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Savage Wolves Among the Flock

What Scripture Says About False Prophets and Their “Fruit”

by J. Greg Sheryl

Near the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), the Lord Jesus warned:

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders

in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:15-23).



It is important that the Christian understands what the Bible teaches about false prophets and what Jesus meant by “fruits.” If we can know — that is *recognize* or *discern* — false prophets, then we are less likely to be taken in by them.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Jesus specifically stated that we can recognize false prophets by their fruits. He did *not* say here that we can recognize
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Editorials

THE HYBRID CLONING MACHINE OF THE HEBREW ROOTS MOVEMENT

There is no denying that the Hebrew Roots Movement relies heavily on the extrabiblical Jewish Talmud. Kenneth E. Bailey's *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* is a current example. If read discerningly, Bailey can be viewed as a studied, first-rate scholar with much to offer.

However, it is not always clear whether those within the HRM rely on the much longer Babylonian Talmud (said to be completed in A.D. 499) or the earlier and much shorter Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud (said to be redacted about a century earlier) or even if such differences are understood. One online Jewish source offers this explanation and distinction of the two versions:

"Due to persecution of the Jewish community in Israel the Jerusalem Talmud, completed in the mid 4th century C.E., was never completed or fully edited. The Jerusalem Talmud is much shorter (it contains only four of the six sections of the Mishna) and is more cryptic and harder to understand than the Babylonian Talmud. The situation of the Jews in Babylon was much more stable and the rabbis in

Babylon had considerably more time to edit and explain the subject matter. Although there are two Talmuds, they are not really separate. The Rabbis of Babylon had access to the Jerusalem Talmud while they were working on their text. But if there is dispute between the two Talmuds, the Babylonian Talmud is followed. Both because [the] Babylonian Talmud is considered more authoritative and the Jerusalem Talmud is more difficult to study. Jewish students pouring over the Talmud in yeshiva are using chiefly the Babylonian Talmud. The Talmud is more than just an application of the details of the Jewish law as expounded in the Mishnah. It's the encyclopedia of all Jewish existence" ("The History of the Talmud," SimpleToRemember.com, Judaism Online).

It is unlikely that all or most all of Talmudic teachings and practices, which were developed long after the Roman destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in A.D. 70, can be read back into the first-century era of Jesus. This in turn casts doubt on the idea that the Talmud and the times of Jesus should be superimposed on New Testament Church life. These two premises are foundational to the HRM, but must be questioned.

It would be much like saying that the words "hip," "cool," or "groovy" could be read back into (or imposed upon) Colonial American days. Such a practice is called
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SEXUAL HARASSMENT CHARGES FORCE GOTHARD RESIGNATION

Bill Gothard, the longtime head of the Institute in Basic Life Principles (IBLP), resigned as president and from the ministry's board and its affiliates following charges of sexual harassment and other misconduct.

Gothard was first placed on "administrative leave." A week later, on March 6, he resigned, telling IBLP's Board of Directors of "his desire to follow Matthew 5:23-24 and listen to those who have 'ought against' him," according to an email sent to the ministry's Advanced Training Institute International families. ATI is identified as "a home education program that provides curriculum and training to support parents in raising their children."

In an online post, *Christianity Today* reported, "The popular seminar speaker and his ministry had weathered moral and financial controversies, as well as scrutiny over his teachings, in the past. But recently a whistleblowing website gathered accusations of sexual harassment from more than 30 women." That website, recoveringgrace.org, is said to have statements from 34 women who alleged that they had been sexually harassed by Gothard, four of whom alleged molestation.

The *Religion News Service* corroborates the accusations made public by Recovering Grace, saying it has spoken "with several women who alleged they were sexual[ly] harassed, including one woman who alleged that Gothard molested her when she was 17." *World* magazine reported, "The statements concern sexual harassment and — in one case — sexual abuse that included fondling but not rape." The reported abuses date all the way back to the 1970s and later, and in many occurrences the statute of limitations has expired leaving Gothard's victims unable to pursue legal recourse.

The *RNS* article also stated, "The allegations against Gothard dovetail with financial woes. In recent years, IBLP's net revenue has dropped significantly, and the ministry is losing money. Between 2009 and 2012, it lost \$8.6 million. Its net assets dropped from \$92 million in 2010 to \$81 million in 2012. It held 504 seminars in 2010, but that number dropped to fewer than 50 in 2012."

In April, the 79-year-old Gothard broke his silence and responded publicly via Twitter saying, "I have repented in deep sorrow. ... I have failed to live out some of the very things that I have taught."

—MKG

MEGACHURCH REPORTS MEGATHEFT

Lakewood Church, the Houston-based megachurch pastored by bestselling author and prosperity preacher Joel Osteen, said that \$600,000 — \$200,000 in cash and \$400,000 in checks — was stolen from a safe following weekend services on March 8 and 9. The theft occurred between 2:30 p.m. Sunday and 8:30 a.m. Monday. Police were notified Monday morning by a church employee who discovered the robbery.

In a one-page statement posted on Lakewood's website, the church stated: "We were heartbroken to learn today that funds were stolen from the church over the weekend. ... If you made a contribution during these weekend services, we would encourage you to pay close attention to your accounts over the next several days and weeks and report any suspicious activity to your financial institution or credit card company immediately."

The church's statement further indicated that they were "working with the police to fully investigate the incident" and the "funds were fully insured, and we are working with our insurance company to restore the stolen funds to the church."

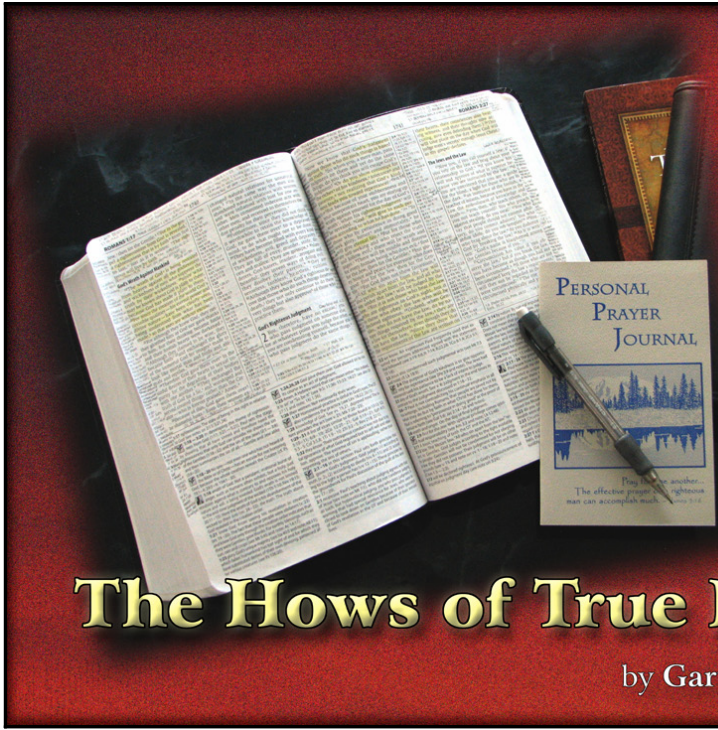
As of publication time, no one had been arrested in the case. Crime Stoppers of Houston said in a statement that a \$25,000 reward was being offered for information leading to the arrest of the person or persons responsible for the theft.

One local media outlet, News 92FM (Houston), alleges that there is "a lot of speculation on the streets of Houston" as to the person or persons responsible for the robbery. "Many people we talked with think it's an inside job," the radio station reported. The news item also stated, "Another person claimed to have inside information. 'Well, one of the ladies I work with is a member of the Lakewood choir and she was telling us that they keep the money hidden in a safe in one of the rooms that you can't just walk down the hallway and find.'"

Christianity Today crunched the numbers and posted an article with the headline that read, "Joel Osteen Lakewood Church gets \$32 million in yearly donations." The article explained, "By multiplying \$600,000 by 52 weeks, the sum comes to \$32 million."

—MKG

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SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES AND THE BELIEVER

The Hows of True Biblical Discipleship

by Gary E. Gilley

When we speak of discipleship or Christian maturity, we must understand that all spiritual transformation is a supernatural work of God. Just as the natural man cannot will himself to be born again, so the Christian depends upon God for inward change and growth.

In Ephesians 3:16-17, Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers “that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”

However, before He strengthens us with power, the Lord must give us new life. This new life is the result of a spiritual birth, being born again, born from above (John 3:3), or regeneration. Paul wrote in Titus 3:5, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.”

Just as regeneration is a supernatural work of God, so is our progressive sanctification. The Holy Spirit uses means to bring about our spiritual development and the primary means

— the one most spoken of in Scripture — is the Word of God.

Romans 12:2 tells us we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. Our thinking does not change unless there is new information for our minds to process. Spiritual transformation simply does not take place by osmosis. Apart from a renewing of our minds by means of the input of God’s Word, we will not be changed.

SCRIPTURES CLAIM TO HAVE TRANSFORMATIVE POWERS

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus’ prayer focused on His disciples. As He contemplated the struggles they would face in a world that hated them and from a devil who wanted to destroy them, He asked the Father to sanctify them. When used in the New Testament and in the context of the Christian life, “sanctify” means to set apart for a holy purpose. Jesus prayed that His disciples would be kept separated from the polluting influences of the world around them so that they might live as the Lord intended and fulfill the mission of making disciples. Jesus expressed just how believers are to be sanctified when He prayed, “Sanctify them by

Your truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

The disciples would wage their battle largely in the realm of truth. If they were compromised by a worldview dominated by sinful impulses and demonic insight, they would be unfruitful in making disciples for Christ. If they were to be successful in their discipleship endeavors, they would need to be saturated with truth.

Jesus made clear that the truth He spoke of does not emerge from the culture or the wisdom of humans, but from God’s Word. Their great weapon in this fight against the darkness of sin and spiritual blindness would be the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).

As Paul addressed the early Church on the process of change and growth, he told them to “put off ... the old man” and “put on the new man” and to “be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Ephesians 4:22-24). The renewing of our mind — the way we think, the way we process what enters our minds, the way we approach life itself — must be changed through the truth, which is found in the Word of God.

As we contemplate Scripture's place in our spiritual development we must return for a moment to the foundational role of the Lord Himself. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul wrote of the hardening of the minds of the Old Testament Jews (v. 14a). He likened their condition to having a veil over their minds and hearts (vv. 14b-15) that disabled them from seeing who Christ really was.

But when a person turns to Christ that veil is removed (v. 16). The believer can now see what they could not in their unregenerate state: The glory of the Lord. Paul wrote, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (v. 18).

To be sure, the unbeliever can read and understand the details of Scripture. Even some scholarly and mostly accurate commentaries on the Bible have been written by non-Christians. But the unregenerate cannot comprehend the true glory of Christ or know Him as Savior and Lord, until the spiritual veil has been removed at the moment of conversion.

The unbeliever cannot grasp the Gospel both because he does not have the spiritual capacity to do so and because Satan has blinded him to the glory of Christ. Paul continued, "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Those who are perishing (present tense — not *will* perish, but *are* already doing so) can understand the details of Christology and soteriology, but they cannot grasp the significance of the Gospel because it reveals the glory of Christ, which they cannot truly see.

Because of this spiritual blindness, the unbeliever is in a hopeless bind. He cannot comprehend Christ's true

nature and glory and is in bondage to Satan — the god of this age. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:1-3 that the unsaved are dead in their trespasses and sins, merely following the course of the world, are children of disobedience, enslaved to their own lusts, and under the wrath of God.

Our situation is indeed hopeless, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:4-5). Through a supernatural work of God we have been born again — given spiritual life. In 2 Corinthians 4:6 Paul describes the spiritual transaction this way:

"For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The very God who in the act of creation separated light from darkness is the same God who turns on the spiritual light in our hearts so we might be able to comprehend the glory of Himself as found in His Son.

These texts reveal the supernatural nature and requirement of regeneration. We cannot give ourselves new life; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not hard; it is impossible apart from God's intervention (Mark 10:27). Now that the Lord God has removed our spiritual veil, has revealed His glory through His Son, and given us new life in Him, we can be progressively transformed by the power of the Spirit through the means God supplies.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, the believer is privileged to behold "as in a mirror the glory of the Lord." Ancient mirrors were usually made of polished metals and lacked the nearly perfect reflection we enjoy today. This picture communicated to the original readers that while they could now view the image of Christ it would not be with the absolute perfection and clarity reserved for the future (1 Corinthians 13:12 and 1 John 3:2). Nevertheless,

we are promised that as we are "beholding the glory of the Lord," we are being transformed into Christ's image.

This promise reminds us of Romans 8:28-29 that speaks of us being called, foreknown, and predestined "to be conformed to the image of His Son." A marvelous part of God's redemption plan is the believer's conformity to Christ-likeness. Our Lord is not content with saving us and leaving us virtually unchanged. Rather as Christians "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

God has chosen Scripture to play the role of revealing Christ's glory to His people. Many biblical passages detail the transformational nature of Scripture. Our Father has chosen to use His written Word, combined with the power of His Spirit, to change us and enable us to grow toward conformity with His Son.

OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING

The New Testament unmistakably supports this thesis, as does the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 29:29 states, "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."

Much like people today, the people of Moses' time apparently wanted to be privy to the secret counsels and will of God. Not content with what God had revealed to them, they wanted knowledge of the future and insight into God's sovereign plans and the reasons behind His actions. Moses makes it clear that some things are for God alone and we are not invited to His inner councils. However, He has revealed many things to His people. These things, recorded by men but inspired by God, are ours forever. By this means we are able to observe His will and live accordingly.

The first six verses of Psalm 19 deal with God's revelation through nature.

The physical universe reveals certain things about God such as His glory and creative powers.

Romans 1:18-20 adds that the Lord's invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature are clearly seen in that which He has created, so that rebellious mankind is without excuse when it rejects Him. But what we learn of God through creation has limits. The general power, nature, and glory of God are evident, but many details are missing. No one could ever discern a great number of truths about God by gazing at the stars or hiking through the rain forest or sailing the seas. We would never understand Christ, sin, salvation, the necessity of the cross, the resurrection, and much more, for such things need specific revelation from our Creator.

In Psalm 19:7, David turns from general revelation, as found in observation of the universe around us, to specific revelation: The written Word of God. He speaks of the Law in particular as perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, desirable, sweet, and providing warning for those who disobey the commandments of God. They will be restored, made wise, rejoice, be enlightened, and rewarded (vv. 7-14).

The Psalmist can't seem to find enough wonderful things to say about God's Word, but Psalm 19 pales in comparison to Psalm 119. Out of 176 verses, 173 speak of the grandeur and/or power of the written Word. It is by treasuring the Lord's Word in one's heart that we are kept from sin (v. 11). We can keep our way pure by living according to God's Word (v. 9). Affliction comes from the hand of a faithful God and is good for us (vv. 67, 71, 75, 92). The Lord's Word cannot be changed (v. 89), and much more.

The Old Testament is clear about the role Scripture plays in enabling God's people to change, grow, and live according to the Lord's glory. But the New Testament is even clearer.

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

The New Testament claims that the Scriptures contribute a number of

spiritual benefits. The two most fundamental are:

Salvation. Especially in light of reported claims of people coming to Christ through dreams, visions, and unusual experiences, it is important to note Scripture's role in our salvation. Romans 10:17 tells us that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." People cannot come to a saving knowledge of Christ without input from the Word of Christ.

Scripture reveals the absolute holiness of God, enables us to see our sinfulness and need for salvation, describes and explains the Lord's redemption plan through Christ's sacrifice on the cross and resurrection, which informs us that salvation cannot be obtained by our good works, and that we receive the gift of eternal life through faith alone. There is no way that any of us could know the content of the Gospel apart from the divine revelation found in the Bible.

As Paul trained Timothy in his faith and ministries, he encouraged the younger man to continue in the things that he had taught him (2 Timothy 3:14). Of first importance is that from childhood Timothy knew the Holy Scriptures were able to make him wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (v. 15). Paul's concern was that Timothy not detach himself from the things Paul had taught him, including the part Scripture plays in salvation, and substitute some of the new theological trends beginning to manifest themselves in the early days of Christianity (2:14-26). Timothy must be totally convinced of the necessity of the sacred writings to bring people to Christ.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul refers to the Gospel as the "message of the cross." He warns that to "those who are perishing," the cross is "foolishness," but "to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1:18). This statement is immediately reinforced (in verse 19) by quoting Isaiah 29:14.

Similarly, Romans 1:16-17 speaks of the Gospel as "the power of God to

salvation for everyone who believes." Again Paul's claims for the Gospel is backed by Scripture, "as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'" (v. 17b). The place of Scripture is pivotal in our salvation. It in fact reveals the power of God for salvation. Without Scripture we would neither know the work of the cross nor be able to apply it to our lives. No one is saved apart from the application of the Gospel, which is found only in the Bible.

Transformative Powers. Romans 12:2 already has been referenced and is perhaps the key text explaining the role of Scripture in sanctification. If transformation takes place through the renewing of our minds as Romans 12:2 claims, then renewing of our minds comes about through the knowledge of the Word as the Old Testament has affirmed. But several New Testament passages echo this thought.

In Acts 20, we find Paul teaching the Ephesian elders concerning guarding and instructing the church in his absence: "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (v. 32). If the saints are to be built up, then the elders must be diligent to teach the Word of grace. It was through this means that the saints would grow.

Peter agrees. In 1 Peter 2:2 he urges the believers to be "as newborn babies, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow" in respect to salvation. If the children of God are to grow up, they must be like babies who grow when they receive nourishment.

Many Christians wonder why they have never grown much in their spiritual lives, but upon closer examination these believers often have fed very little on the Word. An undernourished child does not grow and develop properly. The same principle applies to the undernourished spirit. Growth is dependent upon wholesome intake of the Word of God.

Peter, in his second epistle, adds that Christ's "divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (1:3). The words "all things" leave no room for competing input. If spiritual life and godliness are to be attained, the sole means is through the true knowledge of Christ, which can only be attained through the Scriptures.

Peter is ready for those who elevate experience above God's revelation, or others who view dreams and mystical encounters as being superior for such claims. In the same chapter he recalls a real-life experience, as opposed to a mystical one, in which he and others witnessed the glory of the Lord at the Transfiguration (2 Peter 1:16-18). Still, Peter wrote, there was something better than that: The Scriptures themselves (1:19-21).

No prophet, he declared, made up his prophecy but rather was moved or inspired by the Holy Spirit. In his understanding of Christ, Peter wrote that Scripture trumps even real experiences. Experiences are subjective and can be misunderstood or even altered in our minds over time. Memories are not static and are therefore unreliable, completely unlike the objective inspired Scriptures.

Hebrews 4:12 says that "the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The Scriptures reveal our hearts and thoughts and help us deal with sin and to live righteously. This verse is the perfect follow-up to David's prayer in Psalm 139:23-24:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Hebrews 4:12 reveals how this would happen: The Lord exposes the

heart and leads through His revealed Scriptures.

James 1:21-25 warns that the Word behaves as a mirror exposing our spiritual blemishes. When this happens, we can either deal with what the Word reveals or we can walk away and ignore what we have seen. It is the *effective doer*, not the *forgetful hearer*, James says, who will be blessed in what he does (v. 25).

In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul outlines how Christ's Church functions. Gifted men have been given to the Church (v. 11) for the task of equipping the saints to minister and building up the body of Christ (v. 12). Maturity is the goal (vv. 13-14), so that believers are able to speak the truth in love, enabling fellow believers to "grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ" (v. 15). When this takes place the whole body functions as it was intended, resulting in "growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (v. 16). What a beautiful picture all hinging on the gifted men of verse 11 fulfilling their God-ordained role of equipping the saints "for the work of ministry" (v. 12).

The word rendered "equip" here was used in New Testament times for resetting of broken bones and mending ripped nets. What the doctor did for his patients with broken arms and what the fisherman did with his broken nets, so the gifted men are to do for the saints. Broken bones and ripped nets need to be mended or else they will never do what they were designed to do. As people come to Christ, they come with lives wrecked by sin and in need of repair. The gifted men equip or mend broken and torn up lives.

Paul explains how these gifted men equip or repair in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Paul writes that the Bible, which is God-breathed, is profitable for four things: To teach us about God, ourselves, and how we are to live; to reprove us in pointing out our sin; to correct us, showing us how to overcome sin; and to train us, so that we can walk in the path of righteousness.

When all this takes place Paul assures us that we "may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (v. 17).

Paul is clear about what equips us for every good work: The proper use of the Word of God. The gifted men mend broken lives and enable the body to function as designed by equipping the saints through the diligent teaching of the Word of God. It is no wonder that Paul immediately charges Timothy to preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:5), for only through the proclamation of the Word will the children of God be equipped for every good work.

Paul does not give these instructions to Timothy without a context. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul has commissioned Timothy to take the truths that Paul has given him (which Paul had received from Christ) and pass them on to faithful men who would do the same with other faithful men. But Timothy could not do this if he himself was not "diligent to present [him]self approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (v. 15).

If Timothy was to pass on to others the "word of truth" he had to study it in order to accurately proclaim it. Equipping saints is hard work and to do it well requires diligent study, so that the word of truth is rightly divided, handled accurately, or "cut straight" as a literal translation of this verse might read.

The use of the Scriptures as the means of spiritual transformation is not an incidental matter. Scripture proclaims itself to be at the very heart of any change and all growth in the life of the saint. Conformity to the image of Christ is not possible without the Holy Spirit applying the Word of God. But it is one thing to strongly believe in the power of the Word; it is another to accurately apply it to our lives.

BE DOERS OF THE WORD

By way of application, it is important to emphasize four things:

Proper Interpretation. There are many Christians who strongly proclaim their love for the Bible, yet seldom open it. Others read a verse or two per day, but do not meditate on what they read. And even those who dedicate themselves to a regimen of study may misinterpret, and thus misapply, what they read. When we are told to rightly divide — or cut straight — the Word of truth, this presupposes that such is possible. While some texts and themes are difficult to understand and are subject to disagreement even among sound believers, the majority of Scripture is clear with even a small amount of study and effort.

The real cause of most confusion and disagreement is not the plain teaching found in a passage, but the hermeneutical approach being used. Hermeneutics is the science and art of interpretation. We use hermeneutics every time we read anything from the newspapers to a novel to our tax forms. Most often we interpret what we read literally — or normally. When it comes to the Bible this is often called a historical-grammatical approach, simply meaning that we interpret the Bible according to the rules of grammar and in its historical context.

But with Scripture, numerous other interpretative theories have been invented. Some of the more complicated ones include neo-orthodoxy and redemptive-spirit hermeneutics. But for the average student of Scripture it is the allegorical and devotional methods that cause most of the damage.

These approaches seek hidden and secondary meaning behind the obvious. When applied to a biblical text, the intended meaning is brushed aside and replaced with an imaginative meaning that goes beyond the clear teaching of the passage. Through these methods Scripture can be twisted to mean anything the reader wants it to mean and in the process God's communication to us is marred and mutilated.

The world of Paul and Timothy was no stranger to allegoricalism, having

become common prior to the Church Age. It is for this reason that Paul tells Timothy to work hard at accurately interpreting the Word. The lazy can and will pervert the teaching of God's Word. The serious Christian must be careful not to do so. When we do not interpret Scripture in a normal fashion, as it was meant to be read, we will mute its marvelous message and be the poorer for it.

Growth in Discernment. The author of Hebrews, in chapter five, wanted to explain to his readers how Jesus is now their high priest after the order of Melchizedek. The author feared they would not understand this valuable teaching because they had become "dull of hearing" (v. 11), and this because they had not matured in their understanding of spiritual things and were in need of being taught again the "first principles of the oracles of God" (v. 12). He reminded his readers that solid spiritual food is only for the mature (v. 14a). One gains such maturity by training their senses to discern both good and evil (v. 14b).

We find no sympathy for Christians who have been saved for many years, but have remained as babies not growing in their understanding of the deeper things of God. Rather, because they have stayed stagnant in their spiritual development, they are missing out on valuable understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Inward Dwelling. Paul admonished the Colossians to allow "the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16). To *dwell richly* means to be at home within them.

As Christians the Colossians were indwelt by Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit (see Colossians 1:27), but here Paul desired that Christ's very words find a home in their hearts. Home is where we feel comfortable and accepted. Christ's Word should receive that same kind of reception with us. When it does, we will find ourselves teaching with wisdom, exhorting one another, experiencing thankfulness, and living out

our lives in the name of the Lord (Colossians 3:16-17).

Exhorting and Refuting in Sound Doctrine. When the Word of Christ is richly dwelling in us it should be natural that we want to share God's truth with others. As Paul lays out requirements for elders in his letter to Titus, he first details personal, godly qualities and then turns to one related to the Word. An elder is 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" the truths of the faith (Titus 1:9).

Elders must hold fast, clinging to the Word of God. They must have a tenacious desire to not be moved from its truth. But more than that, they must know the Word well enough that they can exhort or encourage others in the faith, and in the sound doctrine or teaching of the Word. And even further, when necessary they will be able to show the error of those who teach false doctrine. This assumes that an elder has carefully studied Scripture and theology to the point that he can take both positive and negative stands for truth as he leads and protects the local church.

Paul also called for Timothy to retain and guard the sound words of Scripture (2 Timothy 1:13-14). Timothy was neither to seek new revelation nor adopt the philosophies, imaginations, and speculations of those around him. He was to "Hold fast [maintain, cling to] the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me [Paul]."

As the Spirit-moved writer of Scripture and apostle of Christ, Paul had been given the "sound words" of the faith. He handed these down to many others, including Timothy. Timothy was to retain and guard these sound words as well as entrust "these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). The servants of Christ are not to be creative in what they teach. They are to take the "sound words" first given

to the human authors of Scripture by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16), and hand them down to faithful believers who will do likewise.

This treasure of sound words will surely be subject to attack by demonic forces and evil men. So Paul tells Timothy to also “guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you” (2 Timothy 1:14, NASB).

Jude appeals to his readers to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed ... ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (vv. 3-4). If “the faith,” which is synonymous with the doctrines of the faith, is so precious and valuable and such a treasure, it is only natural that those who love it will fight for it.

The result of a biblically informed use of Scripture is spiritual growth. Second Peter 1:3-8 states:

“His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Thus, it is no wonder that John wrote, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth” (3 John 4).

As we consider the means by which spiritual change, growth, and development takes place we find that Scripture constantly points the believer to the very inspired words it contains. We need not look to extrabiblical sources such as those found in the Spiritual Formation Movement, among others. Growth in godliness comes primarily through the power of the Holy Spirit, who enables believers to understand and apply the Word of God to their lives.

Yet many today view the Word as insufficient for Christians to be complete and equipped for every good work. And this, in part, has allowed the Spiritual Formation Movement to rock the Church. Ancient disciplines, most often practiced within the monastic movement in the early centuries of Christianity, have been dusted off, repackaged, and resubmitted to believers as the means for obtaining spiritual growth.

There is increasing discussion about fasting, journaling, pilgrimage, simplicity, solitude, silence, contemplative prayer, and spiritual direction in Christian literature. While things can be learned from this renewed interest in spiritual formation, as well as from the history, teachings, and dangers of the Spiritual Formation Movement, it is of greater importance to consider the biblical alternative to spiritual formation by examining one very crucial means — or discipline if you choose — which the Word of God clearly identifies as the way God has designed for His people to be transformed into Christ-likeness and to experience intimacy with Him.

As noted, the modern Spiritual Formation Movement is a reintroduction of ancient extrabiblical practices created and developed by members of the early Church. These practices, often called disciplines, promised to enable the users to grow closer to the Lord, experience divine communion, and “hear” the voice of God.

While these disciplines did not emerge directly from Scripture, many had a loose connection that enabled

the originators to claim a biblical basis for their practices. Other disciplines have no scriptural foundation at all. They appear via supposed visions, dreams, and revelations from God. As time moved on, these disciplines multiplied and became acceptable within certain segments of Christendom.

Practiced and defined increasingly by hermits, monks, and those within monastic living, such disciplines became associated with “holy” men and women — the spiritual elite. While the average church member was vaguely aware of some of these supposed marks of holiness, most were ignorant of how such things worked. Super-holiness was for the clergy; few others had the time or inclination for spiritual formation. Thus, for centuries, spiritual disciplines stayed primarily within the narrow boundaries of monasteries and spiritual retreat centers.

There were some attempts to broaden their appeal and use, as is evidenced by a little 14th-century book of questionable authorship called *The Cloud of Unknowing*. But it would not be until the 1970s that the spiritual disciplines would break free of their obscurity and be exposed to a wider audience. When this took place, the disciplines moved quickly from their Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox roots to infiltrate Protestant and evangelical circles as well.

For many Evangelicals it was as if the lights had come on. Suddenly a whole spiritual world had been revealed to those hungry for something fresh, something real, something personal that they were not experiencing with God. For such people the Spiritual Formation Movement hit the spot. As taught by Richard Foster and Dallas Willard and promoted by ministries such as Foster’s *Renovaré* and Youth Specialties, spiritual formation gradually became a major voice within evangelicalism.

Today the Spiritual Formation Movement not only continues its rapid growth, but has become readily accepted as a means of discipleship.

Most Bible colleges and seminaries now have spiritual formation departments and offer related degrees. Rare is the evangelical author who does not quote from the Christian mystics and/or recommend some of these ancient practices as fresh means of spiritual growth.

And, for many, the disciplines seem to work. Adherents testify to a renewed passion for God, and experiences of divine intimacy and spiritual development. But as always, pragmatism, testimonies, and experience cannot set the pace in our search for truth; only the Word of God can be our authoritative guide. With this in mind, it is vital that we take the Spiritual Formation Movement through the grid of Scripture to determine its place in the life of the follower of Jesus Christ.

The Spiritual Formation Movement claims to offer an almost unlimited number of disciplines that will aid in forming Christian character. While some of these have a bit of basis in Scripture, others have none, and even those which seem to be drawn at least in part from the Bible go beyond the Word in either their actual practice or what they promise or both. They are the ideas of men and women, not the doctrines of God. As such they should be abandoned for the true disciplines given to us by the Lord Himself.

It is important to affirm that the word “discipline” is a good one and found in Scripture (e.g. Colossians 2:5, NASB). The issue is not whether discipline is helpful or even necessary for spiritual development. It is, as self-control is one facet of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). And there are specific disciplines that aid in progressive sanctification.

At issue is which disciplines have been given to believers as a means of discipleship. Any means that the Lord has ordained for our use in the process of our spiritual growth can be identified in the Scriptures. If the Bible is God’s complete, authoritative revelation to us today and if it is designed to make us “complete, thor-

oughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17), then we should have every confidence that the inspired text would include, with clarity, the instruments by which God would have us grow.

The Lord desires that we know these things and has made no effort to hide them from us. It is not necessary for monks or hermits or other spiritual leaders to unearth some secret formulas designed to teach us spiritual formation.

When we turn to the Word of God to discover the Lord’s clear teaching on discipleship, what do we find?

First, admittedly the Bible is a big book with many layers of wonderful truths about God, ourselves, our world, our future, and more waiting to be explored. It is a multifaceted revelation from God that reveals the wonders of Christ “in whom are hidden all the treasures and wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).

This leads to perhaps the primary distinction between the Spiritual Formation Movement and biblical discipleship. Both camps would claim Colossians 2:3 for themselves and both would agree that it is in Christ that all the treasures and wisdom and knowledge of God are hidden. The divide comes largely in the arena of revelation.

The believer is promised that through “His divine power God has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him [Christ] who called us by glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3). The question is: Where is such knowledge of Christ found? Is it found in the Holy Scriptures or in extrabiblical revelations and dreams, or both? The only inspired revelation from God for our times is the Bible. We argue this because all other claims to revelation lack the authority of Scripture.

In addition, all other doctrines, methodologies, philosophies, traditions, and spiritual practices that do not emerge directly from God’s Word are at best suggestions and opinions.

But when understood as having divine sanction, these things fall under the condemnation of Jesus, who warned the Pharisees that their traditions actually invalidate the Word of God (Mark 7:13).

Paul warned, “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8). The Spiritual Formation Movement has violated these principles and is “Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mark 7:7).

If so, it is time we turn our attention to what is actually found in the inspired text pertaining to spiritual formation or discipleship. Any effort on our part to produce Christ-like character is totally dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul prayed for the Ephesians that “the eyes of your understanding be enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power” (Ephesians 1:18-19).

Later, he continued, “that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16). Then in Philippians, immediately after telling these believers to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” he wrote, “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (2:12-13). There is no growth in godliness without the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Scriptures specify four means needed for spiritual growth. These can be summed up in the description given of the activities of the early Church as “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). This verse gives us four essentials for spiritual devel-

opment and includes a commitment to sound doctrine, fellowship, the centrality of Jesus Christ in our lives, and prayer. We will consider one of those essentials: prayer.

However, before we look at prayer, it is critical to first discuss some of the views of sanctification that have held sway within evangelicalism. The word “sanctification” comes from the Greek word *hagios*. *Hagios* and its derivatives is translated in the Bible as “sanctified,” “sanctify,” “sanctification,” “holy,” “saint,” and so forth. The basic meaning of this word group is “to be set apart.”

One could have a particular chair or cup that is for personal use and that chair or cup would be sanctified. Used in a spiritual context the word speaks of being set apart for God, or for a holy purpose. The term is used in three tenses in Scripture. First, there is positional sanctification in which believers are redeemed from sin and set apart as the people of God (1 Corinthians 6:11). This is the believer’s standing in God — it is who they are and it does not speak directly to how they live. At the moment of salvation we are set free from the penalty of sin and join the family of God.

Sanctification has an ultimate stage, which takes place at the moment of the believer’s death or the return of Christ (1 John 3:1-3). At that point we are set free from the presence of indwelling sin and are presented holy and blameless before the Father (Ephesians 5:26-27). A final way in which the word is used speaks of progressive sanctification in which the child of God grows in his walk with God (Romans 6:19; 1 Peter 1:16).

It has been said that in positional sanctification the believer is set free from the penalty of sin; in progressive sanctification he is being progressively set free from the power of sin; in ultimate sanctification he is separated from the presence of sin. It is progressive sanctification that takes up the bulk of New Testament teachings as the writers, moved by the Holy Spirit, instructed Christians how

to live out their position in Christ while they wait for their ultimate holiness in the presence of the Lord.

It is this subject of progressive sanctification, or how the believer matures in Christ, to which we now turn our attention. There have been a number of models held by various groups in Christendom. They include:

Christian Perfectionism: Held by some in the Holiness, Pentecostal, and Wesleyan camps, the idea is that at some point of crisis, whether a second work of grace or a second or even third baptism of the Holy Spirit, the sin nature can be eradicated and the believer can reach the point of sinlessness in this life.

Higher Life: Sometimes called Victorious Life, this view popularized by the Keswick Movement beginning in the mid-1800s also teaches a point of crisis in which the believer “lets go and lets God.” At that moment the Christian realizes that he is to play a passive role in his spiritual development and rely upon God to do all that is necessary for sanctification.

Dedication: Lewis Sperry Chafer, in his book *He That is Spiritual*, argues that Christian growth comes as a result of being filled or controlled by the Holy Spirit. Through the power of the Holy Spirit the believer is enabled to obey the Lord and thus make significant progress in his spiritual walk. Chafer made a distinction between a Christian who is saved by grace and one who, at a moment of crisis, dedicates or rededicates his life to the Lord and is filled with the Spirit. Before this dedication the believer will grow very little in the things of the Lord, but following the dedication the believer will mature in Christ-likeness.

Spiritual Formation: This model teaches that through the use of ancient spiritual disciplines, Christ is formed in the life of the believer. The ultimate goal of spiritual formation is a crisis event in which Christ is experienced in an inexplicable mystical experience.

Roman Catholicism: The Roman Catholic concept of sanctification is intricate and heavily bound up within and confused with its notion of justification and even glorification. While Catholics see sanctification as being made “holy,” they teach that it first takes place at baptism. A “second” sanctification is a lifelong process and occurs as a person endeavors to increase his or her justifying grace. To increase one’s justifying grace, “salutary acts” — or acts necessary to salvation — are performed and supplemented with “actual grace,” which is granted through the sacraments (Penance, Holy Communion, etc.). Thus, these salutary acts bestow upon the Roman Catholic believer a sanctifying grace leading to sanctification. Within Catholicism, it is impossible to regard one’s individual salvation as something fixed and certain.

Reformed: All who are justified will grow in sanctification. Of the major views presented here, this is the only one that does not teach some form of crisis experience or salutary acts as necessary for sanctification. Growth in the Lord, while uneven, will continue throughout the lifetime of the one who has been truly regenerated. If, in time, there is no evidence of spiritual development in the professing believer, the most likely reason is that he was not truly born again.

As can be seen, Christians differ to some degree concerning how progressive sanctification takes place. And with having surveyed those various models, let’s now turn our attention to prayer.

THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER

Few would doubt the importance of prayer in the life of a believer. Several passages of Scripture affirm prayer’s role in our spiritual development.

Hebrews 4:15 says, “we do not have a High Priest [Christ] who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” In the Old Testament, the High Priest of Israel served as mediator between the people and

God. Only he could go into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, and then only once per year on the Day of Atonement. There he would offer a blood sacrifice for the sins of the people.

But even such sacrifices could not completely atone for sin because “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). What the animal sacrifices could not do, Christ did in His once-for-all sacrifice for our sins (vv. 9-18). As a result the door is now open for those cleansed by the blood of Christ to “come boldly to the throne of grace,” for at such times we are assured that we will “obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

The Lord has determined that the means by which He meets our need(s) is prayer. For instance, if our need is to deal with anxiety, we are told not only to cease being anxious but “in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6), which will lead to the peace of God.

In the context of sickness, James points us to prayer, not just our own but that of others, particularly the elders of the church (James 5:13-18). The word for “sick” in James 5:14 is *asteneho* meaning “to be weak, feeble, to be without strength, powerless,” according to *Strong’s Concordance*. It is found 36 times in the New Testament, and its meaning is dependent upon the context. The word for “sick” in James 5:15 is a different word (*kam-nonta*) which is found only two other times in the New Testament (Hebrews 12:3 and Revelation 2:3), where the meaning is clearly “weary.”

James does not seem to have in mind physical illness as much as spiritual and emotional weariness. When the child of God is facing times of spiritual exhaustion and weariness, he or she should turn to prayer — not just personal, private prayer, but to the prayers of others as well. James 5:16 reads, “Confess your trespasses

to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” It is prayer that we need in such times.

Paul, in 1 Timothy 2:1-2, urges God’s people to pray for all people, particularly those in authority so “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” Prayer is vital for living godly lives. In verse 8, corporate public prayer is in view when Paul writes, “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.” Again, both private and public prayers are important in true discipleship of individuals and the Church.

Romans 8:26-29 is speaking in the direct context of discipleship: Being “conformed to the image of His Son” (v. 29). The text begins with a warning that “we do not know what we should pray,” and therefore the Holy Spirit “helps in our weakness” by making “intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

Note carefully that we are not being told that the Holy Spirit prays for us, giving us “groanings” that are equivalent to Him speaking through us. Rather, He intercedes for us. He is taking our prayers, as feeble and misplaced as they might sometimes be, and interceding on our behalf in such a way that the petition coming before the Father is in accordance with His will and purpose (vv. 27-28).

These Spirit-interceded prayers are now used to conform those the Father has predestined, and called, and justified, and glorified, to the image of Jesus Christ (vv. 29-30). This is true spiritual formation or, better, transformation, and our prayers as translated by the Holy Spirit are at the center of such spiritual change.

We can be certain then that prayer is a God-ordained means by which the people of God are molded into His image. However, there is one more matter with which we need to concern ourselves, especially in light

of one of the key disciplines within the Spiritual Formation Movement — contemplative prayer.

Contemplative prayer is defined as a form of praying in which the mind is bypassed. The goal of such praying is not cognitive, rational, or an intellectual presentation of our petitions, confession, or worship to God, but a mystical approach in an attempt to experience an inexplicable moment of ecstasy with God. Such ecstasy is supposed to lead us to a deep but incomprehensible union with the Lord. But this is not the kind of prayer prescribed, modeled, and taught in Scripture.

WHAT IS BIBLICAL PRAYER?

The Bible is filled with prayers. The book of Psalms alone contains more than 100 prayers that can serve as models for our own. The prayers of numerous individuals are recorded for us to study, examine, and be edified by. In addition, we are given instructions on how to pray. The following four passages are but highlights.

Matthew 6:9-13 is often called the Lord’s Prayer. In the middle of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, He told His disciples how He wanted them to pray. Later, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, and He offered virtually the same guidelines (Luke 11:1-4). Jesus called for clear, intellectual praying that involved a person’s cognitive thinking.

We are to offer praise to God, urge the coming of His kingdom to earth, seek our daily needs, ask for forgiveness of sins, and pray for protection from temptation. In this greatest of instructional prayers, there is no hint of extra-sensory experiences in which the mind is passive.

As Paul prayed for the various churches we get an excellent understanding of what intercessory prayer looks like. Ephesians contains two of these prayers, the first in 1:15-23. Here we find Paul desiring the spiritual enhancement of the believers in this first-century church. He wanted their

spiritual eyes opened so that they “may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe” (1:18b-19a).


All of this, Paul informed them, is “according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ” (1:19b-20a). He went on to highlight the person and greatness of both the Father and the Son. Here is no mantra leading to some form of intellectual and emotional purgation. Rather we hear firm and powerful requests that Paul continuously makes on the Ephesians’ behalf (1:16).

Later, in the same epistle, Paul adds to his requests (3:14-21). In this prayer he asks that these believers would be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ might dwell in

their hearts by faith, that they might be rooted and grounded in love and comprehend all that the Lord has for them, including the surpassing love of Christ, leading to all the fullness of God. He closes with a great chorus of praise to the Lord Himself (3:20-21). Once again there is no ambiguity in this prayer. There is praise to God and petitions for the believers.

In Philippians 4:6-9, Paul taught the first-century believers — and us — how to pray, especially in the context of disharmony among believers (4:2-5) and the need for God’s peace in life’s circumstances (4:6). We are told to pray about everything and to do so with supplication. That is, we are to make our requests known to God (v. 6b). As a result we should experience God’s peace, a peace beyond our comprehension. In each of these cases, and they could be multiplied many

times over, the prayer originates from our minds. They are rational, intellectual prayers. But at the same time they are not devoid of emotion or experience.

One cannot read these prayers without recognizing that they arise from the passionate heart of a man deeply devoted to and in love with the Lord. They are not mindless prayers filled with techniques on how to have a subjective experience. What we are seeing is an important distinction between biblical praying and practices taught in Scripture and contemplative praying as practiced and taught by ancient monks, hermits, and promoters of the Spiritual Formation Movement today. Prayer is essential for spiritual growth. But it must be prayer that is taught and shaped by the Scriptures rather than ancient and modern mystics. 

SAVAGE WOLVES

(continued from page 1)

Christians by their fruits, although one could debate whether this is also true.

One can ask, “What is a false prophet?” or “What is a true prophet?” A true biblical prophet is one who claims to speak for the true God — the God of the Bible — and who does, in fact, speak for Him. He (or she) is God’s spokesman or spokeswoman.¹

While a true prophet is one who speaks the words of the living God of the Bible, a false prophet is one who makes the *claim* — or has the *reputation* — of speaking for God (or another god), but who does not speak for the God of the Bible. The false prophet may *know* that he is not truly speaking for the true God or may sincerely *believe* that he is.

A KEY ASSUMPTION IN THIS STUDY

Strictly speaking, a true prophet would be one who speaks *by direct*

inspiration of God and a false prophet might make the claim that he is doing so. It may be that Jesus is speaking in this passage of prophets in this strict sense: Claiming to speak by direct inspiration from God. One can understand this passage to mean that Jesus spoke here not *only* of those who claim to have a supernatural gift of prophecy from God (although, if true, that would, indeed, make them prophets), but that He spoke in a much broader sense of any who claim to be serving as God’s spokesmen, which would *include* not only prophets (in the strict sense of the term mentioned above), but *also* apostles, pastors, preachers, and teachers and so forth.

Scripture speaks not only of false prophets, but of false christs (Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22), false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13; Revelation 2:2), false teachers (2 Peter 2:1) and false brethren (2 Corinthians 11:26; Galatians 2:4).

WHAT SCRIPTURE SAYS ABOUT FALSE PROPHETS

One Bible dictionary states:

“While the term ‘false prophet’ does not occur in the O[ld] T[estament], references to false prophets are clear. The pages of the OT are filled with men and women who fit the description of a false prophet given in Jer. 14:14 (NASB): ‘The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds.’”²

So, although the first use of the term “false prophet” (Greek, *pseudoprophetes*) in the Bible is found in Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:15, the *concept* of the false prophet was well-attested throughout the Old Testament.

The original false prophet was Satan who, in the Garden of Eden, lied to Eve by contradicting the words of God, who had told Adam, “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17). The devil boldly coun-

tered to Eve with the lie, “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4).

In the Bible, death is separation, *not* non-being. In physical death, the soul or spirit is separated from the body (Genesis 35:18; Luke 23:46 with John 19:30). In spiritual death, a person is spiritually separated from God (Luke 15:32; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:1,5). Adam would live physically for many hundreds of years after he and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (see Genesis 5:5);³ however, he and Eve died *spiritually* the very day they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, just as God had said (and contrary to the lie of the devil).

Concerning *human* false prophets, one of the most interesting and mysterious Old Testament examples of a false prophet is Balaam, the son of Beor, whose story is recounted in Numbers 22-24, although he is also the instigator (Numbers 31:6 and Revelation 2:14) behind the seduction of Israel recorded in Numbers 25. Balaam was such a significant and infamous opponent of Israel that, in addition to the account in Numbers 22-24, he is mentioned by name in nine other passages of Scripture, three of which are in the New Testament.⁴

Excluding the devil, false prophets are mentioned in at least 12 of the 39 books of the Old Testament (Numbers, Deuteronomy, 1 Kings, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, and Zechariah). While some of the Old Testament passages regarding false prophets deal with false prophecy, others speak more generally about false prophecy and/or prophets. Other passages give the names of specific false prophets. Of all the books in the Bible, Jeremiah (chapters 5-29) says a great deal about false prophets, including a number of specific instances of false prophets.⁵

One source states, “There are 4 OT discussions about the issue [of false prophets].”⁶ The four discussions it mentions are Deuteronomy 18:20-22,

Deuteronomy 13:1-5, Jeremiah 23:9-40, and Ezekiel 12:21-14:11.⁷

Seven of the New Testament’s 27 books use the term “false prophets” (Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, 2 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation). If we add references to false christs, false apostles, false teachers and teachings, and other false leaders, we can include most of the books of the New Testament. Outside of charismatic circles and cults, we are probably less likely to encounter false prophets or false apostles today than we are to encounter a false teacher, preacher, or other false spokesperson for God.

For instance, Scripture says:

“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1).

Peter here seems to make a transition between false prophets, which were a problem for God’s people in the Old Testament, and false teachers in New Testament times.

However, it is also *possible* that we could encounter a false christ, false prophet, or false apostle — especially within charismatic circles and cults. Recall that in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus warned:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

The people Jesus described in this passage are most likely sincere; it would be futile for them to make a

false claim before Him on Judgment Day. Furthermore, the deeds that these wonder workers claim are miraculous works of power: prophecy, casting out demons, and doing wonders — and all of these things in the name of Jesus Himself. In rejecting these claimants, Jesus didn’t deny that they did the miracles they claimed to have done in His name — only that He never knew them. That is, they were not of His sheep (cf. John 10:26-28) and that they were lawless people. Notice also that Jesus said that “many” will make these claims on that day.

Near the end of His earthly ministry, in describing events leading up to His return, Jesus said:

“For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many” (Matthew 24:5).

A few verses later, He said:

“Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many” (Matthew 24:11).

And later on in His discourse, He said:

“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand” (Matthew 24:24-25).

Notice within these verses that Jesus states that even believers might be deceived. Later on in the New Testament the Apostle John wrote that “many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1b). Because of this, he warned Christians:

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1a).

New Testament scholar Craig S. Keener notes:

“Many false messianic figures arose in the first century (and subsequently); they often attracted large and devoted follow-

ings. Although Josephus, writing for Gentile readers, describes them as ‘false prophets’ rather than as messiahs, their political aspirations are usually apparent in his descriptions.”⁸

He also observed:

“Some Jewish false prophets in first-century Judea drew large followings by claiming that they could perform miracles, such as parting the Jordan or making the walls of Jerusalem fall down; they failed to make good on such promises. In addition, many magicians claimed to work miraculous cures, and some Jewish false prophets probably made similar claims. Some others reportedly prophesied that Jerusalem or the temple would not fall — some of them right up until their deaths in the burning temple.”⁹

Another source states:

“Josephus mentioned several historical figures who might be regarded as false christs: (1) Theudas, who appeared when Fadus was procurator (A.D. 44-46) and summoned the people to the Jordan River wilderness with the promise that he would divide the Jordan like Joshua and begin a new conquest of the land; (2) various ‘imposters’ during the term of Felix (A.D. 52-59) who led crowds into the wilderness with promises of signs and wonders; (3) an ‘imposter’ during the term of Festus (A.D. 60-62) who promised deliverance and freedom from the miseries of Roman rule for those who would follow him into the wilderness; (4) Manahem ben Judah (alias ‘the Galilean’) during the term of Florus (A.D. 64-66) who came to Jerusalem ‘like a king’ and laid siege to the city. These messianic imposters and the barely distinguishable false prophets repeatedly urged the Jewish people to take up armed resistance to Rome or to stay in Jerusalem to fight. In contrast, Jesus urged His

disciples to attempt to save themselves by fleeing the city. The Christian inhabitants of Jerusalem remembered this advice when the war with Rome broke out (A.D. 66) and fled to safety in Pella in Transjordan.”¹⁰

Down through the centuries, there have been additional false christs and false prophets. A second-century leader nicknamed Bar-Kochba led a revolt. One source notes that his nickname, “Means ‘son of the star’ and was the title given by Jewish rebels to Simeon bar Kosevah, the leader of their revolt in A.D. 132-135. The title designated him as the Messiah (Num. 24:17).”¹¹

This Bible dictionary further tells us:

“By using guerrilla tactics they were able to overpower the Roman forces and liberate Jerusalem in A.D. 132. Bar-Kochba was the civil leader of the [Jewish] people, and Eleazar was the high priest. Their initial success led to such widespread rebellion that even some Gentiles and Samaritans joined them.”¹²

It also notes:

“Bar-Kochba made his last stand at Betar [a.k.a. Bether — located in the Judean wilderness], where most of the remaining insurgents died in 135. Some retreated to caves in the Judean desert and had to be starved to death.”¹³

In the 17th century, a false messiah named Sabbatai Zevi arose. One source states:

“In the city of Smyrna (mentioned in Rev 2:8), Sabbatai Zevi fervently studied the Jewish mystical writing known as the Cabala [also spelled Kabbalah]. In 1648 he declared himself the promised Messiah and drew a large following. By 1666 almost the entire Jewish community was convinced that their Messiah had arrived. But within weeks of the new year, Turkish officials arrested Zevi. At first disillusioned,

his followers reassured each other that Zevi first needed to suffer in order to be glorified. But when the Turks attempted to convert him to Islam, Zevi consented and abandoned his messianic role for the Muslim faith. Despite this, some Jews — still believing he was the Messiah — followed him in conversion to Islam!”¹⁴

There were a number of false christs in the 20th century, including Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon, Father Divine (a.k.a., George Baker, Jr.), Yahweh ben Yahweh (a.k.a., Hulon Mitchell, Jr.),¹⁵ Jim Jones, David Koresh (a.k.a., Vernon Howell), Guru Maharaji Ji of the Divine Light Mission (a.k.a., Elan Vital), etc. Despite the professions of some of them that they worked miracles, they were lacking in this department. Thus, the miracle-working false christs and false prophets that the Lord Jesus refers to in Matthew 24:24 may be referring to personalities to arise at some point in our future.

JESUS ON HOW TO RECOGNIZE FALSE PROPHETS

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructed us to “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15). He then stated that we will recognize such false prophets by their fruits (Matthew 7:16, 20). Then in the following verses He spoke of those who will prophesy, cast out demons, and perform wonders in His name. Then, as we saw in Matthew 24:24, Jesus stated, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” From these passages, therefore, we can see that the mere ability to perform signs and wonders — even signs and wonders *in Jesus’ name* — does not constitute the “fruits” by which Jesus says we can recognize false prophets.

This same truth is borne out in Deuteronomy, which has two impor-

tant passages containing teaching about false prophets. The Lord said in Deuteronomy 18:20-22:

“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’ — when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”

Although this passage doesn't use the words “false prophet,” the Lord here described a false prophet: One who speaks in the Lord's name something that the Lord hasn't commanded him to speak or who speaks in the name of other gods. Under the Old Covenant, the penalty for prophesying falsely was death. Then the Lord said that if a prophet prophesies in His name and the thing he prophesies doesn't occur, his prophecy isn't from the Lord and the person who gave it has demonstrated that he isn't a true prophet of God.

The second passage in Deuteronomy regarding false prophets deals with a *wonder-working* false prophet. Deuteronomy 13 says:

“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’ — which you have not known — ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear

Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst” (vv. 1-5).

Here we see that even if the prophet or the dreamer of dreams gives a sign or a wonder that comes to pass, if he tries to lead people astray after other gods, he is still a false prophet. And, under the Old Covenant, we see that such a person was to be put to death. So, even under the Old Covenant, the mere fact of a prophet doing something miraculous was not in itself regarded as proof of a true prophet if the prophet's ministry was designed to lead people away from the true God. It is partly by this that Balaam is revealed as a false prophet: For he did speak the true words of God and even uttered a prophecy regarding the Messiah (Numbers 24:17). Nevertheless, Scripture says “Balaam ... taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality” (Revelation 2:14 cf., Numbers 31:16. The actual incident of which these two Scriptures speak is related in Numbers 25:1-18).

The Apostle Paul speaks of “the man of sin” or “the man of lawlessness” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12. Many believe that this is a reference to the same personage referred to in Revelation 13:1-10 as “the beast,” who is popularly known as the Antichrist. Paul says of this personage:

“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those

who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie” (2 Thessalonians 2:9-11).

There will be power, signs, and wonders associated with this person, but this person will be a servant of Satan, not God. In the book of Revelation, the one whom Scripture calls “the false prophet” (Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10) and who is the promoter of “the beast” appears in the latter part of Revelation 13. Regarding “the false prophet,” Scripture says:

“He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (Revelation 13:13-15).

Later in Revelation we read:

“And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs” (Revelation 16:13-14a).

Again we see that miracles alone do not prove that one is a true servant of God. Satan's servants may also do signs just as the magicians in Pharaoh's court mimicked the miracles the Lord granted Moses to do — up to a point.

There is a debate among Evangelicals as to whether or not Satan can do actual miracles. Those who assert that

Satan *cannot* do actual miracles include Reformed theologian R.C. Sproul¹⁶ and Christian illusionist André Kole.¹⁷ Christian apologists John Ankerberg and John Weldon,¹⁸ popular author and pastor Mark Hitchcock,¹⁹ and Walter Martin, the late authority on cults and the occult,²⁰ disagree and maintain that Satan *can* do actual miracles. While the debate is interesting and beyond the scope of this article, in one sense, it doesn't matter whether the miracles are genuine or only apparent, because in either case they accomplish their purpose of deception.

Even exorcisms are not irrefutable proof of a true servant of God. Jesus acknowledged that some Jews in His day were performing exorcisms (Matthew 12:27). Even exorcisms done *in Jesus' name* are not proof of a true prophet:

"Now John answered Him [Jesus], saying, 'Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.' But Jesus said, 'Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side'" (Mark 9:38-40; cf. Luke 9:49-50).

And in Acts 19, we read:

"Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, 'We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.' Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?' Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded" (vv. 13-16).

All these things make it evident that true prophecy, real (or apparent) signs

and miracles, and even exorcisms — even if/when these things are done in Jesus' name — are not the "fruits" that Jesus spoke of which would enable us to recognize false prophets.

MORE "FRUITS" THAT DO NOT REVEAL FALSE PROPHETS

Other things that do not qualify as "fruits" include a person's physical appearance, personal magnetism or charisma, boldness or confidence (for a couple of Scriptural instances of bold false prophets, see the examples of Zedekiah in 1 Kings 22:2-40 and Hananiah in Jeremiah 28:1-17), natural talent, spiritual giftedness, nor real or apparent sincerity. People can fake sincerity. People can also be sincere but wrong. The fruits that Jesus spoke of are not necessarily seemingly good results, such as souls saved or people apparently healed, nor the fact that the person is able to give a biblical message or to say some things that are profoundly insightful and true.

For example, Pelagianism is an early Church heresy named for the 5th-century British monk Pelagius. While Reformed theologian R.C. Sproul agrees with the early Church's condemnation of Pelagius, Sproul said this about the man:

"[There are] tremendous good points that are available in Pelagius' writings. It's an amazing thing, if you read some of the extant writings of Pelagius — if you read just about 95 percent of Pelagius' writings, you would find a man whose theology was *impeccably* orthodox; and whose devotion to Christ; and whose pursuit of righteousness exceeds, you know, almost every great saint of the ages. ... For example, you know, if you want to read what some of the demands of the New Testament are in terms of righteousness, and what true righteousness consists of, I can't think of anybody better to read than Pelagius; he has an exposition of the nature of the godly widow that I don't think anybody's beaten in the history in

the Church; and what it means to be a Christian widow. ... But it's that 5 percent of his thought that he's noted for, you see; it's the question of soteriology [i.e., the doctrine of salvation] that came out in the debate with Augustine that leaves the reputation of Pelagius in shambles; and, I might say, rightly so. Because the error ... of Pelagius is a fatal one, and a very serious one."²¹

Likewise, in distinguishing between *false teaching* and *false teachers*,²² Christian authors and apologists John Ankerberg and John Weldon state:

"... *false teaching* is a mixture of truth and error. Thus, people may at the same time be encouraged and nourished by some things that are true but unknowingly accept error along with it. Unfortunately, sometimes even a small amount of error may be dangerous. Ninety-eight percent of rat poison is wholesome food. Only two percent is deadly."²³

SOME BIBLICAL USES OF THE WORD "FRUIT"

The Bible uses the word "fruit" in many ways. Some of these are the fruit of one's mouth (e.g., Proverbs 12:14; 13:2), fruit of one's deeds (e.g., Isaiah 3:10; Jeremiah 17:10), fruit of sin (Romans 6:21), fruit to (or for) God (Romans 7:4), fruit to (or for) death (Romans 7:5), fruit of righteousness (James 3:18), fruits of the kingdom of God (Matthew 21:43), fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and fruits worthy of repentance (Matthew 3:8, 10; Luke 3:8-9ff.).

SCRIPTURAL WARNINGS AGAINST COUNTERFEIT SERVANTS OF THE LORD

The task of identifying false prophets is made difficult by the fact that they disguise themselves as sheep (Christians) when they are actually wolves (deceivers). Paul used a description of false apostles that is similar to Jesus' description of false prophets:

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deed” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15, NASB).

These false apostles, who are servants of Satan, disguise themselves as apostles of Christ and servants of righteousness. They are counterfeit servants of Christ, and not “the real deal.”

Paul, in his farewell message to the Ephesian elders, stated:

“For I know this: that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29-30).

Similarly, in speaking of the danger of false teachers in the Body of Christ, the Apostle Peter warned:

“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words” (2 Peter 2:1-3a).

One translation renders the final phrase as, “In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up” (2 Peter 2:3a, NIV).

Citing this latter rendering of the phrase, Erwin Lutzer wrote:

“One television preacher said that some who sent him money

received letters from the mortgage company saying that their loan was fully paid! *Stories they have made up!*”²⁴

Likewise, Jude addressed his readers (including us):

“Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people. I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God’s marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (Jude 3-4, NLT).

THE “FRUITS” BY WHICH FALSE PROPHETS MAY BE RECOGNIZED

Counterfeit Christians and false servants of Christ are not going to appear under their true guise nor announce their intentions to fleece and devour God’s flock. Rather, they will appear to be genuine Christians and servants of Christ. So, Jesus says that we will know them by their fruits. But what are the fruits by which we will recognize them? As Jesus said during His Sermon on the Mount discourse:

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:15-20).

In Luke 6:43-45, Jesus used almost identical language and thus reveals to us what He meant by “fruits” in Matthew 7:

“... or a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:43-45; cf. Matthew 12:33-35).

In comparing these verses with what Jesus said about false prophets in Matthew 7:15-20, we can see that the “fruits” Jesus spoke of are the *words* that the prophet *speaks*. These words would include whether the prophet’s words are doctrinally sound and in accordance with Scripture, whether the prophet is truthful, the character of the words that they speak (that is, whether the prophet’s words are characterized by the fruit of the Spirit; or by the works of the flesh as described in Galatians 5:19-23).

A PROBLEM AND ITS RESOLUTION

One thing could render the above diagnosis of the counterfeit servant of Christ incomplete: This false servant of Christ could be trying to disguise himself by sounding gracious and loving while planning something sinister. Scripture states:

“He who hates, disguises it with his lips, and lays up deceit within himself; when he speaks kindly, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart; Though his hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness will be revealed before the assembly” (Proverbs 26:24-26).

It also says:

“A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering

mouth works ruin" (Proverbs 26:28).

Both a lying tongue and flattery are examples of false speech.

David said:

"My enemies speak evil of me: 'When will he die, and his name perish?' And if he comes to see me, he speaks lies; his heart gathers iniquity to itself; when he goes out, he tells it" (Psalm 41:5-6).

These false friends came to David, pretending to be concerned about him; however, they really wanted to see him dead; and when they found out what they wanted to know, they would leave David's presence and go out and gossip about him.

The Pharisees were continually seeking to trap Jesus:

"Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him [Jesus] in His talk. And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?' But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, 'Why do you test Me, you hypocrites?'" (Matthew 22:15-18).

Thus, perhaps there is more to what Jesus meant by "fruits" than merely the speech of a purported prophet. The fruits Jesus spoke of consist of more than simply the so-called prophet's speech.

As earlier noted, in his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul described false apostles this way:

"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of right-

eousness, whose end will be according to their deeds" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15, NASB).

Even though these false apostles are disguising themselves as servants of righteousness, Scripture says that their "end will be according to their deeds."

In Titus, we read:

"To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him [NASB says, "but by their deeds they deny Him"], being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work" (Titus 1:15-16).

Despite what they claim, Paul said that their profession was shown to be hollow and empty by their disobedience and abominable disqualified deeds.

Paul wrote to Timothy:

"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8).

We again see that a person's deeds give them away because regardless of what they say, if they don't provide for their own family — assuming that they have the ability to do so — they have denied the faith by their deeds. Scripture says that they have not only denied the faith, but that they are actually *worse* than an unbeliever.

This is not at all teaching salvation by works. Good works are the *fruits* of true faith. The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* says in its annotation of James 2:14-26:

"[T]o use Martin Luther's words that people are justified (declared righteous before God) by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. Genuine faith will produce good deeds, but only faith in Christ saves."²⁵

At least three English translations of the Bible render Matthew 7:16a as referring to the deeds or actions of false prophets (although such a rendering is really an *interpretation* of the passage, rather than an actual *translation*):

"You will know them by what they do" (*Good News Translation*).

"You will know them by the deeds they do" (*The Modern Language Bible: The New Berkeley Version in Modern English*).

"You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act" (*New Living Translation*).

Thus, Jesus says that the way we can recognize false prophets is by their fruits. By studying Scripture, we have seen that the "fruits" can be recognized by examining both their words *and* their deeds.

Deeds that manifest a false prophet can include the works of the flesh mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21, and bitter jealousy and selfish ambition mentioned in James 3:14-16 [NASB]. They can also include preaching a Jesus other than the biblical one, or a gospel other than the biblical one (2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6-9). It could also include the type of behavior exhibited by the false apostles. Paul mentioned this when he wrote:

"For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face. To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison" (2 Corinthians 11:20-21a, NASB).

May we heed the words of Jesus to "Beware of false prophets" and may He graciously grant us to know them by their fruits, and thus avoid being deceived and led astray by them.

Endnotes:

1. There were female prophetesses in the Bible — e.g., in the Old Testament, Miriam (Exodus 15:20); Deborah (Judges 4:4); Huldah (2 Kings 22:14); Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3); in the New Testament, Anna (Luke 2:36); Philip the evangelist's four

daughters (Acts 21:9).

2. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, General editors, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003, s.v., "False Prophet," by Donna R. Ridge, pg. 554.

3. Even though Adam and Eve continued to live physically after they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, their sin brought about physical death to them and all their descendants (cf. Genesis 3:22-24; see also the repeated phrase "and he died," throughout Genesis 5, with the notable exception of Enoch in Genesis 5:24).

4. Numbers 31:8,16; Deuteronomy 23:4-5; Joshua 13:22; 24:9-10; Nehemiah 13:2; Micah 6:5; 2 Peter 2:15-16; Jude 11; Revelation 2:14.

5. Notable instances of specific false prophets in Jeremiah are Pashhur the priest (Jeremiah 20:1-6); Hananiah (Jeremiah 28:1-17); Ahab the son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah (Jeremiah 29:21-23); and Shemaiah the Nehelamite (Jeremiah 29:24-32).

6. Derek Williams, editor, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1989, s.v., "Prophecy, Prophets," pg. 453.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 453-454.

8. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2014, pg.

107, comments on Matthew 24:4-5. Josephus was a first-century Jewish historian.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109, comments on Matthew 24:23-24.

10. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, op. cit., s.v., "False Christs," pg. 554. For the words of Jesus to which the dictionary entry is likely referring, see Luke 21:20-24. (Similar references occur in Matthew 24:15-19 and Mark 13:14-17; cf. Luke 17:31, although this latter reference in Luke is in a section referring to the Second Coming of Christ.)

11. *Ibid.*, pg. 171, s.v., "Bar-Kochba," by Ricky L. Johnson.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. B.J. Oropeza, *99 Reasons Why No One Knows When Christ Will Return*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994, pg. 174. Oropeza cites Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails*. New York: Harper/Torchbooks, 1964, pp. 8-12. *Ibid.*, pg. 207, note 18.

15. The first three examples here came from the article by Charles E. McCracken, "Messianic Wannabes," *Israel My Glory*, November/December 2010, pp. 24-26.

16. R.C. Sproul, *Surprised by Suffering*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1989, "Appendix B: Contacting the Dead," pp. 193-214. Also, R.C. Sproul, *The Invisible Hand: Do All Things Really Work*

for Good? Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997, pp. 195-200.

17. André Kole and Terry Holley, *Astrology and Psychic Phenomena*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998, pp. 7-9.

18. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on the Occult*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1991, pp. 19-22.

19. Mark Hitchcock, *101 Answers to Questions About Satan, Demons, and Spiritual Warfare*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2014, pp. 54-56.

20. Walter Martin, Jill Martin Rische, and Kurt Van Gorden, *The Kingdom of the Occult*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008, pg. 395.

21. R.C. Sproul, "The Pelagian Controversy," audio tape #TH110.8, side 1. From the audio tape series, *The History of Christian Theology – Part (A)*. Orlando, Fla.: Ligonier Ministries, 1988, emphasis in the original.

22. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on False Teaching in the Church*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1988, pg. 5, italics in original.

23. *Ibid.*, italics in original.

24. Erwin W. Lutzer, *Who Are You to Judge?* Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2002, pp. 96-97, italics in original.

25. *Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, 2008 update, pg. 1919, from the study note on James 2:14-26.

EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

anachronism, like saying the Puritans did the "Lindy Hop." It would assume that those reading that or hearing that claim knew something about the Puritans as well as the American dance step, which evolved in the 1920s and 1930s. If Christians are not somewhat in touch with the Judaism of Jesus' day as compared to later developments of the Jamnia Council (and Diaspora Judaism outside the land of Israel), then they may assume that the two are one and overlay much later traditions, legends, geographical boundaries, and parochial practices on first-century Christianity and beyond. It is a delicate dance that does take some historical study, verifiable research, and discernment. It is not all or nothing at all with the Talmud, but we must be sure the middle ground is factually solid and provable.

For instance, how sure can we be that prayer shawls, yarmulkes, formulaic Jewish prayers, traditions, customs, rituals, and other later historical developments in Judaism are actually valid in earlier first-century practice at all? Does it really follow that the view of the first century through the grid of the Talmud should then be imposed on the twenty-first century? Admittedly because

the Talmud is relied upon in the HRM in general, therefore shouldn't we be apprised of just what the Talmud is and what it teaches? Should we not ask how really trustworthy it is for New Testament studies? And above all, are its practices for the New Testament Church?

Enter Alfred Edersheim. Edersheim (1825-1889) was an Austrian Jew who was converted to Christ in Budapest with the help of John Duncan, a Scottish missionary and professor of Hebrew at Scotland's New College. Edersheim became a missionary to Jews in Romania. He was a scholar who researched deeply and wrote extensively on the life of Christ. Edersheim was described as "a monument of learning." The Church is indebted to Edersheim for three great books: *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Time of Jesus*, and *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus*.

At times Edersheim referred to portions of the Talmud to illustrate Scripture if he believed those parts truly reflected in some fashion first-century Judaism; that is, Judaism at the time of Jesus. He did so for illustration — not imitation. He referred to Talmudic practice as Rabbinism. Edersheim's research, scholarship, and pedigree eminently qualify him to be able to describe for us

just what the Talmud is and what it is about. It is not an inspired pristine first-century document, but a development within an evolving Judaism written over centuries between the second and fifth centuries A.D.

In *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Edersheim wrote: "If we imagine something combining law reports, a Rabbinical 'Hansard,' and notes of a theological debating club — all thoroughly Oriental, full of digressions, anecdotes, quaint sayings, fancies, legends, and too often of what, from its profanity, superstition, and even obscenity, could scarcely be quoted, we may form some general idea of what the Talmud is" (Vol. 1, pg. 103).

A "Hansard" is a lengthy, cumbersome, word-for-word written report of a very long parliamentary procedure. The Talmud is a dated historical document that no one would suggest is inspired.

Edersheim adds:

"The most defective is the Jerusalem Talmud, which is also much briefer, and contains far fewer discussions than that of Babylon. The Babylon Talmud, which in its present form extends over thirty-six out of the sixty-three tractates of the Mishnah, is about ten or eleven times the size of the latter, and more than four times that of the Jerusalem Talmud. ... On the other hand, it seems unaccountable how any one who has read a Talmudic tractate, or even part of one, could compare the Talmud with the New Testament, or find in the one the origin of the other" (ibid., pg. 104).

Though rather long, it is instructive and very helpful to read more of Edersheim's analysis:

"Rabbinism started with demand of outward obedience and righteousness, and pointed to sonship as its goal; the Gospel started with the free gift of forgiveness through faith and of sonship, and pointed to obedience and righteousness as its goal. In truth, Rabbinism, as such, had no system of theology; only what ideas, conjectures, or fancies the Haggadah yielded concerning God, Angels, demons, man, his future destiny and present condition, and Israel, with its past history and coming glory. Accordingly, by the side of what is noble and pure, what a terrible mass of utter incongruities, of conflicting statements and too often debasing superstitions, the outcome of ignorance and narrow nationalism; of legendary colouring of Biblical narratives and scenes, profane, coarse, and degrading to them; the Almighty Himself and His Angels taking part in the conversations of Rabbis, and the discussions of Academies; nay, forming a kind of heavenly Sanhedrin, which occasionally requires the aid of an earthly Rabbi. The miraculous merges into the ridiculous, and even the revolting" (ibid., pp. 106-107).

Edersheim continues saying:

"Miraculous cures, miraculous supplies, miraculous help, all for the glory of great Rabbis, who by a look or word can kill, and restore to life. At their bidding the eyes of a rival fall out, and are again inserted. ... Modern ingenuity has, indeed, striven to suggest deeper symbolical meaning for such stories. ... Thus as between the two — the old and the new — it may be fearlessly asserted that, as regards their substance and spirit, there is not a difference, but a total divergence, of fundamental principle between Rabbinism and the New Testament, so that comparison between them is not possible. Here there is absolute contrariety. ... The Talmud has it, that he who busies himself with Scripture only (*i.e.* without either the *Mishnah* or *Gemara*) has merit, and yet no merit" (ibid., pg. 107).

The *Mishnah* and *Gemara* are the earliest oral traditions, interpretations, and rules that finally made up large parts of the Talmud. They were the foundations for the construction of the Talmud. Edersheim points out the rabbinic thought that if one was very involved in Scripture alone without the *Mishna* or *Gemara* it would not be enough and would be of no merit. Some cults make similar claims for their extrabiblical books.

We are not saying that the Talmud is of no use at all or that it may not have some historical value. What we are saying is that if the Talmud is appealed to, it must be appealed to cautiously, discerningly, and within boundaries. We must be sure that any Talmudic quotes truly and accurately reflect actual first-century life and times. This is only possible if we make sure there is corroborating historical evidence and documentation. If one has corresponding proof from sources such as Josephus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, other early manuscripts, or contemporary writers it places us on safer ground. Establishing facts on the basis of two or three witnesses is the biblical principle. The Talmud portions that can be used must be seen as only illustrative and not as doctrine or mandates for behavior. Jewish culture and practice can illumine the times of Jesus and inform us of those times, but do not constitute a straitjacket of belief or church life.

So many within the extreme wing of the HRM have rotted roots when they quote the Talmud and superimpose its rules and rites on Jesus and the New Testament, and then onto Gentiles and the Church without any justification. This is obvious when Christians are told that ministers should be called rabbis and that churches should be called synagogues and that Jesus can only be called Yeshua.

What Edersheim found was a wonderful, enlightening, and informative discipline that unfortunately has become a hybrid "machine" for cloning. The Talmud then is not a rule for godliness, but a historical document that informs us regarding the development of Judaism after the loss of its temple, priesthood, and land. Those parts

that reflect the times of Jesus can be used as an interpretive tool to illumine certain biblical passages, but not seen as a Third Testament. The HRM takes the Talmud way beyond what it is, what it was meant for, and where and to whom it belongs.

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

BROWNSVILLE REVIVAL EVANGELIST DIES

Stephen Hill, the evangelist who was a key player in the long running and highly embellished “Brownsville Revival” in Pensacola, Fla., died March 9 following a 10-year battle with melanoma. He was 60.

The “Brownsville Revival” began on June 18, 1995, when Brownsville Assembly of God pastor John Kilpatrick enlisted Hill to preach during a Father’s Day service. That service turned into a vocation that lasted more than five years as Hill preached four nightly revival services each week until the effort fizzled and ended in 2000. In 2003, Hill went on to start and serve as senior pastor of the Heartland World Ministries Church in Irving, Texas. Hill later founded the Heartland School of Ministry, a two-year ministry training school similar to the one from which he had graduated and which had been run by the late David Wilkerson.

Reports claim that more than 4 million people from around the world attended the “Brownsville Revival” and that as many as 150,000 made “decisions for Christ at the altars.” The meetings were touted as an “end times move of God,” and both Hill and Kilpatrick indicated that the “revival” was as important — if not more important — than those recorded in the book of Acts.

Critics of the doctrine and practice of the revival argued that the success and popularity of the meetings was built upon a foundation of myths, distorted facts, and exaggerations. The online encyclopedia Wikipedia states that “A video of the [1995 Father’s Day] service is available online and appears less dramatic than the services were later claimed to have been.”

In the end, the revival left Brownsville Assembly of God church on the brink of financial collapse. According to a 2012 Associated Press news article, a debt of \$11.5 million had been amassed when the revival drew to a close.

Hill is survived by his wife, Jeri, and three adult children.

—MKG

PROPHET BOB JONES DIES

Bob Jones, the well-known “prophet” within the New Apostolic Reformation movement, died Feb. 14. He was 84.

Among the self-proclaimed, modern-day prophets such as Mike Bickle and Rick Joyner, Jones was lauded as one with “a clear revelatory gifting, accompanied by gifts of healing and miracles.” Jones likened himself to the Old Testament prophet Daniel, “who functioned at an incredible level.”

Jones’ connection with the prophetic was said to have started at an early age. According to his website, the “Arch Angel Gabriel” appeared to him when he was 7 years old and walking down a dirt road in Arkansas. Gabriel appeared on a white horse and blew a double silver trumpet in his face. The angel is said to have thrown an old bullskin mantle at Jones’ feet, which many years later he says he returned to pick up. He called it the mantle of a “Seer Prophet.” (*Editor’s note:* The Bible never refers to Gabriel as an archangel. The apocryphal Book of Tobit does, however.)

Jones’ website says, “After his death experience in 1975 God sent him back to minister to church leadership and reach the multitudes with His love, truth and equipping the saints with understanding of the spiritual gifts. God promised Bob that he would see the beginning of one billion souls coming into the kingdom in one great wave of the end time harvest.”

In 1991, Jones admitted to and was disciplined for “sexual misconduct.”

Jones is said to have suffered a fractured femur Jan. 7, for which he had surgery a few days later. Jones also was receiving dialysis treatment three times a week. The combination of dialysis and physical therapy hindered his recovery and led to congestive heart failure along with pneumonia.

A *Charisma* magazine post which quoted those honoring Jones following his death cited Robby Dawkins of Vineyard Church in Aurora, Ill., who reminisced that “Bob Jones said, ‘I don’t see anything prophetically after 94’. So either Jesus is returning then or I’m going home then.’ Rest in Peace Bob.”

Jones, even up until the time of his death, continued with his prophetic utterances.

—MKG

CHO FOUND GUILTY OF FRAUD

Following years of accusations, investigations, and a court trial, South Korean pastor David Yonggi Cho was

sentenced by the Seoul District Court to 3 years in prison and fined nearly \$5 million.

The court's verdict brings a measure of closure to Cho's 2013 indictment for a stock scheme. Elders from Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, the megachurch founded by Cho and said to be the world's largest congregation, accused Cho of embezzling as much as \$500 million from church donations. Cho relinquished his role as senior pastor in 2008 and was said to have received a severance payment of \$18.7 million, which he acquired without the knowledge or vote of any of the church's major decision-making bodies.

The charges by the elders also said that Cho returned only \$60 million of the \$153 million he borrowed from the church. Additionally, the elders claimed that Cho's wife, Kim Sung-hae, had not accounted for nearly \$10 million given by the church as support of Bethesda Christian University, a school she operates in the United States.

Not all the accusations by the elders involved finances. Church elders claimed that Cho continued to control the church after his "retirement" by making decisions as "governor." Cho's post-pastoral actions were said to have made it difficult for the church's current pastor, Young Hoon Lee, to effectively exercise authority on church matters and finances.

During a press conference late last year, a physical altercation occurred when some of Cho's supporters tried to assault the elders.

Cho is esteemed within Pentecostal and Charismatic camps in the U.S. and throughout the world because he built the world's largest congregation. He is also a proponent of positive confession and other Word-Faith doctrines.

—MKG

BOOKS IN REVIEW

(continued from page 24)

speaks to His people today (pp. 213-230). He also includes a helpful discussion of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit (pp. 224-226).

The publisher of the book is a bit puzzling. Thomas Nelson Publishers normally cares very little about theological content or positions and has published books by Benny Hinn, Todd Burpo, Sarah Young, and Brian McLaren. Why Nelson would publish *Strange Fire* or why MacArthur chose this firm is a mystery.

Strange Fire is a timely and valuable work. The reader will learn much about the history, doctrine, dangers, and influences of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement. For those who identify themselves as New Calvinists, and are open to the charismatic gifts of tongues, healings, and prophecy, it is hoped that this book will be carefully read and cause them to reconsider their position.

—GEG

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

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



Books in Review

STRANGE FIRE

by John MacArthur

Thomas Nelson Publishers, 331 pages, \$22.99

John MacArthur has long been concerned about the dangers of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement. Over twenty years ago, he wrote *Charismatic Chaos*, which documented many of the excesses of the movement. MacArthur was accused of painting too broadly and lumping those on the lunatic fringe of *charismania* with those who were substantially more biblically sound. The fringe crowd, after all, composed a small minority of the total Pentecostal/Charismatic family.

Whatever MacArthur's critics might think of *Strange Fire*, they no longer can claim that the extreme Charismatics are either the minority or unusual. The fastest-growing and most visible segments of the movement are those formerly identified as fringe. There are still many doctrinally sound Charismatics within Christendom today and MacArthur takes great pains to say so (pp. 81-82). But extremists are everywhere and growing rapidly. In addition there are newer concerns such as the Reformed Charismatics, or Neo-Calvinists, who are combining some excellent theology in some areas with openness to the charismatic gifts. These include Wayne Grudem, John Piper, D.A. Carson, and Mark Driscoll. MacArthur devotes his final chapter to pleading with these men to re-examine their position biblically.

MacArthur's overarching concern is that the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement's commitment to subjectivism and experience dominates their belief in biblical revelation (pp. 16-17) and is leading much of evangelicalism to embrace this philosophy. MacArthur traces the roots of this emphasis on subjectivism at least back to Friedrich Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl, the founders of theological liberalism, who replaced revelation with experience as their source of authority (pp. 215-218). Pentecostalism itself had its beginnings in the Wesleyan/Holiness Movements of the 18th and 19th centuries, but was officially birthed in 1901 by Charles Parham.

The recognized start of the Charismatic Movement was 1960. Today we have witnessed the Third Wave, the

Latter Rain, the New Apostolic Reformation, the Word-Faith and the Prosperity Gospel movements, among others. Yet the movements are riddled with theological and practical problems. Scandals have been common within Pentecostal leadership (pp. 60-65), the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture has been declared demonic by some (pg. 69), bogus claims abound, and believers are being led astray.

What can be done about all this? MacArthur spends two chapters showing how the Christian is to test the spirits of the age (pp. 37-82). Most importantly, he emphasizes that whatever is happening today is not what happened in the New Testament: biblical tongues were actual languages, whereas tongues today are gibberish (pp. 133-154); biblical healings were undeniable, miraculous healings of organic diseases and ailments, whereas healings today are unverified, selective, and practiced in controlled environments; and prophecies in the Bible were without error, whereas prophecies today are mistake-ridden products of human imaginations.

The issue of "fallible" prophecy is an important one due to its acceptance by many leading Evangelicals in the Neo-Calvinist camp. Often known as continuationists, these leaders teach that the Lord continues to give prophecies today. Those prophecies however, unlike biblical ones, are fallible. A certain revelation may be partly from the Lord and partly from the mistaken imagining of the "prophet." The doctrinal basis for this view is found in Wayne Grudem's groundbreaking work, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, and in his *Systematic Theology*. Both of these books try to show that unlike Old Testament prophecy, which was infallible, New Testament prophecy was a flawed mixture of true revelation and human interpretation. MacArthur demonstrates that Grudem is wrong in his thinking and that all revelation from God is without error (pp. 105-123). Later, MacArthur provides an appendix showing that his view, known as cessationism, has been the historic stance among major Evangelicals (pp. 251-261).

One of the important — and erroneous — criticisms of cessationism is that it diminishes the role of the Holy Spirit. MacArthur spends over 50 pages refuting this idea by showing the active ministry of the Holy Spirit in our salvation (pp. 179-195), our sanctification (pp. 197-213), and inspiration of Scripture — the means by which God

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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.