

A Study in EVOLVING FADISM THE CULTIC LEANINGS OF BILL GOTHARD'S TEACHINGS

by G. Richard Fisher

Religious teachers sometimes pick up on crazy fads and teach silly things that disrupt the Church. Bill Gothard's reputation in this area is tough to match. PFO repeatedly gets requests for an evaluation of Bill Gothard and his ministry.

Gothard is the founder and director of the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts. He is 61, a bachelor, graduate of Wheaton College and ordained in the LaGrange Bible Church in suburban Chicago. The Institute was founded in 1973 and while attendance at his seminars today pales when compared with two decades ago, his influence remains.

Gothard's organization is an educational road show that teaches his unique view of Scripture. His seminars offer self-help, presumably from the Bible, in the form of lists and steps to solving life's problems. He has a subjective and personal interpretive scheme and finds in God's Word what no one else has. These trends trouble even some of his followers.

Wilfred Bockelman's book, *Gothard ... The Man and His Ministry*,¹ although basically a positive, favorable treatment of Gothard's work, did point out some serious disagreements. This now out-of-print book was not widely accepted

or taken seriously because Bockelman himself is unknown. Yet the publication was measured and thoughtful. One of Bockelman's conclusions was that we should accept the good we can find at the seminars, but also "beware of some of the dangers."² These dangers were spelled out in his book.

In 1 Corinthians 1:12 Paul warned the Corinthians against seeing one teacher as the final possessor of all truth, as having the final word on everything. This practice was causing division and sinful pride in that local church. A well-balanced Christian draws from various godly men in their areas of insight and takes advantage of all legitimate ministries (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:21, 22).

Gothard tends to take uncompromising stands on issues where Christians often disagree. Consider these:

Divorce

All of Gothard's early materials make plain that he does not believe a divorce can take place for any reason whatsoever. He avoids the exception clause of Matthew 19:9 by saying Jesus is only speaking of Jewish betrothal. However, the Greek word *mnesteuo* (betrothal) is never mentioned in the chapter or

context, only marriage. Tim Crater exposed Gothard's error in his article, "Bill Gothard's View of the Exception Clause."³ He exposed serious weaknesses and fallacies in Gothard's hermeneutical system and shows how Gothard relies on subjective impressions.

Gothard refers to the "Spirit of Scripture" and speaks of views as "confirmed by spiritual discernment," which led Crater to question Gothard's leaning toward mysticism and subjectivism in interpretation. Crater's conclusion: Gothard goes beyond Scripture. Jay Adams, in his book, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage*,⁴ further demonstrates why the betrothal or "Engagement Thesis" is erroneous.

Further confusion has been added by the publishing of Gothard's *Rebuilder's Guide*, in which he says, "The exception clause does refer to illegal marriages such as incest. It may also refer to immorality during the Jewish betrothal period."⁵

Gothard appeals to two pages of notes by Dr. Charles Ryrie for his subsequent inclusion of the incest statement. Yet, ironically, in the complete set of notes, which runs 17 pages and was issued by the Institute in 1981, Dr. Ryrie on page 6 dismisses the betrothal view by saying, "Porenia is nowhere

else used in the restricted sense of unchastity during the betrothal period." He goes on to state his view that incestuous marriages (forbidden in Lev. 18:6-18) give "the key to understanding ... the Matthean exception clause."⁶

Subjective Guidance System

Gothard appears to teach a system of extra-biblical guidance by "inner checks," "inner promptings" and feelings of "inner peace." A good example comes from the Institute's *Men's Manual*, where a fourfold test is given for decision making and guidance.⁷ It states: "A. The Test of Scriptural Commands." This sounds good and is a good start. "B. The Test of Scriptural Illustrations." This is more subjective and relies on the illustrations and their source. "C. The Test of Proper Counsel." Parents and husbands are mentioned as "proper" counsel, but no space is given to the issue of unsaved parents and unsaved husbands and the counsel they might give.

Point "D" undermines and negates the rest since it gives as the final test, "The Test of God's Spirit." This is based upon Colossians 3:15 and explained as follows:

"A wrong decision may look right, but if we are alert to the prompting of God's Spirit, we will *not have peace in the matter. You should have inward peace after the first three tests have been passed. Let the peace of God rule (be the umpire) in your hearts*" (emphasis added).

The context of Scripture quoted has to do with keeping peace in one's relationships with others in the church. Colossians 3:12 urges kindness and longsuffering; verse 13 urges forgiveness and condemns quarreling; verse 14 urges love in our responses and relationships; verse 15 deals with one's willingness to keep peace with others. The verse has nothing to do with guidance or decision making. The Scripture verse has been 'wrested' to prove a point.

So, in Gothard's guidance system an inner feeling of peace is the ultimate test. If we do not have that subjective feeling of peace, do we then question the objective statements of Scripture? Feelings of peace should not supersede

scriptural direction. Churches have had to carry out discipline in obedience to Christ (Matthew 18) while feeling stress, agony, turmoil and spiritual grief.

Glowing Reports to Validate Teaching

Every sect and cult has its amazing stories. Apparent miracles or successes might make a teaching sound more plausible, but don't make it true. Proper interpretation of Scripture determines truth.

Take for example Gothard's "Cabbage Patch" flap. In 1986, he taught that the highly popular Cabbage Patch Dolls were causing strange and destructive behavior in children that could only be alleviated when the dolls were removed or destroyed.

In a letter from his organization, his followers were told by representative Ginger Jones that to enter into a written agreement to love a doll was a violation of the First Commandment. The threat as seen by Gothard was that by adopting a doll, children might not want to raise up their own godly children.⁸ Children may "love" dolls as they do other toys but this does not mean they worship them.

Testimonials were included with the above letter about the awful effects of the dolls with no allowance made for other environmental and social factors in the homes. The Cabbage Patch doll became a scapegoat.

Reports, testimonials and letters are not the ultimate test of truth. PFO has received its share of negative commentary on Gothard. Consider this from a man in Oregon:

"Twenty years ago I thought Bill Gothard was great. Over the past 10 years I have come to see him as an autocrat with no tolerance for other people's views. He is the sole authority of scriptural interpretation."

Direct Consequences of Our Forefathers' Sins

In one of his alumni booklets, Gothard states, "We were in Adam and a part of his sin."⁹ The imputation of Adam's sin to the human race is stated somewhat differently in Romans 5. That

this has anything to do with the D.N.A. ladder, as Gothard goes on to state, is debatable. But Gothard's point is the extension of our solidarity with Adam. This, he believes, indicates that we and our physical children are under some kind of direct consequence, not just the social or environmental consequences, of our forefathers' acts of sinning. That being so, according to Gothard, we must agree with God about their sin and ask Him "to remove its consequences from us and from our children."

To enforce this view, Gothard cites the story of a 3-year-old girl who "did not want to believe in Jesus" until the parents realized their need to confess their sins and the sins of their forefathers. His use of Jeremiah's acknowledgment of the past and present idolatry of Israel (Jeremiah 14:20) is hardly adequate proof. His use of Exodus 20:5 demonstrates his poor exegesis. Here he fails to understand this verse in context. He makes no attempt to discuss the national consequences of Israel's idolatry or to exegete the next verse.

Gothard emphasizes sins visited "upon the children unto the third and fourth generation" and neither emphasizes nor explains the pregnant phrase, "of them that hate me." It is also regrettable that he does not properly consider verse 6 "But showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments." His view is novel and as far as I know cannot be found in any major commentary. Here Gothard parts company with good men. A quick glance at his materials on adopted children shows an extension of this error.¹⁰ Here he teaches that the new parents of an adopted child must research the sins of the "biological parents," confessing them and casting the consequences off the child. He says:

"Causes of Conflicts — Adopted children are affected by the sins of their natural parents, and these sins are usually very severe."

"Steps to Resolve Conflicts — If the child is too young to understand, pray for the child. Confess your sins and acknowledge the sins of the natural parents. Ask

God to rebuke Satan and free the child from any unbelief or rebellion from the lives of the parents. Pray in the name and through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Then he goes on to say that if the adopted child is old enough, “Explain that just as physical weaknesses are passed down through parents, so are spiritual weaknesses such as pride, lust and rejection (see Exodus 20:5).” He then tips his hat to Exodus 20:6 and Ezekiel 18:20. But if these verses apply, what need is there of the “Step to Resolve the Conflict” in the first place? No such exorcistic ritual is ever hinted at anywhere in the Bible.

Whether ours by birth or by adoption, our children must be brought up under the consistent, continued, corrective, instructive discipline of the Word of God. There are no “quick fixes” for their sins and lapses. There are consequences of Adam’s sin, but grace, salvation and progressive sanctification are the scriptural antidote. Helpful information on adoption of children, certainly more practical and reliable, can be obtained from Christian agencies working in this area of ministry.

Marilyn Willet Heavilin points out the thread of fear running through the ancestral-bondage theme. After her son was killed by a drunken driver some people, like Job’s comforters of old, offered her advice:

“One well-meaning lady heard my story and suggested that we have someone pray over us to cleanse our bloodlines. Another listener suggested our family was bound by a curse of death. ... I have begun to understand that most of these comments are motivated out of fear that the same thing could happen to those that share them. If a person comes up with a reason for your trauma, they can believe if they avoid that particular pitfall, nothing similar will happen to them.”¹¹

One interesting side note to this topic is the inconsistency found in the previously mentioned *Men’s Manual*. In a footnote on page 55, Gothard mentions Adam Clarke. He calls the late English Methodist one of the “greatest Bible teachers of the nineteenth century”

whom God rewarded by opening his “spiritual understanding to the great themes and hidden wisdom in the Bible.” It is interesting to note what Clarke says of Exodus 20:5, which is a far cry from Gothard’s view.

With such a high endorsement of a man who was totally Arminian and believed in the “second blessing” teaching (as well as loss of salvation), one wonders where Bill Gothard really stands doctrinally. But as to Exodus 20:5 Clarke says:

“Visiting the iniquity of the Fathers upon the children. *This necessarily implies — if the children walk in the steps of their fathers; for no man can be condemned by Divine justice for a crime of which he was never guilty; see Ezekiel 18. Idolatry is however particularly intended, and visiting sins of this kind refers principally to national judgments.* By withdrawing the Divine protection the idolatrous Israelites were delivered up into the hands of their enemies, from whom the gods in whom they trusted could not deliver them. This God did to the third and fourth generations, i.e. successively; as may be seen in every part of the Jewish history. ... These national judgments thus continue from generation to generation, appear to be what are designed by the words in the text, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children”¹² (emphasis added).

Whatever one thinks of Clarke’s exegesis, it is clear that it does not agree with Gothard’s view. Clarke’s reference to Ezekiel 18 is crucial to this issue. Ezekiel 18:20-22 says:

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live and not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not

be mentioned unto him: In his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.”

All of this was an answer to those who were saying that sons in some way personally bore the iniquity of their fathers (v. 19). Germane as well is Jeremiah 31:29-30: “In those days they shall say no more, the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge. But everyone shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.”

Imposing Ancient Cultural Patterns

The Bible records various kinds of family and cultural patterns. Abraham was a bedouin, David a shepherd and Gideon a farmer. In Scripture, one encounters polygamy (multiple marriages), endogamy (marriages within a family), planned marriages, large extended families (inclusion of all the immediate relatives in a home), as well as a strong emphasis on the patriarchal and patrilineal modes.

One hermeneutical principle is that not everything reported in the Bible is commanded. It is clear from materials that Gothard operates on the principle that certain cultural modes are more biblical and necessary than others. He cites examples in the Old Testament, but they are selective and purely subjective, given the variety of models. His method of choosing examples of cultural forms leaves one accepting Gothard’s word for what is important since the Scripture gives no principle for the acceptance or rejection of any one cultural mode.

Gothard generally re-creates a modified extended-family concept with large doses of the patriarch model. He suggests that, unless they have parental consent, adult single children should remain at home and that married couples should exercise what seems to be excessive dependence on the counsel of their parents (even if the parents are unsaved and in spite of Psalm 1).

Extended families and a patriarchal structure are not commanded by God, no matter how many instances of them are reported in the Old Testament. Jesus did not live at home and there is no

record that He ever had to get Mary's permission to leave. Jesus' comment that the husband and wife must leave father and mother, which involves more than just physical leaving, is certainly suggestive that the neolocal and nuclear family is the New Testament model.

The relationship of adult single people to parents, as well as the continuing relationship of a married couple to parents, is quite a bit more flexible and unstructured than in Gothard's system. At best, the exact relationship of the marriage structure of the Old Testament to the Church is debatable and should not be made a test of spirituality or orthodoxy.

Gothard's views on singleness might have led to the scandal that almost wrecked his organization by way of his brother's repeated and prolonged immorality with secretarial employees, which Gothard admitted in his letter to pastors, July 18, 1980:

"For many years I have put the ministry ahead of my family and staff, especially my brother. My pride and wrong priorities resulted in encouraging him to postpone marriage because of the demands of the ministry, thus disregarding his personal needs. I have also failed others, including present and former staff members who sought to warn me of my incomplete handling of past staff problems, rejecting reproofs, and personal inconsistencies."¹³

However, he never recalled any of his materials.

Dogmatic Assertions on Arbitrary Matters

At his Advanced Seminars in 1983, Gothard introduced sex regulations based upon Old Testament commands. Under the session titled "Six Purposes, Principles, and Keys To Fulfillment In The Marriage Relationship," he told married couples to abstain from physical relations: 1. During the wife's menstrual cycle; 2. Seven days after the cycles; 3. 40 days after the birth of a son; 4. 80 days after the birth of a daughter; and 5. The evening prior to worship.¹⁴

This is Scripture twisting, legalism, an imposition of Mosaic ritual and a clear breach of 1 Corinthians 7:5. It is clear from 2 Corinthians 3:7-18, that Christians are not only under the New Covenant but that the Old Covenant of Moses has been abolished. So much of Gothard's teaching is based on an imposition of Old Testament legalism that flies in the face of Hebrews 8:7-13. His system is a subtle form and resurgence of the Ebionite error.¹⁵

Some may even find the sexual guidelines found in his 1986 volume, *Research in Principles of Life Advance Seminar Textbook*, intrusive and offensive. What most would feel is personal and private between a couple and their physician, Gothard spells out.

On pages 170-171, Gothard suggests that a man keep track of his wife's menstrual cycle and use it as a reminder of the sufferings and death of Jesus, then quotes Isaiah 53:4-5. This is unnecessary as Jesus already gave us the reminder of his suffering and death by the ordinance of The Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Elaborating on the benefits of abstinence, Gothard includes the strangest testimonial about abstinence even after a woman's cycle stopped following a hysterectomy.¹⁶

Then there are testimonials how abstinence helped couples who were barren to have children and also of healthier stronger children born because of abstinence at certain times of the month.¹⁷ Other testimonials include "How Infection and Irregular Cycles Cleared Up After Proper Abstinence."¹⁸ A testimonial of "How A Persistent Bladder Infection Stopped When Abstinence Began" and how that abstinence decreases "The Danger Of Genetic Abnormalities."¹⁹ The abstinence is not total, but Gothard-directed, going by the book — his book.

In 1991, popular Christian artists, including Bill and Gloria Gaither, Dave Boyer, Sandy Patti and Michael Card became Gothard's newest scapegoat. What was destroying the youth of America was contemporary Christian music, in Gothard's mind.

The June 1990 edition of the *Book-*

store Journal noted that Gothard wanted to wipe out contemporary Christian music, believing it would undermine parent's authority and lead to a "life of sin," namely drugs and immorality.

Gothard launched his campaign against contemporary musical artists in two published booklets: *Notice of Complaint Against The Unrecognized Enemy of The Church* and *Contemporary Christian Music: Ten Reasons Why the Rock Beat is Evil In Any Form*. He again sought to bolster his point of view through a collection of witnesses who testified to the validity of his position.

Yet another vivid illustration of Gothard's authoritarianism is found in his *Men's Institute Curriculum*, where a set of notes contains a page titled, "How to Make Your Worship Service a Source of Scriptural Power." Under the subheading, "God's Order" is found:

1. Enter with praise
2. Give sermon first
3. Confirm message with singing and testimonies
4. Examine self with Communion
5. Unite in righteous prayer
6. Conclude with the offering."²⁰

There is no specific order of worship spelled out in the New Testament. Obviously all of these elements are mentioned in Scripture, but never in any particular order either by direct statement or example.

Francis Schaeffer struggled with the forms and freedoms of the local church:

"Our forefathers understood ... when they spoke of the fact that the church's authority was administrative and declarative. It meant that in the area of doctrine and the area of conduct, the church has a right to bind other people's conscience only where it could show that the principle was derived from an open exegesis of the Scripture."

"We must speak where the Scripture has spoken. But let us notice that we must also respect the silences. Within every form, there is freedom. Whether one is painting a picture, or dealing with a sociological problem, or raising a child, it is the same. The formation of a school and the order in a

school rests [sic] on the balance of form and freedom. I would suggest that where the Bible is silent, it indicates and reflects a freedom within the scriptural form."

"God could have added one more chapter to the book of Acts and given us much more detail. He did not. We surely cannot say the Bible is mistaken. We must believe not only that what is said is — by God's will and inspiration — final, but also that where there is silence we are granted freedom under the leadership of the Holy Spirit."

Schaeffer goes on:

"Community and polity stand together. But within this double form, there are freedoms in which the Holy Spirit may lead different people at different times, different congregations thereby meeting different needs."

He concludes:

"Many evangelicals and conservatives tend to be low-church people. That is, very often they speak out against those who have any formalized form of liturgy. But in reality the low-church evangelical has his own form of liturgy which often is absolutely unchangeable. It is inconceivable to move the service from 10:00 to 10:45 or from morning to afternoon, or to change the order of the service, or to consider having the pastor stand in a privileged position only once on Sunday, rather than twice — to preach on Sunday morning, but answer questions Sunday night. You have all sorts of possibilities. There should be different kinds of services at different places and different times. ... Let us be thankful there is a given form. Then let us be careful to make sure that we are not bound by unbiblical forms, by forms which we have become used to and which have no absolute place in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. In regard to the polity and practice of the church, except for the clearly given biblical norms, every other detail is open to nego-

tiation among God's people under the leadership of the Holy Spirit."²¹

To make dogmatic assertions on arbitrary matters of freedom is to fall into the errors Schaeffer is warning against. I am concerned that The Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts is no longer a parachurch organization helping Christians with some areas of Christian living, but has in fact become a system unto itself. This system covers counseling, ministry, home, family, worship, church structure, divorce, adoption, dating, even hiring a church secretary. A whole church ministry program can be set up with a minister's manual.²² Some of that system, Gothard suggests, should be introduced into the church as curriculum.²³ Gothard also instructs fathers to teach the *Men's Manual* to the family as family curriculum.²⁴

Discipleship or Shepherding?

Gothard's system began to encompass more and more of his followers' lives with his 1985, *Men's Manual* (Vol. 2). One gets the feeling that Gothard's system is much like the legal system of the Pharisees, legislating, dictating, directing and regulating just about every phase, every aspect, every move, every eventuality of life. Not much is left to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, sanctified creativity or just informed choice. Most of Gothard's teaching in the *Men's Manual* again is buttressed by the Old Testament and the legal system of Moses.

In the publication, Gothard dogmatizes on many personal and peripheral issues. On pages 78-101 he teaches that under no circumstances are we to borrow money or buy on credit. In his use of Romans 13:7, Gothard ignores the context, which has to do with paying taxes and not withholding the "love debt" we owe others. The best that can be said about the verse is that we should pay debts on time. Anything further is misinterpretation.

Then on pages 103-115, Gothard devotes considerable space teaching on how to become sales-resistant. This is ironic, considering all that the Gothard organization sells.

From the organization one can obtain guidance from cradle to grave, complete with all the basic steps and how-to's. Gothard's home-schooling materials, issued in 1985, are called *Parent Guide, Wisdom Booklet*. In the second volume of his *Men's Manual* are instructions on making a will. There is even material on preparing shopping lists.²⁵ For the women, there is a discussion on page 172 of meal planning, dental care, and home safety.

In the *Advanced Seminar Textbook*, he provides on pages 276-281 information on how women are to select makeup and choose colors that enhance skin tone, how to choose a hair style, how to wear accessories and the place of accents on the clothing as well as how to stand (with illustrations) and why to avoid any slits in the skirt.

Gothard opposes women working outside the home.²⁶ While he cites Proverbs 31 in suggesting home business as the proper choice, a careful reading of the text would not eliminate outside work at all.

He also opposes business partnerships.²⁷ Some might consider this area within the realm of Christian liberty if one is in partnership with a Christian. What is a marriage if it is not the ultimate partnership? There can be nothing inherently wrong with a partnership since our union with Christ is designated as such. The Greek word *koinonia* which describes our union with Jesus and other believers means literally, communion, fellowship, partnership, having things in common. First Corinthians 15:33 advises that our "partnerships" be with the right kinds of people.

Beyond these materials is a large set of notes called *Advanced Training Institute of America*. In it he teaches on: self image, responsibility, conscience, rights, freedom, success, purpose, friends, engagement, finances, gratefulness and prayer. With material this extensive one can only wonder when there would be time to read the Bible.

Some of the material borders on silly. Proverbs 6:6-8 advises us to think ahead like an ant and to make proper provision for the future. The simple illustration and context are very clear. But why

leave it so simple and so easy? From the biblical illustration, Gothard develops an elaborate 20-point system (with drawings and illustrations) around ants.²⁸

One could argue that these things are simply helpful hints rather than dogmatic assertions. And as such, either of the two choices would be based upon the followers' own perceptions. Nonetheless, the publication's title, "Principles of Life," gives the impression that they are more than just helpful hints.

In addition, Gothard takes his teachings very seriously as do his followers. One ex-follower stated that the distinct impression imposed on them was that the successful use of the material was "the way to be godly."

One pastor who established his congregation on "God's Order of Worship" by way of the Gothard materials eventually left our Baptist Fellowship in protest over our lack of spirituality. So, in this writer's experience, Gothard's followers see the materials as a bit more than helpful hints.

Additionally, it appears that Gothard's teachings and methods produce in some cases feelings of exclusiveness, elitism, and isolationism. Any system producing these effects should be questioned.

The late professor of comparative religions, Walter Martin, warned that isolationism is a mark of an aberrant group and produces close-mindedness, personal antagonism, intolerance and spiritual blindness.²⁹

Division is antagonistic to Paul's prayer in Ephesians (unity of mind among Christians) and contrary to the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17.

Ambiguous Grace and Faith

Equally serious is Gothard's misunderstanding of key doctrines. *The Advanced Seminar Textbook* offers "operational definitions."³⁰ They are misleading and wrong. "The Grace of God," which is God's unmerited favor, is defined as: "The desire and power to reproduce ourselves spiritually." In this redefining and recasting of grace, Gothard does not even come close. The

source of grace is God, not ourselves. It is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Henry Thiessen defines grace as "the goodness of God manifested toward the ill-deserving."³¹

Gothard's confusion of law and grace is further demonstrated as he teaches: "The Christian can never keep the standards of the law by his own efforts. It is only as he is obedient to the Holy Spirit living within him that the principles of the law can be lived out in his life."³²

No one would dispute the need for the power and motivation of the Holy Spirit for godly living. However the Holy Spirit points us to Christ and all the principles of the New Covenant. He does not drag us back to the law. Even the law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. We are not lawless but have the framework, dictates, commands, of the New Covenant with all the empowerment of God's grace. This is the point of Paul's letter to the Galatians (see also 2 Corinthians 3).

Faith is defined by Gothard as "Visualizing what God intends to do."³³ Faith is not visualization in any sense. Faith (Greek: *pistis*) is trust in God and His Word. Faith is clinging to God and His promises (Romans 10:17). It is translated as trust in most of the Old Testament passages. It is a distortion to turn a strong biblical concept into a watered-down human endeavor of visualization.

Conclusions

When Gothard speaks where the Scripture is silent and is dogmatic on questionable interpretations, he becomes a law unto himself; thinking Christians must be aware of it and critical and discerning. Gothard would do better to stay with his strong area of basic seminars and not pontificate on every issue. He also should open his organization to independent scrutiny.

Heresy doesn't have to start with a major leap; it may begin with a leaning, a trend that moves off center just a bit. Certainly Gothard doesn't intend to confuse and divide, but we have seen his followers make areas mentioned above a test of orthodoxy and their fellowship with others has been de-

stroyed. Everyone needs to be scrutinized when he presumes to speak for God.

There is no perfect denomination or teacher. However, Jesus warned us to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:6). This has to do with additions and the adding of human error to truth. It has to do with creating traditions and building into the texts what is not really there. It has to do with creating elaborate systems of practice that in the end are a subtle diversion from the pure Word of God and the New Covenant.

It helps to liken a denomination or a teacher to a building. Paul does so in 1 Corinthians 3. Certainly a building can still house people if the siding is peeling and a window is cracked. The building can also be somewhat safe even if a window is broken and the roof has small leaks. Even the most conscientious teacher may have a "loose tile" or a "small crack" in his foundation, so to speak. None of us have the last word on everything.

However, if a lot of windows are out, part of the roof is off, the siding is falling off, and rodents are invading, there may be a point at which that building becomes structurally unsafe. It is still a building, yes, but its quality and safety should be called into question and we would probably urge the occupants to seek a safer structure.

Gothard's "house" has so many flaws, so many questions, so many aberrational leanings, so many structural weaknesses and a foundation that is not New Testament. Its occupants may not be very safe and should move to safer quarters.

The words of Charles Bridges are filled with godly wisdom:

"The novelties of fancy, accredited by some favorite name, readily pass for the revelation of God. But here men are ready to drink any cup that is presented to them, like children, who think everything good that is sweet. Errors, never solitary, are built upon some partial, insulated, or perverted truth ... carefully ponder whom we follow. Sift the most plausible pretensions

(1 Thessalonians 5:21, 1 John 4:1). Never set a great name against the Divine testimony. Admit only the one standard; like the noble Bereans, who would not believe even an Apostle's word except it was confirmed by the written testimony (Acts 17:11)."³⁴

Endnotes:

1. Wilfred Bockelman, *Gothard, the Man and His Ministry: An Evaluation* (Santa Barbara, Calif., Quill Publications, 1976).
2. *Ibid.*, pg. 83. Note: Bockelman also says on page 140: "I also feel that many of the things he says are also very close to the borderline of leading people to bondage rather than freedom."
3. Tim Crater, "Bill Gothard's View of the Exception Clause," *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (Phillipsburg, N.J., Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 5-12.
4. Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, (Phillipsburg, N.J.; Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 55-59.
5. *Rebuilder's Guide*, (Oak Brook, Ill., Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, 1982), pg. 58.
6. Charles Ryrie, *Biblical Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage* (Used by permission, Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, 1981).
7. *Men's Manual*, Vol. 1, (Oak Brook, Ill.,

- Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, 1979, 1981), pg. 90.
8. Copy of December 8, 1986 letter on file.
9. Bill Gothard, *Supplementary Alumni Booklet, Conquering Impossible Mountains*, Vol. 9 (Oak Brook, Ill., Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, 1983), pg. 15.
10. Bill Gothard, *Ten Reasons Why Adopted Children Tend to Have More Conflicts* (Oak Brook, Ill., Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, 1982), pp. 1-2.
11. Marilyn Willet Heavilin, *Roses in December*, (Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), pg. 21.
12. Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary*, Vol. 1, (New York-Nashville, Abingdon Press, No Date), pp. 402-403.
13. *Christianity Today*, August 8, 1980, "Bill Gothard Steps Down During Institute Shakeup," pp. 46-47.
14. Robert Sheridan, "Bill Gothard And Dispensationalism," Graduate paper, Calvary Bible College, pp. 18-19. Copy on file. See also Bill Gothard, *Research in Principles of Life Advance Seminar Textbook*, (Oak Brook, Ill., Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, 1986), pg. 172.
15. For more information on the Ebionites, see G.R. Fisher, "Here Come the Ebionites," *PFO Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 2, 7.
16. *Advanced Seminar Textbook*, pg. 179.
17. *Ibid.*, pg. 180.
18. *Ibid.*, pg. 182.
19. *Ibid.*, pg. 183.

20. Bill Gothard, *Men's Institute Curriculum*, (Oak Brook, Ill., Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, 1980), pg. 2.
21. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the 20th Century* (Downers Grove, Ill., InterVarsity Press, 1970), pp. 74-77.
22. Bill Gothard, *The Basic Church Ministry, How to Solve Perplexing Church Problems* (Oak Brook, Ill., Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, 1979).
23. See *Rebuilder's Guide*, pages 221 & 222, Chapter 7, "Begin Through the Church."
24. *Basic Church Ministry*, pg. 6.
25. Bill Gothard, *Men's Manual*, Vol. 2, (Oak Brook, Ill., Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, 1985), pp. 135-141.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 174-179.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 210-217.
28. *Men's Manual*, Vol. 2, pp. 226-229.
29. Cited by Agnes C. Lawless with John W. Lawless, *The Drift Into Deception*, (Grand Rapids, Mich., Kregel Resources, 1995), pg. 125.
30. *Advanced Seminar Textbook*, pp. 355-358.
31. Henry Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures In Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich., Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), pg. 132).
32. *Advanced Seminar Textbook*, pg. 173.
33. *Ibid.*, pg. 356.
34. Charles Bridges, *A Commentary on Proverbs*, (London, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), pg. 180.



The Crux of the Matter

(continued from page 4)

ear Translation of the Greek Scriptures says:

"There is no evidence that the Greek word *stau·ros'* here [Matthew 27:40] meant a cross such as the pagans used as a religious symbol for many centuries before Christ. In the classical Greek the word *stau·ros'* meant merely an upright stake, or pale, or a pile such as is used for a foundation. ... The apostles Peter and Paul also used the word *xy'lon* to refer to the torture instrument upon which Jesus was nailed, and this shows that it was an upright stake without a crossbeam, for that is what *xy'lon* in this special sense means. ... Evidence is, therefore, completely lacking that Jesus Christ was crucified on two pieces of timber placed at right angles. We

do not want to add anything to God's written Word by inserting the pagan cross-concept into the inspired Scriptures, but render *stau·ros'* and *xy'lon* according to the simplest meanings."⁵

Likewise, a recent *Watchtower* magazine said:

"The Bible shows that Jesus was not executed on a conventional cross at all but, rather, on a simple stake, or *stau·ros'*. This Greek word, appearing at Matthew 27:40, basically means a simple upright beam or pole, such as those used in building foundations. Hence, the cross never represented true Christianity."⁶

However, the *Watchtower's* solicitation of the Greek and its definition of *stau·ros'* is just another example of the verbal acrobatics Jehovah's Witnesses must go through to validate their distorted doctrine. While the word

stau·ros' primarily means an upright stake or pole, the word has an alternate meaning: cross. Therefore, the word does mean much more than what the *Watchtower* says it does.

Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* gives three meanings for *stau·ros'*. The first matches the *Watchtower's*; the others present other distinct meanings:

"The *σταυρός* [*stauros*] is an instrument of torture for serious offenses, ... In shape we find three basic forms. The cross was a vertical, pointed stake ... or it consisted of an upright with a cross-beam above it ... or it consisted of two intersecting beams of equal length."⁷

Kittel explained the particulars involved in the carrying out of the fatal punishment upon a *stau·ros'*:

"Crucifixion took place as follows. The condemned person carried the