

The Discerner

the voice of... **Religion Analysis Service**

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 29, Number 1

January • February • March 2009

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Hare Krishna

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*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*

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SUTHERLAND
GRAPHIC SERVICES

EDITOR GOES TO LATVIA

From 1994 to 2008 I taught over two dozen modular courses at the Riga International Bible Institute (RIBI) in Latvia. During that time hundreds of Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking students have been instructed at this central resident site. My students were pastors, missionaries, chaplains, and church leaders (elders, choir members, Sunday School teachers, and prayer leaders). At the same time we taught extension students in Liepaja, Cesis, and Tukums.

Last fall Dr. Viktor Petrenko, newly-installed director of RIBI, talked with me extensively about the possibility of establishing a Bible Correspondence School in Latvia. He had heard of my background work in correspondence studies in Germany from 1971-1987. God blessed Bibelfernunterricht or BFU (Bible Instruction from a Distance) with tens of thousands enrolled. BFU was well received by Christians in German-speaking countries, and from many church denominations and demographic groups. Today it is going strong with over two dozen courses offered that are well written and equal to any course by direct instruction anywhere.

The consultation in Riga is the official launching of the Latvian Bible Correspondence School. God is bringing personnel, funds, and expertise together for which we are praising Him. We request your prayers as God uses this work and makes it possible that Russian-speaking people in all of Eastern Europe will benefit from it.

Laurence J. Sutherland

DEAR READER

I have the greatest respect for pastors, having been a pastor myself for four years in Northern Minnesota. I can quickly identify with some of the problems that Timothy faced as exhibited in 1. and 2. Timothy. The young pastor Timothy had to deal with a multitude of issues in Asia Minor, the biggest of which appears to have been with false teachers and their deleterious doctrines. A cursory review of these two pastoral epistles reveals false teachings relating to:

1. The purported allegorical use of genealogies to propound teachings that only provoked endless controversies and meaningless talk, probably similar to Kabbalah;
2. The distorted and erroneous interpretation of the Old Testament law as it relates to the Gospel message - the Judaizers taught that faith must be augmented and completed by the observance of the Jewish law;
3. A false asceticism that forbade marriage and the eating of certain foods;
4. Weird godless myths/fables, old wives' tales, and so called "full knowledge" or incipient Gnosticism resulted in only controversies, quarrels about words, deviation from truth, and shipwrecked faith.

The names of Hymanaeus, Alexander the Coppersmith, Jannes and Jambres, Demas, and Philetus will live in historical "infamy" as examples of false teachers, opponents of truth and sound doctrine, and lovers of this world rather than of God.

Paul's charge to Timothy encourages us all in our struggle to preach, teach, and defend the truth of the Gospel of Christ (2.Timothy 4:2-5):

"Preach the Word, be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage -with great patience and careful instruction.....But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry".

May we, following the example of the Apostle Paul, "finish the task" that God has given each of us - to "fight the good fight", "finish the race", and "keep the faith" in anticipation of His glorious coming and the crown of righteousness"(4:7,8).

WITH THIS ISSUE

It is a singular pleasure for me to introduce Dr. Gerald Stigall, pastor of Grace Evangelical Free Church in Fridley, Minnesota, to our readers. He is our personal pastor who has distinguished himself in a most refreshing way in innovating various ministries in our church and community. His biblical expositions have especially impressed me by their clarity, candor, and color. His popular treatment of the Book of Judges deserves our best attention.

Another pastor, retired and living in Wisconsin, Dr. Roy Knuteson, takes on the task of analyzing the gift of prophecy from a biblical perspective. This theme is especially central to the proper understanding and refutation of cults that often declare their extrabiblical revelations. Even among conservative Christians there are varying views as to the correct interpretation of this charismatic gift. Dr. Knuteson's position is welcomed by the Religion Analysis Service as substantive and convincing. Surely this article will spark new interest in this sensitive area.

Part II of Steve Lagoon's in-depth evaluation of Christian Science deals with the nitty-gritty of this aberrant teaching. High-blown ethereal concepts must eventually touch reality where we live. It is at this point that Christian Science miserably fails. Lagoon's detailed expose of Mary Baker Eddy's nebulous and dangerous literature is poignant and adequate.

My regular quiz concerns itself this time with the historical development of religion in America. The broad swath of questions should challenge us to know and research our religious heritage.

Laurence J. Sutherland

GOD VS. HIS PEOPLE

SUMMARY RULINGS FROM THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Dr. Gerald L. Stigall

What would it feel like to hear a biblical writer speak a “*Thus saith the Lord*” directly to us? If we’re not careful we can insulate ourselves from the immediacy of Scripture by thinking that the words pertain to people then, rather than also to us now. Judges is one such book that poignantly addresses us. There are some summary rulings that we would be wise to hear and to heed.

Picture the writer of Judges coming in from the side room. He’s dressed in a black robe. We rise to show respect. In deference to the awesome significance of the moment, there is a hushed silence. The bailiff pronounces, “*Hear ye, Hear ye, the Supreme Court of Scripture is now in session in the case of God vs. His People.*”

We sit awaiting the words of the writer of Judges. With glasses lowered on his nose, he peers over a document. After clearing his throat he begins to utter his summary rulings of the book, which he has penned. What verdict will he render in response to all of the evidence that has been shown, not only about the condition of the Israelites, but by implication, about your condition and mine?

We don’t have to wonder long because with a gravelly voice he begins: “*In the case of God vs. His People this court renders four verdicts:*

Verdict One: God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life.

What did he say? “God loves me? God loves you? God loves us?” And what is more, “God offers a wonderful plan for our lives?” Does that not catch you off guard?

How could he derive that verdict based on the evidence that has been presented in Judges? What about the oppression? The pain? What about the relentless attacks of the surrounding countries? No doubt throughout Judges there is harsh judgment, but God’s discipline is always in the context of His love.

Perhaps you wonder, “*How did God show love for the Israelites?*”

- Well, first, remember the context. The people of God were enslaved for 400 long years. God heard their cry and in the fullness of time He sent a deliverer. Moses was called and enabled to lead the people from the land of slavery to the land of freedom. Along the way, as the Lord guided, He provided. He gave them water from the Rock, manna from heaven, and the Law from the mountain. He cared for them as an eagle cares for her eaglets.
- When the Israelites came to the Land of Rest, the Lord continued loving them by leading them victoriously into battle through Joshua. With the sound of the trumpet, the walls came down at Jericho. And with the sounds of joyful music and dance the people reveled in their great and awesome God.
- As they came into the Land the people asked the Lord how to proceed, and the Lord responded with clear, unambiguous direction (Judges 1:1). What is more, throughout Judges, God raised up judge after judge, deliverer after deliverer, not only to rescue the people from oppression and to lead them victoriously into battle, but especially to turn their hearts toward God, their ultimate home and salvation.

But time after time, the people rebelled. Time after time, the people ignored the Lord. Like the prodigal son, they flagrantly walked away and spent their inheritance in flippant ways. And even then, God loved them. Even when they disregarded the LORD, He still loved them. Like the prodigal’s father, the Lord patiently waited for His children to come home. Even when they “slopped pigs” in the far country of rebellion, His heart was breaking. If we doubt that, consider Judges 2:18. The text says, “*the LORD had compassion on them (the Israelites) as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them.*” You see, He’s not a God who doesn’t care, who lives way out there. God was compassionately concerned with the Israelites. And what is more, God is compassionately concerned with you.

So there’s the first verdict: God loves you. He cares for you. He is compassionately interested in your present and in your eternal well-being. But there’s another verdict that the writer of Judges renders:

Verdict Two: Sin separates us not only from God, but also from one another.

Throughout Judges, and throughout our lives, we affirm this truth.

- Like a wedge, sin separates.
- Like a knife, sin severs.
- Like erosion, sin weakens the foundation of our lives.
- Like a single drop of ink in water, sin pollutes.

Seven times, as if to suggest completion, the record shows the sinful condition of the Israelites (Judges 2:11, 3:7, 3:12, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6, 13:1). But we needn't stop there. If we go to the New Testament we read, "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). The prophet Isaiah agrees, "*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way*" (Is. 53:6).

Sin separates. It creates a chasm, a gulf, a gorge, that no one can bridge. We can try. Indeed, we've tried throughout time, throughout history.

- In the Garden, Adam surely tried to cover his shame, his guilt. He first covered himself. Then he covered in darkness. Finally he conferred blame to his wife, and then ultimately to God. "*This woman who YOU gave me, she made me sin.*"

- The Israelites also tried to bridge this chasm. They did what was right in their own eyes. So they worshipped where they wanted to, how they wanted to, when they wanted to. They fashioned little idols made in their own image, and then basically worshipped themselves. They were sincere. But they were sincerely wrong.

- And we are wrong, too, whenever, wherever, however we think that we can bridge this chasm of sin that separates us from a holy God. The Apostle Paul reminds us, "*He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit*" (Titus 3:5). He writes, "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast*" (Eph. 2:8-9).

Here's the second verdict: Sin separates us from God and from one another.

There is none that is righteous. No not one. Try as we might, we cannot bridge the chasm. We need a savior.

And that leads us to the third verdict.

Verdict Three: In God's love He has consistently offered mercy and grace by offering to us a deliverer, a redeemer, a savior.

There is no way we can miss this point in Judges. Throughout the book, when the people felt the weight of sin, they cried out to the Lord. And the Lord in His mercy, responded by sending a judge, a deliverer, a "savior." Consider just a few of the passages: Judges 3:9, 3:15, 4:3, 6:6, 10:10, and 10:11-12. In his love, God rescued his people. He saved his people through the judges whom He sent. The Lord didn't send the judges merely to get their oppressors off their back. He sent the judges ultimately so that the Lord would be in their hearts. He empowered the judges to be an incarnational presence in the midst of His people. Of course, the judges, though they often failed, were to foreshadow the ultimate Deliverer of all, Jesus Christ. He was the One whom the Father sent to save the world. There on the Cross, Jesus willingly laid down His life so that we might have the burden of sin lifted. There, through Jesus, the Father demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). And this leads us to the final verdict.

Verdict Four: We must respond in faith - *completely, immediately, wholeheartedly.*

Faith is not one-dimensional. It is three-dimensional. It is not merely a matter of the head. It involves also the heart and hands. Faith is not merely believing the right things. It implies complete, immediate, wholehearted and dynamic trust in God. The Israelites never quite got it. Yes, they turned to the Lord when they got in a jam, but they never really committed themselves completely into a relationship with the Lord God. They viewed faith as an insurance policy. They didn't understand that faith is a decision of the will to strive to love the Lord our God with all of one's heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love one's

neighbor. Simply put, faith means that we reach up to God and that we reach out to others. Love God. Love others. Faith, therefore, is not a matter of having the right answers. Faith is having a right relationship with Almighty God.

The Israelites never really got it, did they? They thought that they could obey for a day. They didn't understand that God calls us to follow Him for life. Do you remember what the Lord Jesus said?

“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him” (John 14:21).

Obedience is the language of faith. There are inevitable consequences when we compromise dynamic trust in God. The Israelites disobeyed the Lord whenever His call on their lives seemed too difficult. Repeatedly they failed to drive out the enemy. They settled down to a situation of compromise where they tried to live side by side with the enemy. Little by little they cozied up to sin, until they lost not simply their witness, they lost their way. This, in turn, led to the disasters that came as the days went by. They were the right people, in the right place, at the right time, under the right conditions, but they did the wrong thing.

And we can be the same kind of people. We can be sincere, but sincere failures whenever we fail to yield all the areas of our lives to Christ. Yet, as we expose our lives to His searching eye, and allow His Spirit to transform us, we can experience renewal. So, before the Judge's gavel goes down, let's pose some questions:

- Are you living right now in a dynamic, trusting, wholehearted relationship with the living Lord?
- Have you actively yielded all areas of your life to the Lord Jesus?
- Are you evidencing the fruit of the Spirit?
- Are you relying on the Holy Spirit - the Holy Comforter - rather than on your own efforts to produce change in your life?
- What thoughts or principles do you want to remember from Judges?
- What attitudes do you, through the power of the Spirit, want to cultivate?
- What actions do you want to evidence for the glory of God?

If your answers are positive, then the abundant life is yours to enjoy. But if not, why not take the next step to deepen your relationship with the Lord Jesus? May we have ears to hear these summary rulings. May we remember these four spiritual *laws* lest they reveal for us four spiritual *flaws* of neglect.

Dr. Gerald Stigall is senior pastor of Grace Evangelical Free Church of Fridley, MN. His undergraduate degree is from Vanderbilt University and his M.Div. and D.Min. degrees are from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL.

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY: WHAT IS IT?

by Roy E. Knuteson, Ph.D.

One of the major spiritual gifts granted by the Holy Spirit of God is that of being a prophet, or one who “prophesies”. In spite of the fact that prophets and prophesying are mentioned numerous times in the Bible, there seems to be little or no understanding today regarding the nature and exercising of this particular spiritual gift. Consider the following questions:

1. What is the purpose for the granting of this spiritual gift?
2. Are there biblical prophets living today?
3. Are women gifted to be prophets?
4. Is prophesying the same as preaching or testifying?
5. Should we eagerly desire this gift?
6. How can a believer discern whether he or she has this spiritual gift?
7. Is there ever a time when prophets are unneeded?

For the answer to these and other related questions, we need to do an inductive study of both Testaments about this very important spiritual gift.

PROPHETS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The first recorded prophet is Enoch, the man “who walked with God” (Genesis 5:22). His prophecy, however, is recorded in the New Testament in Jude 14. “Enoch, the seventh from Adam”, prophesied about the Second Coming of Jesus and His judgment on all the se prophets and teachers who ever lived. Other Old Testament prophets include: Noah (Genesis 9:25-27), Moses (Deuteronomy 34:10), Balaam (Numbers 23-25), Samuel (Acts 13:20), David (Acts 2:29), Elijah, Elisha, and all the writing prophets from Isaiah to Malachi. Four women were designated “prophetesses”: Miriam, Moses’ sister (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), and the unnamed wife of Isaiah (Isaiah 8:3). In the days of the United Kingdom, King Saul is recorded to have prophesied along with a host of other men, including his soldiers. (1 Samuel 10:6, 19:19-23). What they actually said is not reported. Whatever the Spirit’s manifestation

was in this unlikely encounter, it prompted the question: “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (2 Samuel 19:24). Apparently, he was.

The Old Testament prophetic line ended with John, of whom Jesus said: “Among those born of women, there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:11). The biblical prophets were men and women whom God raised up to declare His will and counsel to the nation of Israel. Peter reveals the source of these prophetic utterances: “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of men, but men spoke for God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Prophets were certain that the messages they declared were God-originated and God-given. That being true, the various prophets could never make prophecies that were in conflict with other prophetic utterances. The essential features of biblical prophecy were, therefore, that only God could foreknow and bring to pass these messages and they always contained a reminder of God’s wisdom, omniscience, and sovereignty.

According to Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 18:20-21, the chief credential of a true prophet was not his ability to perform some “miraculous wonder” but whether his message was in harmony with the objective Word of God. Isaiah wrote: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn” (Isaiah 8:20). Those whose messages did not pass this test were to be stoned to death. In addition to the doctrinal test there was the test of fulfillment versus non-fulfillment. If they failed a short-term prediction, they were to be rejected, and any long term prediction ignored. No margin of error was ever allowed. Prophets had to be accurate all the time. Claiming to be a prophet under the Old Covenant was a risky business. Jeremiah 28 records the false prophecy of Hananiah and his resultant death.

The prophetic movement continued for over a thousand years in Israel. Even though the various prophets lived hundreds of years apart and many were separated geographically, yet their messages always harmonized. Every prophet asserted that God had spoken to him. “Thus says the Lord” became the verbal authority for all he wrote or spoke. This is a phenomenon unparalleled in world history and is one of the amazing confirmations that the Bible is truly the Word of God.

PROPHETS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Our English word “prophet” is a transliterated word from the Greek word *Prophetes* and means primarily a foreteller, or a predictor of coming events. The word also includes the idea of “forth-telling” or declaring the Word of God with messages that result in edification, consolation, and comfort (1Corinthians14:3).

Prophets continued to play an important role in the New Testament era. God’s church, we are told, “was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20). The inclusion of Gentiles in the body of Christ was “revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Ephesians 3:5). According to Ephesians 4:11, certain men were gifted as prophets and they, along with apostles, were the highest-ranking ministers in the early church (1 Corinthians 12:28). These uniquely-gifted persons were both predictors and proclaimers of divine truth.

According to Acts 11:27-28, a number of prophets came to Antioch from Jerusalem and one of them, Agabus, predicted a severe famine throughout the Roman world. This same prophet predicted that Paul would be arrested and beaten if he went to Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-14), which indeed happened to Paul. These same prophets also provided the spiritual direction in the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. Two of these prophets, Judas and Silas, strengthened the believers with their prophetic messages (Acts 15:22). Acts 19:6 describes that some of the disciples of John the Baptist were converted and then prophesied. The final reference to prophesying is recorded in Acts 21:9, where we are told that Philip, the Evangelist, had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. Whatever they were capable of saying is not revealed, but it is obviously more than a mere testimony.

The prophetic nature of prophesying is readily understood. It is simply the predicting of coming events that would be unknown apart from divine revelation. The non-prophetic messages, also called “prophecies”, are more difficult to understand since there are no examples in the Bible as to the contents of these messages. Apart from the contents, we know that whatever these messages were, they were supernaturally given by the Holy Spirit. The New Testament gift of prophesying is more fully described in 1 Corinthians 12-14, where we have an overview of this very important gift and the rules to govern its manifestation.

1. It is a divinely and sovereignly- bestowed gift on certain men and women preselected by God (1 Corinthians 12:10-11).
2. It is a spiritual gift to be “eagerly desired’ by all and above all other gifts including the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:1,5,7,12).
3. Prophesying is a spoken utterance given by direct revelation from God and is, therefore, something different than testifying or preaching (1 Corinthians 14:30).
4. In a church meeting prophets were to declare their revelations in an orderly fashion with complete control over their spirit and their messages (1 Corinthians 14:29-33).
5. A prophet’s message was to be analyzed by other prophets who are present to determine the nature and contents as to authenticity (1 Corinthians 14:29).
6. The gift of prophecy is regarded as a “sign to believers” rather than to unbelievers, and, if authentic, this divine revelation should result in their edification, encouragement, and comfort (1 Corinthians 14:3, 22, 24-25).
7. While it is clearly evident that women possessed this spiritual gift (Acts 2:17-18 and 1 Corinthians 11:5), yet in the church assembly, they were to remain silent. They were not permitted to exercise their gift. This was the Lord’s command (1 Corinthians 14:33-38).

CONTEMPORARY PROPHETS

In light of the material presented, the natural question is: “Are their any real prophets living today?” There are many who claim to be prophets, just as there were in the First Century, but are they authentic? In order to answer these questions we cannot depend on human reason or logic alone. Our answer must be based on whatever is revealed in the Bible, for apart from God’s Word, we would not know that such a divine gift even existed. We have discovered afresh that this particular spiritual gift, like several others, has a supernatural element about it. Prophets spoke as “they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21)

They received their message, whether it be foretelling or forth-telling, by direct revelation from God. That being true, there is no room for error or false messages. When prophets spoke, it was on a par with Holy Scripture and, in some cases, that is how the Word of God came into existence.

Regardless of what others have claimed, prophesying is not the same as preaching or testifying. Today preaching is not the source of new truth but the exposition of truth already revealed. If anyone claims that what he is about to say is the result of divine revelation, he should be denounced quickly as a false prophet for that is indeed what he is. Beware of any person who claims: “The Lord told me” or: “I have a new revelation from God”.

It must be remembered that those First Century Christians did not have Bibles as we possess them today. Apart from the Scriptures, how were they, or we, to know what God’s will is for this new age of grace? It is obvious that this is the method God used to reveal truth until the Canon of Scripture was completed. Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 13:8 that “prophecy would cease”. In this context, Paul went on to state that the spiritual gift of prophecy was limited in content and that it was a temporal means of revelation as we await “the perfection”— that is the complete Word of God found in the sixty-six books in our Bibles.

Throughout Scripture there are warnings regarding “false prophets”. If anyone claims to have this spiritual gift today we can immediately conclude that they are very deluded and confused since the gift has already passed away almost two thousand years ago. This means that the Pope of Rome, the Islamic prophet Mohammed, Joseph Smith, Charles Russell, Ellen G. White, and all the other so-called prophets of Christendom were and are false. The greatest “False Prophet” is yet to be revealed as the associate of the AntiChrist in the coming Great Tribulation at the end of this age. See Revelation 13.

A concluding word regarding the need for prophecy today: If a person claims to speak as a prophet and his prophecy contradicts or distorts the prophecies recorded in the Bible, his so-called “prophecies” are absolutely false, but if his prophecies are in agreement with the prophecies of the Bible, they are not needed and are, therefore, invalid as additional revelation from God.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

PART II

by *Steve Lagoon*

The last issue of *The Discerner* contained Part I of an article about the Christian Science cult which gave background information on the formation of Christian Science as well as comparing its beliefs to biblical Christianity. Part II of this article exposes some of the fallacies of this cult related to medicine and health care, especially their practices that cause the suffering and pain of so many Christian Science children. The article concludes by examining some other unusual beliefs of the group which should serve to show that Christian Science is a satanic deception.

Problems with Alleged Healings (Example #1)

I want to consider two recent testimonies by Christian Scientists as case studies of alleged Christian Science healings:

“Around the same time, my son developed a wart on his finger. He noticed it, but it didn’t bother him . . . My husband, who had not been practicing Christian Science at the time, wanted to have it removed by a dermatologist. I consented. The wart came right back about a month after its surgical removal. From my study of Christian Science, I knew the real cause of any troubling condition was essentially mental and not physical . . . I realized a good starting point would be to weed out the imperfect view of my son that I’d been harboring . . . Within the month, the wart dropped off my hand, and has never reappeared.”¹⁰⁵

This brief account raises some questions. To begin with, I ask, if the wart was not real, why did the child, the mom, the dad, and the doctor all see it, and in the same place? How can you account for all involved having the very same illusion at the very same time? Also, according to Christian Science beliefs, not only was the wart an illusion, but so was the hand that the wart appeared on. So why did Mrs. Tish (the mother) refuse to believe in the wart, but freely believed in the hand?

Further, why was the removal of the wart considered a healing if the wart never actually existed, but was only an error of thought? Also, the *Christian Science Sentinel* states that healings reported in their publication must be “verified by individuals who can vouch for the testifier or who know of the healing.”¹⁰⁶ Doesn’t this requirement for additional verification mean that even other Christian Scientists believed in the illusory condition?

We can go further still by noting that according to Christian Science beliefs, the paper that the *Christian Science Sentinel* magazine is printed on, that reported the healing, doesn't actually exist; the building containing the Christian Science reading room, that sells the Christian Science magazine, doesn't actually exist; nor does the car that the Christian Science reading room representative drove to work in, exist. You get the point!

Healing Example #2

“One day I was moving a large couch when I lost my grip and dropped the heavy sofa on my foot. I managed to get it [the couch] off, but had to immediately sit down because of the pain . . . I sat for about a minute and then got up. I was still in a lot of pain, and my foot had swollen; so, I had to undo the binding on my sneakers. This took place at a summer camp for Christian Scientists where I was working, and I had a bit of a walk to get back to my own cabin. A friend offered to help me back, but I declined, determined to lean wholeheartedly on those healing statements from the Bible . . . I was insisting that there could be no accident . . . The more I thought about the love of God . . . the less I felt any pain. In less than an hour, it was completely gone and didn't return. However, my foot was still very swollen and discolored, so I continued to pray . . . After a few months, I noticed that the bump did not go away . . . I knew I could not exhibit signs of something unlike God . . . I endeavored to keep these truths active in my consciousness. Within about two days, the bump was completely gone. This healing occurred two years ago. Today, my feet are identical, and I continue to love wearing high-heeled shoes.”¹⁰⁷

Now I really feel compassion for this young lady and admire her desire to be true to her beliefs. Yet, it is both comical and tragic that she had to endure the situation as she did.

My first question is why was she trying to move a couch that didn't exist? When the idea to move a couch came to her, why didn't she resist the idea by saying, “The couch is merely an illusion of mortal mind; it doesn't actually exist, so why should I move it?”

It's too bad that she didn't imagine the couch was a lawn chair instead. That may not have hurt at all! Also, it is unfortunate that she made the mistake of believing in the couch at the same time she made the mistake of believing in her foot.

As she relates, the incident occurred at a Christian Science camp, so I would guess there was extra incentive to stand strong on the healing. Interestingly, another Christian Scientist fell under the same illusion that our young lady was injured and compassionately offered to help.

She reports that within an hour the pain subsided. Well, without any treatment, that would be expected naturally, and hence doesn't quite seem to be a miracle.

She also reported that after a few months there was still a bump on her foot, and she knew she “could not exhibit signs of something unlike God,” and was “completely” healed in about a couple of days. But if she could not exhibit something unlike God, why did she still continue to imagine her foot was real? Does God have a foot, and does He wear high-heeled shoes?

Medicine?

Mrs. Eddy made inconsistent statements about the use of medicine, but, for the most part, condemned their use as the following quotes show:

“If by such lower means [medicine] the health is seemingly restored, the restoration is not lasting, and the patient is liable to a relapse.”¹⁰⁸

“It [Christian Science] places no faith in hygiene or drugs.”¹⁰⁹

“We ask and receive not, because we ‘ask amiss;’ even dare to invoke the divine aid of Spirit to heal the sick, and then administer drugs with the full confidence in their efficacy, showing our greater faith in matter, despite the authority of Jesus that ‘ye cannot serve two masters.’”¹¹⁰

“Having faith in drugs and hygienic drills, we lose faith in omnipotence, and give the healing power to matter instead of Spirit.”¹¹¹

“He [Jesus] used no material medicine, nor recommended it, and taught his disciples and followers to do likewise.”¹¹²

“So long as matter is the basis of practice, illness cannot be efficaciously treated by the metaphysical process.”¹¹³

During the fifty years that I have been a Christian Scientist, God has been my only physician, and divine Mind my only medicine.”¹¹⁴

“A drug cannot of itself go to the brain or affect cerebral conditions in any manner whatever. Drugs cannot remove inflammation, restore disordered functions, or destroy disease without the aid of mind.”¹¹⁵

These statements show a clear rejection of the medicinal use of drugs, and suggest that such use displays a lack of faith in God, and will even make spiritual healing impossible. No wonder Christian Scientists avoid their use, not wanting to be seen as weak and faithless Christians.

This is all the more tragic in light of the strong documentation that Mary Baker Eddy herself used medicines including morphine even in the period following the publication of *Science and Health* and down to her death.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, one wonders how many Christian Scientists through the years died because they blindly believed the lies of Mary Baker Eddy, as in the quote below that guarantees that they will not die if they follow her teachings and forsake the use of doctors.

“Christian Scientists are harmless citizens that do not kill people either by their practice or by preventing the early employment of an M.D. Why? Because the effect of prayer . . . is quite as salutary in the healing of all manner of diseases . . . The interval that detains the patient from the attendance of an M.D., occupied in prayer and in spiritual obedience to Christ’s mode and means of healing, cannot be fatal to the patient.”¹¹⁷

The Great Cop-Out

The following statement is amazing in light of the previous quotes, which warned of the dangers of using medicine:

“If from an injury or from any cause, a Christian Scientist were seized with pain so violent that he could not treat himself mentally, - and the Scientists had failed to relieve him, - the sufferer could call a surgeon, who would give him a hypodermic injection, then, when the belief of pain was lulled, he could handle his own case mentally.”¹¹⁸

What about the Children?

Mary Baker Eddy taught that the principles of Christian Science must be taught to children from the very beginning. For instance, “Parents should teach their children at the earliest possible period the truths of health and holiness. Children are more tractable than adults,”¹¹⁹ “Children should be taught the Truth-cure, Christian Science, among their first lessons and kept from discussing or entertaining theories or thoughts about sickness. To prevent the experience of error and its sufferings, keep out of the minds of your children either sinful or diseased thoughts.”¹²⁰

Suffer the Children

But what are the results of such teachings in the lives of Christian Science children? Caroline Fraser, a former Christian Scientist, wrote an article for the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1995 that described some of the tragic results of children raised in Christian Science families. I am including a lengthy story here because the accounts are powerful:

We both knew what they were. The illnesses and deaths of Christian Science children—and adults—are not only frequently senseless, they are often shockingly grotesque. It is heartbreaking to see children in hospital beds, suffering from cancer or leukemia. But ill and frightened though they are, such children at least have adults to minister to their physical and emotional needs with medical care, pain killers, counseling, and empathy.

Imagine those children at home being told by their parents that their illness is not real and that the pain they feel is not a part of the real world—God’s world. Imagine yourself at six or nine or twelve being very sick and hearing your parents read to you Eddy’s definition of man, which begins, ‘Man is not matter; he is not made up of brain, blood, bones, and other material elements.’ Imagine

what happens to a child when her cancer goes untreated for months. And then imagine how it feels. If you can bear to imagine that, you will be imagining what actually happened to Ashley King.

Ashley King died in 1988. She was twelve years old, and she had bone cancer. The only child of John King, a real estate executive in Phoenix, Arizona, and his wife, Catherine, both Christian Scientists. She was withdrawn from school in November of 1987 because of ‘a problem with her leg.’ Officials at Cocopah Middle School in Scottsdale agreed to arrange for Ashley’s teacher, Tammy Van Denberg, to see her at home.

According to court records, in February of 1988 Van Denberg came to the Kings’ home for a visit but was not allowed to see Ashley. She kept coming, hoping to see the child. Catherine King repeatedly reassured her until, in April, she met Van Denberg at the door and said, ‘We finally have come to the point where you place God before your own life.’ School authorities called Child Protective Services.

On May 5 Detective Edwin Boehm of the Paradise Valley Police Department came to the house; he believes himself to have been the first person other than her parents to see Ashley in months. When I reached Boehm recently and asked him if he remembered Ashley King, he said, ‘You work on a case like that, you don’t forget it.’ He said it had taken some time before he ‘gained entry,’ because Catherine King at first refused to answer the door.

He described seeing Ashley: ‘I knew first thing looking at her that she was dying.’ He couldn’t see her leg, because ‘she had a pillow on it under the covers—she was hiding it.’ He would eventually tell a grand jury, ‘She was extremely white, ashen colored—to be specific, death color.’ The next day Child Protective Services received a court order allowing them temporary custody of Ashley for the purpose of medical examination.

Judging by photographs taken a year or so before her death, Ashley King was a beautiful girl with long, straight, dark-brown hair and high cheekbones. When she was taken to Phoenix Children’s Hospital, she had a tumor on her right leg that was forty-one inches in circumference.

Her hemoglobin count, according to Paul Baranko, the physician who examined her, was ‘almost incompatible with life.’ Her heart was enlarged from the burden of pumping blood to the tumor, her pulse was twice normal, the cancer had spread to her lungs, and she was in immediate danger of dying from congestive heart failure. Immobilized by the tumor, she had been lying in the same position for months. Her buttocks and genitals were covered with bedsores. Nurses who testified before the grand jury said that Ashley had told them, ‘I’m in so much pain’ and ‘You don’t know how I have suffered.’

Baranko, who estimated that Ashley would have had a 55 to 60 percent chance of recovery if she had had timely, proper medical treatment, recommended that her leg be amputated to reduce her pain in the time she had remaining; the Kings declined. He later said, ‘This has to be the most disturbing, depressing case I have ever seen in my twenty five years as a physician.’

Ashley stayed in the hospital for only six days. Officials with Child Protective Services reached an agreement with her parents whereby Ashley would be transferred to Upward View, a Christian Science nursing home. At Upward View, a facility that was not state-licensed and was staffed by Christian Science nurses, who provide only nonmedical care,

Ashley lay in bed in conditions that must have been similar to those she had endured at home. When she cried out, a nurse reminded her to remember the feelings of the other ‘visitors.’ She died on June 5, 1988.¹²¹

In the same article, Fraser described the experiences of another Christian Scientist and her work with children:

Telling me about her work as a practitioner, Shepard had to stop twice to compose herself. ‘I know that no one actually died when I was praying for them,’ she said. ‘But I know that people suffered terribly and had malformations as a result of having no medical treatment, especially in the cases of cuts, deep wounds, and burns.’ She remembers two children in particular:

The parents of a six-year-old girl called to ask her to pray for the child because she had fallen and bruised her arm. The girl herself later called Shepard, crying uncontrollably. Shepard drove to her home and found her alone, lying on the floor with a protruding broken collarbone. Her parents had gone to work and left her on the floor with the telephone.

On another occasion a mother called and described her child as having a sore throat. Three days later Shepard visited the child and found that he had swallowed lye and had a hole in his throat.¹²²

What about Death?

We have seen that Christian Science denies matter, sin, and sickness, so it should not surprise us that they also reject the reality of death, though it seems to be a universal phenomenon! Consider the following incredible statements:

“Because man is the reflection of his Maker, he is not subject to birth, growth, maturity, decay. These mortal dreams are of human origin, not divine.”¹²³

“Man is immortal, and the body cannot die, because matter has no life to surrender.”¹²⁴

“Life is real, and death is the illusion.”¹²⁵

“Death is an illusion, the lie of life in matter; the unreal and untrue . . . Any material evidence of death is false, for it contradicts the spiritual facts of being.”¹²⁶

“Mortal mind affirms that mind is subordinate to the body, that the body is dying, that it must be buried and be decomposed in dust; but mortal mind’s affirmation is not true.”¹²⁷

“It is unchristian to believe in the transition called *material death*, since matter has no life.”¹²⁸

So, according to Mrs. Eddy, it is unchristian to believe in death. Well, we can choose to believe Mrs. Eddy, who by the way, died, or we can believe the Scriptures and the obvious evidence that people do, in fact, die. Consider these biblical passages pertaining to death and our future judgment before God: Genesis 2:17; Psalm 89:48; Romans 5:12; Hebrews 9:27; and Revelation 20:11-15.

The Afterlife?

It should not surprise us that Mrs. Eddy also rejected biblical teaching regarding the afterlife. She said, “Heaven is not a locality but a divine state of mind” that is, rather than desiring to be with God forever in heaven, Eddy suggests heaven is just some blissful state of mind.

Further, she held to a form of purgatory in which people continue to exist until they reached mental perfection (accepting her ideas).

“Those who reach this transition, called *death*, without having rightly improved the lessons of this primary school of mortal existence,—and still believe in matter’s reality, pleasure, and pain,—are not ready to understand immortality. Hence they awake only to another sphere of experience, and must pass through another probationary state.”¹²⁹

Further, Eddy rejected the clear teaching of Scripture concerning death and the coming judgment day:

“No final judgment awaits mortal, for the judgment day of wisdom comes hourly and continually.”¹³⁰

I appeal to Christian Scientists to believe in God’s holy Word rather than the fallible statements of Mrs. Eddy. Your soul is worth the time to seriously explore the true biblical message!

Authority: Bible or Mrs. Eddy?

It is an important question for Christian Scientists to ask themselves. Should I trust my soul to the writings of Mary Baker Eddy or to God’s holy Bible? It is clear that Mrs. Eddy held a high view of her writings as the following quotes show:

“No human pen or tongue taught me the Science contained in this book, Science and Health; and neither tongue nor pen can overthrow it.”¹³¹

“A Christian Scientist requires my work Science and Health for his textbook . . . Why? *First*: Because it is the voice of Truth to this age . . . *Second*: Because it was the first book known, containing a thorough statement of Christian Science . . . and registered the revealed Truth uncontaminated by human hypothesis.”¹³²

“I should blush to write a ‘Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures’ as I have, were it of human origin, and were I, apart from God, its author. But, as I was only a scribe echoing the harmonies of heaven in divine metaphysics, I cannot be super-modest in my estimate of the Christian Science textbook.”¹³³

“Even the Scriptures gave no direct interpretation of the scientific basis for demonstrating the spiritual Principle of healing, until our heavenly Father saw fit, through the Key to the Scriptures, in Science and Health, to unlock this ‘mystery of godliness.’”¹³⁴

“Mary Baker Eddy, the inspired author of the textbook, ‘Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures.’”¹³⁵ answers the question:

“‘Will the Bible, if read and practiced, heal as effectually as your book, ‘Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures’?’ . . . ‘Uninspired knowledge of the translations of the Scriptures has imparted little power to practice the Word. Hence the revelation, discovery, and presentation of Christian Science—the Christ Science . . . became requisite in the divine order.’”¹³⁶

“Christian Science came through revelation, reason, and demonstration.”¹³⁷

“It was not myself but the divine power of Truth and Love, infinitely above me, which dictated ‘Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures.’”¹³⁸

“The manifest mistakes in the ancient versions, the thirty thousand different readings in the Old Testament, and the three hundred thousand in the New, — these facts show how a mortal and material sense stole into the divine record with its own hue darkening to some extent the inspired pages.”¹³⁹

The foregoing statements show that Mary Baker Eddy herself, and Christian Scientists in general, believed her works to be at least as important, if not more important, to spiritual growth as the Bible.

But I ask why we should believe her? With something so important, why should we just accept her word? Was there no true practice of Christianity for nearly two thousand years until Eddy came on the scene? Does not the Bible itself claim to be the fully inspired and complete word from God (Proverbs 30:6; Galatians 1:8-9; 2 Timothy 3:16; and Revelation 22:18-19)?

The Apostle Paul warned that even if “an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned”

(Galatians 1:8). He further warned against false teachers, “I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!”(Acts 20:29-31).

This is exactly what Mary Baker Eddy did. She was born and raised in the Congregational church, but rejected its teachings in favor of her own, twisting the Scriptures to her own destruction (2 Peter 3:16) and the destruction of her followers.

The Key of Science and Health

But Christian Scientist protest; “We are not saying that *Science and Health* are more important than the Bible. It is merely an aid to understanding the Bible.”

For instance, “Question: It’s sometimes said that Christian Scientists see *Science and Health* as a second Bible, superseding or even superior to the Scriptures. Answer: This is an important point to clear up, because for Christian Scientists *no* book can take the place of the Bible . . . A key doesn’t replace the door it’s intended to unlock-it opens it. Just so, Christian Scientists see Mrs. Eddy’s teachings as opening their understanding of the Bible’s meaning.”¹⁴⁰

This is clever sophistry, but deceptive just the same. Without a key, you cannot open a door. You can’t get inside to get what you need! If *Science and Health* is really the key to the Bible, then it follows that you simply cannot understand the Bible without it. Anyone who has the Bible only, without Science and Health, has no ability to understand it. I say blasphemy! This would mean that for almost two millennia no one understood the Bible until Mrs. Eddy brought her key.

Restoration

Indeed, like many other cults, Christian Science claims to have restored true Christianity to the earth after it had been lost not long after apostolic days:

“Yet healing, as I teach it, has not been practiced since the days of Christ.”¹⁴¹

“Has Truth, as demonstrated by Jesus, reappeared? Study Christian Science and practice it, and you will know that Truth has reappeared.”¹⁴²

“(It, truth) ended in the downfall of genuine Christianity, about the year 325.”¹⁴³

Mrs. Eddy’s Sense of Self-importance

Mrs. Eddy seemed to have a sense of self that could almost be described as delusional. Consider the following statements:

“Others could not take her place, even if willing so to do. She therefore remains unseen at her post, seeking no self-aggrandizement but praying, watching, and working for the redemption of mankind.”¹⁴⁴

“The star of Bethlehem is the star of Boston, high in the zenith of Truth’s domain.”¹⁴⁵

“Reading my books, without prejudice, would convince all that their purpose is right. The comprehension of my teachings would enable any one to prove these books to be filled with blessings for the whole human family.”¹⁴⁶

“If the Bible and my work Science and Health had their rightful place in schools of learning, they would revolutionize the world.”¹⁴⁷

“No person can take the individual place of the Virgin Mary. No person can compass or fulfil the individual mission of Jesus of Nazareth. No person can take the place of the author of Science and Health, the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science.”¹⁴⁸

Despite Mrs. Eddy’s very vigorous self-esteem, the evidence shows her to be a false teacher.

Church Census?

One of the interesting things I discovered as I researched this article was Mrs. Eddy’s lack of consistency. An example of this is the question of whether her church should keep records of its numbers. In the first quote, Eddy says no, while in the next three she regularly broke her own rule.

“Christian Scientists shall not report for publication the number of the members of The Mother Church, nor that of the branch churches. According to the Scripture they shall turn away from personality and numbering the people.”¹⁴⁹

“I am grateful to say that in the last year of the nineteenth century this first church of our denomination, chartered in 1879, is found crowned with unprecedented prosperity; a membership of over sixteen thousand communicants in unity, with rapidly increasing numbers.”¹⁵⁰

“The history of Christian Science explains its rapid growth. In my church of over twenty-one thousand six hundred and thirty-one communicants, two thousand four hundred and ninety-six, (of whom) have been added since last November.”¹⁵¹

“Two thousand seven hundred and eighty-four members have been added to our church during the year ending June 1902, making a total twenty-four thousand two hundred and seventy-eight members.”¹⁵²

Parenting Advice

In this last section, I am relating some Christian Science advice for living that I find troubling.

“It is related that a father plunged his infant babe, only a few hours old, into the water for several minutes, and repeated this operation daily, until the child could remain under water twenty minutes, moving and playing without harm,

like a fish. Parents should remember this, and learn how to develop their children properly on dry land.”¹⁵³

We can only hope that nobody took this advice of Mrs. Eddy seriously.

To understand the next statement, we must remember the Christian Science idea that there are no imperfections, as we are all perfect reflections of a perfect God. Therefore, in reality our children are perfect. As a father of six children, I can say that I pity any parent that actually tries to practice the following childrearing philosophy.

“Susan Tish writes of defeating another kind of negative influence when she realized that ‘like a lawyer who had not been adequately defending her client,’ she’d been unintentionally ‘malpracticing’ her child by talking about his bad behavior with other moms. Through prayer she discerned her son’s unchanged child-of-God nature, and major improvements followed.”¹⁵⁴

I can imagine the people who go to Christian Scientist marriage counseling. The counselor says, “Hey, what’s the problem? You are both perfect reflections of God. Go home! Don’t forget to leave the check with my receptionist!”

Oh, and if you are having problems with your parents, remember that they are not actually your parents. Since material bodies don’t really exist, no one actually fathered you or gave you birth. This whole idea of family is merely an illusion as the following quote reflects.

“In his true selfhood, man is the offspring of his Father-Mother God, not the offspring of human parents. To rise above the material sense of parentage is to experience the new birth—the realization of our spiritual origin.”¹⁵⁵

And as long as we are clearing things up for you, remember that the sexes are also an illusion. That’s right. Since there are not really human bodies, there is no such thing as boys and girls!

“Gender also is a quality, not of God, but a characteristic of mortal mind.”¹⁵⁶

Certainly, there are some serious ramifications for this idea, but it hurts to think about it.

The End.

Steve Lagoon

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QUIZ - RELIGION IN AMERICA (A LITTLE HISTORY)

1. The earliest English settlers in Virginia were
 a. Anglicans
 b. Baptists
 c. Roman Catholics
 d. Methodists

2. The famous missionary among the Indians was
 a. James Oglethorpe
 b. Charles Wesley
 c. David Brainerd
 d. George Whitefield

3. He is considered the greatest theologian that America has produced:
 a. Cotton Mather
 b. Patrick Henry
 c. Noah Webster
 d. Jonathan Edwards

4. A revivalist, instrumental in founding Oberlin College:
 a. David Finney
 b. Dwight L. Moody
 c. Billy Sunday
 d. Oral Roberts

5. Harvard and Yale were founded for the training of
 a. industrialists
 b. ministers
 c. military personnel
 d. legislators and judges

6. The first Roman Catholics to settle in North America lived in
 a. Ohio
 b. Rhode Island
 c. Pennsylvania
 d. Maryland

7. The World Council of Churches was founded in

- a. 1912
- b. 1933
- c. 1896
- d. 1948

8. Which cult appeared first?

- a. Mormons
- b. Jehovah's Witnesses
- c. Christian Science
- d. Scientology

9. He defended creationism vs. evolution:

- a. William McKinley
- b. William Jennings Bryan
- c. Charles Darrow
- d. Noah Webster

10. Pentecostalism's beginning is strongly identified with

- a. Atlanta, Georgia
- b. Los Angeles, California
- c. Tulsa, Oklahoma
- d. Dallas, Texas

Answers:

1. (a); 2. (c); 3. (d); 4. (a); 5. (b); 6. (d); 7. (d); 8. (a); 9. (b); 10. (b)

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