

DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

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Introduction

Over the last few years I have become aware of a growing lack of spiritual discernment among God's people. For many it is a lack of familiarity with what the Bible actually teaches. For others it appears to be an inability or unwillingness to evaluate new teachings and ideas through the lens of scripture. Many are willing to uncritically accept stories of people's "spiritual journeys and experiences" over what the Bible clearly teaches. My heart's desire for God's people is the same as that of the apostle Paul:

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ (Ephesians 4:14-15)

It is my desire to speak the truth in love, but to speak the truth. In this paper I will quote the writings of different authors. I do not know these people and it is not my intention to personally attack them or question their hearts or motives. I simply want to compare what they are teaching with the scriptures and let you make the decision on whether or not they are consistent.

Shearing Wolves

We are living in a generation that has, for the most part, lost any desire for spiritual discernment. We are living in an age that questions whether absolute truth exists. To question someone's belief is considered rude. To believe that you have the truth is considered arrogant. To be definitive or to try to make distinctions is considered at best a waste of time.

To most, even if truth does exist, it doesn't matter. What matters to them is personal fulfillment and emotional experiences.

In Christian circles there is an increasing desire to break down all differences and distinctions. One of the most popular "Christian" authors of our day has written:

"I like attending a Catholic service every once in a while . . . I grew up Baptist . . . Some of my friends have left their churches and gone Greek Orthodox. I think that sounds cool." (Donald Miller, Blue Like Jazz 130)

"I began to attend a Unitarian church. . . . was wonderful." (BLJ 215)

But Unitarians deny the deity of Christ and salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. They see all Christian and non-Christian religions as paths to God (if He/She/It exists at all).

"I began to understand that my pastors and leaders were wrong, that the (theological) liberals were not evil . . ." (BLJ 215)

Jesus and the apostles however warn us to beware of false teachers.

1. God Warns Us About False Teachers.

Matthew 7:15 *Beware of the false prophets*, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are *ravenous wolves*

Acts 20:28-31 *Be on guard* for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.²⁹ "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.³¹ "Therefore *be on the alert*, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-15 But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of *devotion* to Christ.⁴ For if one comes and preaches *another Jesus* whom we have not preached, or you receive *a different spirit* which you have not received, or *a different gospel* which you have not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully . . . **13** *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.*¹⁴ No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also *disguise themselves as servants of righteousness*, whose end will be according to their deeds.

2. God Wants Us To Be Discerning.

The fact that Solomon asked for discernment pleased God.

1 Kings 3:9-12 "So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"¹⁰ It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing.¹¹ God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice,¹² behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you.

Jesus said:

Matthew 16:3 "And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot *discern* the signs of the times?"

3. Discernment Is The Ability To Distinguish Between Things.

The Hebrew word *binah* is the ability to establish a space between choices, to distinguish between things, to see differences and distinctions. For Christians it is critical that we discern between: good and bad, wise and foolish, right and wrong

4. Discernment Comes From Applying God's Word To Life.

The entire book of Proverbs was written to help us to develop discernment. Many other passages teach the importance of discernment and understanding.

Hebrews 5:13-14 For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Psalm 119:169 Let my cry come before You, O LORD; Give me understanding according to Your word.

Acts 17:11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so.

5. We Should Pray For Discernment.

Philippians 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment

1 Corinthians 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

6. God Reprimands Those Who Are Unwilling To Make Spiritual Distinctions.

Revelation 2:14 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit *acts of* immorality.

Revelation 2:20 'But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of* immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

Hosea 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

Beware Of The Misuse Of Scripture

Satan's primary attack has always been upon God's word. His primary goal is to deceive the hearts and minds of people. His primary method is to keep God's people away from God's Word, or better yet to have people misunderstand the Word.

In the Garden of Eden he caused Eve to question God's word.

Throughout the Old Testament he is constantly introducing false prophets to get the people into idolatry and false religions.

The New Testament repeatedly warns of Satan's attempts to deceive God's people.

2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-15 But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity *of devotion* to Christ. ⁴ For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully. . . ¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. ⁵ *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ

Satan has historically attacked people's confidence in the Bible. His false teachers:

Deny that the Bible is from God

Deny that the Bible has been preserved

Deny that the right books are in the Bible Cf The DaVinci Code

Deny that we can understand the Bible

1. Beware Of Faulty Translations

Most of our translations in the past have attempted to render the original Greek and Hebrew words into English as closely as possible. They tried to stay as close as possible to the original languages.

Translations that have tried to keep closely to a word for word translation include the King James Version, New King James Version, American Standard Version, New America Standard Bible, English Standard Version, and Holman Christian Standard Bible

Many of the more recent translations do not attempt a word-for-word literal translation. These "dynamic equivalent translations" attempt to explain what the authors meant (as they perceive it) rather than rendering what the authors actually said and allowing the reader to interpret the words for themselves. Those with this philosophy include the New International Version, New Living Translation, Today's English Version, Good News, and Phillip's translations.

Several supposed translations have replaced masculine pronouns and sometimes nouns in an effort to make the Bible less offensive to certain segments of our society. (Today's New

International Version, New Living Bible, New Revised Standard Version, Contemporary English Version, New Century Version, New English Translation)

In addition, there are paraphrases such as the Living Bible and The Message which make no attempt to translate words at all, but are more like running commentaries. These often reflect the bias of the authors.

The further a translation moves from the original, the more interpretive it becomes and the further the words are from the original text. Compare the translation with the paraphrase below.

Matthew 16:25 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (NAU)

Matthew 16:25 “Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to find yourself, your true self.” (The Message)

2. Beware Of Authors Whose Writings Incorporate Many Translations.

There are authors who go from translation to translation looking for one that can readily be made to support the point they are trying to make. (Some even come up with their own translations.)

As an example, one author chose to use **The Message’s** paraphrase of Psalm 63:3 because it supported her ideas about personal fulfillment. Compare the various translations below with that from **The Message**. Is this a proper rendering of Psalm 63:3?

^{ESV} **Psalm 63:3** Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.

^{KJV} **Psalm 63:3** Because thy lovingkindness *is* better than life, my lips shall praise thee.

^{NAS} **Psalm 63:3** Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise Thee.

^{NAU} **Psalm 63:3** Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise You.

^{NKJ} **Psalm 63:3** Because Your lovingkindness *is* better than life, My lips shall praise You.

The Message: Psalm 63:3 *In your generous love I am really living at last!*

The same author went to a Japanese translation of Psalm 22:3 to support another of her unusual ideas.

^{NAU} **Psalm 22:3** Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

Her comments.

In the Japanese Bible, it says: “When we worship, we build a big chair for God to sit in.” I love that! My worship invites the Holy God to come and dwell in the big recliner my worship creates for Him.”

While all other translations picture our praises helping God to be seen in His glory, she chooses a paraphrase that communicates a completely different idea that she wants to convey.

3. Beware Of The Misuse Of The Original Languages.

One author says of the Greek word for worship (*proskuneo*), “It is almost the idea of blowing a kiss to God”

The Greek usage of *proskuneo* however carries the idea of bowing before a sovereign and kissing the hem of his garment or his signet ring as a sign of submission and loyalty.

4. Beware Of Texts Taken Out Of Context

We must be careful not to let our preconceived ideas take precedence over the original intent of the author. It is not “What it means to me” that is important, but what it meant to the author. We can easily fall into the trap of taking a passage out of context if we carelessly search for passages that we can twist to prove a point we want to make. This leads to the danger of reading a passage from a pre-disposed understanding rather than within its context.

Some have used **Ephesians 5:28** to teach the virtue of self love.

Ephesians 5:28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself

But upon examination, this passage is assuming, not promoting self-love. In fact the Bible teaches in many places that self-love is a problem. cf 2 Timothy 3:2

One author uses **Psalm 42:1-2** to teach a wrong concept of private worship where she says that we are to mentally visualize God and to experientially have a two way conversation with Him.

However, Psalm 42 is not referring to some private worship experience where we are to visualize and interact with God in our imagination. It is referring to public worship. In the Psalm, David expresses his desire to return to Jerusalem to worship with God’s people at the temple. Verse 4 mentions his desire to worship with the “*throng*” and “*a multitude keeping festival.*”

5. Beware Of Texts Taken Out Of Their Cultural Context

One author draws some questionable applications from John 13:23 which states: ***There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.***

The custom of the time was for diners to recline at the table and rest on their left elbows with their heads toward the table and the feet pointed away. (Cf John 12:2; 13:28) If John was in front of Jesus, he would automatically be reclining close to Jesus’ breast. If the author had understood the culture, she would not have gone on to draw some erroneous conclusions and applications.

6. Beware Of Allegorical Interpretations

Many try to do this with the tabernacle, colors, numbers, etc. I have seen many different interpretations of each. These “deep insights” are speculative and only as good as the imaginations of the authors.

It is only safe to interpret something symbolically if the Bible itself tells us what it means.

Points of Application

- a. Use a good translation.
- b. Beware of those who are constantly changing translations to make their point.
- c. Don’t assume that those who refer to the original languages know what they are talking about.
- d. Always check out a text in both its immediate and larger context.

- e. Be aware of cultural contexts.
- f. Remember that the Bible was written to be understood. It is not a code book using hidden meanings.

Beware Of A False View Of Mankind, And The Gospel

2 Corinthians 10:5 *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

In this section we will look at two important areas false teachers distort: the nature of mankind and the gospel.

1. Beware Of A False View Of Mankind

Are people basically good or are we sinful by nature? Can we blame crime on social problems? Is the main reason people have serious problems because of some mental illness?

What we believe about human nature will affect how we think in a number of areas. It will influence how we deal with our children's misbehavior, and how we view the reason people commit crimes and harm others.

The secular world teaches that the solution to human problems lies in education, economic reform, or social welfare.

The world teaches that:

We are sick, so we need medical attention not repentance.

We are victims, so we need behavioral modification, not salvation.

We are a mass of unmet emotional needs, so we need to have someone meet our needs, not to be born again.

We are victims, it is not our fault, so we don't need to confess sin or get right with God.

Some "Christian" leaders no longer believe that people are completely sinful by nature.

Brian McLaren writes: Many of us have grown uneasy with this understanding of "the fall" (and with it an exaggerated understanding of the doctrine of "original sin").

The Bible however teaches that we are sinful inside and out. *We aren't sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.*

Psalm 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

Romans 3:10-12 as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

Romans 8:7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, *for it is not even able to do so,*

1 Corinthians 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and *he cannot understand them*, because they are spiritually appraised.

Ephesians 2:1-3 *And you were dead* in your trespasses and sins,² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air,

of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were *by nature children of wrath*, even as the rest.

2. Beware Of A False Gospel

Alan Wolfe is a non-Christian social scientist. In his book *The Transformation of American Religion* he writes:

“Talk of Hell, damnation, and even sin has been replaced by a non-judgmental language of understanding and empathy. . . More Americans than ever proclaim themselves born again in Christ, but the Lord to whom they turn rarely gets angry and frequently strengthens self-esteem. [As a result] the faithful in the United States are remarkably like everyone else.”

Wolfe believes that the rapid growth of evangelicalism is not due to their unique message, but to their capitulation to the culture’s message.

a. The Biblical gospel is that Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 Now I make known to you, brethren, *the gospel* which I preached to you, . . . that *Christ died for our sins* according to the Scriptures,⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Matthew 26:28 for this is *My blood* of the covenant, which is poured out for many *for forgiveness of sins*.

John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*

Romans 4:25 *He who was delivered over because of our transgressions*, and was raised because of our justification.

2 Corinthians 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin **to be sin on our behalf**, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Galatians 1:4 who *gave Himself for our sins* so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

Ephesians 1:7 In Him we have *redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses*, according to the riches of His grace

Ephesians 5:2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and *gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God* as a fragrant aroma.

1 Peter 2:24 and *He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross*, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

1 Peter 3:18 *For Christ also died for sins* once for all, *the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God*, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

b. Some teach that salvation has nothing to do with forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Brian McLaren: “The church has latched on to that old doctrine of original sin like a dog to a stick, and before you knew it, the whole gospel got twisted around it. Instead of being God’s big

message of saving love for the whole world, the gospel became a little bit of secret information on how to solve the pesky legal problem of sin.”

The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is about Jesus saving us individually from God’s wrath and judgment of our sins.

John 3:18 "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the **wrath of God** abides on him."

Romans 1:18 For the **wrath of God** is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

Romans 2:5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up **wrath** for yourself in the day of **wrath** and revelation of the righteous **judgment of God**,

Ephesians 5:6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the **wrath of God** comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Revelation 19:15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce **wrath of God**, the Almighty.

The Bible teaches that God hates sin and will judge us, in spite of the fact that many are denying judgment and Hell. To deny this is to change not only the nature of God, but also the nature of the gospel.

c. Some teach that God saves us because of something about us that He likes.

Donald Miller writes: Jesus didn’t just love me out of principle; He didn’t just love me because it was the right thing to do. Rather, there was something inside me that caused Him to love me. (Blue Like Jazz 238)

But the Bible teaches differently.

Romans 7:18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not.

Job 15:14 "What is man, that he should be pure, Or he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? ¹⁵ "Behold, He puts no trust in His holy ones, And the heavens are not pure in His sight; ¹⁶ How much less one who is detestable and corrupt, Man, who drinks iniquity like water!

Isaiah 64:6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?

Romans 3:10 as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

God doesn’t save us because of something in us, rather than as an act of mercy and grace.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy . . .

d. Some believe that if we can get people to like us they will come to Christ.

We are told that people are not rejecting the gospel or Christ; they are rejecting our out-of date methods. We are told that if we can get the world to like us they will embrace the Savior.

But Jesus said:

John 15:18-20 "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you.¹⁹ "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.²⁰ "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

Cf Matthew 10:22; 24:9; Luke 6:22, 26

In Revelation, it wasn't the popular large and growing church at Laodicea that pleased the Lord, but the poor persecuted church at Smyrna.

e. Some are marketing Jesus as the solution to this life's problems and evangelism as reaching a "felt need."

They have determined that people aren't motivated by the commands of God nor are they all that interested in truth. They believe that to attract people to Christ we must entice them by promising to give them what they think they want. People want to have their felt-needs met. They want to have a religious experience. So they present Jesus as the One who fixes marriages, cancels loneliness, give us power, and generally makes us happy. Unbelievers are being called to "follow Christ" in order to find fulfillment, self-esteem, a better marriage, a thrilling lifestyle, or purpose and meaning in life. Instead of messages that lead to conviction of sin and point to salvation through the death of Christ, churches are preaching messages that are designed to make people feel good.

We are to present the gospel exactly as the Scripture describes, knowing that its message will repulse many unbelievers.

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Nobody should ever think that unbelievers are going to be attracted to Christ if we only offer him in a more attractive package.

1 Corinthians 1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,

f. Beware Of A Social Gospel.

Brian McLaren in his book, *Everything Must Change*, admits that he is not teaching the same old gospel.

Rob Bell: “For Jesus the question wasn’t how do I get into Heaven? But how do I bring heaven here? . . . The goal isn’t escaping this world but making this world the kind of place God can come to.”

They teach that salvation isn’t personal or eternal, but social and temporal.

It is about environmentalism and social justice.

They believe that Jesus was teaching about how to improve life for people in this world. If there is an afterlife, all will get in unless they choose to opt out.

g. Beware Of A Mystical Gospel

Increasingly people come to church with the desire to experience or feel the presence of God. They desire a divine rendezvous. They are seeking religious experiences devoid of objective content. They come every week to have an encounter with God, while at the same time living immorally with their boy friend or girl friend. The gospel of repentance from sin and receiving Christ as Lord has been replaced by a subjective experience.

Nowhere is this idea of a mystical gospel found in the Bible

h. Beware Of An Inclusive Gospel.

Some teach that everyone will be saved unless they choose to opt out. They teach that adherents of other religions will be saved. Good Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and even Atheists are saved by following the light they have. They assume that people are genuinely seeking God.

Romans 3:10-12 as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

The Bible teaches that no person will come to Christ without being drawn by God.

Matthew 11:27 "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*."

Matthew 13:11 Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted."

John 10:26 "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep."²⁷ "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

John 6:44 "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."⁴⁵ "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me."

Acts 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

Acts 16:14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

The Bible teaches that apart from faith in Christ nobody will be saved.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

Acts 4:12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

John 3:18 "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

1 John 5:11-13 And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. ¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

i. Beware Of A Man-Centered Gospel

What all of the false gospels above have in common is that they are in one way or another man-centered. (Our goodness, felt needs, desires, methods, etc.) The centerpiece of the biblical gospel is Christ. It is about His glory, love, sacrifice, grace, and mercy for a fallen and sinful mankind. Cf Ephesians 1:3-14

It is extremely serious to proclaim a different gospel.

Galatians 1:8-9 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! ⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

Beware Of “Christian” Mysticism

Many “Christian” writers are turning to mysticism.

Donald Miller: You cannot be a Christian without being a mystic. (Blue Like Jazz p. 202)

Richard Foster: We are to live in a perpetual, inward, listening silence so that God is the source of our words and actions. (Celebration of Discipline p. 16)

The mystic believes that he or she can enjoy an unmediated link to God through a superrational experience.

John MacArthur writes: *The mystic disdains rational understanding and seeks truth instead through the feelings, the imagination, personal visions, inner voices, private illumination, or other purely subjective means.*

They believe that their thoughts and mental impressions can be explained as the inner voice of God.

The problem is that we are easily self deceived. Our impressions may be from God, Satan, or our own deceitful hearts.

^{NKJ} **Jeremiah 17:9** " The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

2 Corinthians 11:14 No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

This is why we must rely on the Scriptures, not our feelings, experiences and impressions.
Cf 2 Peter 1:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 11:13-14

1. Beware Of A Mystical View Of Faith.

Some are teaching that faith is not rational.

“It cannot be explained—It is something you feel.”

But God says:

Isaiah 1:18a "Come now, and let us *reason* together," Says the LORD . . .

Matthew 22:37 And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, **AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.**'

2. Beware Of A Mystical Spirituality.

We are to live in a perpetual, inward silence so that God is the source of our words and actions. (Celebration of Discipline p. 166)

And I love this about Christian spirituality. It cannot be explained, and yet it is beautiful and true. It is something you feel, and it comes from the soul. (Blue Like Jazz p. 57)

For me, the beginning of sharing my faith with people began by throwing out Christianity and embracing Christian spirituality, a nonpolitical mysterious system that can be experienced but not explained. BLJ p. 115

And yet the Bible explains spirituality as Christian maturity and godly living, not a feeling or experience.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, ³ for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

3. Beware Of A Mystical View Of The Scriptures

Some are saying that we can never really understand the Bible, we can only experience it.

The truths of the Bible were magic, like messages from heaven, like codes, enchanting codes that offered power over life, a sort of power that turned sorrow to joy, hardship to challenge and trial to opportunity. BLJ p. 59

Some today are moving away from a straight-forward interpretation of the Bible to a more subjective approach.

For them, the reader's understanding is considered more important than the intent of the Biblical author.

They believe that the Bible can mean different things to different people.

Some are even advocating that a passage of scripture can have multiple different and conflicting meanings.

God wants us to understand His Word. He didn't give us some kind of secret code book that we have to try to decipher by some strange methods of interpretation.

When we seek to understand almost any literature besides the Bible, we tend to use a normal literal hermeneutic. That is we take words and sentences at face value unless the context dictates otherwise. We expect that the author meant what he said and that he wants us to understand what he is communicating. This is how Jesus and the Apostles understood the Bible. They interpreted it in a very straight forward manner.

Jesus believed in the literalness of Biblical people and events

Satan

John 8:44 "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Adam and Eve

Matthew 19:4-6 And He answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who created *them* from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh'?" ⁶

Paul also took Genesis 2 quite literally.

1 Timothy 2:13 For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve.

Jonah

Matthew 12:40-41 for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹
"The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Jesus trusted the Bible down to the very word used. cf Mt 22:41-45

Jesus trusted the Bible down to the tense of a word. cf Mt. 22:31-33

Jesus trusted that the scriptures were divinely inspired by God.

Jesus trusted that the OT had been preserved by God so that what He had in His day was accurate.

4. Beware Of Mystical Prayer

There is a big movement now for what is called contemplative prayer.

Contemplative prayer is sometimes called "listening prayer."

It is said to be a way to receive God's guidance for everyday life.

One speaker has called it "attentiveness to God's whisper."

He states that it is giving God an opportunity to talk to you.

Richard Foster emphasizes that we have to learn to distinguish the voice of God.

He said that we do that by learning to distinguish its tone, spirit, and content.

**He believes that we should keep a journal as we 'listen to the thunder of God's silence'.
(Celebration of Discipline p. 108)**

**He states that true service comes from a relationship with the divine Other deep inside. We
serve out of whispered promptings, divine urgings.' COD p. 128**

The Bible knows nothing about this kind of prayer.

Biblical prayer is our communication to God.

Where do they find listening prayer in scripture?

One popular speaker says it is found in God's instruction to the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. She quoted Matthew 17:5b as God's instruction for us to engage in contemplative (listening) prayer.

Matthew 17:5b "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"

This is a classic case of a text being taken out of context. This statement was made to the disciples who were present on the mountain with the person of Christ. It says nothing about us listening to a subjective voice in prayer and assuming it is Jesus.

Other verses they appeal to include:

Habakkuk 2:20 "But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him."

The context is God's judgment. It is referring to a silent submission to God and His authority. This is not a passage on prayer.

^{KJV} **Psalm 46:10** Be still, and know that I *am* God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

The context is warfare. Again the passage is speaking of submission to God and a reverence for His greatness, not prayer.

The New American Standard translates this passage, "Cease striving and know that I am God"

If contemplative prayer is the way God wants us to relate to Him, why didn't He give us instructions on how to pray in this manner?

How could the Holy Spirit inspire the writing of the Scriptures and yet forget to include a chapter on mysticism.

Why did He not give examples and instructions?

Many are incorporating prayer labyrinths as a way to "come into intimate contact with God."

Again, where do we find these in the Bible?

5. Beware Of Mystical Worship

Richard Foster teaches that worship *'is a breaking into the Shekinah of God, or better yet, being invaded by the Shekinah of God. . . . We have not worshiped the Lord until Spirit touches spirit . . . [And] it all begins as we enter the Shekinah of the heart'* COD pp. 158-162

Linda Dillow: *I think worship is spirit-to-Spirit communication. In worship my spirit flows to His and His Spirit back to mine. (Satisfy My Thirsty Soul p. 37)*

This is her definition of worship. It doesn't come from the Bible. It doesn't come from the Greek or Hebrew words for worship. It doesn't come from a Bible dictionary.

Some take the vision that Isaiah had in Isaiah 6 as that which should be normative for all believers.

Linda Dillow claims to have regular encounters with God. cf *Satisfy My Thirsty Soul* Cf pp. 233-236

But only 6 or 7 biblical characters were given a glimpse of God's glory. And that includes the 3 apostles who were with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. Most had only one encounter in their lifetimes. The most any one person had was two.

More and more Christians today say they want to go to a church where they can experience or feel God.

Where in the Bible are we told that worship is to be a felt experience? The Bible never tells us to seek an experience in which we feel the presence of God.

Genuine worship is a response to God. It is passionate because it arises out of our love and appreciation of God. True worship is God-centered. When we are looking for that which pleases or excites us, our worship becomes self-centered, not God-centered.

If we analyze most Christian music today by comparing it to the Psalms, we find a big difference. David Wells found that 58.9 percent of the praise songs he analyzed had no doctrinal grounding or basis for the praise.

With the right music it is possible to create almost any mood. Music is able to create excitement, tears, reflection and just about any other emotion. However we must realize that *aroused emotions are not necessarily evidence that true worship is taking place.*

6. Beware Of A Mystical Guidance.

I heard God speak to me. BLJ p.48

I could feel that it was true BLJ p.229

If this is how God wants us to connect with Him, why didn't he bother to tell us in His Word?

7. Beware Of Mystical Visualization.

The Bible does not teach or encourage us to form mental images of God in our minds so that we can interact with them, talk with them, and write down what they supposedly say to us.

Developing Spiritual Discernment

Isaiah 8:20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

Acts 17:11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so.

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

2 Timothy 3:15-17 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:19-21 So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. ²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Beware Of A False View Of Love, Tolerance, And Acceptance

1. The Bible Teaches That Christians Are To Be Loving, Tolerant, And Accepting Of Others In Most Situations.

a. Biblical Love

Matthew 5:43-44 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Luke 10:27 And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

Ephesians 5:2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us . . .

1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

1 John 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

1 Corinthians 13:13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

b. Biblical Tolerance

Ephesians 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love

Tolerance means to put up with or bear with.

c. Biblical Acceptance

Romans 15:7 Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

Acceptance means to receive or welcome into your group or inner circle.

Romans 14:1 Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.*

2. Beware Of An Unbiblical Tolerance And Acceptance Of Sin.

I couldn't be myself with my Christian friends. My Christian communities had always had little, unwritten social ethics like don't cuss . . . BLJ 210

But the Bible says:

Ephesians 4:29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Ephesians 5:4 and *there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.*

The problem with the Christian community was that we had ethics, we had rules and laws and principles to judge each other against. BLJ 215

I wanted tolerance. I wanted everybody to leave everybody else alone, regardless of their religious beliefs . . . I was tired of the biblical ethic being used as a tool with which to judge people rather than heal them. BLJ 216

And that is what I love about Reed College, because even though there are so many students having sex and tripping on drugs and whatever, there is also this foundational understanding that other people exist and they are important, and to me Reed is like heaven in that sense. BLJ 225

The Bible teaches a different kind of love.

We are to reach out to all unbelieving sinners with the message of hope and forgiveness.

We are also called as Christians to lovingly and firmly keep fellow Christians accountable to God's Word and righteous standard.

Matthew 18:15-18 "If your *brother sins*, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ "But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.** ¹⁷ "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

Romans 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and *turn away from them.* ¹⁸ For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 9-13 It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. ² *You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst . . .* ⁹ I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ¹⁰ *I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.* ¹¹ *But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one.* ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? ¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. **REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.**

2 Thessalonians 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you *keep away* from every *brother* who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.

2 Thessalonians 3:14 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and *do not associate with him*, so that he will be put to shame.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; ***Avoid such men as these.***

Note that all of the above passages are New Testament instructions to us. The Bible does not equate love with tolerance and hate with accountability.

3. Beware Of An Unbiblical Acceptance Of False Teachers.

As we saw earlier, there seems to be a desire to break down all doctrinal distinctions as if they are unimportant.

Yet the Bible repeated tells us to not associate with false teachers. False teachers are those who represent another God (Deuteronomy 13), give false prophecies (Deuteronomy 18), teach a different Jesus, Spirit, or gospel (2 Corinthians 11:3-4), or lead people into sin (Revelations 2:20).

The Bible teaches us that false teachers are destructive and that we are to beware of them. God reprimands those who are unwilling to separate from them. In additions to the earlier passages, we see the same warnings in:

Matthew 24:11 "*Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.*

Matthew 24:24 "*For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.*

Galatians 1:8-9 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, *he is to be accursed!* ⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, *he is to be accursed!*

2 John 1:10-11 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, *do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting;* ¹¹ for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

Revelation 2:20 "*But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*

Other passages about false teachers include:

Matthew 7:15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Acts 20:28-31a "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ "Therefore be on the alert . . .

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of

light.¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

Ephesians 4:14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

Philippians 3:2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision

Colossians 2:4, 8 I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument . . .⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

2 Timothy 3:13 But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad* to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

2 Timothy 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,

2 Peter 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

2 Peter 3:17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness,

Revelation 2:14 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit *acts of* immorality.

4. Beware Of A Wrong View Of Jesus And Our Relationship With Him.

Sometimes I picture . . . Jesus talking with His friends around a fire, except He is not rambling about anything, He is really listening, not so much pushing an agenda . . . speaking some truth and encouragement into their lives. Helping them believe in the mission they feel inside themselves . . . BLJ 235

This is not the Jesus of the Bible. We are here to fulfill His mission. He is not here to help us fulfill our agenda.

Pop Psychology And The Bible

Perhaps the strongest outside influence affecting Christianity today is pop psychology

The means for progressive sanctification and biblical living have been shifted from the biblical to the therapeutic.

Yet even the secular world is now questioning the legitimacy of much of counseling Psychology.

The Psychologizing of Crime- Newsweek 12/7/92

Sick or Just Quirky?- US News and World Report 2/10/92

Doing the Disorder Rag- USNWR 10/27/97

1. Pop Psychology Isn't Based On Science.

a. It is not substantiated by research.

Dr. John Street, *The Failing Attempt of Integration Psychology*.

Psychologist Roger Mills: "The field of psychology today is literally a mess. There are a many techniques, methods, and theories around as there are researchers and therapists. I have personally seen therapists convince their clients that all their problems come from their mothers, the stars, their biochemical make-up, their diet, their life-style and even the 'kharma' from their past lives." ("Psychology Goes Insane, botches Role as Science," *The Natural Educator*, July 1980, p. 14)

Sigmund Kock: "The hope of psychological science became indistinguishable from the fact of psychological science. The entire subsequent history of psychology can be seen as a ritualistic endeavor to emulate the forms of science in order to sustain the delusion that it is already science." ("The Image of Man in Encounter Groups," *The American Scholar*, 1973, p. 636)

Karl Popper: "Psychological theories of human behavior 'though posing as sciences,' had in fact more in common with primitive myths than with science, that they resemble astrology rather than astronomy myths. They contain most interesting psychological suggestions, but not in testable form." ("Science Theory and Falsifiability," *Perspectives in Philosophy*, Robert N. Beck, ed., New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winton, 1975, pp. 343, 346)

The U. S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment of the United States Congress (1992) published report titled *The Biology of Mental Disorders*. The report concludes: "Research has yet to identify specific biological causes of any of these disorders." (p. 14)

In a consensus conference sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in November of 1998, the panel of experts concluded: "There are no data to indicate that ADHD is due to brain malfunction" (p.2). In their report they went on to state that the same can be said for "most psychiatric disorders, including disabling diseases such as schizophrenia." (p.2)

b. It is composed of more than 250 contradictory theories.

"Christian counseling today . . . is populated by counselors and writers . . . whose personalities, theologies, psychological orientations, values, and person experiences have lead to a variety of sometimes-clashing counseling goals, assumptions, theories and techniques- all of which are

labeled Christian.” (Gary Collins in *Helping People Grow*, as quoted in *Christians on the Couch*- Moody Monthly 5/91)

Personality theories don’t work.

USNWR 9/20/04

Self esteem theory is unbiblical and doesn’t work

The Curse of Self-Esteem- Newsweek 2/17/92

The Trouble With Self-Esteem- USNWR 4/2/90

The Self-Fulfillment theory is unbiblical

c. Most pop psychology is not dealing with medical problems.

Life Events Thwart Scientists’ Attempts To Draw DNA Profiles- Wall Street Journal 7/7/06

Parents Can Counteract ‘Environments’ Created By Children’s Genes- Wall Street Journal 2/24/06

Behavior effects our biology according to study by McClintock- ISU Bengal 9/5/96

For the Obsessed, the Mind Can Fix the Brain- Newsweek 2/26/96

Politics Of Biology- USNWR 4/21/97

Born Happy?- Newsweek 10/14/96

Pop psychology is treating a non-organic cause of a non-organic part of you.

2. The Bible Gives Us Adequate Instruction To Meet Our Emotional And Spiritual Needs.

2 Peter 1:3-4 seeing that His divine power *has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness*, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴ For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

The only possible justification for psychology in the church would be if the Bible did not contain all the counsel, wisdom, and guidance that Christians need to live lives that are pleasing to God.

That there is some category of problem that the Bible doesn’t deal with

If this is true, then Jesus left His followers without the resources necessary to live mature healthy Christian lives until the advent of Christian psychology in the 1960s and the discovery of psychiatric drugs in the 1970s

But the Bible declares that the heroes and heroines of the faith all triumphed over the world, the flesh, and the devil.

And they did it without Christian psychology.

If what we are being told is true, they would all have lived happier, more fulfilling, more fruitful, and more godly lives had psychological counseling been available in their day.

Remember that what psychology offers was never part of the Christianity of Jesus or Paul.

Would Jesus have been more effective if he had only used Christian psychology when he met with the woman at the well?

Doesn't it seem astonishing that God failed to include in the scriptures theories and therapies that are essential to a Christian's spiritual and emotional well-being?

Isn't it stranger still that God waited until these therapies were developed by those who didn't even know God and were often hostile to Christianity. (Freud, Jung, etc.)

Some would argue that going to God in certain circumstances is fine, but you wouldn't go to Him to learn how to fix your plumbing.

The Bible doesn't claim to be a manual for home repair, auto mechanics, or open heart surgery.

The Bible does however claim to be a textbook on living, the same claim made by psychology.

The Bible does claim to give us everything we need for "*life and godliness.*"

The Bible declares that it is able to equip us to live life in such a way as to please God.

2 Timothy 3:16-17; Galatians 5:16, 19-21

The question is whether we believe God, are willing to obey His word, and are content with what He has given us for "life and godliness." Do we trust His divine power as sufficient, or do we think that some psychologist knows what God doesn't and can do what God can't.

3. Pop Psychology Has Altered The Biblical Message Of Sanctification.

The means for life change and biblical living have been shifted from the biblical to the therapeutic.

a. The Bible is God-centered, while pop psychology is self-centered.

The Bible teaches that our purpose in life is to glorify God. Pop psychology has happiness as its highest goal. It begins and ends with self. (Self-love, self-esteem, self-worth, self-image, self-fulfillment, self-actualization, self-assertion, finding self, etc.)

Unfortunately, many churches have substituted a pop psychology message for the Biblical understanding.

Rick Warren recently had an article in *Ladies Home Journal* titled, "Learning to Love Yourself." In it he lists "five truths" that are neither biblical nor true. 1. Accept yourself 2. Love yourself 3. Be true to yourself 4. Forgive yourself 5. Believe in yourself

The Bible teaches that a self-focus is the problem, not the solution.

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, *he must deny himself*, and take up his cross and follow Me.

2 Timothy 3:1-2 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be *lovers of self*, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,

Philippians 2:21 For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.

Romans 15:1 Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength *and not just please ourselves.*

2 Corinthians 5:15 and He died for all, *so that they who live might no longer live for themselves*, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

b. The Bible teaches that we are responsible for our behavior while pop psychology teaches that most of our problems aren't our fault.

It is someone or something else's fault. Sin is reduced to sickness or an addiction. The sinner is not at fault, he/she is a victim. We can blame our bad temper on an abusive father.

A survey of the Willow Creek congregation found that in a 6 month period: 12.5% had committed adultery. Worse yet, 25% of the singles, 38% of single parents, and 41% of divorced individuals admitted to having illicit sexual relationships during that time period. (Willow Creek Seeker Services 264)

Bill Hybels did not call the congregation to repent for their sin against a holy God.

He did not call upon them to examine themselves to see if they were truly of the faith.

Instead he emphasized God's compassionate love:

"We are a *love-starved* people, with *broken parts* that *need* the kind of *repair* that only he can give long-term. We need to bring our brokenness out into the light of his grace and truth." (WCSS 264)

Hybel's has commented in public meetings that hundreds of Willow Creek marriages have broken up over the years. "*Detachment*" is used as a justification . . .

Detachment is a psychological term used of separating from a "co-dependent" relationship.

It is used to justify people leaving difficult or painful marriages.

How does this fit in the teachings of Jesus and Paul, in the New Testament? (cf Matthew 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:7-14)

c. The Bible and pop psychology propose different solutions to people's problems

Pop psychology has a plethora of contradictory theories and solutions.

Many teach that the key to resolving most problems lies in somehow coming to grips with our pasts.

The Bible deals with us in the present, without looking for some hidden root cause in the past.

Our *reaction* to our past may have helped shape what we are today, but change lies in the present as we choose to live in obedience to Christ.

The Bible teaches that change comes through repentance, regeneration, faith, obedience, God's word, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

We must grow spiritually 2 Peter 1:5-8; James 1:2-5

James 1:2-4 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.⁴ And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

We grow spiritually:

By obeying God's word Psalms 119:9-11; Colossians 3:16; Acts 20:32; 2Timothy 3:16-17; John 8:31-32; 17:17; Psalm 119:9,11; Romans 12:2

John 8:32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

John 17:17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

By bearing one another's burdens Galatians 6:2

Through prayer and trusting God Philippians 4:6-7

As the Holy Spirit works in our lives Galatians 5:16, 22-25; Hebrews 5:12-14; Romans 6-8

In conclusion, the Bible encourages us to examine all teachings in light of the scriptures and to stand firmly on the truth.

Acts 17:11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so.

2 Timothy 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires

Jude 1:3b . . . I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.