

The Quarterly Journal



THE NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION OF PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

VOL. 27, NO. 1

JANUARY-MARCH 2007

EDITOR: KEITH A. MORSE

The Why of Discernment Rediscovering the Church's Neglected Gift

by **G. Richard Fisher**

Discernment has fallen on hard times. The word "Berean" from Acts 17:11, which once connoted nobility and praiseworthiness, is now used by many to describe someone who is small-minded, mean-spirited, divisive, narrow, and even pharisaical. Good is being called evil, just as Isaiah predicted (Isaiah 5:20).

NOT OLD AT ALL

The decline of discernment paralleled the rise of the modern Charismatic Movement-Charismatic Renewal (CM-CR) in the early 1960s. That movement emphasized emotion and experience at the expense of doctrine. Experience alone was supposed to bring unity among all religions. This is why, regardless of our denomination, we could all pretend to be one happy family.

The emphasis was on "happy." We were so happy we could forget our differences and that some were teaching differing ways of salvation. Majors were discounted while minor



issues were magnified well beyond their significance.

The writers of *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* admitted:

"As an experiential movement, CM-CR has always been strong on faith-affirmation and short on critical reflection. Charismatic faith strongly upholds divine intervention in miraculous occurrences, supernatural guidance, and prophetic messages. But while the need for discernment is widely recognized, charismatic discernment is mostly intuitive and generally lacks an adequate underlying theology, particularly of the relationship between the

(continues on page 14)

Inside this Issue:

THE BIBLE IS ENOUGH	PAGE 2
TBN FUNDS UNDERWRITE BOX OFFICE DISAPPOINTMENTS ...	PAGE 3
GOD'S WILL: LOST OR FOUND?	PAGE 4

Editorials

THE BIBLE IS ENOUGH

This edition of *The Quarterly Journal* focuses on issues that should be dear to the heart of every Christian: Exercising discernment and knowing God's will for his or her life. Unfortunately, most believers are lacking in these crucial areas of understanding.

The reasons for such deficiencies may be many, but paramount is the failure to recognize the sufficiency of God's Word for all of life and godliness. Sadly, Christians go looking for truth and guidance in all the wrong places. They dig through the garbage pails of modern-day prophets, psychology, mysticism, spiritual gimmicks, and supernatural quick fixes. They are being told — sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly — the Bible is not enough.

"As a result," pastor and teacher John MacArthur says, "they wallow in a watered-down, pseudo-Christianity that has been drained of its vitality, effectiveness, and security" (*Our Sufficiency in Christ*, back cover). The Word is not like frozen concentrated orange juice, its contents need not be supplemented, augmented, or diluted. Sadly, most Christians do not realize that bad theology does come with grim consequences.

Mysticism, subjectivism, pragmatism, and the like have become profoundly woven into the fabric of a Christian's life today. The objective — the Bible — succumbs to the

subjective. This disastrous way of thinking is so common that no one — young or old — can escape its harmful influence. Take, for example, the directives of Bob Smithouser, editor of *Focus on the Family's Plugged In* magazine. Smithouser, in his "the last word" editorial, "Clearing a Channel for God's Still, Small Voice," offers:

"I've been ministering to teens ever since I was a teen, and one thing never changes: *Young people want to hear from God.* 'Lord, how do I know You're there?' 'What college major is right for me?' 'Who should I date?' 'Do you want me to work at Taco Hut or Burger Barn?' Beyond seeking His will for their lives, they want to see the Lord do miraculous things. (Which, by the way, is God's desire as well.) So why do many young people assume that their loving Creator is silent or indifferent about the intimate details of their lives?" (*Plugged In*, August 2005, pg. 12, italics in original)

Smithouser then puts forth his rationale as to why young people fail to hear God's "still, small voice" and/or witness "miraculous things":

"I'm convinced one reason teens aren't hearing from God the way they want to is that He's being drowned out by the electronic media. It's not just that the volume is turned up too loud; it's the sheer amount of hi-tech noise consuming adolescents' attention. That includes entertainment that contra-

(continues on page 20)

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

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

Visit PFO's Web Site at: <http://www.pfo.org>

BOARD of DIRECTORS:

James Bjornstad	Cedarville, OH	Joan C. Cetnar	Kunkletown, PA
G. Richard Fisher	Bricktown, NJ	Gary E. Gilley	Springfield, IL
M. Kurt Goedelman	Saint Louis, MO	Robert L. Griffin	Gulf Shores, AL
Keith A. Morse	Denver, CO	David M. Tyler	Granite City, IL

BOARD of REFERENCE:

Dr. Jay E. Adams	Enoree, SC	Dr. Norman L. Geisler	Charlotte, NC
Dr. Ron Rhodes	Frisco, TX		

© 2007 – PFO. All rights reserved. ISSN: 1083-6853. These articles may not be stored on web pages or Internet sites without permission. *The Quarterly Journal* is the newsletter publication of PFO. Published by Personal Freedom Outreach, P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, MO 63136. PFO's *Journal* may also be obtained on CD-ROM in Portable Document Format (.PDF) for use with Adobe® Reader® software.

TBN FUNDS UNDERWRITE BOX OFFICE DISAPPOINTMENTS

Matthew Crouch, son of Trinity Broadcasting Network president Paul Crouch, has been making religion-themed movies at the expense of tax-free donations from his father's ministry, according to a recent report in the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper.

Following the premiere of his most recent project, *One Night With the King*, William Lobdell and Stuart Pfeifer, staff writers for the *Times*, revealed that Crouch's "televangelist parents have authorized more than \$32 million in tax-free donor money for the funding of his three movies. In addition, \$16 million was given to a ministry that financed 'One Night.'" That organization, the Hope, Direction and Encouragement Ministries, is headed up by the Rev. Tommy Tenney and employed Crouch to produce the film.

The *Times* report also indicated that each of Crouch's first three films, including *The Omega Code*, have failed to make a profit. The article indicated that the \$7.2 million, 1999 apocalyptic thriller took in \$12.6 million at the box office. However, a federal tax filing indicated that the network received only a \$2 million return for its \$7.2 million investment.

Crouch's latest venture, the biblical account of Queen Esther based upon the novel *Hadassah: One Night with the King* by Tenney, brought in less than \$12 million during its first four weeks of release. Many of Hollywood's major motion pictures will exceed that amount on their opening weekend.

In 1992, Crouch and his wife, Laurie, founded Gener8Xion, an enterprise which he used to market his production services to pastors wanting affiliation with TBN. Joe Marroquin, a former Gener8Xion employee said, "Crouch would charge pastors \$15,000 to \$20,000 a week to produce their shows — work that consisted of little more than providing access to his parents' network," the *Times* reported. TBN, through its attorney, denied Marroquin's allegation.

Crouch's company had nearly a \$3.7 million deficit during 2005 alone and reportedly had to borrow \$6 million last August to distribute *One Night With the King*. Crouch also uses his parents' network continuously to pitch the premiere of his films during its *Praise the Lord* and other broadcasts.

Crouch's failure at the box office doesn't appear to have hampered his lifestyle. The *Times* article maintained that his TBN connection "may explain why he never had to take a vow of poverty. He owns a Hollywood Hills mansion. He and his wife, Laurie, have eight vehicles, including a \$240,000 Bentley Arnage." TBN's annual donor income is said to be in the neighborhood of \$190 million and is controlled by a three-member board consisting of his father, mother, and older brother.

Entertainment-industry workers who have been part of Crouch's projects suggest that his career as movie producer would be short-lived if it were not for his parents' ministry. Brian Trenchard-Smith, who directed *Megiddo: The Omega Code 2*, told the *Times*, "I think he would be a laughingstock if he was a penniless evangelical, going cap in hand, office to office, trying to raise money and projecting the same personality he does."

Crouch has been described as everything from charismatic, charming, and visionary to arrogant, ruthless, and greedy.

—MKG

JERALD TANNER DIES

The man regarded by most cult ministries as the pre-eminent Christian authority on Mormon history has died. Jerald D. Tanner died Oct. 1, 2006 in Salt Lake City, due to complications associated with Alzheimer's disease. He was 68.

In the 1960s, he founded Modern Microfilm Co. which served as the vehicle to publish his historical research of the Latter-day Saints church. In 1983, he established the non-profit organization Utah Lighthouse Ministry which continues to print his research. Tanner was the co-author along with his wife, Sandra, of more than 40 books, including *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* and *The Changing World of Mormonism*. The latter work was published by Moody Press in 1980. Tanner and his wife also edited and published their ministry's newsletter, *Salt Lake City Messenger*.

Tanner's research and insight into the LDS church was impeccable and unparalleled. In 1985, a document known as "The Salamander Letter" surfaced, which was said to contain evidence in Joseph Smith's own handwriting that Smith had engaged in occultic activities. It

(continues on page 22)



God's Will: Lost or Found?

by Gary E. Gilley

A prestigious evangelical graduate school asked Professor X to accept a position as dean. In trying to determine God's will on the matter, Professor X writes, "While reading Acts 10 in Peterson's 'The Message,' I read the words, 'If God said it is okay, it is okay.' I felt the Lord applying this Scripture to my situation; I knew then that I had permission to go."

A well-respected Christian author tells of a farmer who, while on his tractor plowing one morning, heard God say, "Go into Victoria, get \$2,000.00 out of the bank, and take it to the Missionary."¹ In this same book, this author of devotional classics further heaps story upon story of the Lord leading through inner impressions and audible voices. He writes:

"It is positively exhilarating, and at the same time very humbling, to be in the company of men so intimately acquainted with God that they expect Him to even direct them in which house to visit, what tide to take, or what stranger to speak to on the trail."²

This concept of how the Lord leads is so commonplace today that the above examples probably would shock no one. And this is not just a modern phenomenon. Puritan pastor Cotton Mather (1663-1728) believed in

"Particular Faiths," saying, "a little degree of the *Spirit of Prophecy*' granted by God to the devotional elite for abounding in secret prayer."³

Mather believed that angels administered "Particular Faiths," which would guarantee answers to prayer and provide infallible divine leading. For many years he had absolute faith in divine leadings, until many of these messages proved to be false. Because of this, Mather's own faith almost unraveled. He speculated, for a time, that the problem might have actually rested with the angels. Perhaps, he mused, they may actually be ignorant of the future themselves. Finally, he realized he had misinterpreted these impressions and abandoned them.⁴

THE WILL OF GOD FOR MY LIFE

We constantly overhear in Christian circles that someone is looking for God's will for his life: Whom to marry, where to attend school, what vocation to follow. Others seek God's will for lesser concerns: What car or house to buy, church to attend, vacation to take. We have been taught that God's will can be ascertained through divinely prompted feelings, hunches, impressions, or dreams. If these fail, we can turn to fleeces, fasting, flipping coins, or opening the Bible

randomly and following the first verse that makes sense. These methods are usually accompanied by analysis of circumstances, wise counsel, and sensing the peace of God. The sincerity of the believer's desire to know God's will is not in doubt, but the validity of the method is.

Most Christians use the term "the will of God" to describe three distinct things:

The sovereign will of God — Our Lord is in control of all things in the universe. Ephesians 1:11 says, "...being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will." While some aspects of God's sovereign will are revealed in Scripture, others are not (Deuteronomy 29:29). God's Word is clear that God rules over all things and His plans can never be thwarted.

The revealed will of God — This makes known to us how God expects us to live. Paul writes, "Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thessalonians 4:1-3). This is

just one example. It is God's revealed will that we be sanctified or, in this context, live in purity. It is His revealed will that we love Him and that we love our neighbor. It is God's revealed will that we worship and obey Him.

The specific or individual will of God — Garry Friesen, while personally opposed to this concept, nevertheless, defines it as God's "ideal, detailed life-plan which God has uniquely designed for each believer."⁵ He further frames the issue by writing, "This life-plan encompasses every decision we make and is the basis of God's daily guidance. This guidance is given through the indwelling Holy Spirit who progressively reveals God's life-plan to the heart of the individual believer. The Spirit uses many means to reveal this life-plan as we shall see, but He always gives confirmation at the point of each decision."⁶ Most espousing this view are content to suppose that God reveals His will only for major decisions, but others take this to the extreme of believing that God has a will, which we must find, for even the minutest matters in life.

While God *is* at work behind the scenes, leading and directing our lives, the issue is whether the Bible teaches that God has specific wills for each of us — specific choices He wants us to make on all sorts of things — and whether these wills must be discerned through extrabiblical means. The popular notion today is that God does reveal His will this way. A close look at the Bible reveals something else.

THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

The Bible nowhere teaches that God has a specific will for every believer's life that is to be found through extrabiblical means. While there are numerous examples in the Word in which God specifically directed His people to take a course of action, these cannot be applied to every believer across time.

The fact that a few individuals received direct guidance from God

does not mean that such guidance was then, or is now, normative. Balaam's donkey spoke to him, but since then donkeys have kept their counsel. Peter walked on water once, but the term "walking on water" has become a metaphor for doing the impossible. Even if it can be proven that it once was customary for God to reveal His specific will, it does not prove that such is God's plan today.

These examples occurred far less frequently than most people think. God spoke to and directed Moses regularly, David and Peter on occasion, Solomon two or three times, and a host of others just once. But there is no evidence, in either Testament, that the vast majority of believers ever received such guidance.

Guidance given even to the key characters of Scripture was rare. God spoke most often in biblical times through the prophets, yet even the major prophets could go years without a word from God. Many who served God powerfully and accomplished much for His glory never once heard from Him, to our knowledge. The entire books of Nehemiah, Ezra, Esther, and Ruth contain not one instance of direct communication from God with any person.

Even the exceptions received guidance only for the most important matters. Except as object lessons and/or messages intended for a wider audience, there is no record of a biblical character being told specifically what choices to make concerning normal matters of life. Not once was anyone told what to do regarding such matters as household purchases, investments, or whom to marry, except for the case of Isaac — and that was indirect — and Hosea — as an object lesson to Israel.

While God chose occasionally to give special leading to a few of the important New Testament leaders, we never find those individuals seeking such guidance or being commanded to do so. Peter was sleeping on a roof when he got word concerning what to eat and which Gentile to witness to.

Philip was involved in a preaching campaign when he was sent to speak to the Ethiopian eunuch. Paul was headed in one direction when the Lord sent him to Macedonia. Each of them was busy serving the Lord when the Lord chose to change their direction. The last time we find an example of God's people seeking His specific will is in Acts 1:24-26 with the choosing of Matthias to be an apostle. And here they do not hear the voice of God, or even feel a prompting, but rely on a game of chance. It is questionable that the right decision was made through this methodology. Later, Christ selected Paul as Judas' replacement, leaving little room for Matthias to be part of the Twelve.⁷

GOD'S LEADING

If God, in this New Testament era, has changed plans and has made extrabiblical guidance the norm, we need to know how this takes place. Most evangelicals outside of Charismatic circles do not expect God to communicate with them through prophets, audible voices, visions, Urim and Thummim, the casting of lots, or angelic visitations, yet these were used in biblical times when God chose to lead apart from the written Word. Today, the majority of evangelicals believe that God leads through other means, usually highly subjective ones such as hunches, promptings, open doors, inner peace, or lack thereof.

In Scripture, when God chose to communicate, the transmission was objective. While there were times when the interpretation of these messages was complex, there was never any doubt that God had spoken. We don't hear of Isaiah, for instance, saying, "God spoke to me last night, I think, and I believe He wants you Israelites to do such-and-such, but then again, I am not absolutely sure of this. After all, it is often difficult to tell where the voice of God leaves off and my own thoughts take over. And, of course, there is always the problem of interpretation. I know what I heard, but I may possibly confuse the

message. My prophecy may then be 50% from God and 50% from my own imagination, but I will lay it out before you and let you discern whether and how much the Holy Spirit has actually said through me.”⁸

The problem becomes more complex in non-Charismatic settings, because non-Charismatics often are expecting God to lead and speak to them in ways never mentioned in Scripture. We will search in vain for instances in which God led His people through hunches and promptings. And we will search in vain for occurrences of New Testament believers asking God for His individual will

Apostle Paul is dealing with one of the most important decisions in life: marriage. But, instead of laying out the steps for discernment of the will of God, the Holy Spirit-inspired apostle, after some advice pertinent to the current situation, leaves the decision to the individual believer as to whether one should marry (vv. 8-9, 20-21). He even leaves the decision on whom to marry to the individual, as long as he marries another believer (v. 39).

Seeking the individual will of the Lord is so foreign to New Testament teaching that Professor Bruce K. Waltke wrote a book suggesting that

behavior is what Christ saved us out of.”¹⁰

THE CHOICE: BIBLICAL OR NON-BIBLICAL REVELATION

Dave Swavely in his book, *Decisions, Decisions*, writes:

“This is why I think it is true that many Christians, who would say that they do not believe in new revelation, are essentially seeking new revelation in their decision making. They may have a theology of ‘cessationism’ in their view of revelation, but in their everyday practice they contradict that theology by trying to hear God say something that is not in the Bible. And I would suggest that their theology is right, so they should let it shape their practical living. God is speaking today, but he is speaking through his Word alone.”¹¹

O. Palmer Robertson suggests that Christians can’t have both biblical and extrabiblical revelation:

“Why not the illumination of Scripture coupled with new revelations of the Spirit? Simply because if you declare a need for both, you have implied the insufficiency of the one. You have placed yourself back in the framework of the old covenant, in a time when new revelations were required because of the incompleteness of the old. But Christ is the final word.”¹²

On the other side of the fence are those who say that such theology is practical Deism, robbing us of a personal God who is at work in us individually. Scripture, they say, is unquestionably the inspired Word of God — but it is God’s Word for everyone equally. They argue that while the Bible says the “Lord is my Shepherd” or that “Christ died for our sins,” these are true statements, and they are true for every believer. God claims to love all men and He has spoken in general to all (through the Bible), but we also need personal words — words just to us, to affirm

The Lord is at liberty to adjust or cancel any of our plans and the believer must live in recognition of this fact.

or, for that matter, explaining their decisions as springing from God’s individual will communicated to them through feelings.

Take the example of those in James 4:13-17 who arrogantly announce their business plans without regard to the will of God. James does not admonish these believers for neglecting to first seek the will of God in the matter; he simply is saying that our plans must always be subject to the sovereign will of God.

The Lord is at liberty to adjust or cancel any of our plans, and the believer must live in recognition of this fact. The implication is that because none of us can know God’s will in advance, we must humbly accept His will when it becomes evident. This is the pattern found in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 7, the

it was basically a pagan notion.⁹ He writes:

“When we seek to ‘find’ God’s will, we are attempting to discover hidden knowledge by supernatural activity. If we are going to find His will on one specific choice, we will have to penetrate the divine mind to get His decision. ‘Finding’ in this sense is really a form of divination. This idea was common in pagan religions. As a matter of fact, it was the preoccupation of pagan kings. ... I have talked with people who perform certain rituals before going to God with an important request, as though they could make themselves more acceptable to God and therefore be more likely to get an answer. But that sort of pagan

our personal relationship. And part of that personal word includes guidance.

Yet when we turn to Psalm 19 we find there are two sources of revelation: nature (vv. 1-6) and Scripture (vv. 7-14). The "general revelation" of nature, while speaking boldly of the glory of God, still has limitations.

Romans 1:20 confirms that nature is capable of revealing to mankind the eternal power and divine nature of God; therefore even those who know nothing of Jesus Christ are without excuse when they reject God. But general revelation is incapable of exposing a multitude of things, including Jesus Christ, the Cross, grace, eternal life, and on and on. For such things we need the "specific revelation" of Scripture. These two, general and specific revelations, have been recognized by God's people throughout the ages as the normal ways in which God communicates to us.

Nevertheless, there are Scriptures that seem to imply God does have a specific will and He will lead us in it if we meet certain conditions. However, a closer look at these passages in context reveals a different meaning.

Romans 8:14 — "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." A common interpretation of this verse is that one way we know we are children of God is through the inner leading of the Holy Spirit. If we are born again we should expect the Holy Spirit to confirm our spiritual condition by the steady reception of extrabiblical, supernatural direction from the Holy Spirit about personal decisions. But the context of the passage has nothing to do with decision making and everything to do with holy living. The evidence of our conversion, Paul is saying, is the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives — but that leading is toward righteous living, not decision making (vv. 9-13).

Romans 8:16 — "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." Some think Paul is saying that a Christian will know he is saved because the Holy Spirit is

somehow speaking to his heart. Even if that were true, we are not told how the Holy Spirit "bears witness with our spirit." Many conclude that this "witness" is an inner voice or impression by which we feel the presence of God through the Holy Spirit and thus know we are saved. But that interpretation cannot be confirmed from this verse.

The verse does not say that the Holy Spirit witnesses "to" our spirit, but "with" our spirit. In other words, when the Holy Spirit and our spirit are in agreement, we know we are saved. When the witness of the believer's spirit, as to why he believes he is a child of God, agrees with the witness of the Holy Spirit (the Spirit-inspired Gospel as recorded in the Bible), then he knows he is a child of God.

Don Matzat writes:

"Bible teachers generally agree that when the apostle Paul tells us to be led by the Spirit, he is not speaking of some momentary external invasion of the Holy Spirit into our consciousness, telling us what to do and how to do it. Nor is he referring to our effort to conjure up the Spirit in some mystical encounter. Paul is simply telling us to live according to our new life in Christ, which is Christ dwelling within us by his Holy Spirit, or to be 'led by the Spirit' as opposed to living according to our old sinful nature, or being 'led by the flesh.'"¹³

Psalm 37:4 — On the basis of this verse, "Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart," some conclude that believers, living in conformity with the Lord, are able to trust their desires to lead them. Calvin is reported to have said, "Love God and do as you please." But this interpretation pushes the verse too far and runs counter to other Scriptures. The normal understanding of this verse is that, when we delight in the Lord, it will result in changing our desires so

that they are in harmony with God's desires for us. But the Psalm does not go on to say our desires are now totally trustworthy.

Our flesh is at war with the Spirit for as long as we are in these bodies (Galatians 5:16-18), making it difficult to always know that our heart's desires are pure. Paul seemed to struggle with conflicting desires regularly (Romans 7:14-25), and he desired to go to Spain, but never did (Romans 15:24, 28). Even Jesus desired to avoid the Cross, but chose to submit Himself to the will of the Father (Matthew 26:36-46). The desires of the committed Christian may be a good starting place in the decision-making process, but we cannot biblically claim that our desires have been implanted by the Spirit, or that they are infallible guides.

Philippians 4:6-7 — Coupled with Colossians 3:15, these are verses that have been used by multitudes of believers who seek the "peace of God" in their decision making. The argument goes like this: The final arbitrator in knowing God's will is the peace of God. If the Lord wants us to take action He will indicate His approval by giving us His peace. On the other hand, if we are not in the will of God, the Lord will make this obvious through unrest in our hearts.

Both passages, however, describe peace — or lack of conflict — between the believer and other people and/or God, not some inner peace. Harmony with our fellow man and God by living out His revealed will — not decision making — is the context.

2 Corinthians 2:12-13 — This passage reads, "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia." Verses that speak of open doors (see also, Acts 14:27; 1 Corinthians 16:8-9; Colossians 4:3) allow us to examine the role circumstances play in making good decisions. But Scripture does not

indicate that circumstances are God's way of communicating His will to us.

One of the problems with circumstances is that we can read into them just about anything we want. If we can't find a good job in our home town, this could be God's way of telling us to move or His way of wringing materialism out of our souls.

We might decide that it is God's will for us to move, but the next question is: "Where to?" Certainly the Lord was direct with Paul's call to Macedonia, but that was a unique move on the Lord's part involving a vision, not just a change in circumstances. Of course, if the Lord opens a door, or closes one (the latter never mentioned in the Bible), we need to take a good look. But even these open doors are not authoritative. Paul prayed for open doors for the Gospel, asking for opportunity to spread the good news, yet in 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 God had given him an open door which he chose to ignore because he had other things on his mind. At best, circumstances represent opportunities (or lack thereof) which may help us in our decisions, but are not mandates from God. If one believes he has been "called" to preach, but no one seems willing to listen, the examination of that circumstance may prove most helpful. But it neither confirms nor negates whether one ought to be a pastor, although it may be helpful in choosing a vocation.

Proverbs 3:5-6 — "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

The understanding of this passage is skewed by the NKJV rendering of the final phrase, which reads, "and He shall direct your paths" (similarly rendered, "and He shall direct thy paths" in the KJV). The implication is that the Lord will direct us in His perfect and specific will for our lives if we will but trust in Him. The problem with this understanding of

the passage is that the word "path" does not reference a specific will in the Old Testament usage, but speaks of the general path of life. This thought is captured by the NASB and NIV renderings, "And He will make your paths straight." In Proverbs 4:18 we hear that "the path of the just is like the shining sun." And in Proverbs 15:19 we are told that "the way of the upright is a highway."

Proverbs 11:5 gives a similar promise as 3:6 when it says, "The righteousness of the blameless will direct his way aright." What we have then is not a promise of an individual direction found through trusting God, but a description of the type of life that the trusting lead. It is a life in compliance with the moral, or revealed will of God. Those who lean on Him are going in the right direction on the path of life. They are living as God would have the righteous live. Garry Friesen writes, "The point of Proverbs 3:5-6, then, is that those who trust God, and trust in His wisdom rather than their own worldly understanding, and acknowledge God in each part of their life, will reap a life that is successful by God's standards."¹⁴

John 14:26 — "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."

John 16:12-14 — "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you."

Many take these verses to have universal application. John 14:26 especially has been used by many to support either continuing revelation or unique illumination, but such an interpretation is hobbled by the closing phrase, which promises to "bring to your remembrance all things that I

said to you." Jesus was clearly speaking of instructions given to the apostles while He was walking among them. Much of what He taught them was beyond their comprehension. The discourse in John 14-16 contained some of the deepest theology Jesus ever presented and was easily beyond the grasp of the apostles. He therefore promises them that in the future a Helper will come, the Holy Spirit, who will bring these things back to their remembrance and even guide them into new revelation (16:13-14).

WHAT WE CAN AND CANNOT KNOW

The issue is not whether God has a specific plan for our lives; the issue is how much of it we can know. Deuteronomy 29:29 tells us, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." This verse adds a lot of insight into how God wants us to live. The "things which are revealed," the Scriptures, have been given to us in order that we might live according to God's revealed (sometimes called moral) will. But the "secret things" — the things hidden, the things not made known in the Word — belong to God. Rather than trying to search out the mysteries of God, we should concentrate on what God has disclosed to us. The revealed things enable us to live in conformity to His ways.

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

Let's narrow our search to those decisions in life for which Christians commonly seek an extrabiblical word from the Lord.

Personal Preferences — Just as today, the early Christians had trouble accepting the concept that other Christians might see things differently. We are most comfortable when everyone agrees with us — after all, our preferences are hopefully based on principles drawn from Scripture. When others don't accept our logic

and reject our preferences, we have conflict. Paul writes Romans 14 to deal with this very scenario. The apostle's inspired counsel is neither to seek the peace of God, nor to recommend a method to discern who is right, but to accept one another (v. 2) and let God be the judge (v. 4). Let's frame this with an example:

First Church needs a new building. About this all agree, but there the unanimity ends. Brother Joe wants to move to Third Street, but Brother Bill believes God would have them move to the countryside. Sister Suzy, treasurer and professional financial planner, believes the church can easily handle a \$500,000 mortgage, but Sister Jane has no peace about debt. Pastor Jim is praying for a word from the Lord to bring back to his people, but about the time he thinks God has spoken to him, head-deacon George claims a contradictory word from God. The fight is on.

Romans 14 lays down timeless principles for handling differences of opinion. The passage is not going to tell First Church whether they should build, where, with or without debt, but it will tell the congregation how the body of Christ is to handle disagreement and varied preferences.

Giving — Second Corinthians 8-9 is Scripture's most comprehensive section on the subject. Many instructions and motivations are given, but the bottom line is, "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity" (9:7). No prayer is made for God to lay a burden on our hearts. No demand to tithe is given. Of course, God loves a cheerful giver (9:7), giving is a great privilege (8:2-6), giving is to be liberal (8:2), giving is to be motivated by Christ's indescribable gift (8:9; 9:15), and giving is to be proportionate to our financial blessedness (1 Corinthians 16:2). Still, we are giving as we purpose in our heart.

Marriage — Few decisions in life can compare to choice of a spouse. If ever we could use a word from the Lord, it would be about whom to

marry. Yet nowhere in the New Testament are we taught anything about finding God's "one and only." In 1 Corinthians 7, in which Paul discusses numerous marriage-related problems and concerns, we are actually given different instructions. He writes in verse 39, "A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord" (emphasis added). That does not mean there are no other biblical criteria for choosing a mate, but the choice is left to the believer. Scripture never says God has "the one" picked out for you and, that if

Here's what the New Testament says about decision making:

Begin with Scripture — The habit of many is to begin with an idea, philosophy, personal preference, pet peeve, or observation, and then go back to Scripture to find a few verses to support the position. If we do that, we might be able to convince ourselves of almost anything. But if all we do and believe emerges from the Word itself, we will be able to discern the value, or lack thereof, of all other ideas.

The Bible will not say which house to buy, but it will frame that decision

The Bible will not say which house to buy, but it will frame that decision with financial, ministerial, and family guidelines.

you marry someone else, you will miss out on God's perfect plan.

DECISION MAKING

When we search the New Testament to learn how God would have us make decisions, we find principles and guidelines, not specific answers. The New Testament paints a picture of a believer who knows and obeys Scripture, is indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and who has been given a mind whereby he is able to think, reason, discern, and choose. He is an individual who is quite capable (due to regeneration, the Scriptures, and the renewing of his mind) of making wise decisions that please God. It is for these reasons that God does not call for Christians to make subjective choices based upon what they feel God might be telling them.

with financial, ministerial, and family guidelines. It may not say to move to 334 South Grant Street, but it will present issues such as determining that one's financial priorities are biblical, ensuring that this is the best move for all people considered, and so on.

Pray for wisdom — James 1:5-8 applies principally to trials, yet many decisions are made during such times. James says God will answer our prayer for wisdom, when asked in faith, but He does not say how. If wisdom is defined as the application of the knowledge of the Word of God, then perhaps the Lord opens our minds to the understanding of His truth in a unique way when we pray. We can't be certain of the methodology, but we can be certain that God will answer. Again, we are not told that the Lord will specifically make

the decision for us through some form of prompting, only that He will provide wisdom when we need it.

Seek wise counsel — The Scriptures encourage us to seek the counsel of wise and godly people (Proverbs 12:15; 13:10; 15:22; 20:18). Paul tells the believers that they should counsel one another (Romans 15:14). Wise, godly, and scriptural counsel is an important resource for making good decisions, but we must keep in mind that no human counselor is infallible.

Consider circumstances and opportunity — Circumstances and opportu-

nities offer us options that should be carefully examined, but these options are not mandates from God. Even though we are offered a job in Indiana, we do not have to take it. Even though God has “opened the door” for us to teach junior high boys, we do not have to do so.

Testament is someone called to ministry: Paul is called to be an apostle (Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1); Barnabas and Saul are called to go on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:2); and Paul is called to take the Gospel to Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10). These three incidents do not establish a norm. We do not find any definite teaching on a call to ministry in the New Testament, but John Newton, who wrote the hymn “Amazing Grace,” offered these three tests:

1) *Desire* — Do you have a “warm and earnest desire to be employed in this service”?

able to teach the Word, as well as stand against and correct those who teach false doctrine.

Personal freedom — Surrounded by these principles and others found within the New Testament, we are given freedom to make choices that we believe will glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Many Christians are uncomfortable with such freedom, having been taught that the perfect will of God could be found through extrabiblical means. But the good news is that God, within biblical boundaries, has given us the freedom and ability to make wise choices that honor Him.

BUT WHAT ABOUT...?

Other issues can arise during a discussion of Christian decision making. Among them are:

Prophecy — Many in the Charismatic movement believe that God speaks today through prophecies and words of knowledge. They insist that such revelation does not contradict the written Word and that it should not be given equal status or added to Scripture.

This Charismatic theology of revelation has been adopted almost completely by the larger evangelical community. What is missed by both groups is that revelation from God, no matter what format or venue, is still revelation from God. It is not possible for God to give revelation that is not authoritative and demanding of obedience. All revelation from God carries the authority of Scripture. It is true that God has not chosen to insert all His revelation onto the pages of the Bible. It is possible, for example, that during biblical times the Lord spoke to His servants, but did not choose to include that conversation in Scripture.

Nevertheless, whatever He said at those moments carried the full weight and authority of the written Word. Today many claim to hear from God, but what they hear does not have the status and significance of Scripture. This is logically impossible. Either

Circumstances and opportunities offer us options that should be carefully examined, but these options are not mandates from God.

nities offer us options that should be carefully examined, but these options are not mandates from God. Even though we are offered a job in Indiana, we do not have to take it. Even though God has “opened the door” for us to teach junior high boys, we do not have to do so.

Our desire — God often works through our desires. In 1 Timothy 3:1 Paul writes that those who desire to be elders desire a good thing. But Paul did not tell Timothy to grab all who desire the office of elder and install them. Rather, he lays out for Timothy the requirements that an elder must meet (3:2-7; see also Titus 1:5-9).

This would be a good time to say a little more about the “call” to ministry. Only three times in the New

2) *Gifts* — “Besides this desire, there must in due season appear some competent sufficiency, gifts, knowledge, and utterance. Surely, if the Lord sends a man to teach others, he will furnish him with the means.”

3) *Opportunity* — “That which finally evidences a proper call is a correspondent opening in providence.”¹⁵ There must be a potential audience.

To Newton’s remarks, add the necessary spiritual requirements as listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Those lists contain mostly spiritual characteristics, but also include the ability to hold “fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). In other words, elders must be

God has spoken or He has not. If He has spoken, that message is as authoritative as Scripture. I agree with John MacArthur who wrote, "God reserved divine revelation for special times, which were encompassed in the written word, and since that time revelation has ceased."¹⁶

Extrabiblical Revelation — Henry and Richard Blackaby's book *Hearing God's Voice* was written largely to address the question of determining whether God is speaking to an individual, but failed miserably at doing so. The authors suggest that to hear God's voice, faith is required,¹⁷ as is the conviction that God speaks apart from Scripture.¹⁸ We can expect new Christians,¹⁹ they write, and those not in the habit of hearing from God, to be a bit disoriented for a while,²⁰ but hopefully that will all change and we will gradually come to recognize when God is speaking.²¹ And "the closer you are to God, the more easily you'll recognize his voice."²²

None of this is helpful. This whole conversation is out of alignment with Scripture. Virtually every time God spoke in biblical history the recipient had no doubt that he was hearing the voice of God — no matter what his spiritual condition or level of faith. With the exception of the child Samuel, everyone, including unbelievers (e.g., Pharaoh, Balaam, and Saul), immediately knew that God was speaking. Additionally, no formula or instruction is found in the Word to teach us how to discern God's voice. Learning to hear God's voice is simply not taught as a skill we must develop. The modern non-Charismatic non-Cessationists have created a category of revelation not found in Scripture. They must now try to defend their view through experience because no biblical defense is possible.

It must be recognized that almost everyone is a Cessationist of some sort. No one says, "Anything goes." But if we do not draw the line at Scripture, there exists no criteria for drawing the line. Had God intended revelation beyond the pages of the New Testament, He would have pro-

vided us a means by which to discern His voice. Had God determined to change His mode of revelation from verbal communication to inner feelings and voices, we would have expected some notification of this change. We would have expected some instructions by which we could decipher His message. He did none of these. We must therefore conclude that God did not choose to launch a unique form of communication after the close of Scripture. The problems we are encountering today concerning God's leading go back to this fundamental issue.

A Still Small Voice — We are told that God speaks today, either through inner voices or words of prophecy, but that these messages may be partially from God and partially from our own thoughts.

Such supposed messages are of no value and may be dangerous. If we don't know what part of a thought, dream, or prophecy is from God, we cannot discern what God is trying to say.

New Testament Prophets — First Corinthians 14:29 mentions New Testament prophets who speak and then have others in the church body interpret what they said. How are we to understand this passage?

The word "prophecy" has a dual meaning. It can mean foretelling, as when prophecies revealed some future event, or forthtelling, as when a message from God concerning living for Him is conveyed. This passage seems to be concerned with forthtelling, which itself comes in two varieties. On the one hand, there is the preaching or proclamation of the Scriptures, just as is done today. There was also divinely inspired forthtelling, in which God gave a message of truth through certain individuals. This passage most likely references both types of forthtelling.

It should be remembered that the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20), for it was these two types of gifted people who gave us the in-

spired Word of God. Hebrews 1:1-2 reads, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son." Then later in chapter two, verses three and four, the author of Hebrews continues this thought by writing, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?"

The passage calls those who communicated the Word of God in the New Testament a select group of people who heard these words from the Lord and were authenticated by miraculous signs. In 2 Peter 3:2 we are told, "that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior." Peter points to Old Testament prophets who gave us the inspired Old Testament corpus and to the apostles who gave us the inspired New Testament text.

Every indication is that the New Testament revelation was delivered through the apostles and a few others closely associated with them (Mark, Luke, James, Jude, and possibly the writer of Hebrews). John warns at the very close of the New Testament that we are not to add to the prophecies of the Book of Revelation (22:18,19). Because Revelation is the last book in the canon, it is difficult to imagine how any additional prophecy today would not violate this warning.

When Paul gave the exhortation found in 1 Corinthians 14:29, he could be referring to both those who were preaching the already-revealed Scriptures, and to those who were claiming an inspired word from the Lord. It should be remembered, at that point the New Testament canon had not yet closed and God was still giving His inspired, authoritative Word. One of the problems the first-century believ-

ers had to face was the issue of false apostles and prophets claiming divine authority. For this reason Paul spoke of false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13) and signs of a true apostle (2 Corinthians 12:12).

At Corinth there were those posing as divine spokesmen for God, even apostles. Paul said they were to “pass judgment” on what these men claimed to have received from God. They were to test them first by determining if these individuals had the signs of a true apostle. Next, they were to discern their message to see if it was sound. They “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). In other words, even at a time when revelation was still being given, what people claimed to have heard from God had to pass the scrutiny of Scripture. Now that “the faith [has been] once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) and inspired prophecy has been declared ended (Revelation 22:18-19), there is no longer a need for further revelation to God’s people.

Impressions — Garry Friesen is correct when he writes that impressions are not authoritative; they are just impressions.²³ Trying to determine the source of impressions is futile, but most impressions simply come from our own thoughts. For example, we see a person who needs Christ; we know the power and glory of the Gospel; we long to tell others about the truth. There should be nothing strange about feeling an urge to tell folks about the Lord.

Hearing God in Prayer — Until recently, most Christians recognized prayer as our communication to God and the Scriptures as God’s communication to us. But because of the influence of Blackaby and many others, many believers expect God to speak to them during their time of prayer. Blackaby writes, “In the Scriptures, prayer is often presented as a two-way conversation wherein people hear God respond to their prayers. ... The key to God transforming us is not found in what we say as we pray but

in what we hear. As God speaks to us, we cannot remain unchanged.”²⁴

The biblical support for this type of understanding of prayer is scant. The most widely used New Testament text in its defense is Romans 8:26-27 about which Blackaby says, “[The Holy Spirit will] reveal the Father’s thoughts and help believers know how to pray.”²⁵ But a careful reading of these verses in context does not render Blackaby’s interpretation. The Bible does not promise that the Holy Spirit will reveal to us the mind of God as we go to prayer. Rather, the promise is that the Holy Spirit will intercede with the Father on our behalf, so that our prayers are presented to the Father in such a way that they are in accordance with the will of God. This is necessary because we often “do not know how to pray as we should” and the Spirit must conform our prayers to the will of God.

It would be most helpful on this issue to study the prayers of the New Testament (e.g., Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Colossians 1:9-14; Philippians 1:9-11). In these prayers there is no mention of praying a few words and then sitting back listening for the voice of God. New Testament prayers are the communication of the heart and mind of the believer to the Lord. They are not two-way communication. The Bible does record occasions in which God spoke to individuals as they were praying. But this is not the normal pattern given, and to make it the norm is to distort the expressed purpose of prayer, which is for us to speak to God.

Being in God’s Presence — The New Testament teaches that Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19) and therefore are constantly in the presence of the Lord. There is nothing we can do to be more in the presence of God than we are right now. When a worship leader invites the audience to enter the presence of the Lord or someone asks the Lord to come into His presence, he misspeaks. In Hebrews 4:16, on the basis of the finished work of Christ, the child of God is invited to draw

near to the throne of grace. That is, we now have direct access to God and we are encouraged to take advantage of that access in prayer. This does not mean we are nearer to the presence of God during prayer; it means because Christ is our High Priest, we have the privilege of God’s presence at all times and we can confidently approach Him in prayer.

The Holy Spirit’s Leading — The evidence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is not feelings, but spiritual transformation. Two important passages, both often used out of context, help us here. Romans 8:14-16 speaks of the Holy Spirit leading our lives, but the leading here is toward sanctification. It is through the Spirit’s power that we are gaining victory over the deeds of the body (vv. 12-13). In Galatians 5:16-25, we recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit by the spiritual fruit that He produces in our lives. Christlikeness, not a particular type of emotional encounter, is the mark of the Holy Spirit.

IT’S NOT AS DIFFICULT AS WE MAKE IT

Christians are wholly justified in their desire to know God’s will — especially if their desire to know His will is coupled with a desire to do it. Where many believers go astray is in the methods they employ and the extent to which they desire to know His will.

The Bible is very clear on how God has revealed His will to mankind over the centuries. At first, there were audible, unmistakable messages to a select few men, such as Abraham, Moses, and the Old Testament prophets. The written record of their encounters with God and their deeds became our Old Testament. For a short time Jesus — God in human flesh — appeared on the scene and spoke to mankind directly. Many of His words and deeds, although certainly not all, were recorded in the Gospels. The Book of Acts documents the birth of the Church, and the Epistles give us a glimpse at the issues the early Church faced.

One of the greatest differences between what Acts records and what the Epistles record is the role of direct communication by God. Acts documents several definite examples of God communicating directly with His servants (Acts 8:26-29; 9:4, 10; 10:3, 11-16; 12:7-8; 13:2-4; 16:6, 9-10; 18:9; 21:4, 11; 22:17-21; 23:11). The Epistles do not emphasize historical accounts, but focus instead on teaching the believer how to live. The Epistles' silence concerning miraculous events and hearing God's voice is quite evident. No one is called, instructed, or urged to seek the voice of God. Instead, they — and we — are told to pay attention to Scripture (cp., 2 Timothy 3:15-4:4). Doctrine, truth, and instruction, as found in the Old Testament and the apostles' teaching, are the bread and butter of the Epistles. If the Lord had something to offer beyond the Scriptures, He would have made it a point to alert His readers in the Epistles. Instead, He inspires Paul to write, "Preach the Word."

Fowler White expresses it this way:

"...the Bible gives us no reason to expect that God will speak to His children today apart from the Scriptures. Those who teach otherwise need to explain to God's children how these words 'freshly spoken from heaven' can be so necessary and strategic to God's highest purposes for their lives when their Father does nothing to ensure that they will ever actually hear those words. Indeed, they must explain why this is not quenching the Spirit. Moreover, the promise of such guidance inevitably diverts attention from the Scriptures, particularly in the practical and pressing concerns of life. Let us never underestimate just how serious this diversion really is. In the Bible the Church hears God's true voice; in the Scriptures, we know that He is speaking His very words to us. Advocates of words 'freshly spoken from heaven' should beware: By di-

verting attention from the Scriptures, they quench the Spirit who is speaking therein."²⁶

Our mandate today is this: Rather than seek extrabiblical communication from God, we need to diligently learn how to handle the Word of Truth so that we might be "approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed" (2 Timothy 2:15). Thomas Watson, the English Puritan, said, "They who leave the light of the Word and follow the light within them, as some say, prefer the shining of the glow-worm before the sun."²⁷

God, a Pagan Notion? has a number of insightful comments, I nevertheless found it overall disappointing with Waltke often supporting the very things that he set out to disprove.

10. Bruce K. Waltke, *Finding the Will of God, a Pagan Notion?* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995, pg. 11.

11. Dave Swavely, *Decisions, Decisions*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2003, pg. 65.

12. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word*. Carlisle, Penna.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993, pg. 135.

13. Don Matzat, *The Lord Told Me... I Think*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1996, pg. 64.

14. *Decision Making and the Will of God*, op. cit., pg. 98.

One of the greatest differences between what Acts records and what the Epistles record is the role of direct communication by God.

Endnotes:

1. Phillip Keller, *Splendour from the Sea*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1963, pg. 135.

2. *Ibid.*, pg. 170.

3. Kenneth Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*. New York: Harper & Row, 1984, pg. 173, italics in original.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 188-190.

5. Garry Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God*. Portland, Ore.: Multnomah Press, 1983, pg. 35.

6. *Ibid.*

7. See Revelation 21:14 which strongly implies that the inner circle of the apostles of the Lamb is limited to twelve. The other individuals mentioned in the New Testament as apostles (e.g., Barnabas), I believe were apostles (or sent ones) of the Church and were not on the same level as the Twelve.

8. See further this author's article, "The Lord Told Me — I Think!," dealing with this form of modern day prophecy (*Think on These Things*, Springfield, Ill.: Southern View Chapel, September 2005). This information will also be available in this author's forthcoming book, *Is That You Lord?* (Spring 2007, Evangelical Press).

9. While Waltke's book *Finding the Will of*

15. John Newton, "How Do I Know I Am Called," *Leadership* magazine, Vol. XI, No. 3, pp. 55-56.

16. John F. MacArthur, Jr., "New Revelation." Taken from a message delivered at Grace Community Church in Panorama City, Calif. Document available at: www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/NEWREV.HTM.

17. Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Hearing God's Voice*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002, pp. 52-53.

18. *Ibid.*, pg. 260.

19. *Ibid.*, pg. 257.

20. *Ibid.*, pg. 214.

21. *Ibid.*, pg. 235.


22. *Ibid.*, pg. 210.

23. *Decision Making and the Will of God*, op. cit., pg. 131.

24. *Hearing God's Voice*, op. cit., pp. 34, 122.

25. *Ibid.*, pg. 37, see also pp. 116, 124, 137.

26. Fowler White, "Does God Speak Today Apart from the Bible?," in John H. Armstrong, editor, *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1996, pg. 87.

27. Watson quoted in Don Kistler, editor, *The Puritan Pulpit: Thomas Watson*. Morgan, Penna.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2004, pg. 141. 

working of the Holy Spirit and the functioning of the various layers of the human spirit. On the one hand, charismatic faith strongly challenges all forms of skepticism and unbelief in the supernatural; on the other hand, intelligent faith challenges naïveté and simplistic identifications of unusual phenomena with the divine or the demonic."¹

Now, in less than half a century, the rotten fruit of this movement is everywhere. We see the awful manifesta-

Charisma juices it up by noting that, "Wiese describes being mauled by fiendish creatures, hearing relentless screaming and experiencing true hopelessness."⁵ Hell has become a place we can visit for 23 minutes, not a place of eternal torment.

Charisma also offers Steve Sjogren's *The Day I Died*, advertising it as "a fascinating story about the aftermath of a botched gall bladder surgery that changed Vineyard pastor Steve Sjogren's life. It features a wealth of supernatural encounters. Among them: Sjogren's conversation with God while his spirit hovered over an operating table and his vision of four

become. His book *Ecumenical Jihad* has a chapter "What Christians Can Learn from Confucius, Buddha, Muhammad, and Moses."⁷ Yet evangelical writers quote him favorably. When we quote authors favorably without any disclaimers, we give that writer credibility and convey the sense that all he says is fine. PFO will very rarely quote anyone favorably with whom it has significant doctrinal disagreements without noting those disagreements.⁸

Kreeft is certainly parroting the quasi-Universalism of Karl Rahner. Kreeft, like Rahner, believes that the influence of the Catholic Church has widening circles of grace that will embrace all sincere and good people, no matter what they believe. He asks, "Is there a 'hidden Christ of Hinduism' and even of Buddhism and Taoism?"⁹ Then there is Kreeft's out-of-body experience, of which he says, "Whether it was real or unreal, objective truth or subjective fantasy, I cannot say."¹⁰

Right up front, Kreeft tells his readers that what he is about to reveal may be fantasy. But he writes, "I am commanded to tell you. Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel."¹¹ He presses on:

"You've all heard about OBEs, out-of-body experiences, in which a person's soul leaves his body and sometimes seems to experience some foretaste of Heaven. Well, it happened to me. It usually happens when something mystical triggers it: most usually imminent death, or the expectation of death, or something so ecstatic that you lose self-consciousness. Well, I was engrossed in the most mystical thing I know on earth: surfing."¹²

The short version was that Kreeft claims he was wiped out by a wave which "became a tunnel of light."¹³ He then says, "I soul-surfed the wave of light and landed on a Heavenly beach."¹⁴ Kreeft writes that he met Confucius carrying a surfboard. The dialogue that follows sounds like

Encounters with the dead used to be called spiritism, necromancy, or occultism, but *Charisma* does not seem to care that such practices are forbidden by the Bible.

tions in magazines such as *Charisma*, which proudly advertises books such as *Dream Language: The Prophetic Power of Dreams, Revelations, and the Spirit of Wisdom* by James W. and Michal Ann Goll, and *Angels in Our Lives* by Marie Chapiant²

A book by Stella Gwandiku-Tita, who is advertised as a "Prophetess," purports "to teach God's wounded army of believers violent warfare prayers."³ *Charisma* also gives a thumbs up to Bill Wiese's book, *23 Minutes in Hell*, which reads a lot like Mary Baxter's *Divine Revelation of Hell*. Apologist Robert Liichow suggests that Wiese's book is a borrowing of ideas from both Baxter and Jesse Duplantis.⁴

people who gathered around his bed while he lay in a coma. Instinctively he knew each one's name and age and that all had died that week while in intensive care."⁶

Encounters with the dead used to be called spiritism, necromancy, or occultism, but *Charisma* does not seem to care that such practices are forbidden by the Bible. Tales of out-of-body experiences are a dime a dozen. There are stacks of books on visits to heaven and hell, with most contradicting the others in detail and message.

HOW WOULD I KNOW?

Roman Catholic author and heretical philosopher Peter Kreeft is another example of how bad things have

something out of a *Saturday Night Live* skit. Kreeft claims to have learned harmony from Confucius. Then he met Buddha and interacted for a time and learned silence and detachment.

Kreeft then writes that God told him that he would meet a man who would “teach you the heart and soul of all true religion.”¹⁵ Kreeft then admits:

“I was shocked by this, since the man was evidently Muhammad. I wondered how a man who was not even a Christian could teach me the heart and soul of all true religion. But I could not argue with the Lord.”¹⁶

Kreeft learned surrender from Muhammad. James 1:27 postulates something totally different as the heart and soul of true religion. After interacting with Muhammad and the Qur’an awhile, Kreeft encounters Moses who comes off like a Jewish comic.

Kreeft takes a leap from the Roman Catholic commitment to transubstantiation (that Christ is physically present in the communion wafer) and fantasizes whether Jesus may be present in ancient pagan myths:

“Might He be present in other religions, which, like the myths, are all mixtures of profound truth and profound error? ... Is there, as Raymond Pannikar supposes, a ‘hidden Christ of Hinduism’? When a pious Muslim practices his *islam*, his submission, might this be taking place through Christ and His grace and presence, though the Muslim does not know it or acknowledge it? I think this is very likely. God loves to hide. It is His style.”¹⁷

Even Evangelicals have become obsessed with experiences. This is seen by the success of writers such as Henry Blackaby,¹⁸ who unabashedly endorses mystics and heretics such as Madame Guyon.¹⁹ Also, Thomas Merton and Brennan Manning²⁰ are hot sellers among Protestants.

The 1960s brought in an age of religious confusion and a free-for-all in terms of beliefs. Now the Church has decided it has to reinvent itself and emerge — as in the emerging church movement. The emerging church seems to be a code word for what used to be known as liberalism and higher criticism. Old heresies are simply being renamed and repackaged.²¹

TIME TO GET BACK TO BASICS

If the Church is ever to get back to its proper path, there must be a wholesale return to discernment. There are four reasons we must insist on discernment:

1. *It is a gift from God* — We shouldn’t despise God’s gift. Even William DeArteaga, who maligns those who question Charismatic extremism as Pharisees, admits that, “Errors in discernment can have the gravest consequences for the Christian community.”²²

The Trinity Broadcasting Network gives us a daily smorgasbord of Word-Faith teachers, Charismatic extremists, Oneness Pentecostals, and fund-raising gimmicks. Some proclaimed Evangelicals wittingly or unwittingly endorse all the doctrinal confusion by themselves appearing on TBN.

One writer observes:

“There’s a new term being branded against those in the church called as watchmen. It used to be ‘heresy hunters’ but now we’re being called ‘neo-Pharisees.’ The former label was made popular by TBN’s Paul Crouch against those who exposed the false doctrines of TBN regulars who taught the Positive Confession/Word-Faith teachings that they utilized to get the viewers to pay them for God’s favors. The new term is courtesy of the Emerging Church using such demagoguery against anyone who dares to point out the occult/mystical roots of ‘contem-

plative prayer’ and iconology. People resort to name-calling when they cannot defend their positions and must resort to the use of *ad-hominem*s. Unfortunately, some will be deceived by such propaganda and brush off the voices of any discerning warnings and continue following those who are leading them off the narrow way.”²³

WHAT IS IT?

In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul lists spiritual gifts. In verse 10 he lists the gift of “discerning of spirits.” The word Paul uses for discerning is the Greek word *diakrino*. It means to separate, distinguish, decide, assess, examine, or judge between two. It is a cerebral word and was used in courts of law. Of the more intense form, *anakrino*, linguist W.E. Vine offers:

“...to distinguish, or separate out so as to investigate (*krino*) by looking throughout (*ana*, intensive) objects or particulars, hence signifies to examine, scrutinize, question, to hold a preliminary judicial examination preceding the trial proper (this first examination, implying more to follow, is often present in the non-legal uses of the word).”²⁴

While it is true that we can become excessively critical, it is also true that we can become naive, undiscerning, and unwilling to face gross error. The misuse of discernment by some is an erroneous reason why it should not be properly exercised. While we cannot judge a person’s eternal destiny we can judge and evaluate teaching.

As to God’s gift of the discerning of spirits, Adam Clarke adds:

“A gift by which the person so privileged could discern a *false miracle* from a *true* one; or a *pretender* to inspiration from him who was made *really* partaker of the Holy Ghost. It probably extended also to the discernment of *false professors* from the *true ones*, as appears in Peter in the case of Ananias and his wife.”²⁵

Harvard's Joseph Henry Thayer concurs with his definition of *diakrino* as "to separate, make a distinction, discriminate,"²⁶ and *anakrino* as "to investigate, examine, inquire into, scrutinize, sift, question."²⁷

Solomon, in Proverbs, urges, "Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:3-5).

The Apostle Paul prayed for his converts and friends at Philippi, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:9-10). Paul knew that love without discernment would be reduced to a mushy sentimentality unable to know right from wrong. Knowledge of the Word of God and holding all things up to the light of Scripture are the only ways to approve what is excellent.

Discernment is a tremendous need for our day:

"Every day we face myriads of choices not just between good and bad, but also between good and better and between better and best. More than anything else today we need a sense of what is vital, a spiritual sensitivity to true value so we will be able to distinguish between the good and the best and, thus, give our approval to those things that are excellent. How can we get this sense of what is vital? How will we be able to discern between the good and the best? This second element of Paul's prayer grows naturally out of the first. We develop spiritual discernment by abounding more and more in our love for God. The more we love God, and the closer we are to Him, the sharper

will be our spiritual discernment."²⁸

The Apostle Paul commands us to "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Paul's word for "test" is the Greek word *dokimazo*, which means to put something to the test. The test is Scripture. Paul reminds the Corinthians, "that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6). Going beyond Scripture is to invite disaster. In short, discernment is simply to evaluate biblically.

Another related word is "understanding." The Greek word *noeo* is defined as "to perceive with the mind, as distinct from perception by feeling."²⁹ We are to understand the work of creation by God (Romans 1:20, Hebrews 11:3), understand the mystery of Christ (Ephesians 3:4), and have understanding in all things (2 Timothy 2:7). These are ways we begin to love God with all of our mind (Matthew 22:37).

Ironically, those who stress the need for certain other spiritual gifts not only ignore the gift of discernment, but despise it.

2. *There is so much error in the world* — Without discernment and God's Word, we cannot distinguish between truth and error or right and wrong. Discernment is sight for the mind. Some would try to blind us to that.

It seems that lack of discernment and unbelief are sisters. Ben Witherington writes:

"It is no accident that in the 1990s we were regaled time and again by the revelations of the Jesus Seminar. This group of scholars dismembered Jesus' teachings and then divided them into genuine and inauthentic parts. It is no accident that we have well-known figures like Bishop Spong or Marcus Borg proclaiming a new Christianity for a new age. They are John the Baptists heralding the coming of a new syncretism of New Age

religion — part pagan, part gnostic and part Christian. It is no accident that a mainline denomination has now ordained a gay bishop, and gay marriage is already being legalized in various places. It is no accident that a judge in the Bible Belt was censured for putting up a monument to the Ten Commandments in a public place, commandments that were part of the basis of every Western law code, including America's. Our culture is experiencing a sea of change, and the old Judeo-Christian ways of thinking about things are being challenged at their very foundations."³⁰

We need to take seriously the words of Jesus to "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). How would we know the difference without Scripture and discernment?

Because we no longer live in a discerning culture, error is rampant and the "wolves" abound:

"The 'final' authority of human experiences (we have all heard the cry 'I can't deny my own experience') ring out loud and clear in the Gnostic literature. But unfortunately, genuine human experience is not all good or self-validating. Experience needs to be evaluated on the basis of some valid external criteria, otherwise there is no objective way to tell the difference between a heart-warming experience and heartburn. Both are genuine experiences, but they should be evaluated very differently."³¹

Paul warned the Ephesian elders that, "savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29). Paul told them to watch, that is, be on the lookout and be discerning. He then commended them to God and His Word in Acts 20:32. Unfortunately, many elders are asleep at the switch. Apart from discernment and the Word of God, there would be

no way to detect and fight error in the world. Thank God He has given us the gift of discernment and His Word to be able to deal with the sin and false teachers. But there is more regarding discernment.

ONE BIG EXAMPLE

One of the more obvious places in Scripture that people seem to suspend discernment is when they deal with the Book of Acts. So many see it, not as what it is — a book of history, but rather try to make it a book of rules. Acts is not a rigid rule book; it is a history book. It is the first Church history. It is, after all, the Acts of the Apostles. Codex Bezae calls it the "Transactions of the Apostles."

So many get confused and try to create ecclesiology (organization of the Church) from Acts when ecclesiology must be created from the Epistles. Acts is a book of transition and progression. Doctrine is fixed in Acts, but not polity or practice. Geographically (Acts 1:8), Acts takes us from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. Consider how unusual first-century Acts really is. The polity and practices are variegated and fluid:

1. They waited in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit (1:4);
2. They elected an apostle (1:20-26);
3. They spoke in languages they never studied (2:1-11);
4. They lived communally (2:44-45);
5. They worshipped in the Jewish Temple precincts (3:1, 5:12);
6. People died in the fellowship for lying (5:1-10);
7. Apostles ordained deacons (6:6);
8. Experienced miraculous transport (8:39-40);
9. Appearance of Jesus and His audible voice at conversion (9:1-6);
10. Apostles raised the dead (9:40-41);
11. Miraculous angelic deliverance from prison (12:7-11);

12. Opponents died for blaspheming (12:21-23);

13. Sorcerers struck blind (13:11);

14. Unusual miracles with healings from aprons and hankies from Paul (19:11-12);

15. Predictive prophecies that were accurate (21:11); and

16. An imperviousness to a viper's bite (28:3-6).

Acts is clearly like Exodus — a foundational book — and an account of the miraculous raising up of a new people of God. In spite of all the

3. *The Bible commands it* — The Bible in many places commands us to hold to true doctrine (1 Timothy 4:16, 6:3, Titus 1:9, 2:1). Clearly, evil and destructive doctrine was being taught in Paul's day (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Without discernment we could not know the true from the false. Paul confronted the lack of discernment in Corinth, and especially when it came to moral matters:

"Do you not judge those that are inside? ... therefore put away from yourselves that wicked person. ... Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And

Discernment is urgent because it is a gift from God and because there is so much error and confusion in the world and in the Church.

boasting and bluster, it is impossible for any modern ministry to create the above. To try to recreate it would only bring chaos and counterfeit. Acts captured how God laid the foundation of the Church with the apostles (Ephesians 2:20). That foundation held the superstructure of the rest of the New Testament (Ephesians 2:21-22, 1 Corinthians 3:9). Acts is in fact descriptive, but not prescriptive. Just a small amount of discernment shows Acts, though fixed in theology, is not fixed and rigid in polity and practice. Discernment is urgent because it is a gift from God and because there is so much error and confusion in the world and in the Church.

if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that you will judge angels? How much more the things pertaining to this life. ... I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between the brethren?" (1 Corinthians 5:12-13, 6:2-3, 5)

Lack of discernment and the unwillingness to act in discipline was the shame of the Corinthian church. Paul commands them to judge and discern. Every second Epistle is written to combat heresy and false doctrine. Certainly the writers of Scripture were constantly discerning.

Writers on discernment point out that there is a right kind of discerning or judging. We are not to judge hypocritically, unjustly, presumptuously, or superficially. We also need to be aware of the difference between major and minor issues. We are mandated by the Scriptures to judge truth from error, good from evil, sin in the Church, false prophets, and false doctrine (Matthew 7:15, 18:15-20, Romans 16:17-18, Titus 3:9-11, 2 Peter 2:1-3).

DISCERNMENT EVASION

We are not to be put off by excuses such as “touch not the Lord’s

Some agree that discernment ministries are necessary:

“...it is quite appropriate for some Christians to devote their attention to making such judgments and passing on their findings to the rest of the church. Just as we need consumer advocates to warn us about dangerous or defective or over-priced products on the market, we need people who can warn us about false or oversensationalized claims made for various doctrines circulating today. If these specialists do their jobs

4. Life was created that way — Everyone has the ability to distinguish and discern. Lack of discernment is a condition that fights against the way we were made. In the fall, Adam tried to opt out of his responsibility for the sin by blaming it on the wife God gave him. Eve in turn did the same thing by blaming the serpent. Their discernment got skewed. Part of the effect of the fall was that Adam and Eve left sin unjudged and therefore did not judge or discern their predicament rightly. That lack of discernment is a product of the fall and unnatural to the way God created us. There is still enough of the image of God (though marred and broken) that pushes us to evaluate and discern at many levels.

All of life hinges on discernment. Fixing a car requires discernment. Erecting a building requires discernment. A second opinion on a medical matter requires discernment. In everyday life, people function by making decisions and choices that grow out of a natural ability to discern. The Christian should be even more able. Salvation enables us to begin to renew our minds (Romans 12:1) and to begin to have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5). The renewed mind is a discerning mind (Romans 12:2).

Ephesians 4 lays out our ability as believers to know what is good and evil and to begin to change our behavior based on that knowledge. Colossians 3 offers two ways for the believer. Those two ways are the old man or the new man. Discernment is necessary to make the right kind of behavioral choices. The enablement of course comes from the Holy Spirit within. The Spirit and the Word were given to us so as to be able to properly discern.

Robin Griffith-Jones further amplifies the fact that life was created with a discernment component built in and that we could not function without it:

“How might we start to imagine chaos? To think or speak of any thing is to know it as distinct from the other things surrounding it, as uniquely defined in

All of life hinges on discernment. Fixing a car requires discernment. Erecting a building requires discernment. ... In everyday life, people function by making decisions and choices that grow out of a natural ability to discern.

anointed.” The truly anointed of the Lord do not teach heresy and error. Another evasion often heard is, “You should not name names.” Paul did (2 Timothy 2:16-18, 4:14). So did John (3 John 9). Worst of all is the idea that God could not raise up discernment ministries to warn the Church. “Who made you the watchdog?” is the question. The answer is, “If we don’t, who will?” There are fewer and fewer “keepers of the gate,” and as Peter indicated, there are false teachers among the believers who bring in “destructive heresies” (2 Peter 2:1).

right, they teach us to take responsibility ourselves for avoiding the bad and making the most of the good. In doctrine, while some of us may be more gifted at discernment than others, all of us are called to exercise discernment.”³²

We cannot ignore or waste God’s gift because error will swallow us up if we do. These reasons help us understand why discernment is commanded. Further, we cannot evade discernment simply “because.”

space and time. Similarly, beyond the realm of physical things, to understand *courage* or *love*, *blue* or *round*, *walk* or *sit* is to know to which people, things, or actions the words apply and to which other things they do not. A world wholly without such distinctions cannot be imagined; it would have no up or down, no before or after, no objects, character, or contrasts. There is nothing to be spoken of, nothing to be named. It would not be a world at all. Our thought can get no grip on such chaos. ... It is not surprising, in turn, that for the proper process and result of right thinking we speak of light. The sun casts light on the world; our reasoning and imagination cast light on its working. The first source is a daily symbol of God's creative work; the second is our finite, fallible copy of that activity. We make distinctions by the sun's light and our mind's together. When are these distinctions of our own secure? Our poet might have answered, when they conform to the distinctions made and illumined together by that first creative blaze. Light makes it possible to discern differences. To discern differences brings light. To speak of judging, the Greeks used a more general word than ours: They would 'distinguish' or 'discern' between two things or opinions. It is no accident that John links light and the judgment that it makes possible and that brings light in its turn. Judgment and discrimination: of physical objects, of relations, and of the moral world."³³

CRUCIAL AND NECESSARY — OR ELSE!

Discernment is God's precious gift to the Church to help us avoid evil, false teaching, and chaos. There is so much error in the world showing that we desperately need discernment and, after all, the Bible commands it. In the end, we cannot avoid it because life was created that way. We will either have a defective navigational system

and risk calling good evil and evil good, or we will have minds trained in the Word of God, able to discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14).

Therefore, we discern so that we can be more like Jesus. As the apostle records, "But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man" (John 2:24-25).

If good discernment is not recovered and embraced, the decades ahead will be chaotic. It will be like the time of the Book of Judges where "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). The darkness will deepen and the Church will become even less meaningful and marginalized. New myths and fads will abound and it will be much like Athens, with professed believers spending "their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing" (Acts 17:21).

With the navigational system broken, the Church can only become more confused and misdirected and the nightmare gets worse. We need to pray for discernment, exercise discernment, and insist that others around us evaluate and judge all teachings in the light of God's Word. It is our only hope.

Endnotes:

1. Stanley M. Burgess, Editor, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002, pg. 517.
2. An advertisement for these publications is found in *Charisma*, August 2006, pg. 7.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. 27.
4. Robert S. Liichow, "Hell Receives Another Visitor," *Truth Matters*, Detroit: Discernment Ministries International, July 2006, pp. 1-8.
5. Christine D. Johnson, book review of *23 Minutes in Hell* by Bill Wiese, *Charisma*, August 2006, pg. 88.
6. Ken Walker, book review of *The Day I Died* by Steve Sjogren, *Charisma*, August 2006, pg. 88.
7. Peter Kreeft, *Ecumenical Jihad*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996, pg. 85.
8. See for example, J. Greg Sheryl, "The Grave and Beyond - A Biblical Look at What Happens After Death," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2006, pg.

- 19, endnote 17.
9. *Ecumenical Jihad*, op. cit., pg. 160.
10. *Ibid.*, pg. 86.
11. *Ibid.*, pg. 85, italic in original.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, pg. 86.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 98.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, pg. 156, italic in original.
18. See further, G. Richard Fisher with M. Kurt Goedelman, "Experiencing Mysticism - Critiquing the Teachings of Henry Blackaby," *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 2003, pp. 4-16.
19. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "The Mindless Mysticism of Madame Guyon," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 1997, pp. 4, 12-15.
20. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "What a Marriage! Why Did Evangelicalism Marry Catholicism's Stepchild?," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2005, pg. 16; Gary E. Gilley, "The Lure of Mysticism - A Path to Spiritual Growth or Road to Deception?," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2005, pg. 18; and M. Kurt Goedelman, "A 'Liar' Who Stayed to Help?," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 2006, pp. 22-23.
21. See further, Gary E. Gilley, "The Challenge of the Emerging Church," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2006, pp. 1, 17-26.
22. William DeArteaga, *Quenching The Spirit*. Lake Mary, Fla.: Creation House, 1992, pg. 15.
23. Jackie Alnor, "Neo-Pharisees: The New Heresy Hunters," *Apostasy Alert*, May 27, 2006, italic in original. Document available at: www.apostasyalert.org/REFLECTIONS/NeoPharisees.htm.
24. W.E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine's - Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984, pg. 306.
25. Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. New York: Abingdon Press, no date, pg. 259, italics in original.
26. Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966, pg. 138, italics in original.
27. *Ibid.*, pg. 39, italics in original.
28. Brian L. Harbour, *Living Joyfully*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991, pg. 23.
29. *The Expanded Vine's*, op. cit., pg. 1180.
30. Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel Code*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004, pg. 12.
31. *Ibid.*, pg. 108-109.
32. Robert Bowman, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992, pg. 32.
33. Robin Griffith-Jones, *The Four Witnesses*. San Francisco: Harper, 2000, pg. 296, italics in original.

dicts God's Word. How can we expect to hear His 'still, small voice' amid the cacophony of culture?" (Ibid.)

While Smithouser is correct that Christians invest far too much time in devoting themselves to fruitless activities, his solution is an inconsequential fix, which is really no remedy at all. Just "turning off the iPod, letting the TV or computer go dark, silencing a video game, or limiting their availability to take cell calls and text messages," as he suggests, is not going to clear a channel for God's still, small voice. He may have diagnosed the problem, but his cure is incorrect. And, as noted above, when aberrant theology or unbiblical antidotes are used, dreadful results may follow. Smithouser, by having his readers seek after a still, small voice, opens them to confusion, chaos, subjectivism, mysticism, or deception at best — and demons at worst.

Why do young people fill their lives with meaningless conduct? Jesus tells us the answer in no uncertain terms when He said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). It is because they desire the hollow things of this life, rather than desiring Jesus. It is a simple matter of their priorities. And this is a plight not just limited to young people.

Adults fare no better in their pursuit of worthless treasures and activities, and in being saturated with confusing counsel for spirituality. Take, for instance, a recent edition of a Southern Baptist missions magazine. The dominant theme in this particular issue was listening for God's voice. The methods for doing so were a plethora of unbiblical notions, including "God's gentle whisper," your job, contemplative prayer, fleeces, and other avenues of mysticism.

The editor of the magazine writes that, for her, hearing God's call was sometimes easy, sometimes a struggle. Following her work as a missionary journeyman and subsequent seminary study, she wrestled with a decision to enter the mission field. She writes, "However, I could not distinguish what was just my heart's desire and what was truly God's call on my life. Somehow I didn't think the two could coincide" (Janet Erwin, "Listen for His Voice," *Missions Mosaic*, November 2006, pg. 1).

Why not? With such a muddled view of knowing and acting within God's will, it's no wonder one needlessly labors and toils. Fortunately for Erwin, her missions professor cut through the fog by asking her, "Why is it so hard for you to believe that what God has put into your heart is not God's call on your life?"

Why do we think we have to work up some sort of great mystical experience to satisfy or assure us that we

are in the will of God? Perhaps, central to this is an ignorance of God's Word and/or a lack of belief that the Bible is sufficient for knowing all of life's matters which please and honor the Lord. Added to that is the inundation of contemporary mystics and their writings. As PFO director Richard Fisher has said, "You become what you read, so read a lot of the Bible."

With the Church's bent toward mysticism, the Bible has become so passé. James Draper and Kenneth Keathley are correct when they write that many people "believe that the Bible was the best resource for its day when it came to instruction manuals for living. But they believe it too bound to its time and culture to be the final word on the difficult issues of our era. The Bible is thought to be like a sweet old grandpa: quaint, filled with interesting stories, but hopelessly out of date" (*Biblical Authority*, pp. 107-108).

To Draper and Keathley's analysis, one should also add the fact mentioned above that most people view the Bible lacking in providing guidance for their lives. The Bible, they assume, is sufficient for instruction in how to get saved, but after that we're on our own, as far as Scripture is concerned. It is widely accepted that if we want to keep the Divine as part of our decision-making process, we should listen for that still, small voice or interpret our dreams or circumstances.

In another article in the missions magazine, its author deploys the Psalm 46:10 battle cry of the contemplative prayer movement, "Be still and know that I am God." This verse has been ripped from its context and misapplied by contemplative prayer advocates. But the author in this Southern Baptist periodical goes beyond just mere misapplication or misinterpretation. In order to support the central idea of his article (i.e., hearing God's call), he incorporates his premise into the verse:

"The Psalmist said in 46:10 that we should 'be still.' But he added be still *in order to hear the call* and in order to know God" (Don L. Madaris, "How to Hear the Call: Learn to Listen," *Missions Mosaic*, pg. 24, emphasis added).

Psalm 46:10 has nothing to do with hearing God's call. It was not the Psalmist who added that, but this modern day author desperate for scriptural support for his unbiblical notion. The setting of this passage is God's power, might, and majesty against those who war against Him. As Charles Spurgeon, the renowned preacher of yesteryear, comments:

"Hold off your hands, ye enemies! Sit down and wait in patience, ye believers! Acknowledge that Jehovah is God, ye who feel the terrors of his wrath! Adore him, and him only, ye who partake in the protections of his grace" (*The Treasury of David*, Vol. 2, pg. 383).

Eminent British scholar Adam Clarke echoes this interpretation:

“Cease from your provocations of the divine justice; cease from murmuring against the dispensations of His providence” (*Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible*, pg. 485).

The insertion into Psalm 46:10 of the idea that one can hear God’s voice (or call) through a mystical and subjective means demonstrates just how destitute and bankrupt the position is.

In fairness to this periodical, a sound directive may be found within its pages: “When we are hungry to hear from Him, we need go no further than our Bible. Through it we are enlightened, inspired, and loved. And through it all we hear Him speaking” (*Missions Mosaic*, pg. 42). However, it must be said that within the extent of the entire magazine, this direction is grossly extraneous to its many other instructions. This one sane comment appears to be a case of a statement that does not belong with the others.

An event from recent headlines further demonstrates how futile and defective listening for God apart from His holy Word is. It is the tragic episode of prominent pastor and evangelical leader Ted Haggard. In November, charges of sexually immoral conduct were aimed at Haggard. After first denying the allegations, Haggard later acknowledged his misconduct and resigned as pastor of his 14,000-member New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colo., in addition to relinquishing his role as president of the National Association of Evangelicals.

Readers of *The Quarterly Journal* may recall that PFO has never been a big fan of some of Haggard’s teachings. According to the *Denver Post*, Haggard received his theological training at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa and claims that as a young man of 19 he “found his calling [as pastor] over a late-night bowl of Cheerios.” Over his evening snack, Haggard asserts, God told him to become a pastor. His propensity for visions and mystical experience is well documented.

Back in the late 1990s, an advertisement in *Charisma* magazine promoted Haggard as part of the National School of the Prophets conference, where for \$175 (or \$125 if you registered early) Haggard and others would “minister and release you into a new level of prophetic anointing.” The event was held at Haggard’s World Prayer Center in Colorado Springs and claimed “Prophets help to prepare the way for the Apostles to establish the Lord’s Church” (*Charisma*, December 1998, pg. 43).

In 2003, Haggard again promoted his supposed prophetic abilities, claiming a powerful vision from the Lord that if 1,000,000 prayer intercessors could be mobilized to pray for Saddam Hussein on March 3, 2003 at 3:33 p.m., Hussein would voluntarily leave Iraq, thus eliminating

the need for a U.S. invasion. Despite Haggard’s claim of 1.4 million intercessors, his vision did not come to pass.

Yes, PFO is grieved and saddened by Haggard’s disclosures of his struggle with sin, by the disgrace and humiliation it has caused his family and congregation, and for the reproach which it has brought upon the Church. Yet we have to question why Haggard didn’t use his own prophetic skills or his mystical communions with the Lord to know the fate that awaited him as he secretly engaged in homosexuality and drug use.

No one at PFO is a prophet, nor do we claim visions or direct revelation from God, but we could have told Haggard: “Your sin will find you out” and “Nothing is hidden that will not be made known” (Numbers 32:23 and Luke 12:2). One does not need to be a prophet to know and express these things. One simply needs to be a student of the Word.

In all of this, the issue that should disturb Christians the most about those saying, “God told me,” (either from religious icons like Haggard, or from magazine authors and editors, or from pastors in the pulpit, or deacons in the pew) is that such a claim is bearing false witness against God. Apart from the written Word, God didn’t tell them anything; they speak from the desires of their heart and imaginations.

Escaping the quicksand of subjectivism may seem like an impossible task, but it’s not. PFO director Richard Fisher’s comments from his lecture examining the mysticism of Henry Blackaby is a helpful lifeline to those sinking in the chaotic seduction of subjectivism:

“Do we or do we not have all that we need for life and godliness in the Scripture? If we don’t, then you can just go out there with all the Mormons, and all the special revelation, and the Charismatic lunacy, and fringe extremism. Because there is no way to know where it ends. We can’t. So, I’m really perfectly happy with a book from God. That really satisfies me. That gives me security. It gives me safety that I’m not at the whim of these guys with all their special revelations. I don’t have to be. I have what I need, and Christ communicates to me clearly and guides me and directs me on the pages of Scripture. That’s what we have lost in the Church today. We have really lost that” (*Experiencing God or Experiencing Mysticism*, Saint Louis Conference on Biblical Discernment, April 2004).

Yes, Christian, you have what you need. “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path,” the psalmist declared (Psalm 119:105). It is not a still, small voice or dreams and visions which are that lamp and light. Scripture was given that the man (or woman) of God may be complete, adequately equipped, not lacking anything (2 Timothy 3:17). The Bible is enough.

—MKG

was nearly unanimously accepted as authentic, even by document experts and the leadership of the LDS church. Tanner was virtually a solitary voice in expressing skepticism about the letter. Within a few short months, Tanner's disbelief was confirmed when the document was revealed to be the work of forger Mark Hofmann.

Tanner also was not afraid to critique the research of other Christians who wrote in opposition to the Mormon church when their writings intermingled fact with fiction or incorporated exaggeration and embellishment. His reputation for seeking only the truth was renowned.

In addition to Tanner's life work as a researcher, author, and publisher, he served on the board of the Rescue Mission of Salt Lake, as well as doing volunteer work for the organization and spending time with those being helped by the ministry. He was also an Elder and served on the Governing Board for Discovery Christian Community.

Tanner is survived by his wife of 47 years, Sandra, three children, and five grandchildren.

—MKG

VICTORIA OSTEEN FINED BY FAA, SUED BY FLIGHT ATTENDANT

The repercussions from an ill-started family Christmas vacation in 2005 continues to be felt by the wife of megachurch pastor and best-selling author Joel Osteen.

On Dec. 19, Victoria Osteen, husband Joel, and other family members voluntarily left a Continental Airlines flight scheduled to depart from Houston for Vail, Colo., following a preflight altercation between Mrs. Osteen and flight attendants.

According to a Federal Aviation Administration report, Mrs. Osteen assaulted flight attendant Sharon Brown in an attempt to get to the cockpit following the flight crew's failure to give immediate attention to cleaning a spilled liquid from the armrest of her first-class seat. (See further, "Osteens Grounded," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2006, pg. 3.)

The aftermath of her tantrum continues to plague Mrs. Osteen. In August, she paid a \$3,000 FAA fine for interfering with a flight crew member. In late September, Brown, who was the flight manager on the trip, filed a civil law suit against Mrs. Osteen. According to an Associated Press report, "Brown is seeking unspecified damages for past and future medical care, emotional pain, mental anguish, suffering and humiliation."

Mrs. Osteen denies Brown's charges. "Victoria Osteen never assaulted her," said Mrs. Osteen's lawyer, Rusty Hardin. "This flight attendant just flipped out. I can't answer why. The only thing I can say is that Victoria Osteen is the last person in the world who would assault anyone," Hardin added. Mrs. Osteen reportedly sent a letter to the members of her husband's congregation saying that she conducted herself "in a Christian-like manner" during the occurrence.

Brown's attorney, Reginald McKamie, countered with, "We're going to let a jury of 12 people from Harris County decide whether she acted in a Christian-like manner."

—MKG

WARREN SOUGHT TO REVITALIZE SYNAGOGUES

The philosophies and methods of seeker-sensitive guru and megachurch pastor Rick Warren have attracted the attention and ambition of more than just Christian pastors. Last summer, Warren was the special guest and featured speaker for the Friday Night Live Shabbat services at Sinai Temple in Los Angeles. The event marked the first time Warren had preached in a synagogue, and drew a capacity audience of 1,500.

Prior to his arrival at Sinai Temple, Warren said he had just completed a photo shoot at Sony Studios with actor Brad Pitt to bring attention to AIDS in Africa and other global problems.

Warren appeared at the Shabbat service at the invitation of Synagogue 3000, which is described as "an umbrella Jewish organization pushing for synagogue transformation." The Jewish organization had asked Warren to bring a message in an effort "to explore what synagogues can learn from mega-churches and small groups."

Warren's efforts met with great accolades — at least from his Jewish audience. "As I sat listening to him speak at Sinai Temple's Friday Night Live Shabbat services last week, I thought of the only other person I'd met with Warren's eloquence, charisma, and passion — but Bill Clinton carries a certain amount of baggage that Warren doesn't," Rob Eshman, editor of *The Jewish Journal of Great Los Angeles*, wrote in his article, "Jesus' Man Has a Plan."

Eshman's account of Warren and the Shabbat services should make Christians more than a bit apprehensive. "Warren managed to speak for the entire evening without once mentioning Jesus — a testament to his savvy message-tailoring. But make no mistake, the driving purpose of an evangelical church is to evangelize, and it is Warren's devotion to spreading the words of the

Christian Bible that drive his ministry," Eshman reported.

Yet, how one could be devoted to spreading the words of the Christian Bible without once mentioning Jesus Christ as the Messiah remains a mystery. Causing additional concern was Eshman's statement that Warren told the program's leader, Rabbi Ron Wolfson, that "his interest is in helping all houses of worship, not in converting Jews. [Warren] said there are more than enough Christian souls to deal with for starters."

Eshman's added observation that, "The success of Warren's second book, "The Purpose-Driven Life (Zondervan, 2002), demonstrates his ability to turn a particular gospel into a universal one. ... His teachings apply to 95 percent of all people, regardless of religious belief," should cause indignation among Bible-believing Christians. And it has. Ken Silva, Southern Baptist pastor and apologist, calls Warren's message the "new evangelical inclusivism," and says his "stealth evangelism hides the road to hell."

Warren's appearance at the Jewish synagogue was not his first drift across theological perimeters. Last spring, the Southern Baptist pastor made a two-part presentation at the 100th anniversary of the Azusa Street Revival. The 1906 revival is said to have birthed the Pentecostal movement. (See further, "Pentecostal Centennial Celebrated," *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 2006, pp. 3, 22.)

—MKG

BOOKS IN REVIEW

(continued from page 24)

dependency — and its disastrous consequences. Some of the testimony comes from Hendrickson's own personal history, including her older brother's suicide and her own hopelessness where she contemplated killing her child and taking her own life. This is a compelling book.

Those currently under the care of a physician and taking drugs for emotional problems will find that this book offers a different solution. However, the authors warn that while working through biblical principles provides God's healing, any change in taking one's medication must be supervised by a physician.

The book is enhanced with helpful charts and graphs. Each chapter concludes with a "Growing In Your Faith" section in which further biblical counsel is given.

The heart of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 becomes so relevant in the scope of this volume. With a totally biblical worldview, a Christian is to trust God with all of life's problems — including emotional challenges.

Everyone knows someone on antidepressant drugs: family, friend, neighbor, or co-worker. Although written primarily to women, anyone can benefit from it. It will challenge readers' thinking and assist, by God's grace, to help them get off the merry-go-round of hopelessness and emptiness.

—AMG

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 DISCIPLINING THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED.



Books in Review

SPELLBOUND

The Paranormal Seduction of Today's Kids

by Marcia Montenegro

Life's Journey, 255 pages, \$13.99

Books that examine the cults from a Christian worldview are abundant. However, Christian publications that explore the dark side are not quite as easy to come by. Yet, with our culture's inclination toward the supernatural, the occultic, and Eastern thought, the need for such works is great. Former professional astrologer Marcia Montenegro's *Spellbound* can help in an area that has been lacking.

Our young people today are targeted through books, movies, television programs, and the Internet, which lure them with seductive images of the occult. What was once off limits is now acceptable and pursued. Witches with hooked noses, riding brooms, and casting spells have been replaced by the beautiful heroines of *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch*, *Charmed*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or Zodiac Barbie, an exclusive line of the popular doll created for Wal-Mart.

Montenegro's work is a virtual encyclopedia of the major components of the occult. She tells what they are, where they came from, why they are a threat, and, most importantly, what Scripture has to say about them. For example, how does the Goth (or Gothic) movement correlate to the occult? Page 127 has the answer. From the tools and objects of the occult (such as tarot cards, crystal balls, and amulets and talismans) to its activities (such as divination, sorcery, necromancy, and astrology), this book provides the details. From the contemporary Harry Potter books to the erstwhile popular *Dungeons & Dragons* (fantasy role-playing games), Montenegro sorts out the bad, the evil, and the deadly.

Each chapter concludes with a brief section entitled, "Bringing It Home," which is a list of suggestions or questions that will help the adult reader communicate the chapters' content to children. The only way this

volume could be enhanced would be with a subject index to allow for an easier retrieval of specific topics.

Montenegro says in her autobiographical Preface, "I have written this book to inform parents about the basics of the paranormal — the areas of danger, where it exists in our culture, how to identify it — and to offer suggestions for informing and equipping children and teens" (pg. 19). Her ambitions have been achieved in this admirable publication.

There are no degrees of separation when it comes to knowing someone who falls under the lethal magnetism of the occult. Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, Sunday school or Bible study teachers, youth leaders, and even nursery workers need to read this book.

—MKG

WILL MEDICINE STOP THE PAIN?

by Elyse Fitzpatrick & Laura Hendrickson

Moody Press, 234 pages, \$13.99

One way to quickly raise the ire of many a Christian is to suggest that the cause of depression, anxiety, out-of-control moods, or other emotional struggles may well be sin and not a chemical imbalance. Doing so takes the ailing person from being a victim to one who is responsible for their decisions and actions. By not doing so, the drugs being taken may help the person feel better, but they are not a cure and eventually may aggravate the emotional problems.

That is the message behind Elyse Fitzpatrick and Laura Hendrickson's powerful new book. Fitzpatrick is the author of 10 previous volumes in the biblical counseling field; Hendrickson is an M.D. who formerly practiced psychiatry. Both are now active as biblical counselors.

Antidepressant drugs have become the preferred solution to many problems, but doubts about their effectiveness are beginning to grow.

The book is a captivating read, with sound biblical counsel and engrossing stories of real people who have fallen victim to the plight of prescription drug

(continues on page 23)

Editor's Note: The publications featured in PFO's *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$2.50 to the price listed for shipping and handling. Due to occasional price changes by the publishers, the retail amounts listed are subject to change without notice. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.