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EDITOR: KEITH A. MORSE

The Plight of Ancestral Bondage Is It Real Deliverance or Just a Radical Delusion?

by G. Richard Fisher

It is essential for believers to safeguard the Word — that is, protect and defend it to the best of their ability. And one of the vital ways in which this is accomplished is by insisting on proper interpretation. Yet in our “anything goes” Christianity, many couldn’t care less about being diligent in gaining a proper interpretation of the Word of God.

PFO director Kurt Goedelman has written:

“This lack of effort opens them to be titillated with all sorts of fanciful and far-out interpretations. It is the seedbed for the cults and aberrational teachers. ... Sadly, many Christians look to teachers who offer novel interpretations rather than sound hermeneutics. While these men and women want their followers to believe they are revealing spiritual insights that might

otherwise have been missed, they are in fact sending people down a dead-end path or a deadly

drift. It is a case of the blind leading the blind (Matthew 15:14) and followers turning a deaf ear to the truth (2 Timothy 4:4).”¹



Every believer reads and listens to Bible teachers. And Paul strongly admonishes these teachers and pastors to “rightly divide the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). That means that the Word is to be handled responsibly and interpreted properly. There are at least eight words for “divide” in Greek and the particular one in 2 Timothy 2:15 (*orthotomeo*) means to properly and rightly deal (continues on page 11)

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THE MANHATTAN DECLARATION

The Christian village is all abuzz these days about *The Manhattan Declaration*, another brainchild of Charles Colson (along with Timothy George and Robert George) in his attempts at societal improvement and ecumenical unity. In his earlier efforts, such as the *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* documents, Colson and the late Roman Catholic priest John Neuhaus tried to convince Christendom that while strong differences remained between their two separate traditions, there was much in common and it was time for both sides to lay down their arms and unite against liberal Christianity and secular ideology for the good of society.

The Manhattan Declaration addresses a similar theme but focuses more on remedying morally corrupting influences in America than on the nature of the Gospel. This document zeroes in on abortion, homosexual marriage, and religious liberties.

Several hundred thousand individuals have signed the *Declaration*. Deciding whether it is wise to sign this document is further complicated by a strong difference of opinion among highly respected Evangelical leaders. It is not startling to find the signatures of those known for softer sentiments toward ecumenism and leanings toward outward shows of unity such as Ravi Zacharias,

Ron Sider, J.I. Packer, Leith Anderson, Ken Boa, James Dobson, Jerry Jenkins, Tim Keller, Joseph Stowell, Kay Arthur, Jonathan Falwell, Wayne Grudem, Josh McDowell, and anyone connected with *Christianity Today*. A bit more surprising are Mark Bailey, Randy Alcorn, Bryan Chapell, Joni Eareckson Tada, Michael Easley, Michael Youssef, and in particular Albert Mohler, President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Joining these Evangelicals are numerous Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox priests and bishops. Vocal opponents include R.C. Sproul, John MacArthur, Michael Horton, and Alistair Begg.

What is *The Manhattan Declaration*? The statement is about 4700 words long and was drafted in Manhattan by Colson and the two Georges. It was publicly announced on Nov. 20, 2009, and was originally signed by 140 leaders representing virtually every branch of American Christianity. At least 400,000 more have signed the document, largely via the Internet. The *Declaration* is a strong protest against the moral drift of America and the laws that have been passed or are pending that reflect that drift. It is a call to arms by those within the Christian framework against such laws that affect the issues of sanctity of life, the definition and institution of marriage, and freedom of religion. It is a line drawn in the sand telling the American governmental system that Christians will retreat no further. Christians are declaring that they

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P.O. Box 26062 • Saint Louis, Missouri 63136-0062 • (314) 921-9800

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TILL DIVORCE DO US PART

According to several news sources, Suzanne Hinn, the wife of televangelist Benny Hinn, has filed for divorce in Southern California. Suzanne Hinn filed the papers in Orange County Superior Court on Feb. 1, citing irreconcilable differences, after more than 30 years of marriage. According to *Yahoo! News*, the court papers stated that the two separated on Jan. 26, and that Benny “has been living in Dana Point, a wealthy coastal community in southern Orange County.” Irreconcilable differences is code for a no-fault divorce.

Charisma magazine released a statement providing selective information (from news releases) that Suzanne had filed for a divorce. The periodical was very sparse about any details, which is understandable because the magazine’s publishing company, Strang Publishers, had recently released Benny’s newest book, *Blood in the Sand*.

As news of the pending divorce was picked up by the media — both Christian and secular — Benny Hinn’s own ministry Website offered a brief announcement, which merely restated what was being announced in the secular news releases. A personal letter from Benny also was posted on his Website. In it, he stated: “You may have heard by now that my wife, Suzanne, whom I love very much and always will, filed for divorce on February 1. Even though Suzanne has been under great stress, the children and I never expected this to happen. Divorce was the last thing on my mind and theirs. It was a total shock when her lawyer called me the morning of February 17 to inform me she had filed 16 days before. Suzanne never gave the family even a hint that this was on her mind.” Benny alleges that Suzanne’s filing for a divorce was a surprise to her parents as well. He also said “that there was absolutely no immorality in my life or in Suzanne’s, ever.”

Christianity Today magazine suggested that Benny knew the divorce was coming and that the staged denial that Suzanne’s filing caught him by surprise may be more public relations than truth. “Confidential sources have informed *Christianity Today* that the Hinn marriage has been in trouble for a long time and that divorce proceedings were no shock to Benny Hinn,” James Beverley reported on the magazine’s Website. The report also stated that Suzanne’s attorney was the “legendary” Sorrell Trope, whose clients have included Cary Grant, Rod Steiger, Nicole Kidman, and, most recently, Elin Nordegren, wife of professional golfer Tiger Woods. It

was a strange irony that at the same time news of the Hinn divorce hit the newsstands, Tiger Woods was making his own public confession. It once again demonstrates that televangelism is, after all, Hollywood in clergy garb.

On Feb. 26, Benny was featured on Pat Robertson’s *The 700 Club* reading a four-minute, pre-taped statement. In the testimonial, Benny reiterated much of what was stated in the letter available on his Website. The video clip made its way to *YouTube* and included a couple minutes of two of Benny’s staff attesting to Benny’s purity and that he has been “clean” and moral around the world. Benny’s sterling moral character was strongly emphasized, perhaps as a response to tabloid reports coming from both the United States and Uganda with rumors that Benny has been involved in homosexual relationships.

At least for now, the reason behind the real grounds is uncertain, but a divorce is a divorce. No one is yet talking about the reason or reasons behind Suzanne’s filing. However, there had to be reasons — very serious ones. In the carefully crafted public presentation by Benny, the breakup remained totally and completely Suzanne’s fault, at least in Benny’s telling. It was portrayed that whatever the source of Suzanne’s stress was, she did not handle it responsibly or biblically. However, all this could be potentially devastating for Benny’s career to continue at the same level of popularity and acceptance given the verses in Scripture about divorce and the blamelessness of elders or pastors. A select few will rightfully call for Benny to step out of ministry, while untold others will not.

—GRF/MKG

FINANCIAL WOES PLAGUE CRYSTAL CATHEDRAL

Leaders of the Crystal Cathedral, the Southern California megachurch in Garden Grove, claim it is \$55 million in debt and is being sued by several creditors for non-payment of bills. According to *Christianity Today* magazine, it was reported that the church “owes \$2 million in unpaid services.” A major portion of the money owed is to vendors who provided the church with services and items for its annual extravaganza Christmas pageant, an amount said to be in the tens of thousands of dollars.

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So Long, Beth: Your Precepts Have Been a Bad Friend to Us

Beth Moore's Latest Book on Female Insecurity

by G. Richard Fisher with M. Kurt Goedelman



Popular author Beth Moore writes in her latest book, "I've never written a single book out of expertise. I usually write to discover something I myself am yearning for. Even desperate for. ... God has spent this last year systematically exposing every ugly insecurity I had and testing these methods in circumstances too uncanny to be coincidence."¹

Moore, author of *So Long, Insecurity: You've Been a Bad Friend to Us*, founded Living Proof Ministries in 1994 and today is one of the best-known teachers and speakers on the evangelical circuit. Her teachings can run the gamut from quirky, sensational, subjective, and questionable, all the way to somewhat helpful.

The Apostle Paul urged, "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). In looking discerningly at Moore's books and the teachings therein, we are doing what the Bible commands. Sadly, those who do so often are accused of being mean-spirited, harsh, and judgmental.

ALL SHOOK UP

Moore opens *So Long, Insecurity* by writing, "I'M SERIOUSLY TICKED" and "Maybe what I am is peeved."² Near the end of the book, she writes,

"The writer of Proverbs talked of words 'fitly spoken,' but I'm afraid what you've gotten here were words spoken in a fit."³ When we find out why she is in such a state, one can't help but wonder if all of her previous books meant nothing. She seems almost desperate when she pleads, "we need help. *I need help*. Something more than what we're getting."⁴ This book, she divulges, "is the closest I'll ever come to an autobiography."⁵ Her complaint is that no one seems to be helping women with their problems and insecurities.

Moore asserts, "Insecurity among women is epidemic, but it is not incurable."⁶ She states, "I'm feeling ticked for the whole mess of us born with a pair of X chromosomes,"⁷ and adds to that a description of being "irrationally irritated to oblivion" and "feeling scorned."⁸ She narrows the problem down to the question, "Can we still feel adequate in our media-driven society?"⁹ The thrust of her book then seems to be, *How can I begin to feel adequate?* Moore apparently does not grasp that feeling "adequate" may be more a result of something else than a pursuit in itself. The other issue is that if we felt totally adequate all the time, we would have no need of dependence

on God or a desire to grow in the faith. We can be content in Christ and still be discontented as to where we are in our Christian growth. Paul expressed it this way: "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me" (Philippians 3:12).

MORE OF MOORE

Moore has claimed in her books and lectures that her teachings come directly from God. These precepts were said to be the way to deliver us from the past, breaking our bondages, getting us out of our pits, binding the enemy, and giving us the wherewithal to demolish all our strongholds.¹⁰ If all of Moore's other books really worked and delivered what was promised, there would be no need for this new book.

Moore lacks in two critical areas. First, she has no formal Bible training, which lends itself to a subjective, do-it-yourself hermeneutic. Her Website states that her degree in college was in Political Science and that she formerly taught "Christian aerobics." It also mentions that she took a Bible doctrine class at her local church. Second, it appears from the book's

introduction that she is either unaware or ignorant of the past four decades of women's ministry in the Church and the wealth of reputable female Christian authors. Many of these authors have addressed the Christian woman's problems and have provided biblical answers and instruction to the struggles of women in the Church, in their marriage, and in their personal lives.

Space does not permit a complete list of such women authors, but a "baker's dozen" would include Martha Peace, Carol Ruvolo, Elyse Fitzpatrick, Elizabeth George, Nancy DeMoss, Edith Schaeffer, Kay Arthur, Elizabeth Elliot, Joni Eareckson Tada, Donna Morley, Mary Ruth Murdoch, Catherine Marshall, and Jill Briscoe.

Once all the men who have written books for women are added and all the conferences and radio and television ministries of female authors are taken into account, one can see that it is simply false and arrogant for Moore to suggest that no other Christians have addressed women's issues.¹¹

SO WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Moore says her book was derived from her study of more than 1200 people, mostly women.¹² Yet we have no idea if these women were Christians or non-Christians and what demographic they represent. We don't know what worldview they accept or what type of teaching has influenced them. We don't know if those interviewed had severe mental or behavioral problems. And we don't know if the stories were embellished or if essential details were skipped or missed.

If women are not insecure before they read this book, they will be convinced that they are afterward. Moore asserts that most women "have enough insecurity to hinder them."¹³

Moore's definition of insecurity comes from a secular self-help book, *The Tender Heart: Conquering Your*

Insecurity, by Joseph Nowinski. She calls Nowinski a "specialist" and offers his definition, which in part reads, "Insecurity is associated with chronic self-consciousness, along with a chronic lack of confidence in ourselves and anxiety about our relationships."¹⁴ Most astute Christians would spot a problem right away. Believers are to be *theocentric*: God-focused, Christ-conscious, and Word-directed (Psalm 1, Psalm 119, and Hebrews 12:2). Fallen man is *egocentric*, suffering from the idolatry of self-focus and self-centeredness. In fact, chronic self-consciousness is sinful because it is grounded in doubt and lack of faith as to who God is and what He can do. It is sinful because it violates Philippians 4:8-13. Moore identifies insecurity as a struggle, but not as a by-product of sin. Sin can only be dealt with by radical repentance, not self-help talk and whimsical mantras. Adam and Eve had nothing to be insecure about. But after sinning they were afraid and hid themselves (Genesis 3:8-10). Their insecurity was a result of their sin, not the other way around.

GOD SPEAKS YET AGAIN!

In many of Moore's past studies, she considered the inner voices she heard to be the voice of God. Moore writes, "Not long ago I was having one of those days all women have — at least occasionally — feeling down and probably hormonal."¹⁵ On that particular day she was filled with doubt as to whether her husband Keith still thought of her as beautiful. She writes that her own "handicapped soul" told her Keith no longer thought her "beautiful." Then she writes:

"But that's when the freaky part happened. A moment later I heard a deeper voice — not out loud, of course, but from the innermost place within me — say, *Yes. Yes, indeed you are.* The thought came out of left field. In fact, it shocked me. Listen, I'm not given to those kinds of thoughts when I'm in that kind

of emotional funk. I knew that voice was not mine. It was Christ's."¹⁶

Perhaps a significant component of Moore's ongoing insecurity is that she is looking and listening for voices rather than looking at verses. It is far healthier to meditate on all the verses in Scripture concerning God's continuing love for us and our everlasting acceptance in Christ as in Romans 8, which starts with no condemnation and ends with no separation.

Even though Moore quotes Bible verses, she apparently needs inner voices and dramatic experiences to shore her up. The Bible says, "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19).

MAN OF THE HOUSE?

But Moore's anecdote misses something critical. It impugns her husband. Professor of biblical counseling Wayne Mack explains that apart from a husband's relationship with Jesus Christ, his wife must have first place in his life. Mack then instructs husbands:

"She needs to know that she comes before your business, your children, your parents, your house, your hobbies, your golf game. She needs to know that, apart from Christ, you delight in her more than in anything or anyone else. ... *If she knows that, she will be secure.* She will know you love her. If she does not, she may doubt your love."¹⁷

Mack's comments are a stinging condemnation of Moore's insecurity and the help she proffers. She is unobservant to the consequences that might result from presenting explanations and solutions that are not spot-on biblically. Notwithstanding, Moore repeatedly spotlights her relationship with her husband throughout the book:

"Thirty years in, I'm still nuts about my husband and can't

imagine life without him. ... No-body has access to my heart like he does. He is worthy of my respect and gets a steady dose of it."¹⁸

Such narration is a theme that crops up repeatedly: the strength of her marriage and commitment to her husband. Yet Moore often weakens or contradicts these claims by what she misses or by what she says elsewhere. Compare, for example, what Moore said above with what took place at her publisher Lifeway's "Deeper Still" Conference held in North Carolina in 2009. During a "Question and Answer" session that featured Moore, Kay Arthur, and Priscilla Shirer, the question was posed as to the most challenging aspect of marriage. Shirer, who has two small children, told the 10,000 attendees, "I'm often just too tired, if you know what I mean, ladies! [Wink, wink.]"¹⁹ One attendee reported:

"To my (saddened) surprise, the arena of 10,000 women actually stood up and cheered. Various chimes of laughter, screaming, and 'yeah, girl!' boomed in the packed house. This continued for about a minute, while even Beth Moore nodded, laughed and clapped at Ms. Shirer's comment. Priscilla continued by relating a story of how she often tries to creep into bed after her husband falls asleep so that he won't start coming on to her. Beth Moore admitted the same, and the more they discussed, the louder the cheering arena shouted and clapped in agreement."²⁰

Men and women get tired. That is not at issue. But female Christian leaders joking about avoiding their husbands in bed is not really a topic for light public banter. Personal matters between spouses should not be a point of public ridicule. And when Kay Arthur rebuked the speaker on stage by reading 1 Corinthians 7:4-5, Moore and Shirer did not relent. Shirer took issue with the verse and continued the banter by replying,

"Oh, well Ms. Kay has a verse for everything, doesn't she?!"²¹

SO THAT'S WHAT'S WRONG WITH US

Moore overgeneralizes and reads insecurity into almost every action and response. Seeing everything as insecurity causes her to distort Scripture; for instance, the overt sin of the Samaritan woman in John 4 and the revelation by Jesus that she had had five husbands and was now living immorally with a sixth man. Yet Moore turns this biblical story on its head and seems to exonerate the woman, labeling all her ex-husbands as failures and culpable, when she says, "If marrying five losers and living with number six isn't a waving red flag with the letters I-N-S-E-C-U-R-I-T-Y appliquéd on it, one doesn't exist."²² Later, the woman from Samaria tells others that Jesus "told me all the things that I ever did" (v. 29) — not Jesus "told me all the things that my ex-husbands ever did." Unlike Moore, she understood that Jesus knew all about her sinful behavior. She did not say, "Come see a man who helped me with my insecurities that allowed me to hook up with six losers."

Dr. Harry Ironside gets to the heart of the issue:

"He drives the truth of her guilty past and sinful present home to her soul. She stands there, greatly moved, and for a moment does not know what to say. Who is this that could put His finger upon the black spot in her life? He looks so kind and considerate, and yet He has done the very thing that has stirred her conscience to the very depth. She blurts out, 'Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.' A prophet is one who speaks for God. She realizes that this Man, who has never met her before, yet knows all about her sin, who knows all the evil of her life, He must be a God-sent prophet. It was as though she exclaimed, 'I perceive that I am a sinner.'"²³

BENDING THE BIBLE

Moore also charges that the Apostle Paul suffered from an "awful feeling that he wasn't as good as the others."²⁴ She refers to Paul's statements in 2 Corinthians 11:5-6 and 2 Corinthians 12:11. Paul is addressing the false "apostles" who were denigrating him and saying they were super apostles. Moore cites for her readers Paul's defense of his own apostleship, interwoven with her unbiblical suggestions:

*"I do not think I am in the least inferior to those 'super-apostles.' I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. 2 Corinthians 11:5-6. Tell me that's not insecurity. If you're not convinced, take a look at what blurted from his pen only a chapter later: I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the 'super-apostles,' even though I am nothing. 2 Corinthians 12:11. Do you think just maybe he protests too much? In all probability, he fought the awful feeling that he wasn't as good as the others who hadn't done nearly so much wrong."*²⁵

These passages have nothing to do with inferiority or some "dizzying psychological zigzag,"²⁶ as Moore contends. Scripture shows that Paul knew he was better than false prophets and false apostles and that he is speaking sarcastically. Charles Ryrie writes in the *Ryrie Study Bible*, "Of course he did not want them to submit to false teachers, nor did he regard these smooth talkers as 'apostles' in any sense."²⁷ *The New Geneva Study Bible* says, "There is a hint of mockery in Paul's use of this inflated title (lit. 'super apostles') for his opponents in Corinth. It may even be a name they applied to themselves."²⁸ Concerning 2 Corinthians 12:11, this same source wrote:

"Paul had to 'boast' about his apostolic weakness because the Corinthians, who knew him well,

had not defended him against the false apostles, but instead had been seduced (11:1-3) by inflated self-claims and untrue criticism of Paul."²⁹

Moore has given little thought to the text or context here, but simply has her imagination in overdrive. It is hard to fathom how she could take these passages of Scripture to mean that "Paul also battled a big, fat ego."³⁰ One cannot find a commentary that would suggest 2 Corinthians 12:11 had anything to do with Paul's ego or insecurity. Warren Wiersbe wrote:

"The *preachers* of this false Gospel (and they are with us yet today) are described in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. They claimed to have divine authority as God's servants, but their authority was bogus. They claimed that the true servants of God were all impostors; in Paul's day, they said this about him. They even claimed to be 'super-apostles,' on a much higher level than Paul. With their clever oratory, they mesmerized the ignorant believers, while at the same time they pointed out that Paul was not a very gifted speaker ... 'They are not "super-apostles" at all!' warned Paul. 'They are *pseudo* apostles — false apostles!' Their motive is not to glorify God, but to get personal gain by capturing converts. Their methods are deceitful."³¹

LYING ON GOD'S COUCH

God turns up in Moore's book not exactly as a Savior from sin, but rather as a panacea for our rejections. With this thinking in mind, Psalm 23 could be rewritten, "The Lord is my psychiatrist. I shall not feel insecure." Moore writes:

"God knows exactly what happened and what a toll it took. He knows the number it played on your mind. Let Him bring you peace. Let Him tell you you're worth *wanting, loving, even liking, pursuing, fighting for,* and, yes,

beloved, *keeping*. Whatever you do, don't reject the only One wholly incapable of rejecting you."³²

Some of what Moore says here may be true if it arises out of being rightly related to God in salvation. But God here seems to be more an understanding therapist or an easygoing, non-directive counselor instead of the sovereign God of the Bible.

Moore lists in detail all the reasons she thinks people are insecure: abuse, abandonment, losses, broken attachments, loss of innocence, rejection, personal limitations, and other common human experiences. Everyone has been sinned against, but that must not be our focus. If we are saved, we are to put the past out of our minds and not dwell on it, according to Philippians 3:13 and 4:8. Retraining our thinking, as Romans 12:1-2 directs, is the answer. Reading all the medical books we can on our physical ailment will do nothing. Only taking the remedy or right treatment will help.

The other huge issue is the power of God's promises to comfort us and give us freedom from the past. Too much negative introspection is unhealthy. Believing what God says about Himself and His love for us is the key to freedom. Doubt and unbelief can be more the problem than what happened to us years ago. Negative self-talk such as that found in Moore's book can really have us digging a deep hole for ourselves. Constantly focusing on insecurity, which Moore's book does, is unhealthy.

QUESTIONABLE THINGS

Moore's use of author Anne Rice as a positive model is distasteful. Moore writes:

"The great writer Anne Rice had a learning disability that made reading extremely difficult even through young adulthood. Ironically, from that very travail with words, numerous best-selling novels were born."³³

Evangelical writers starve for Moore's kinship, while she calls Rice a "great writer." Even though Rice has written books on the childhood of Jesus, such as *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt*, she is better known for writing vampire novels. Rice has returned to the Roman Catholic Church, the faith she embraced as a child, and she continues to support homosexuality, lesbianism, and abortion. Even her writing on the life of Jesus is suspect, presenting "a fictional view of Jesus that clashes with God's revealed Word."³⁴ Equally alarming, Rice has also written pornographic novels under the name A.N. Roquelaure, which include stories of pedophilia.

One biography of Anne Rice says:

"From the vampires Lestat and Louis to a sexually liberated Sleeping Beauty, novelist Anne Rice has created a host of characters who are notable for their paradoxical combinations of the deviant and the conventional. *Exit to Eden*, for example, ends with the sado-masochistic protagonists embarking on a traditional monogamous heterosexual relationship, while the vampires often long to exchange their erotic immortality for 'ordinary' mortal lives and loves."³⁵

A simple search on the Internet yields all of this biographical material. Either Moore is not the "research freak"³⁶ she claims to be or we must wonder what she is thinking.

PRIDE GOETH BEFORE INSECURITY?

Moore also discusses pride. She says it is "the result of mistaking the eternal for the temporal"³⁷ and calls it a "root of insecurity if there ever was one."³⁸ It is more than that. It is too high an opinion of one's self or one's own importance. It is self-promotion and translated *boasting, haughty, and vainglory* in the New Testament. Biblical counseling professor and author Stuart Scott defines pride as:

"The mindset of self (a master's mindset rather than that of a

servant): a focus on self and the service of self, a pursuit of self-recognition and self-exaltation, and a desire to control and use all things for self."³⁹

Scott nails the epidemic of pride when he stresses, "The question is not, 'Do I have it?' but, 'Where is it?' and 'How much of it do I have?'"⁴⁰

Moore advises that "pride is not hard to spot" and that "taking responsibility," "repentance," and "confession" are necessary.⁴¹ While this bit of advice is biblical and helpful, Moore quickly goes off the track.

Moore offers nearly 40 pages of testimonials from women who report in detail how insecurity made them do stupid things, but nowhere is sin mentioned. The testimonials include statements such as: "Insecurity can make you act like an idiot in female friendships;"⁴² "Insecurity can cause a mom to be overcontrolling or just generally out of control;"⁴³ "Insecurity weighs heavily in weight issues;"⁴⁴ "Insecurity can turn a priceless daughter of God into a boot-licker;"⁴⁵ "Insecurity can talk us into doing things we don't even want to do;"⁴⁶ "Insecurity can make you wear weird stuff to school;"⁴⁷ and "Insecurity can make a girl act like a guy."⁴⁸

IS THERE AN ANSWER?

So, according to Moore, every destructive behavior and every addiction, which the Bible calls sin, springs from our insecurity. But the root of what Moore mentions is not insecurity, but the sin nature. We sin because we are sinners. Jeremiah said, "Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward" (Jeremiah 7:24). And, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Jesus said of the Pharisees, "their heart is far from Me" (Mark 7:6). Jesus then affirmed the basic problem of every person:

"What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man" (Mark 7:20-23).

Insecurity is a by-product of dwelling on personal displeasing events of one's past that ultimately cannot be changed. To allow dissenting incidents to fester in one's mind is sinful thinking. One must be accountable in their reflection and responsible to repent and ask God's help to change the thought process in order to bring Him honor and glory.

Moore cites Ephesians 4:22, 24, and uses it as an affirmation: "Oh, beloved, you are so much stronger than you give yourself credit for. If you are in Christ, you have divine power."⁴⁹ While it may be true that we have divine power in Christ, this is not what Ephesians 4 and the "put off" and "put on" admonition teaches. Ephesians 4 describes the hard, practical work of dealing with old habits by replacing them with new behaviors. In laying aside the old self we must work at (by God's grace and the Spirit's power) replacing lying with truth (v. 25). We must deal with anger and not let it linger and fester (v. 26). We must not be dishonest and steal, but work honestly and give to those in need (v. 28). We must replace harsh, unwholesome words with words that are grace-filled (v. 29). We must rid ourselves of bitterness, wrath, clamor, and slander and be kind and willing to forgive (vv. 31-32). Moore turns what is meant to be practical and life-changing into an affirmation of fleshly, positive-thinking philosophy.

GOD'S VOICE — REALLY?

Halfway through the book, the reader arrives at Moore's promise of substantial healing from insecurity. She writes:

"Find a private place where you can be undisturbed and undistracted for at least half an hour. If you can take a little longer to process the emotions with the meditations, the healing will be more substantial. Some of you may even have the means to get away overnight and have a retreat of sorts with God."⁵⁰

After all that, Moore's directive could have been put into a booklet:

"This guide has not been written hastily or randomly. I've never before felt the leadership of God to put anything like this prayer journey in a book or study. *I am convinced it was His idea for this particular message*, and if it was, I know He intends to make good use of it. God is incapable of wasting our time. I've asked Him to equip me with the supernatural wisdom and insight to compose a prayer that will receive His resounding 'Yes!' And I have no other choice but to trust that He has answered my earnest request."⁵¹

Moore's directions — or God's if you believe her — are "sit, kneel, or even lie facedown. Don't get antsy" and read "slowly, thoughtfully, and *out loud*" the ten pages of prayers that Moore provides.⁵² Perhaps some people can lie face-down and read, but the technique escapes this writer.

Many cult leaders claim that their writings are divinely inspired — given directly by God. *The Book of Mormon* is an example. One must be careful of messages that are called divine:

"The Word of God is, therefore, God's final and complete revelation, and this revelation can be supplanted by no other. The cults have no such commitment, believing in the heretical doctrine of extra-biblical revelation. They claim that God has spoken and recorded words, through whatever medium, *since* He gave us the New Testament Scriptures.

They assert that God speaks or has spoken outside or apart from the Bible."⁵³

Moore appears to be unaware of the gravity of claiming direct divine revelation. Mart De Haan wrote:

"At stake is our own discernment and the honor of the Word of God. If in normal conversation we speak as if what God says to us through our inner inclinations is equal to what He has said through Scripture, we are competing, even unintentionally, with the authority of the Bible. ... The addition of 'I think' or 'I believe' may seem like a small matter. But the issue is big. It is the issue God Himself expressed to Ezekiel when he said, 'They say, "The Lord declares," when the Lord has not sent them; yet they expect their words to be fulfilled. Have you not seen false visions and uttered lying divinations when you say, "The Lord declares," though I have not spoken?' (Ezekiel 13:6-7)."⁵⁴

Moore does not deliver all that she promises. The formula and prayer exercise may not deliver lasting release from insecurity. Moore offers this caveat:

"You will be able to reflect on this process for years to come, read back over the words, and remember where the release began. You will also be able to return to this guide and pray through it again when insecurity sneaks back up on you — and invariably, it will."⁵⁵

So the claim of God's guarantee is no guarantee at all. Insecurity will always be lurking, so we have to keep those ten pages handy.

A basic law of logic is that something cannot be true and false at the same time. The only way we can believe two contradictory things is to fall into a cultic mentality and cognitive dissonance. Moore told us she was sure that her prayer exercise was from God. She also assures:

"When it comes to dignity and security, we have a golden opportunity to know in advance that we are praying the will of God for our lives. And we need to cash in that request post-haste. We can count on the answer being as sure as the appeal. In fact, if you're willing to exercise the kind of boldness that excites the heart of God, you can go right ahead and thank Him in advance because you know that what you've asked is as good as done."⁵⁶

So, according to Moore, we can know and it is as good as done, but you will need to hold onto the written prayers just in case. This claim plays with people's lives, emotions, and vulnerabilities.

NOTHING NEW

Moore as a "research freak" should well know that there are dozens of books with formulaic prayers for deliverance. So her volume is nothing new. They do little, if anything, in the way of progressive biblical sanctification. Jesus called formulaic prayers "vain repetitions" (Matthew 6:7).

Moore continues to contradict herself as far as the origin of the prayer formula. Recall she said that it came directly from God and that she was convinced it was "His idea." Yet she later says of her divine pronouncements:

"When thoughts come to me out of the blue that I'm convinced did not originate in my own mind, if they're consistent with God's character and sound like something He would say in Scripture, I usually assume it's Him. Ultimately, time proves whether or not I discerned the voice correctly. If it produces substantial fruit, I know it was God and I was on target. If nothing comes of it, I probably misunderstood or accidentally ascribed it to Him. None of us are beyond confusing our own thoughts with God's no matter

how many times we've been around the bend with Him."⁵⁷

So, it may be God's idea: "I usually assume it's Him," but then again it may be that: "I probably misunderstood or accidentally ascribed it to Him." Moore's ambiguity demeans Scripture and sets one adrift without the *security* of the written Word of God. A safer mooring for Moore and her readers is not to tether to thoughts that *sound like something He would say in Scripture*, but rather to what *He has said in Scripture*. Equally objectionable is Moore's pragmatism: "If it produces substantial fruit, I know it was God and I was on target." Had the prophet Jeremiah used Moore's reasoning, he would have thought he had "misunderstood" or "accidentally ascribed" God's message when he produced *no* "substantial fruit" as he called Israel to faith and repentance.

Following her disclaimer that God speaks to her, she claims absolute certainty of hearing directly from Him:

"God saw me in inner turmoil *again* about a relentless relational challenge, and while I was wrestling before Him in prayer, my stomach twisted like a wrung-out wet rag, He interrupted. *Child, tell Me your worst fears.* I was a little taken aback. After all, I was in the throes of a particular descriptive lament. Still, in my human estimation, He had no doubt spoken, so who was I to ask Him to wait His turn?"⁵⁸

One is left wondering which statement to believe: that God interrupts her and speaks or that what she "hears" is mistakenly ascribed to Him.⁵⁹

THE BOTTOM LINE

It is essential that we understand what is at the core of Moore's ideas about insecurity. At the foundation are secular ideas about self-image and self-esteem that have taken over the

Church and hijacked true biblical teaching regarding progressive sanctification. Moore's view is summarized in her statement that, "A number of the men in the survey grapple with their self-worth and self-image just like many of us do."⁶⁰ So it is really all about self-worth and self-image. This concept is often described as self-love. It is plainly rooted in secular psychology. PFO director David Tyler warns:

"Psychological or self-esteem sanctification is the trend today. Self-esteem was contrived for the most part by humanists hostile toward Scripture, adopted and then Christianized by well-meaning believers. Christian psychologist Bruce Narramore writes, 'Under the influence of humanistic psychologists like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, many of us Christians have begun to see our need for self-love and self-esteem. This is a good and necessary focus.' Narramore, as well as other Christian psychologists, openly admit that it was atheistic psychologists who invented the theory that gave them a new interpretation of the Bible. Self-esteem sanctification is the most dangerous and at the same time the most appealing fad in the Church today. James Dobson says the whole world is suffering from an 'epidemic of inferiority.' Adults and children alike are not getting their love tanks filled. Parents spend their time fretting over how to give their rebellious child more love, more praise, more of anything that will raise his self-esteem. The in-thing in churches today is sensitivity training classes on how to make everyone feel better about themselves. The Gospel is turned into a story of how Jesus offers significance and worth. Paul writes about how the last days will be very difficult times in the Church. Paul heads the list of sinful behaviors and attitudes with the words, 'for men will be

lovers of self' (2 Timothy 3:2). These are dangerous times in which we live when evangelicals are teaching such nonsense as the inner man is transformed into the likeness of Christ through techniques that raise his self-esteem."⁶¹

In *So Long, Insecurity*, Moore presents herself as a loving mess, and in touch with all of her readers' struggles. She is everywoman. She presents herself as an insider with God, except she's not sure if she really heard God's voice or her own mind speaking.

Some of the material in Moore's book may be helpful, but some of her advice sounds like Mind Science and magical thinking.⁶² Sadly, most of Moore's following will not recognize that.

Moore's newest book is one long litany of stories of insecurity. Her references to her childhood sexual abuse are unhealthy and go against the injunction to believers of "forgetting those things which are behind" (Philippians 3:13).

Moore writes as though she alone has the final answers, although she never discusses to any degree the place of real guilt as a factor in our insecurities. God has designed human beings so that guilt will bring self-loathing. This can drive one to repentance and change. With regard to abuse victims, there are far too many complexities that must be dealt with biblically. It cannot be reduced to the "I" word.

Moore writes, "We're insecure. You and me and every woman. ... Let's have a chat, you and me, through these pages. I'd be honored if you'd join me on my quest for real, lasting, soul-deep security."⁶³ That assumes that every reader is chronically insecure. Moore says, "Paul battled a big, fat ego."⁶⁴ Yet the apostle wrote, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" (Philippians 4:11). Perhaps Moore would argue his contentment was a cover for insecurity.

Some may think Moore's book helped them because she understands their pain. That may sound good, but one doesn't need a mechanic who understands our pain but cannot fix our car. Moore claims to have a formula directly from God, but ends up admitting the formula is fallible. Our logic — and Scripture — tells us God can do better than that.

Endnotes:

1. Beth Moore, *So Long, Insecurity: You've Been a Bad Friend to Us*. Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2010, pp. 13, 342.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2, capitalization in original.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. 335.
4. *Ibid.*, pg. 2, italics in original.
5. *Ibid.*, pg. xi.
6. *Ibid.*, pg. xiii.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 2.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 5.
10. See further, M. Kurt Goedelman with G. Richard Fisher, "When Godly People Teach Ungodly Theology," *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 2007, pp. 1, 18-26; M. Kurt Goedelman with G. Richard Fisher, "Get Out of That Pit-iful Theology," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 2008, pp. 4-15; M. Kurt Goedelman and Glenn E. Chatfield, "Believing Beth About Believing God," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 2009, pp. 4-14; and G. Richard Fisher with M. Kurt Goedelman, "Breaking Free from Faulty Strongholds," *The Quarterly Journal*, June-September 2009, pp. 1, 12-21.
11. For an excellent introduction to many of these early writers, see Jennifer Heller, "Marriage, Womanhood, and the Search for Something More: American Evangelical Women's Best Selling 'Self Help' Books 1972-1979" in the *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, (University of Kansas), Volume 2, Fall 2002.
12. *So Long, Insecurity*, op. cit., pg. xiv. See also, pg. 16. On page vii, she acknowledges that there were more than 150 men who participated in her "guys' survey."
13. *Ibid.*, pg. 16.
14. Joseph Nowinski cited in *ibid.*, pg. 17.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 40.
16. *Ibid.*, pg. 42, italics in original.
17. Wayne A. Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1999, pg. 44, emphasis added.
18. *So Long, Insecurity*, op. cit., pg. 7.
19. Doug Beaumont, "'Shallower Still' — A Sad Commentary on the State of Evangelism, 2009 August 9, citation rendered in italics in original, document on file.
20. *Ibid.*, citation rendered in italics in original.

21. *Ibid.*, citation rendered in italics in original.
22. *So Long, Insecurity*, op. cit., pg. 56.
23. Harry A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of John*. New York: Loizeaux, 1954, pp. 144-145.
24. *So Long, Insecurity*, op. cit., pg. 57.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57, italics in original.
26. *Ibid.*, pg. 57.
27. Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1976, pg. 1764, note on 1 Corinthians 11:4.
28. *The New Geneva Study Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995, pg. 1841, note on 2 Corinthians 11:5.
29. *Ibid.*, pg. 1843, note on 2 Corinthians 12:11.
30. *So Long, Insecurity*, op. cit., pg. 57.
31. Warren Wiersbe, *Be Encouraged*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1984, pp. 122-123, italics in original.
32. *So Long, Insecurity*, op. cit., pg. 77, italics in original.
33. *Ibid.*, pg. 83.
34. Berit Kjos, "Anne Rice Re-imagines Jesus and Christian leaders applaud," January 2006. Document available at: www.crossroad.to/articles2/006/anne-rice.htm.
35. Amazon.com product description for James R. Keller, *Anne Rice and Sexual Politics: The Early Novels*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2000.
36. *So Long, Insecurity*, op. cit., pg. xiv.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.
38. *Ibid.*, pg. 105.
39. Stuart Scott, *From Pride to Humility*. Bemidji, Minn.: Focus Publishing, 2002, pg. 6, quotation rendered in bold typeface in original.
40. *Ibid.*, pg. 2.
41. *So Long, Insecurity*, op. cit., pg. 107.
42. *Ibid.*, pg. 111, quotation rendered in all upper case letters in original.
43. *Ibid.*, pg. 114, quotation rendered in all upper case letters in original.
44. *Ibid.*, pg. 119, quotation rendered in all upper case letters in original.
45. *Ibid.*, pg. 121, quotation rendered in all upper case letters in original.
46. *Ibid.*, pg. 124, quotation rendered in all upper case letters in original.
47. *Ibid.*, pg. 136, quotation rendered in all upper case letters in original.
48. *Ibid.*, pg. 138, quotation rendered in all upper case letters in original.
49. *Ibid.*, pg. 157.
50. *Ibid.*, pg. 163.
51. *Ibid.*, pg. 164, emphasis added.
52. *Ibid.*, italics in original. The ten pages of prayers are found on pp. 165-174.
53. Dave Breese, *Know the Marks of Cults*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1975, pg. 25, italic in original.
54. Mart De Haan, "What God Said To Me," *Our Daily Bread*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Radio Bible Class, Pamphlet TE 663, August 2003, pp. 3-4.
55. *So Long, Insecurity*, op. cit., pg. 165.
56. *Ibid.*, pg. 163.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 325-326.
58. *Ibid.*, pg. 326, italics in original.
59. For a classic case study of one cult's immersion in cognitive dissonance, see Leon Festinger, *When Prophecy Fails*. New York: Harper Books, 1956.
60. *So Long, Insecurity*, op. cit., pg. 181.
61. David M. Tyler, *Self-Esteem: Are We Really Better Than We Think?* Saint Louis: Personal Freedom Outreach, 2004, pp. 8-9.
62. For the history of Mind Science, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *Bright Sided: How the Relentless Pursuit of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009.
63. *So Long, Insecurity*, op. cit., inside front dust cover.
64. *Ibid.*, pg. 57.



ANCESTRAL BONDAGE

(continued from page 1)

with something. To be true to the Scripture, we even have to properly divide this verse about dividing. Paul then adds to the need to rightly divide the Word of God a charge to "shun profane and idle babblings for they will increase to more ungodliness and their message will spread like cancer" (vv. 16-17). When Paul wrote to Timothy there were some who were wrongly dividing the Word. So that word, "divide," means literally to cut straight. It means to handle aright and rightly deal with Scripture. The bottom line in this verse is saying we must interpret and teach Scripture accurately and, as well, listen discerningly. We might say we need to properly divide the dividers.

Our spiritual life, health, and growth can be strongly tied to those who "divide" the Word and whether they do so properly. There even can

be implications in our physical well-being. Consider the plight of Jehovah's Witnesses who allow the Watchtower to turn Old Testament dietary laws into a prohibition against blood transfusions, or the devotees of faith healer Benny Hinn who accept his interpretation of Isaiah 53 that physical healing is guaranteed in Christ's atonement. Jeremiah warned the children of Israel in Jeremiah 29 that they were not to listen to just anyone because there were false prophets who roamed the land claiming to speak in God's name. Twenty-five hundred years removed, we fare no better. The Church at large has been infiltrated by both Charismatic and Evangelical teachers who stab, hack, or mutilate the Word and its true meaning. They serve up a tantalizing but tainted feast in the process. But if we allow ourselves to be fed by them, it is at our own peril. We must never forget: We are only as good as our sources and whom we allow to divide and serve the Word for us is extremely important.

At the very least we have to listen discerningly and compare what we hear to Scripture in its entirety. Numerous cross references keep us safe and sure. Observing context is another important matter. Not every server is safe.

Take for instance the so-called "Deliverance" ministries and "Deliverance" ministers. Nearly all of these ministries are based on the faulty premise that Christians can in some sense be personally indwelt, occupied, possessed, or invaded by demons. Some fudge and say, "Well, we are not exactly possessed, but demons somehow hang onto us or onto certain parts of our body." They may cloud the issue by saying Christians cannot be possessed in the spirit, but only in the soul or body. Regardless of the distinctions made, the premise is unbiblical. Obscure verses are cut and hacked and distorted to try to shape them to sanction this unbiblical concept. That false idea then becomes central, as Dave Breese writes:

“When a theological eccentricity moves to the very center of the attention of a group of Christians, that group, often without sensing it, becomes eccentric and potentially heretical.”²

Fordham Sociologist Michael W. Cuneo studied the subculture of exorcists and exorcisms in America and writes about them in *American Exorcism*.³ Cuneo criss-crossed the country observing these practices, which embody all sorts of bizarre behavior and ritual and which know no denominational boundaries. It is a world filled with confusion and sensationalism.

WHOSE TEMPLE IS IT ANYWAY?

Many Scriptures clearly state the safety of the believer in Christ and that his or her body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Who can believe that the strong powerful Spirit of God would share His temple with a demon? The thought is not only frightening, but outrageous!

There is great comfort in 1 John 5:18, which assures the struggling believer that “the wicked one does not touch him.” The word “touch” involves the idea of laying hold of and covers all the nuances of any kind of ownership or possession. After all, lest we forget, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). Satan is in the world, but the Holy Spirit is within us as believers. If we are Christians we are not our own, but Christ’s possession bought with a price.

Edward Gross reminds us:

“The lordship of Christ over his children implies his rule and reign. In Scripture believers are represented as entering into his kingdom at the time of their regeneration. At the same time they are represented as being delivered from the kingdom of Satan — Christ ‘hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the

kingdom of his dear Son’ (Col. 1:13; also Heb. 2:14, 15). And the Christian is declared to be ‘kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation’ (1 Peter 1:5). Paul assured the Philippians, ‘being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ’ (Phil. 1:6). True, born again believers are represented as not being ‘touched’ by the evil one because ‘he that is begotten of God keepeth himself’ (1 John 5:18; also John 10:28). Believers persevere and do not give themselves over to demonic possession, by God’s grace. The text is referring directly to demonic inhabitation and control. Believers are assured of victory because they are children of God, and the ‘seed [of God] remaineth in him’ (1 John 3:8-10). If Christians can be inhabited by Satan’s angels then they are actually the temple of God and of Satan at the same time. Paul asked, ‘What concord hath Christ with Belial? ... for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people’ (2 Cor. 6:15, 16).”⁴

The deliverance crowd brings more bondage than deliverance by making up false scenarios and throwing around insider lingo about giving ground and creating strongholds. Strongholds in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 are false teachings and false arguments that are to be refuted with the Word of God. No demons are mentioned in that text. A text ripped from its contextual setting is always to be suspected.

As well, deliverance teachers misuse Matthew 12 with clichés such as “binding the strong man” and instructions that *we* must bind Satan. However, Matthew 12 does not teach that. The setting is clear, Jesus says, “I cast out demons by the Spirit of God”

(v. 28). Jesus is the strong man; we are not. To claim we can do what only Jesus can do is sheer nonsense. As theologian R.C. Sproul notes, “The concentrated demonic attack during Jesus’ ministry was part of Satan’s attack on the kingdom. ... It was the work of Jesus to deliver a death-blow to Satan and his legions. Thus, Jesus declared holy war on the realm of unclean spirits.”⁵

Those into exorcistic thinking ignore the context of verses and miss the true meaning of words thereby creating false and misleading conclusions. These are areas where right cutting is urgent, lest we destroy lives and put people under illusions and delusions. In some instances the exorcists and deliverance teachers claim to converse with demons, which places them into the forbidden world of the occult. And if they are conversing with demons, one must remember that Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). The reasoning here on their part is fallacious.

PAGAN FORERUNNERS

One should not assume that exorcism rituals strictly belong to Christianity because “Incantations, magical charms, and formulae for this purpose appear in Egyptian and Babylonian literature. Jews of the Persian Empire used incantation bowls bearing formulae containing various names of the God of Israel, other deities, angels, King Solomon, and an illustrious rabbi (Joshua ben Perahya) deemed potent in insuring protection from evil spirits.”⁶ There are Jewish professional exorcists mentioned in Acts 19:13-17, who, as an added feature to their magic manipulations, tacked on the name of Jesus. It turned out very badly for them (v. 16). Jesus will not lend His name to ritual magic. Modern-day exorcism is just that.

The contrast between magic rituals and Jesus’ methods is stark. Sproul also tells us, “There were others at this time who were attempting to cast out demons, and we have records of their extensive rituals. Jesus, however,

threw out demons by the authority of his word alone."⁷

Some believe naively that these deliverance pursuits are at worst benign or maybe even helpful. Not so, as biblical counselor Dave Powlison underscores:

"But some features of the recent resurgence of interest in spiritual warfare are not so good. Some aspects, in fact, are downright dangerous to the church's view of God, sin, the devil, the Christian life, prayer, and ministry. Zeal without knowledge can tear down and confuse the body of Christ rather than strengthen people in grace."⁸

IT'S MY GRANDFATHERS' FAULT

One popular deliverance concept is drawn from a single Bible verse. It is cut mercilessly out of its context and twisted and deformed until it is nearly unrecognizable. That verse is Exodus 20:5, which states in the portion stressed by deliverance advocates, "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those that hate Me." Of course any generation that hates God is under judgment, but that is not what is emphasized by the deliverance supporters. From this verse they invent an idea of alleged "generational curses" or "generational bondage." Generational curses, they say, are past judgments of God brought into the now because somehow we are supposedly still suffering for the evils of our father and grandfathers. We are stuck with our ancestors' curses and hang-ups, it is alleged, even though we have enough of our own. The secular and psychological version of this is Freudian fatalism.

According to the generational-curse view, personal sins and repercussions of others are passed down to their offspring from generation to generation. It implies that salvation in Christ is not quite enough and that born-again believers need additional

deliverance. Some even say that in salvation we are forgiven personal sins, but not generational sins. Satan somehow still has legal claims over us and forgiveness comes in stages. However, verses including 2 Corinthians 5:17 (which says that we are new creatures in Christ) and Romans 8:1 (which tells us there is no condemnation to those in Christ) refute the concept of generation curses. These two verses alone show strongly that the salvation wrought by Jesus is the cure for *all* sin. Additionally, Romans 5 is clear that we now have peace with God for Jesus died for and covered *all* sin all the way back to the inception of sin by Adam. None of these verses suggests stages or increments of forgiveness.

So, deliverance ministers, failing to rightly divide the Word, have added spoiled food to the plate of believers who read and listen to these teachers. One thing is clear: the consequences and social effects of iniquity and sins may continue to be visited to the third and fourth generation *if those generations continue to hate God*. The verse does mention that those ongoing generations go on hating God. But note also in Exodus 20:5 the absence of *any mention of demons or Satan in the verse*. That idea is imposed upon the texts and smuggled into the conversation.

We are told that our struggles are because of the sins of our great-grandparents as far back as five or ten generations. This kind of speculation is subjective, extrabiblical, and pure Gnosticism. This dilemma of getting free from the bondage of our ancestors always requires an exorcism of some sort. Various exorcists do not agree on how it should be done. There is confusion and lack of agreement in the ranks. Because God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), the confusion has to come from the very confused exorcists. Some even resort to accouterments like holy water, ritual prayers, crucifixes, and incense — making it more aligned with Roman Catholicism or even Hollywood. The true meaning of

Exodus 20:5 dies the death of misinterpretation.

The cross-reference to Exodus 20:5 is Exodus 34:7. It is prefaced by verse 6, which reminds us that God is "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth." Verse 7 is a repeat of Exodus 20:5 with an emphasis that God *will by no means clear the guilty*. The words and context are clear:

"The words neither affirm that sinning fathers remain unpunished, nor that the sins of fathers are punished in the children and grandchildren without any fault of their own ... But when, on the other hand, the hating ceases, when the children forsake their fathers' evil ways, the warmth of the divine wrath is turned into the warmth of love."⁹

So it is obvious that the offspring cannot be condemned or judged for sins they never committed. There are a number of examples in Scripture — one for instance is Hezekiah, a good King, who was the son of wicked King Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:24-25; 29:1-2). Neither Jesus nor Paul ever mention ancestral bondage. In addition, this teaching has been wrongly drawn and twisted from the Old Testament law, which believers are not under.

ANOTHER IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION

Perhaps, as well, there is confusion and misunderstanding of the concept of national judgments. Often God dealt with the whole nation of Israel in judgment even though all did not deserve it. In the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity, many innocents, like Jeremiah, had to live through the physical and social catastrophes endured by the whole nation. God gave grace to the innocent, but in some sense they, though without guilt, had to suffer a national judgment because of the sins of others. Some innocent people in the southern kingdom of Israel were taken in exile to Babylon. They were

not suffering for personal or ancestral sins, but because of a necessary national judgment. That is a different matter altogether and should not be merged or confused with the direct perpetuation of sin and guilt by individuals as in Exodus 20.

Often when the word “curse” is used within generational-curse literature, it sounds like something out of a gypsy lexicon. However, the Hebrew words for curse are *qalal* and *arar* and do not carry the pagan meaning of casting a spell or any such similar incantation. In the Old Testament, the word “curse” often meant non-blessing or judgment, as opposed to blessing as in Genesis 3:17, “Cursed is the ground.” Deuteronomy 27 clearly elucidates non-blessing and even judgments for those who ignore God’s law and live in sin. (See also Jeremiah 11:3, 17:5.) God alone is the only One who can truly “curse” or bring judgment.

It was the pagan cultures around Israel who believed that they could bring certain curses on others through their own power, chanting, rituals, execration bowls, and other magical paraphernalia. The pagan idea is that one can manipulate nature and the future through occult practices. Voodoo is the modern remnant of such belief that man can manipulate objects around him for the harm of others. In Judges 17, curses were used and thrown around by religious apostates. We can easily see that teaching about curses is religious syncretism.¹⁰

In the New Testament, the word “curse” is often used of what we today would call profanity or speaking negatively or in a vulgar way to another. The strongest Greek word is *anathema*, which has to do with judgment for sin and unbelief. It is sometimes translated “accursed” or “disqualified” as in Galatians 1:8-9 and 2 Corinthians 13:5. Another Greek word, *katara*, has to do with the result of sin or what we would call ultimate doom. Yet another Greek word, *katanathema*, is clearly judgment which one day shall be no more as in Revelation 22:3. In Galatians, the word “curse” is

not used of ancestors in any sense, but of the judgment of the broken law, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse” (3:10). Again this carries the idea of non-blessing and judgment. The wonderful remedy is clearly given in verse 13, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’).”

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Once the illusion of a generational curse is entertained and then accepted, the show is on. Rebecca Brown instructs her readers to perform exorcisms by placing a ring of oil upon the upper arm of the afflicted and then squeezing the demons down and out of their fingertips.¹¹ Bob Larson shouts and screams the demons out. Others do it by commands or ritual prayers. Neil Anderson claims to counsel them out. Former Roman Catholic priest Francis MacNutt publishes and dispenses stock prayers people can use for do-it-yourself deliverance. He recommends these be done along with the Eucharist, and his ministry advertises a monthly two-hour “Generational Healing Service” described as a “celebration of Holy Communion, which includes special prayer for generational healing,” and further specifies “Generational healing is freeing us from the effects of our ancestors.”¹² In parts of South America, a Shaman would use an ayahuasca plant to relieve one of ancestral bondage. One holistic source has this to offer:

“Ayahuasca brings the distant polarities of our being to bear upon each other, so that the light irradiates the unconscious, revealing the vistas of our ancestral and genetic karma, for forgiveness to be received.”¹³

The whole deliverance industry is a fusion of Christian and non-Christian cultures.

All of this presupposes that God and Satan are almost equal foes struggling for supremacy and that human

intervention can hand the victory to one or the other.¹⁴ It in no way recognizes the sovereignty and omnipotence of God taught in Scripture.

THE POWER BROKERS

In most cases only the exorcist (or the deliverer) has the power and expertise to set one free, whether by counseling, cajoling, or a rough-and-tumble hands-on wrestling match. Joyce Meyer claims that she and her pastor, Rick Shelton, rode a large demonized woman piggyback while the woman vomited on every towel Meyer had in the house.¹⁵ Yelling and screaming can also be the norm — it is almost like the demons are hard of hearing. Everyone plays their part and everyone becomes part of the cosmic drama with the exorcist commanding and beating up demons. The better the actors are, the better the show.

This all plays very well in a culture that wants quick fixes. Experience also bears out that some who have claimed they were exorcised of the demon of nicotine, alcohol, or anger have been disappointed because they did not stay “delivered” for long.

By contrast, Jesus’ calm commands — He cast them out with a word — are worlds apart from the chaos engendered by exorcists. In the technical sense, Jesus never performed an exorcism as they are popularly described and practiced today.

If any believer were truly saddled with, controlled by, or even determined by his ancestors’ sins (and demons), then he would not be responsible for the sinful actions he commits. As such, redemption then does not really redeem us. Even though the Bible says we are redeemed from our parents’ past (1 Peter 1:18-19), the exorcists claim they have to yet redeem us from that past. We then can blame-shift, having scapegoats in our ancestors for our own immoral habits and besetting sins. When Adam was confronted with his sin, he claimed it was either his wife or God who made him do it (Genesis 3:12), but his rationalization was flawed and failed.

FLIP WILSON THEOLOGY

If we claim demons can rule believers by any means at all, current or past, we are merely trying to avoid responsibility. In the 1960s, comedian Flip Wilson popularized the cliché, "The devil made me do it." More recently, one might label this thinking, "The Jimmy Swaggart Syndrome." The late Assemblies of God pastor Larry Thomas wrote:

"I was very disappointed when I read the book, **The Cup Which My Father Hath Given Me** by my former colleague, Jimmy Swaggart, in which he said Satan can override a Christian's will. He never used to believe that. His numerous articles over the years demonstrate his former position. That understanding changed when he admitted his own personal sin, but refused to accept personal responsibility for it. He claimed the devil made him do it. He rejected the idea that sinful man (even one who claims to be born again) could give into temptation. He gave the impression that only by direct intervention by Satan could a person be overcome by temptation. That absolves man of any responsibility. I'm still amazed at how deceitful the human heart can be."¹⁶

ROTTEN ROOTS AND FILTHY FRUITS

Modern ancestral and generational-curse teachings also have roots in animism, superstition, and fatalism. Animism is defined and described as a belief system in which "Special attention is given to human spirits, which unite with other spirits, particularly those of their ancestors, and gods after death."¹⁷

The theory of inherited curses and demons in Christians became popular and found its way into the evangelical world in the 1970s through a Moody Bible College professor named Mark Bubeck and his book, *The Adversary*. Moody editors should be expressing

deep regret for their part in further unleashing this teaching into the Church. While some may argue that Bubeck is merely expressing his own position and many do not take him seriously, the problem is that many reading his book do take him very seriously.

Later, in the 1980s, a Moody colleague of Bubeck, C. Fred Dickason, aided and abetted Bubeck with his book, *Demon Possession and the Christian*.¹⁸ Dickason admits in parts of his book that his conclusions are experience-based and subjective, even saying some of the information was gleaned from demons. Pastor Gil Rugh comments on Dickason's preposterous beliefs:

"According to Dickason, these ancestral demons do not leave when a person becomes a believer. These ancestral demons are different. In other words, being raised with Christ to newness of life was not enough to take care of these ancestral demons. ... This whole issue of ancestral demons hindering believers is unbiblical. Why does a believer who has been raised to newness of life in Christ have to worry about the sins of his ancestors? If the salvation of Jesus Christ does not set us free from the power of Satan and demons then it was not a complete salvation. We do not need to go around worrying if some relative from the past happened to be involved in the occult. That is why this type of teaching is an attack on the sufficiency of Christ's work. If we still have demons hanging around after our conversion, what good was salvation?"¹⁹

Moody Press was the first to publish Dickason's book. Later it dropped the publication but it was picked up by Crossway Books.

Bubeck was dependent on the wild and woolly earlier speculations of a woman named Jessie Penn-Lewis,

who lived from 1861 to 1927 and who depended on her imagination and supposed insights into the unseen world.²⁰ Her unabridged book, *War on the Saints*, is an underground classic. Her practices more resembled spiritism than biblical truth. Nearly everyone who promotes deliverance teaching and generational-curse teaching depends on her and cites her writings as if she is authoritative and infallible.

TWISTED SCRIPTURE

As emphasized above, there is only one verse (Exodus 20:5) on which all this is based. Repeating a falsehood over and over can make it sound like truth. Hitler's dictum that a lie repeated often enough will begin to sound true applies here. Just who divides the Word and how he divides it really becomes the all-important issue.

The discerning Christian will care who divides the Word for them. He will employ caution and concern when it comes to reading and listening, and will look to those who generally follow good hermeneutics, as well as historical orthodoxy. He will want to put himself under teachers whom he can trust and who hold to the fundamentals of the faith. He will avoid those who ride hobby horses, get off onto tangents, and are sensational for sensationalism's sake. He will certainly avoid those who boast that they can verbally slap Satan and demons around because Jude 8-11 strongly condemns such conduct. Jude says that such teachers are dreamers who speak evil and speak of what they do not know. He says they are corrupt and totally running under their sinful nature and are like Balaam and Cain.

Christians should avoid these so-called "deliverance ministers" because they are clearly unbiblical, boastful, and spawning uncertainty as well as an unhealthy focus. We are to set our focus on things above — looking unto Jesus (Hebrews 12:2), not looking unto demons.

A TRUSTWORTHY EXPOSITOR

One trustworthy teacher is John J. Davis. Davis is a linguistics expert as well as an expert in history, geography, and archaeology. He is a conservative Christian teacher who loves and defends the Word of God. He has written 18 books and led archaeological expeditions to Israel to establish and defend the biblical text. He has spent his life demonstrating his trustworthiness and his desire to rightly divide the Word of truth. We can trust what he says concerning the Exodus 20:5 passage because it not only makes so much sense, but also because it is biblical. Davis explains:

“The last part of verse 5 has been problematic for interpreters. Some see in this the manifestation of a vengeful spirit. It has long been recognized that under the natural course of events, iniquities of the fathers are visited upon the children. Such is the case with various diseases or among those who lack restraint and live in extravagance thus leaving the children beggars. We all inherit countless disadvantages because of the sin of our first parents. The distinction that needs to be made here is between the natural results of a sinful course of action and direct punishment inflicted because of it. God does not penalize one individual for the wrongdoing of another (cf. Ezek. 18:2-24). ... This verse does not teach that sinning fathers are not punished, nor does it state that the sins of the father are punished in the children and grandchildren without any fault of their own. ... The positive aspect of God’s love and mercy is portrayed in verse 6. He shows mercy unto thousands of those who love Him and keep His commandments.”²¹

WHY ARE WE SO MUCH ALIKE?

One might question why we so often sin just like our parents and

grandparents, assuming that likeness means sameness or that somehow their sins are mysteriously transmitted to us. Doesn’t the pattern of our sin, if like our parents, prove an ancestral curse? We have all heard it or maybe even said it — “Like father, like son!” or “You are just like your father!” or “You are just like your mother!” And in many ways we might be.

To say we are inclined to sin because of some determinative ancestral influence is an *interpretation* of our behavior. A more biblical explanation would be the common sin nature that we all have, as Romans 6 and 7 describe. Romans 6 does not urge an exorcism, but rather better choices in the future, yielding ourselves to Christ in obedience (Romans 6:12-16). Progressive sanctification is just that — progressive. Though sin may be a lifelong struggle, the struggle is one of the ways in which God develops our character.

The answer to why we often sin like those before us is easily answered in our common sin nature, sin habit, and a couple of other reasons. First, there are not that many ways to sin. Sins of the flesh are not unlimited like the stars in heaven. Transgressions have a limited number of combinations and manifestations. And second, some modeling and influence by parents is easily learned, adopted, and adapted by sinful offspring. We are great students and modelers, especially when it comes to sin. For instance, though not a pattern set in stone, alcoholic families can pass along alcoholic patterns and practices. Even by virtue of cultural and ethnic patterns, some families see every social event as an excuse to indulge. Likewise, patterns of profanity are easily picked up and repeated. However, in the end, though parents influence us, they do not determine us as is so attested by countless redeemed lives. If they really determined us, no one could change. Grace and salvation would set us free from nothing.

First Peter 1:18-19 assures us that salvation redeems us from the futility

of our ancestry. We are set free from the vain habit patterns of our parents. Peter assures us that their foibles, traditions, and conduct do not control us or determine us. If we were still hounded and harassed by ancestors’ sins then there is no redemption in Christ for the believer until he or she finds the right exorcist. We would need a man to redeem us.

Pastor John Piper, who is very friendly to some aspects of Charismatic thought, is certainly not sympathetic to the mythology of ancestral bondage. In his article, “Jesus Came to Die To Free Us from the Futility of Our Ancestry,” Piper writes:

“You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:18-19) Secular people in the West, and more primitive people in animistic tribes, have this in common: They believe in the power of ancestral bondage. They call it by different names. Animistic people may speak in terms of ancestral spirits and the transmission of curses. Secular people may speak of genetic influence or the wounding of abusive codependent, emotionally distant parents. In both cases there is a sense of fatalism that we are bound to live with the curse or the wounds from our ancestry. The future seems futile and void of happiness. When the Bible says, ‘You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers,’ it is referring to an empty, meaningless, unprofitable way of living that ends in destruction. It says that these ‘futile ways’ are connected with our ancestors. It doesn’t say how. The crucial thing is to notice how we are freed from the bondage of this futility. The power of the liberator defines the extent of the liberation. Silver and gold are powerless to help.

No hex can hold against you, if your sins are all forgiven, and you are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and you are ransomed and loved by the Creator of the universe. Nor is any wound that was inflicted by a parent beyond the healing of Jesus. The healing ransom is called 'the precious blood of Christ.' The word 'precious' conveys infinite value. Therefore the ransom is infinitely liberating. No bondage can stand against it. Therefore, let us turn from silver and gold and embrace the gift of God. ... When Jesus redeemed those who have come to faith in him he broke all those chains of bondage. ... Jesus broke the bonds of everything natural and supernatural."²²

Greek linguist Kenneth Wuest concurs:

"This manner of life they had received by tradition from their fathers. The phrase 'received by tradition from your fathers' is the translation of one Greek word which means literally 'given from father.' That is, this futile manner of life was passed down to the son from the father through the channels of heredity, teaching, example, and environment. The child is born in sin, that is, comes into being with a totally depraved nature, and if the parents are unsaved, comes into a home where evil customs and practices are observed. What the child inherits, Peter calls a futile manner of life. From this futile manner of life the recipients of this letter were delivered."²³

DISTORTION DEBUNKED

Pastor David Kirkwood debunks a number of deliverance clichés, including ancestral bondage, and gives helpful direction:

"God Himself has stated that punishing someone for his parents' sins would be morally

wrong: 'Yet you say, "Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity?" When the son has practiced justice and righteousness, and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live. The person who sins will die. *The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity;* the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself' (Ezek. 18:19-20; italics mine). Moreover, under the Law of Moses, God commanded that neither father or son should bear the punishment for the sins of the other: Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin (Deut. 24:16). ... Thus, the whole idea of 'generational curses' is a superstition."²⁴

Focusing on the past is unhealthy as we should be "forgetting those things which are behind" (Philippians 3:13). Our focus should be God's will in the present as we move toward the future. As Gil Rugh reminds us:

"We should praise God for a salvation that is full and complete. Salvation is more than just being saved from hell. It extends to all areas of our Christian life and that includes demons. Yes, we still struggle with sin, (and the devil wages war with us every moment of our lives) but Christ's death and resurrection have provided the victory over sin and Satan. As believers we have everything we need to live the Christian life. We go to the Word of God and stand firm. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit who empowers us. There are no forces past or present that can keep us as children of God from being everything God intended

for us in Christ. It does not matter what our family background was. It does not matter what kind of occult background our ancestors may have had."²⁵

WHOM DO YOU TRUST?

It all goes back to who divides the Word and if they do so properly. When someone offers to lead us across a bridge of interpretation, we must be sure we are on the right bridge. Our protection is listening to dependable, historically orthodox teachers who recognize context and the balance of comparing Scripture with Scripture. We should also be praying for God to give us discernment. The commentaries we consult should be safe and sound. They should not smuggle in pagan worldviews and inject things into the text that are not there. Syncretism ends up being the real curse.

It is our responsibility to know where we dine and what we are "eating" and who is doing the serving. Sometimes apologetic ministries are maligned for trying to act as some kind of "Board of Health" for the religious "kitchens" out there. Somebody has to do it. Cutting the Word properly is a biblical mandate and essential to our spiritual health (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Reformer Martin Luther had it right in his hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God":

"And tho' this world, with devils filled, Should threaten to undo us, We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph thro' us. The prince of darkness grim, We tremble not for him— His rage we can endure, For lo, his doom is sure: One little word shall fell him."²⁶

Endnotes:

1. M. Kurt Goedelman, "Harmeneutics," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2006, pg. 2.
2. Dave Breese, *Know the Marks of Cults*. Wheaton, Ill.: Scripture Press, 1975, pg. 88.
3. Michael W. Cuneo, *American Exorcism*. New York: Doubleday, 2001.

4. Edward N. Gross, *Miracles, Demons, and Spiritual Warfare*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990, pg. 166, brackets and ellipsis in original.
5. R.C. Sproul, *Before the Face of God, Book 2*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993, pp. 112, 113.
6. Everett F. Harrison, Editor, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1960, "Exorcism," pg. 206.
7. *Before the Face of God, Book 2*, op. cit., pg. 113.
8. Dave Powlison, *Power Encounters*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1995, pg. 38.
9. C.F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985, Vol. 1, pp. 117-118.
10. "Religious syncretism involves the blending together of different religious attitudes and ideas into one system," according to John J. Davis in *Conquest and Crisis*, (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 2008, pg. 285).
11. Rebecca Brown, *Becoming a Vessel of Honor In The Master's Service*. Woodburn, Ore.: Fortress Books, Inc., 1990, pg. 102.
12. Francis MacNutt (Christian Healing Ministries) webpage, "Prayer Ministry Schedule." Document available at: www.christianhealingmin.org/prayer/.
13. "Spirit Vine - Transpersonal States of Consciousness: Illusion or Spirit?" Document available at: www.ayahuasca.com/spirit/mythos/spirit-vine/.
14. *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, op. cit., "Ethical dualism," pg. 174.
15. For further critique of Joyce Meyer and her strange demonology, see G. Richard Fisher and M. Kurt Goedelman, "Mired in Confusion and Mysticism - Demonology and Spiritual Warfare According to Joyce Meyer," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2002, pp. 4-15.
16. Larry Thomas, *Spiritual Warfare: Separating Fact from Fiction*. Excelsior Springs, Mo.: Double Crown Publishing, 1994, pg. 57.
17. Stanley Burgess, Editor, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002, pg. 315.
18. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "C. Fred Dickason and the Demonization of Christians," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 1988, pp. 2, 9-10.
19. Gil Rugh, *Demonization of the Believer*. Omaha, Neb.: Sound Words, 1997, pg. 39, 40.
20. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "Mark Bubeck and Spiritual Warfare - The Cloning of Jessie Penn-Lewis," *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 1996, pp. 1, 14-18; and G. Richard Fisher, "Pressing Truth to the Extreme - The Errors of Jessie Penn-Lewis," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2000, pp. 1, 11-20.
21. John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*. Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 2006, pp. 212-213.
22. John Piper, "Jesus Came to Die To Free Us from the Futility of Our Ancestry," much of quotation rendered in italics in original. Document available at: <http://spiritfilledpuritan.com/2009/03/26/reason-28-jesus-came-to-die-to-free-us>.
23. Kenneth Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973, Vol. 2, 1 Peter, pg. 42.
24. David Kirkwood, *Modern Myths About Satan and Spiritual Warfare*. Pittsburgh: Ethnos Press, 1994, pp. 129, 130.
25. *Demonization of the Believer*, op. cit., pg. 51.
26. Martin Luther, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," *The Celebration Hymnal*. No city: Word Music/Integrity Music, 1997, hymn 151, stanza 3.

EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

are happy to allow others the right to believe what they will, but will not compromise on moral issues deemed nonnegotiable. The three issues addressed in the *Declaration* are the ones the authors see as most important at this moment.

One of the great fears of the signatories of *The Manhattan Declaration* is that the direction of the country, its lawmakers and courts, is systematically removing our freedoms, and this is evident in the three evils that they are addressing. For example, ultimately, if things continue down this pathway, we will have no choice concerning abortion and homosexuality. We will no longer have the right or freedom to object to these issues and can be prosecuted for our views. If, let's say, our churches will not hire a homosexual, the leadership could be jailed for non-compliance with the law. In this sense we are losing our rights.

Many readers of the *Declaration*, while concerned about these issues, are disturbed by statements within the document that link Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy with evangelicalism. For example, in the third paragraph readers are reminded that Papal edicts in the 16th and 17th centuries (when the Reformation battles were at their height) decried the practice of slavery even

as Evangelicals such as John Wesley and William Wilberforce did in the 18th and 19th centuries. This is apparently an attempt to demonstrate that Catholics and Evangelicals have linked arms before in the battle against social evils, but it should be carefully noted that, while both recognized and fought the sin of slavery, Evangelicals in neither period officially joined Catholics in resisting slavery, nor did Evangelicals pretend that Rome taught the same Gospel they did.

The first line under the subheading of *Declaration* makes clear the authors' ecumenical position: "We, as Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical Christians, have gathered." While recognizing distinctions within the three major communities, each acknowledges the others as "Christians." The last paragraph in this section begins, "We are Christians who have joined together across historic lines of ecclesial differences..." Later the *Declaration* says, "We pledge to each other, and to our fellow believers."

There is little question that this *Declaration* is being published by those who see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ despite the fact that the signatories vary widely on their understanding of the Gospel. It is assumed, as the next-to-last paragraph on the document attests, that Evangelicals are united with the Orthodox and Catholics on the Gospel: "Going back to the earliest days of the church, Christians have refused to compro-

mise on the proclamation of the gospel." This raises the question of "Which gospel?" Is it the Gospel of faith alone or the gospel of Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, which makes the sacraments and other works necessary for salvation? It would be difficult to skirt the appearance that Evangelicals signing this manifesto are in agreement with the other two traditions in their understanding of salvation.

It is also instructive to note the "Christians" actually quoted in the document: Pope Paul II, the epistle written to Diognetus (a second century apologist), and Martin Luther King Jr. This is an interesting trio at best. Pope Paul II represents the Roman Catholic Church in its purest form. That is, while certain Catholics may actually be saved, it would be because they have rejected Rome's heretical understanding of the Gospel and are trusting in Christ alone; the Pope can make no such claim. As the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, he would believe and represent everything Rome pronounces, including its sacramental understanding of salvation. Therefore, by biblical definition, the Pope cannot be a Christian. Martin Luther King Jr., while rightly given credit for his stand on civil rights, was not an Evangelical by any definition. Yet these are the kinds of "Christians" that we are asked to join in our stand against the moral crises of our day.

While some have resisted signing the *Declaration*, Al Mohler, with unquestioned credentials as a conservative Evangelical, signed it. Although not all would be in agreement with his Reformed theology, all would agree that Mohler is a deep thinker with a solid stand on the sufficiency of the Word of God. He is not one to sign such statements because he is not impressed with their effectiveness and he is concerned with how they might be construed by others. But he signed this one because "I believe we are facing an inevitable and culture-determining decision on the three issues centrally identified in this statement. I also believe that we will experience a significant loss of Christian churches, denominations, and institutions in this process" (www.albertmohler.com/2009/11/23/why-i-signed-the-manhattan-declaration/). Mohler is concerned that our religious liberties are at stake and therefore courageous steps, such as this one, must be taken to avoid losing these liberties altogether.

His concerns are real and he is not alone in pondering what appropriate actions should be taken. Mohler thinks a conservative believer can sign *The Manhattan Declaration* without compromise. He writes:

"I signed *The Manhattan Declaration* because it is a limited statement of Christian conviction on these three crucial issues, and not a wide-ranging theological document that subverts confessional integrity. I cannot and do not sign documents such as *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* that attempt to establish common ground on vast theological terrain. I could not sign a statement that purports, for

example, to bridge the divide between Roman Catholics and evangelicals on the doctrine of justification. ... My beliefs concerning the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches have not changed. The Roman Catholic Church teaches doctrines that I find both unbiblical and abhorrent — and these doctrines define nothing less than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But *The Manhattan Declaration* does not attempt to establish common ground on these doctrines. We remain who we are, and we concede no doctrinal ground" (ibid.).

But others are not so sure that no doctrinal ground is being conceded. R.C. Sproul writes:

"The drafters of the document ... used deliberate language that is on par with the ecumenical language of the Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) movement that began in the 1990s. The Manhattan Declaration states, 'Christians are heirs of a 2,000-year tradition of proclaiming God's Word,' and it identifies 'Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelicals' as 'Christians.' The document calls Christians to unite in 'the Gospel,' 'the Gospel of costly grace,' and 'the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in its fullness.' Moreover, the document says, 'it is our duty to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in its fullness, both in season and out of season'" (www.ligonier.org/blog/the-manhattan-declaration/).

While Sproul claims he would march with the Pope to resist the slaughter of innocents in the womb, he would "never ground that cobelligerency on the assumption that we share a common faith and a unified understanding of the gospel" (ibid.). "Let me be unambiguous," Sproul writes, "Without a clear understanding of *sola fide* and the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, you do not have the gospel or gospel unity (1 Cor. 1:17; 2 Cor. 5:21)" (ibid.).

John MacArthur takes a similar stance stating that the *Declaration* "assumes from the start that all signatories are fellow Christians whose only differences have to do with the fact that they represent distinct 'communities'" (www.gty.org/Resources/Articles/A390). Further, "the implicit assumption ... is that Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant Evangelicals and others all share a common faith in and a common commitment to the gospel's essential claims" (ibid.). Yet, as MacArthur recognizes, a definition for the Gospel is never found in the document, and in fact would have been impossible "because of the contradictory views held by the broad range of signatories regarding what the gospel teaches and what it means to be a Christian" (ibid.). And MacArthur rightly picks up on another issue of vital importance — the resolution to the moral problems that face our society (problems which we all recognize) is not found in manifestos and legislation, but in the Gospel.

He writes, “the document falls far short of identifying the one true and ultimate remedy for all of humanity’s moral ills: the gospel” (ibid.).

Sproul and MacArthur believe the weakness of the manifesto is twofold: it attempts to fix spiritual problems with human instruments, while at the same time distorting God’s remedy (the Gospel) by attempting to broaden its meaning so that all branches of “Christianity” can lay claim to it.

It must first of all be recognized that Satan is more than willing to give ground on moral and secondary matters if by doing so he can compromise or cripple the Gospel message or its proclamation. *The Manhattan Declaration* does this in a number of ways:

It confuses the Gospel. Although no clear definition for the Gospel is found within the document, we are repeatedly assured that the signatories all believe and preach the same message. This is reinforced by the clear implication throughout that Evangelical Christians, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox are all “Christians” and thus members of Christ’s body. This is a subtle but serious dilution of the understanding of the Christian faith.

It confuses the Christian mandate. While we all lament the loss of certain freedoms and the moral decay that is evident in our culture, we should remind ourselves of our calling. What our Savior commissioned us to do is clearly stated in Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8. We are called to make disciples of all nations, teaching them what the Lord has taught us, and baptizing them in the name of the Triune God. If we draw our marching orders from the New Testament Scriptures we find:

- The Church is not called to change society by legislative action, lobbyist activity, or moral declarations. One searches in vain for a New Testament example or instruction for the Church to involve itself in creating culture or attempting to conform it to Christianized standards. While some may deem this an argument from silence, it should be recognized that the New Testament epistles were given to God’s people to teach them how to live for the glory of God in a fallen world during the Church age. What God considered important and necessary for us to know would surely be found within its pages. This is not to ignore the rest of the Bible for “all Scripture is profitable,” but God’s people are no longer under Israel’s theocracy. New paradigms, directions, and teachings have been given and should be taken to heart.

- Rather than attempting to force fallen men and societies to outwardly live up to biblical standards, Scripture says it is the Gospel that is the power of God to change lives (Romans 1:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Governments have an important role to play in God’s plan for this world, including maintaining law and order and resistance to evil people who would harm others

(Romans 13:1-7). But it is the true Church of Christ which is the pillar and support of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). Only the people of God can offer the good news that sins can be forgiven and lives transformed through Jesus Christ.

The Church, as the Church, is not called to change or create culture except through the Gospel. Those who disagree with this assessment either do so on the basis of New Testament silence or a distortion of the Old Covenant and Israel’s theocratic society in their attempt to superimpose it onto the Church. It is when the New Testament is thus ignored that God’s people find themselves attempting to solve the world’s problems through the world’s means. And in the process we find ourselves distracted from our true calling as mandated by Christ Himself.

- On occasion, throughout history, our Lord has graciously allowed various cultures to be permeated by the Gospel message because of the faithful teaching and living of God’s people. America, at least to a degree, has been one of those blessed cultures, for which we are most grateful. It is with great sadness that we witness the moral deterioration of our country resulting from our society as a whole rejecting Christ and His ways (Romans 1:18).

The role the Church has played in this deterioration can be directly traced to the liberal theology and the social gospel of the 18th century and its subsequent offspring. Much like today, the Church had lost confidence in the truth and sufficiency of the Scriptures to change men’s lives and began to replace the Great Commission with solving society’s temporal problems. As the Church became more distracted with feeding the hungry, temperance movements, political action, and the like (all good things in themselves), she in turn systematically abandoned the proclamation of the Gospel and biblical truth. Many societal changes resulted, most of them beneficial, but the foundation was slowly eroding.

The Church was losing its voice in society because it was saying the same thing that society said instead of proclaiming the Word of God. When secular society eventually usurped the Church by taking the lead in societal change, the Church became redundant and largely lost its voice for decades. We now come face to face with the consequences of our past actions and choices and are beginning to panic. Solutions being offered, such as *The Manhattan Declaration*, are a page right out of the old social gospel’s play book.

Gone, apparently, are the days when the Church called sinners to repentance and held forth the Gospel of righteousness. Now we unite around political and moral pronouncements in the hope that if we get enough signatures, Congress and the courts will listen to our

concerns. Even on a pragmatic level this is a pipedream. We already have a mechanism for changing laws. It is called the vote. Politicians know that if “Christians” were serious about moral decay and religious freedoms they would elect people to office who reflect their views. A non-binding declaration such as this one will not influence the government in the least. What would influence them would be to actually vote our moral convictions instead of our wallet.

- In the meantime, as “Christians” gear up in an attempt to put political pressure on our government, we are again being sidetracked from our true calling as mandated by our Lord. As followers of Christ we are called to be salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13-16), obey our government, pray for our leaders, be model citizens (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17), and, most importantly, proclaim the praises of Christ (1 Peter 2:9) so that mankind will see its true need and turn to Him.

Nothing in Scripture prohibits individual believers from being involved in politics and government and making every use of their rights as citizens to bring about the best government possible in order that we might live a quiet and tranquil life (1 Timothy 2:2). But ultimately our Lord is far more concerned with the radical transformation of lives within society than He is in society itself. The Church is not a political lobbying organization, but the divinely anointed body sent forth by God to declare that mankind is alienated from God, lost in sin, and in need of reconciliation. Only Christ can solve these problems that the Church is uniquely equipped to address.

It would appear that we in America are witnessing the overwhelming price of rebellion as outlined in Romans 1:18-32. We watch as God steadily gives our country over to the very sins it has long demanded and with this comes all the consequences identified in that text. As some of these consequences become evident and unbearable to Christians, such as loss of religious freedoms, abortion, and same-sex marriages, we become terrified. We then put pressure on Congress, form organizations such as the Moral Majority, or write declarations. These measures historically accomplish limited, if any, societal good and what is accomplished is temporary at best because they fail to address the true problem — the heart of man.

Man’s fundamental problem is not immoral actions, such as *The Manhattan Declaration* identifies, but his fallen nature resulting from the fact that he is spiritually dead in sin. It is only the Lord’s common grace that keeps each individual and society from sinking to the depths of the depravity that already lives within us. When the Lord grows tired of our rejection of Him and our constant resistance to His will, He takes His restraining hand off us and allows us to live out the fullness of our depravity.

When this happens to a society, it is a fearsome thing to behold for the masses will unashamedly murder children, deny basic human rights, and approve homosexual lifestyles, among other things. The root of the matter is not bad laws, hence it cannot be solved politically; it is not simply bad behavior, hence it cannot be solved through moral declarations; it is not intellectual, hence it cannot be solved philosophically. The root problem is spiritual and can only be dealt with through the Gospel.

This of course brings us back to our original concern with *The Manhattan Declaration* — it has a faulty gospel. The *Declaration* is a political, moral, intellectual document attempting to do battle with a spiritual problem. Not only is the document ill-equipped to do battle with what really ails our world, the one thing it does do is further muddy the waters on the definition of the Gospel. If there is one true Gospel, as Paul affirms (Galatians 1:6-9), and if those of the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Evangelical communities are all proclaiming it, then all three communities must be in agreement. But that is simply not true. At the Council of Trent, Rome pronounced anathemas upon any who believed in *sola fide*, the very heart of the Reformation. Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches adhere to a sacramental system that combines works with faith, leaving the eternal destiny of souls in the hands of their respective churches. Yet the Scriptures declare that the means of salvation is a gift directly from God, based solely on His grace and received solely by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).

These kinds of documents do little to change culture but do much to change the nature of the Gospel in the minds of believers and non-believers alike. A *Manhattan Declaration* that was a purely political document produced by morally outraged individuals, whether Christian or not, would not be objectionable to sign, although its effectiveness probably would be limited. But when the Gospel itself is compromised in the process, the price for anticipated gain is far too high.

Instead of drawing moral/political lines in the sand, courageously and even defiantly declaring that we will retreat no further, maybe this would be an excellent opportunity to evaluate whether we have already retreated concerning the Gospel. That ground may have been given because of ecumenical expediency, pluralistic pressures, biblical illiteracy, or faith in statements such as *The Manhattan Declaration* which minimize the uniqueness and narrowness of the Gospel message in an attempt to change society. Rather than giving ground, maybe this would be a good time to take a fresh look at the Gospel. Maybe we should define it more carefully, guard it more tenaciously, proclaim it more boldly, and believe in its power more profoundly. For, after all, Paul tells us it is the power of God unto salvation. And, after all, it is what Christ has commissioned us to do.

—GEG

OneNewsNow.com reported that, "One vendor who provided live animals for the pageant's manger scene says the church owes her nearly \$57,000. Another vendor who provided costumes says she's owed more than \$10,000." A dry cleaning firm was holding the pageant's costumes in lieu of payment. The church administrators allege "that there are as many as 185 creditors waiting in line to be paid," *Christianity Today* reported. In a released statement, the church "apologized for the delinquency of the accounts."

In an effort to curtail sinking revenue and get caught up on past-due bills, the church "is laying off 50 workers, selling surplus property and may pull its 'Hour of Power' television show in up to eight markets," the *Los Angeles Times* reported. A 170-acre church-owned retreat in Orange County, known as Rancho Capistrano, has been put up for sale. The church also canceled its "Glory of Easter" pageant. That event, like the "Glory of Christmas" pageant, sells tens of thousands of tickets each year.

The 7,000-member church was founded in 1955 by the Rev. Robert H. Schuller. His son, Robert A. Schuller, inherited leadership from his father in 2006. But within two years, a difference of ministry philosophy, said to be a "lack of shared vision," led to the elder Schuller ousting his son from the role as the sole preacher on the *Hour of Power* broadcast. The younger Schuller resigned completely with plans to begin his own ministry. Seven months after his son resigned, Schuller turned the church reins over to his daughter, Sheila Schuller Coleman.

—MKG

PARSLEY BLAMES THE DEVIL

In spite of diminishing revenue, Rod Parsley and his World Harvest Church have no plans to eliminate any of its ministries — including its *Breakthrough* television broadcasts and World Harvest Bible College — during this year. Late last year, a post on the church's Website alleged that its ministries were "in jeopardy." The church, which claims about 12,000 members, is based near Columbus, Ohio.

Parsley appealed for donors to step forward and "take back what the devil stole," saying it is a "demonically inspired financial attack" that is threatening his ministry. According to *The Columbus Dispatch*, the church "issued a statement saying the recession caused a decline in member giving in 2009, which has led to a fourth-quarter deficit of \$3 million despite a 30 percent reduction in the budget."

The newspaper also reported that in 2009 the church "settled for \$3.1 million with a family whose son was spanked at its day-care center in 2006, to the point his buttocks and legs were covered with welts and abrasions." The church indicated that the settlement made their financial "circumstances more serious." The parents of the boy said, "Parsley refused to meet personally with them and that the church did not apologize or take accountability for the beating." The jury in the case originally awarded the couple \$6 million, but the judge reduced that amount because of a state law which limits the amount that can be awarded in civil cases. The church appealed the judge's award, but that appeal was rejected.

The part-time substitute teacher who spanked the 2-year-old child was ordered to pay \$82,365 of the settlement.

In the late 1970s, Parsley, along with his father and uncle, founded and incorporated Sunrise Chapel, which eventually grew into World Harvest Church. Parsley is a key player in the prosperity gospel movement and is well known for his boisterous messages. He is a frequent guest on the Trinity Broadcasting Network and a regular during the network's fund-raising efforts.

—MKG

OLD PTL HOTEL FACES DEMOLITION

A celebrated landmark of televangelist Jim Bakker and his failed Praise The Lord ministries is being threatened with demolition by officials from York County, S.C. The county has given until the end of June as a deadline for the 21-story Heritage Grand Hotel to be made safe or the structure will be demolished. The hotel was part of the erstwhile theme park built by Bakker and his supporters in the late 1970s and 1980s, and which eventually fell into ruin following the disclosure of Bakker's financial improprieties and sexual scandal.

MorningStar Ministries, headed by self-proclaimed apostle and prophet Rick Joyner, purchased the property along with 52 acres of land nearby in 2005. Since that time the ministry has been working to renovate the 345 rooms, suites, and offices of the dilapidated structure. The ministry has mapped out a \$40 million plan to refurbish the structure into a retirement center, calling it a "Refirement Center," where retiring people could come to be "re-fired" back into ministry service. MorningStar has been thwarted by its inability to find those who will commit to buy into the retirement project. The ministry's inability to market the proposed facility is the opposite of Bakker's problem. He got in trouble for repeatedly overselling the hotel accommodations.

MorningStar Fellowship Church told the county if they demolished the building, it would "cause irreparable and significant financial hardship." County officials noted that MorningStar defaulted on a previous deadline to bring the facility up to code. A depressed national economy is said to be a critical factor in the project's slow response.

The ministry's church, schools, and conference center operate from the old hotel.

—MKG

CHARISMATIC RENEWAL TURNS 50

The movement once called "the new Pentecost" marked its 50th anniversary in April. The birth of the modern Charismatic Renewal is attributed to the late Episcopal priest Dennis Bennett. On April 3, 1960, Bennett shared publicly with members of his Van Nuys, Calif., congregation that while he was attending a prayer meeting a few months earlier he had experienced his own "personal Pentecost," being baptized in the Spirit and speaking in tongues. While some at St. Mark's church were receptive to Bennett's confession, others were not.

Bennett's announcement led to his immediate and voluntary resignation from the pastorate at St. Mark's. That same year he became the vicar of the failing St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Seattle, where he stayed for

more than two decades. Within a year of Bennett's arrival, the Seattle church attendance had quadrupled from 75 to 300. Under his leadership, the church grew from a "little mission church" to become "a strong parish," and was later said to be "one of the strongest churches in the Northwest."

By the 1970s, the movement which flowed from the experiences of Bennett had found its way into nearly every major Christian persuasion, including Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Lutheran. However, its most profound impact was realized in Catholicism. According to one Charismatic reference work, "More than any other development, the spread of [the Charismatic Renewal] to the Roman Catholic Church decisively affected the shape of the wider movement." From this influence, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal was born in February 1967. And in return, the Catholic patterns had their own "major impact" on the Charismatic Renewal, being celebrated in other denominations.

This spring, several celebrations and events took place to commemorate Bennett's legacy and the golden anniversary of the movement.

Following the death of his first wife, Elberta, in 1963, Bennett married Rita Marie Reed in 1966. Together the couple were the leading spokespersons for the Charismatic Renewal. Bennett died in 1991. Following his death, Rita continued to speak at retreats, seminars, and churches, as well as write on inner healing and emotional freedom.

—MKG

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

- I. THE BIBLE AS THE DIVINELY INSPIRED, INERRANT WORD OF GOD: IT IS IN ITS ENTIRETY THE SOLE AUTHORITY FOR ALL MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PRACTICE.
- II. THE ONE TRUE GOD. IN THE ONE TRUE GOD THERE EXIST THREE PERSONS, BEING: THE FATHER, THE SON JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- III. JESUS CHRIST: HIS DEITY, HUMANITY, VIRGIN BIRTH, SINLESSNESS, DEATH AND BODILY RESURRECTION; WHO WILL PERSONALLY AND VISIBLY RETURN AGAIN TO EARTH.
- IV. THE PERSONALITY AND DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- V. THE EXISTENCE AND PERSONALITY OF SATAN, HIS TOTAL OPPOSITION TO GOD, AND HIS POWER OVER THE UNREGENERATE.
- VI. THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF ALL MEN WHICH MAKES THEM HOPELESSLY LOST WITHOUT THE NEW BIRTH OBTAINABLE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
- VII. THE FINAL ESTATE OF MAN: FOR THE SAVED, EVERLASTING LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND FOR THE UNSAVED, EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF.
- VIII. THE GOSPEL, BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED BEING SUMMED IN THE DEATH, BURIAL, AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- IX. THE CHURCH BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNITED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONSISTING OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR. A LOCAL CHURCH IS AN ORGANIZED ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS UNITED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST.
- X. THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST BEING TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL MEN, BAPTIZING AND DISCIPLING THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED.



Books in Review

5-MINUTE APOLOGETICS FOR TODAY

by Ron Rhodes

Harvest House Publishers, 379 pages, \$14.99

Apologist Ron Rhodes is always coming up with new ways in which to help believers contend for the faith. His new book, *5-Minute Apologetics for Today*, is the latest example of his creativity. The publication covers a lot of ground and will educate readers and help them respond to followers of cults, religions, and the “tough domestic and global issues” that believers face every day.

The volume is introduced as a daily 5-minute exercise that can be used over the course of a year. While it can be used that way, it can also be a steady read, or as a resource for Bible lessons, lectures, or sermon preparation. Many entries can be read by most people in less than the anticipated five minutes, but the reader can grow and expand that effort by searching and reading the many Scripture references which Rhodes cites. Doing so will amplify the proposed five minutes, but it will be time well-spent in drawing from the Word, meditating on it, and memorizing its precepts. Also, the entries are labeled “Day 1,” “Day 2,” and so forth — rather than with calendar dates — so the reader can take the book and start at the beginning at any time.

It covers a wide spectrum of subject matter: systematic theology, heretical and aberrational teaching, prophecy, creationism, cults (such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and Christian Scientists), and a lot more. This book is packed with helpful information which will develop one’s discernment skills in many areas.

For example, early in the book under the heading “Reasonable Faith,” Rhodes maps out the five “philosophical arguments for the existence of God.” These are: the “cosmological argument,” the “theological argument,” the “moral argument,” the “anthropological argument,” and the “ontological argument.” Further into the book, Rhodes uses an illustration of tightening circles (like a bulls-eye target) to establish Jesus as the Messiah. These include: the Messiah’s humanity, the Messiah’s

Jewishness, the Messiah’s tribal identity, the Messiah’s family, the Messiah’s birthplace, the Messiah’s life and death, and the Messiah’s chronology.

Elsewhere, under the entry “Marginalizing God’s Word,” he takes on churches that de-emphasize and supplement Scripture with their attempts to draw crowds with entertainment methods. The likes of Benny Hinn and Rodney Howard-Browne are also biblically scrutinized with the brief studies, “Slain in the Spirit” and “Holy Laughter.” Mysticism and contemplative prayer are examined as well.

Theological topics include the Trinity, the attributes of God, Christology (which itself contains a wide variety of daily subjects), sanctification, church ordinances, and much more. Readers also will occasionally find Rhodes discussing puzzling Bible verses or Scriptures taken out of context by false teachers.

Several of the daily vignettes examine various key components of creationism. These contain studies of young-earth creationism, theistic evolution, progressive creationism, the gap theory, and the length of the days of Genesis 1. The reader also will find a great deal of information about heaven, from the basics of its substance and our own nature, to those enigmatic questions about eating food, marriage, and pets in heaven.

The book’s broad spectrum of subjects covers more than just obvious theological issues. From the types of Bible translation to archaeology to hermeneutics to responses to the arguments against the Resurrection of Christ — it’s all contained somewhere in this volume. And while the daily titles will make for easy location or retrieval of insights, the book has a very helpful topical index to make the process even faster.

The reader who is a longtime apologist will also hear a slight echo or two of the men who have instructed and trained Rhodes — including his late friend and mentor Walter Martin (e.g., “a hideous disease called non-rock-a-boatus”).

This is a book not only for the Christian who wants to develop a better understanding of what God’s Word says about many critical issues and to be a more informed witness, but also for the seasoned apologist from which to learn and glean.

—MKG

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