and the Future of Truth and Justice** (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1993), p. 45.
- 10 Gene Edward Veith, **Postmodern Times** (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1994), p. 16.
- 11 Joseph Campbell, **The Power of Myth** (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 57.
- 12 Elaine Pagels, **The Gnostic Gospels** (New York: Random House, 1979), p. 26.
- 13 Deepak Chopra, **Escaping the Prison of the Mind: A Journey From Here to Here** (San Rafael, Calif.: New World Library, 1992), audiocassette.
- 14 Stanley J. Grenz, "Postmodernism and the Future of Evangelical Theology," **The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement**, David Dockery, ed. (Wheaton: Bridgepoint/Victor Books, 1995).
- 15 P. K. Feyerabend, **Against Method: Outlines of an Anarchist Theory of Knowledge** (London: New Leaf Books, 1975), p.299.
- 16 Susan Brooks Thistlewaite, "Every Two Minutes: Battered Women and Feminist Interpretation," Letty M. Russell, ed., **Feminist Interpretation of the Bible**. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), p. 106.
- 17 Watkins, **The New Absolutes**, p. 169.
- 18 Carle C. Zimmerman, **Family and Civilization** (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947), p. 777.
- 19 Leffel, **The Death of Truth**, p. 53.