

The Quarterly Journal



THE NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION OF PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

VOL. 36, NO. 3

JULY-SEPTEMBER 2016

EDITOR: KEITH A. MORSE

Do You Hear What I Hear? Priscilla Shirer Tells Us to Seek and Expect the Voice of God

by M. Kurt Goedelman

In 2002, Verizon Wireless launched an advertising campaign that featured a “Test Man” who traveled across the United States and who paused in various places to ask, “Can you hear me now?”¹

Around the same time, author Priscilla Shirer began her own campaign telling us, “God wants to speak directly to each of His beloved children — not to just a few ‘spiritual elite.’”² It is as if God is saying, “Can you hear Me now?” and Shirer is there in a significant way to help us “hear His voice more clearly.”³

Shirer and her writings are presented to believers with a great deal of enthusiastic praise and approval. For example, best-selling author Beth Moore — who calls Shirer her “soul sister in the study of God’s Word”⁴ — writes:



“God is all over this young woman. I know of no stronger, clearer voice for our ailing culture. When Christ speaks through her, we do well to sit up straight and listen.”⁵

To that, Pam Case, director of LifeWay Women, adds:

“Priscilla digs deep into Scripture and pulls out life-changing nuggets that bring people to a whole new level of understanding God’s Word and hearing His voice. Who wouldn’t want to hear what our

(continues on page 10)

Inside this Issue:

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND THE BELIEVER	PAGE 2
POPE TO COMMEMORATE REFORMATION	PAGE 3
NAVIGATING THROUGH THE MISTY AND MYSTIC WATERS	PAGE 4

Editorials

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND THE BELIEVER

In an increasingly secularized world it should surprise no one that the values, standards, and the very laws of God are regularly violated. Many things that are “legal” are nevertheless unbiblical — even sinful. In an effort to triumph over issues such as moral decay and social injustice, various religious leaders have launched organizations and movements in order to right the wrongs and change our society into a more moral place to live. The concern that believers must address is our response to the legalized sins of society and the demands of a secular government, which often contradict Scripture. Now more than ever, we need a biblical base in order for us to make wise and godly choices in this regard.

We must deal with the basic questions concerning civil disobedience. All believers would agree that God’s laws are higher than man’s, and there are times when we must break the laws of man in order to obey God. The question is: When are we obligated to do so? In order to answer that question we must carefully examine Scripture.

The basic principle found in Scripture is that we are to submit to governing authorities. The two most important passages on this subject are Romans 13:1-5 and 1 Peter 2:13-17. The Holy Spirit lays out for us the following truths: First, *every person is to be in subjection to the*

governing authorities, for God has appointed those authorities (Romans 13:1). It should be remembered that as Paul wrote these words, he too lived in a very worldly and ungodly society. Nero was the Roman Emperor, and his kingdom was based on anything but biblical principles. Second, *to resist God-appointed authorities is to resist God and invite His judgment on our lives* (Romans 13:2). Third, *ruling authorities are the ministers of God for our good* (Romans 13:3-4). It is amazing that God is using even unsaved political leaders to accomplish His purposes, without their consent or knowledge. Fourth, *we are to submit to authorities not only out of fear of punishment, but also in order to have a clear conscience before God* (Romans 13:4-5; 1 Peter 2:13-14). Therefore, the believer will seek to obey the laws of society even when he is not likely to be caught for committing a crime. Our ultimate reason for obedience is to please God. Fifth, *obedience to authorities is a good testimony before unbelievers* (1 Peter 2:15). And sixth, *we are to honor those who have authority over us* (1 Peter 2:17).

It would appear from the above that there is no room for any form of civil disobedience. Yet, we have numerous examples in Scripture of people who honored God by refusing to obey certain dictates of the governments in which they were under. *Obviously, there are times when the believer must obey God rather than man.* By examining the passages that teach God-honoring civil disobedience we can arrive at a clear picture of the kind

(continues on page 21)

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

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

Visit PFO’s Website at: <http://www.pfo.org>

BOARD of DIRECTORS:

G. Richard Fisher	Dillsburg, PA	Gary E. Gilley	Springfield, IL
M. Kurt Goedelman	Saint Louis, MO	Keith A. Morse	Denver, CO
David M. Tyler	Granite City, IL		

BOARD of REFERENCE:

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

© 2016 – PFO. All rights reserved. ISSN: 1083-6853. These articles may not be stored on web pages or Internet sites without permission. *The Quarterly Journal* is the newsletter publication of PFO. Published by Personal Freedom Outreach, P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, MO 63136. PFO’s *Journal* may also be obtained on CD-ROM or flash drive in Portable Document Format (.PDF) for use with Adobe® Reader® software.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version, ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Because of the fluid nature of the Internet, web addresses or links contained in journal articles may have changed and/or may no longer be accessible.

POPE TO COMMEMORATE REFORMATION

No one would have thought that for Roman Catholics the idiom “water under the bridge” could ever be applied to the Protestant Reformation, but that’s apparently what is about to happen. Earlier this year, the Vatican Information Service announced, “His Holiness Francis intends to participate in a joint ceremony of the Catholic Church and the World Lutheran Federation to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, scheduled to take place in Lund, Sweden on Monday 31 October 2016.”

The event will inaugurate a year-long celebration, which will conclude on Oct. 31, 2017, the 500th anniversary of German monk Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses to the door of the church at Wittenberg on Oct. 31, 1517.

The announcement was met with opposition from hard-line traditional Catholics who argue that the pope’s actions will mitigate important doctrinal distinctives between Catholics and Lutherans. Others, like the Rev. Dwight Longenecker, a parish priest in Greenville, S.C., maintain the event is “a chance to take one step further in the long, hard road to unity in Christ’s body.”

Pope Francis himself has said, “On this occasion, Lutherans and Catholics will, for the first time, have the opportunity to keep one and the same global ecumenical commemoration, not in the form of a triumphalist celebration, but rather to confess our common faith in the Triune God.”

—MKG

KATHRYN KUHLMAN FOUNDATION CLOSES

The foundation created by healing evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman has ceased its operations. The closing in late March comes over 40 years after the death of its founder in February 1976.

According to a report in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, “The foundation was once a multimillion-dollar annual operation with staff fielding as many as a thousand letters per day.” The news item further revealed that the ministry “reported less than \$95,000 in income on its 2014 tax-exemption form.”

In the 1960s and 1970s, Kuhlman was known internationally for her faith-healing services and weekly *I Believe in Miracles* television broadcast.

Following her death, much of her collection of ministry materials was given to Wheaton College in Illinois. Now, upon the closing of her foundation, Kuhlman’s copyrights and royalties will also be given to Wheaton College.

When Kuhlman died, her will — which had been newly made only two months prior to her death — designated bequests to various individuals, but she left nothing to the foundation. According to biographer Jamie Buckingham, “Although she left \$267,500 to be divided among twenty employees and three relatives, the remainder of her more than two-million-dollar personal estate was left to the Wilkersons” — a couple who “had moved mysteriously into her life eight months before” her death.

Kuhlman was born on May 9, 1907. That date was a closely guarded secret for Kuhlman’s entire life, and even in death as her grave marker at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Glendale, Calif., displays only the date of her death.

—MKG

DRISCOLL STARTS NEW CHURCH

Less than two years after stepping down as pastor of the now defunct Mars Hill, a Seattle-based megachurch, Mark Driscoll finds himself back in the pulpit with a new church. On Easter Sunday, March 27, the controversial pastor held his inaugural worship service at The Trinity Church in Scottsdale, Ariz.

The scandal-ridden Driscoll resigned in October 2014 as lead pastor of Mars Hill Church following allegations of pastoral abuse, plagiarism, improper use of church funds, and vulgar rants. Mars Hill held its final service on Dec. 28, 2014, and then three days later officially ceased to exist. Eleven of the church’s satellite campuses became independent churches “under new leadership” and no longer are “affiliated with the Mars Hill brand.”

Even though Driscoll finds himself with a new church and a new flock, his transgressions continue to haunt him. In February, Driscoll and John Sutton Turner, a former Mars Hill executive elder, found themselves as defendants in a lawsuit by four former members of the church who are charging them with “racketeering

(continues on page 23)

Navigating Through the Misty and Mystic Waters of “Hearing God”

Are We to Listen for God to Speak Outside Scripture?

by Gary E. Gilley

If we are to believe many of the best-selling Christian authors of our day — including Priscilla Shirer, Henry Blackaby, Beth Moore, and Sarah Young — the Lord has been busy speaking to His children. Several years ago Alistair Begg cited a survey that found “more than one in three American adults says that God speaks to them directly.”¹ The evangelical authors mentioned above are but the tip of the proverbial iceberg of leaders who claim to hear from the Lord.

Southern Baptist pastor Charles Stanley said:

“I believe one of the most valuable lessons we can ever learn is how to listen to God. In the midst of our complex and hectic lives, nothing is more urgent, nothing more necessary, nothing more rewarding than hearing what God has to say. ... His Voice waits to be heard, and having heard it, we are launched into the greatest, most exciting adventure we could ever imagine.”²

Henry Blackaby, who like Stanley is a Southern Baptist, avidly promotes this extrabiblical revelation. When asked how he knew he was hearing from God and not from some other source, he responded:

“You come to know His voice as you experience Him in a love relationship. As God speaks and you respond, you will come to the point that you recognize His voice more and more clearly.”³

“Hearing God” is apparently not just for adults. In a newsletter directed to children distributed by NavPress, the publishing arm for The Navigators, preteens as young as seven are told:

“No matter how young you are, since you have the same Holy Spirit inside you as grownups do you can **hear God**. He loves to hear you talk to Him when you pray. But prayer isn’t just talking to God. Prayer is also listening, because God loves to talk to you, too. How do you know God will speak to you? It’s a promise!”⁴

It is not uncommon to see articles published by conservative denominations that testify to believers “hearing” God in one manner or another. At the end of Priscilla Shirer’s mystical volume of hearing God speak, she writes:

“As you apply the principles you have learned in this book and begin to hear God speak to you and move miraculously in your life, I would love to hear your

story. Will you share it with me?”⁵

IS GOD SPEAKING TODAY?

In vogue in much of evangelicalism is the constant imploring of Christians to “hear” God, “experience” God, and/or “sense” God. D.A. Carson, quoting a friend’s critique of a book titled *Listening to God*, wrote:

“... if anyone had written a book thirty years ago with that title, you would have expected it to be about Bible study, not about prayer. ... Many [Christians] now rely far more on inward promptings than on their Bible knowledge to decide what they are going to do in a situation.”⁶

WHAT DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACH?

The final court of appeal determining the identity of the voice of God, if it is such, is Scripture. The Scriptures claim to be the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). They are inspired, once for all, by the Holy Spirit, enabling prophets and apostles, using their own personalities, to write God’s words as He intended (Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:3-4; Acts 5:12; 2 Corinthians 12:12). With the closure of Scripture, direct, infallible, and authoritative revelation from God has

ceased for this age (Revelation 22:18-19; Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; Jude 3-4; 2 Peter 3:2). It is instructive to note when Paul wrote his last epistle to Timothy about leading the church of God, he did not encourage him to focus on new revelations, impressions, feelings, or hunches. Rather, he continually turned him to the Word of God and the doctrines contained therein (2 Timothy 2:2-14-15; 3:15-17; 4:2-4).

This is clearly the emphasis of the New Testament epistles. As Donald S. Whitney reminds us:

“The evangelistic method of Jesus and the apostles was not to urge people to seek direct experiences with God; instead they went about preaching and teaching the Scriptures (see, for instance, Mark 1:14-15). And Jesus did not say that once we have spiritual life we live by direct mystical experience with God; rather, we ‘live ... on every word that comes from the mouth of God’ (Matt. 4:4). ‘All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work’ (2 Tim. 3:16-17, emphasis added). That includes the ‘good work’ of growing in the knowledge of God and likeness to Christ. So in Scripture the normative method of meeting God is *through Scripture*.”⁷

OTHER ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Yet, meeting God through His Word is considered insipid by many believers today. They insist that if God desires to relate to us in deep, personal, intimate ways, He must speak to us directly, individually, and apart from Scripture. If we do not have such experiences, then we are nothing more than “practical deists.”

There are three competitors now challenging Scripture as the final authority in our lives.

Subjective Experience: In relation to our subject we must thoroughly wrestle with the question of how we

know who or what we have encountered in our subjective experiences. All the information we have about God and our relationship to Him is found in the Bible. Any “encounter” apart from Scripture must be verified by Scripture. You will search in vain for information on what God “feels” like; instead the biblical record speaks of transformation. John 3:3 tells us when we encounter God at the moment of salvation we are born from above (or born again). As Christians encounter God, through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, the mark is changed lives (2 Peter 1:4-9).

D. Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote:

“Let us imagine I follow the mystic way. I begin to have experiences; I think God is speaking to me; how do I know it is God who is speaking to me? How can I know I am not speaking to man; how can I be sure that I am not the victim of hallucinations, since this has happened to many of the mystics? If I believe in mysticism as such without the Bible, how do I test my experiences? How do I prove the Scriptures; how do I know I am not perhaps being deluded by Satan as an angel of light in order to keep me from the true and living God? I have no standard. ... The evangelical doctrine tells me not to look into myself but to look into the Word of God; not to examine myself, but to look at the revelation that has been given to me. It tells me that God can only be known in His own way, the way which has been revealed in the Scriptures themselves.”⁸

Of course, the current bent toward the subjective rather than the biblical is nothing new. In each age it seems there are pockets of God’s people (sometimes bigger pockets than others) who want to go beyond Scripture for their spiritual experiences.

Sinclair Ferguson writes:

“In Calvin’s day, ‘The Spiritual Ones’ were a major thorn in the flesh to biblical reformation. Calvin despaired of helping

people who felt the need to mention the Spirit in every second sentence they spoke! For the Puritans, the ‘Inner Light’ movement constituted a similar danger. In both cases ‘what the Spirit said’ and ‘what the [human] spirit heard’ were divorced from and then exalted over the Word. Put more brutally, subjective feeling and emotion reigned supreme over the objective revelation of Scripture. Similarly, today the subjective, experiential, self-oriented, ‘touchy-feely’ secular mind of the 1960s has come home to roost in the evangelical world.”⁹

Udo W. Middelmann laments, “Our age has largely replaced real discussions of theological, philosophical, and cultural content with ‘personal’ testimony, anecdotal experience, and private views.”¹⁰

A New Kind of Revelation — New Testament Prophecy: In Colossians 2:18-19, Paul addresses a people confused by mystical experiences. The forerunners to the Gnostics taught that a few elite had received the gift of direct inspiration through the Holy Spirit. These moments of inspiration took place through visions, dreams, and encounters with angels. This divided the church into two classes, the haves and the have-nots (those who imagined themselves as truly spiritual and those who had not had these experiences).

This kind of problem is almost identical to the teachings found within various elements of the charismatic movement today. Jack Deere, a theologian who adheres to a continualist position, wrote:

“I also said that I believed in words of knowledge and that God can and does give personal words of direction to believers today that cannot be found in the Bible. I do not believe that he gives direction that contradicts the Bible, but direction that cannot be found in the Bible.”¹¹

Wayne Grudem, another continualist theologian who is a wholesale believer in extrabiblical revelation of

all kinds, tries to explain how we can know we are hearing directly from God:

"... did the revelation 'seem like' something from the Holy Spirit; did it *seem* to be similar to other experiences of the Holy Spirit which he had known previously in worship? ... Beyond this it is difficult to specify much further, except to say that over time a congregation would *probably* become more adept at making evaluations of prophecies, and individual prophets would also benefit from those evaluations and become more adept at recognizing a genuine revelation from the Holy Spirit and distinguishing it from their own thoughts."¹²

Grudem is arguably the most careful and well-respected continualist theologian in the country. He taught biblical and systematic theology at Trinity International University (which is affiliated with the Evangelical Free Churches of America) in Deerfield, Ill., for two decades. Yet, the best that he can devise in answer to our concern is: Did it "*seem like*" something from the Holy Spirit? and a congregation would "*probably*" be able to get better at discernment over time. While we are fumbling around trying to decide if something felt like the Holy Spirit — nothing in the Bible helps us here — and hoping that we will get better at discerning the voice of God, others, such as Henry Blackaby, tell us that we dare not even make a move until we are certain that we have heard from God. Pity the poor Christian caught up in this confusion — he is hopelessly tossed about on a sea of subjectivity and mysticism.

At this point, Blackaby, Deere, and Grudem would cry foul. They would claim that while they believe God speaks to His people apart from the Bible today, these revelations are not on par with Scripture. That is, God speaks today but not with the same authority as He did in His Word. So do not accuse us of adding to Scripture, they would say.

This brings up another issue: Whether God ever speaks in a non-authoritative manner. In the biblical record we find that God did speak, either orally (including through His prophets) or through the written Word. But always, *His word was authoritative*. It was nothing less than a word from God — one that could be understood and must be obeyed and heeded! But we are being told today that God is speaking in a different, less authoritative, even impure way.

This is how Grudem explains it:

"[There] is almost uniform testimony from all sections of the charismatic movement that prophecy is imperfect and impure, and will contain elements which are not to be obeyed or trusted. The Anglican charismatic leaders Dennis and Rita Bennett write: 'We are not expected to accept every word spoken through the gifts of utterance ... but we are only to accept what is quickened to us by the Holy Spirit and is in agreement with the Bible. ... one manifestation may be 75% God, but 25% the person's own thoughts. We must discern between the two.'¹³

Grudem's contention is that New Testament prophecy is different from Old Testament prophecy. True Old Testament prophecy was a direct revelation from God and thus infallible, with the prophet forfeiting his life if he was in error (Deuteronomy 13:5; 18:20-22). But New Testament prophecy, including contemporary efforts, so says Grudem, can be fallible. A New Testament prophecy could be partially from God and partially from us. Thus, the Christian must attempt to discern where God leaves off and where man begins. And we are to make this determination without any insight from the New Testament which is totally silent on the subject. Grudem is in serious error. He leaves the believer with no "sure word of prophecy." Nevertheless, his view is gaining popularity even among conservative theologians and leaders.

A New Kind of Revelation — The "Inner" Voice: Non-charismatic evan-

gelical Christianity has definitely taken on a mystical bent in recent days. While never denying the authority of Scripture as such, many regularly point to mystical experiences as the basis for much of what they do and believe. We must be concerned that this weak view of revelation will ultimately cause great harm in the body of Christ. We agree with David Wells' assessment:

"Furthermore, granting the status of revelation to anything other than the Word of God inevitably has the effect of removing that status from the Word of God. What may start out as an additional authority alongside the Word of God will eventually supplant its authority altogether."¹⁴

John Armstrong concurs:

"Direct communication from God, by definition, constitutes some form of *new* revelation. Such revelation would, at least in principle, indicate that the Scriptures were not sufficient or final."¹⁵

At issue is whether God is speaking today, directly, infallibly, and independently of the Scriptures and whether he reveals Himself, His will, or His truth apart from the Bible. Critics of the cessationist position, which says with the closure of the Scriptures God is no longer giving revelation for this age, will tell us to look at the examples found in Scripture. God seemed to be speaking all the time to all sorts of people, apart from the written Word. This is a clear overstatement, although there is surely some truth to be found.

First, God occasionally did speak apart from the written Word. When we read the Bible we sometimes forget that what we are reading in a matter of minutes may have covered vast periods of time originally. Abraham, for example, definitely heard the voice of God at times. God speaks to him in Genesis 15 and again in Genesis 17. But there was at least a 14-year gap between the two utterances from God and possibly 20 years or more (compare 16:16 with 17:1).

While it may appear to us that God was talking to Abraham constantly, many years went by with no communication from God at all.

Second, when God spoke it was almost always to prophets and key players in the biblical story, not the common man or woman. Yet, many today act as if God speaks to everyone all the time, but Scriptures does not support this idea.

Third, when God did speak in Scripture, whether directly or through His prophets, He did so with audible words, not an inner voice, prompting, or hunch. No one said, "I feel the Lord leading me to do such and such." No one said, "I have the peace of God in this decision." In other words, there are those who have created a means of communication from God not found in the Bible. Scripture does not record God speaking in this fashion and yet some believe that this is the norm today.

In an otherwise excellent chapter on this same subject, R. Fowler White, who takes a cessationist view, opens the door to this form of communication by writing, "God guides and directs His people by His Spirit in the application of His written word through promptings, impressions, insights, and the like."¹⁶ Deere, in one of his few on-target remarks, sees clearly the weakness in White's statement:

"[White] doesn't offer a single text of Scripture to support his assertion that God's *practical leading* is carefully distinguished from the Spirit's work of *revelation*. ... White is simply *asserting* a distinction that not only can not be supported by Scripture, but, in fact, contradicts the Bible. ... How does White know God guides through promptings, impressions, insights, and the like? He can't use the Bible to prove this assertion. ... White is asking us to believe in a form of guidance that can't even be found in the Bible!"¹⁷

Many are telling us that God is speaking in a third way today, a way never found, described, or hinted at

in the Bible. It is said that God is speaking today, but His Word is not authoritative and what we think we are hearing can be weighed, examined, and even dismissed. We are not certain when and if He is speaking. And those who feel certain they are hearing from God still believe that the revelation may be partly in error.

This view of God's Word is no improvement over "*Thus says the Lord*." And the system, with all of its uncertainty, pales in comparison with the certainty of Scripture (2 Peter 1:19-21).

BIBLICAL GUIDANCE IN PRACTICE

Charles Stanley writes, "We might ask, 'Why would God still want to talk to us today? Hasn't He said enough from Genesis to Revelation?'"¹⁸ Stanley goes on to offer what he says are "several compelling reasons why God still has His lines of communication open"¹⁹ to us. His second proposal is so that we may have "*definite and deliberate direction for our lives*."²⁰ He further writes:

"As His children, we need His counsel for effective decision making. Since He wants us to make the right choices, He is still responsible for providing accurate data, and that comes through His speaking to us."²¹

Christians — who have only a Bible in their hands — are not crippled in their decision making because they lack the supposed "*definite and deliberate direction*" that comes only from listening to God. A number of years ago, I wrote an article in *The Quarterly Journal* concerning the will of God and in dealing with issues such as finding His will and whether or not He speaks to us today apart from the Scriptures.²² The position I presented is one that I would call a full *sola Scriptura* understanding of the Christian life. This means that God speaks today exclusively through the authoritative, inspired Word, which needs no supplementation from any other source.

This is not to deny "general revelation" from God's creation, which tells

us something of the power and glory of the Creator (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:20). But when it comes to "specific revelation," we do not expect our Lord to speak to us apart from the Scriptures. His guidance is not to be sought in visions, dreams, angels, or other supernatural manifestations. Nor are we to look inwardly for hunches, promptings, "still small voices," or the peace of God. Even circumstances, opportunities, "open doors," and good counsel — while of great help in our decision making — are not authoritative. We are wise to carefully consider these outward matters, but they do not carry the weight of Scripture nor do they constitute a mandate from God.

If we accept this *sola Scriptura* thesis, we find the specific will of God for our lives by examining the teachings of the Scriptures themselves. We can start by noting that there are passages in the New Testament in which the Lord specifically states His will for us:

It is God's will that we be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9). The very outset of God's will for man is that he be saved. God takes no delight in the death of those who do not believe in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Rather, His goodness and patience is demonstrated in that He desires all men to come to a saving knowledge of the truth.

It is God's will that we be filled with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:17-18 instructs, "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." At the moment of conversion every child of God is immediately indwelt (1 Corinthians 6:19), baptized (1 Corinthians 12:13), regenerated (Titus 3:5-6), and sealed by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). These ministries of the Holy Spirit bring to the believer the unique presence of God, unite us to Christ and His body, create within us a new nature, and secure our position in Christ. None of these is optional for the Christian. The filling ministry of the Spirit, on the other hand, is not automatic, it is conditional. To be filled with the Spirit means to be

controlled by Him. When the believer is living in humble obedience to the Lord he is filled, or controlled, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the expressed will of God that we be filled with the Spirit.

It is God's will that we be sanctified. Paul, in writing to the believers in Thessalonica, stated, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). The term "sanctification" means "to be set apart" and, when used in a Christian setting, takes on the connotation of being set apart for a holy purpose. In the immediate context of the 1 Thessalonians text, the Lord is calling for moral purity. It is the expressed will of God that His people live morally pure lives.

It is God's will that we be thankful. Paul, again in his first letter to the Thessalonians, told them that they are to "in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (5:18). Gratefulness is not a natural quality, yet God wants His children to be thankful. It is most instructive that in Ephesians 5:20 Paul lists the giving of thanks as resulting from the filling of the Holy Spirit and Colossians 3:16 speaks of "singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (NASB) as springing from being indwelt by the Word of Christ. Gratefulness is not to be humanly manufactured; it is a by-product of the control of the Spirit and the Word in our lives. It is the expressed will of God that His people be thankful.

It is sometimes God's will that we suffer. "For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (1 Peter 3:17). It is not always in the plan of God that we suffer for His sake but, when it is, we are to suffer because of our godly testimony, not because of sinful behavior. It is sometimes the expressed will of God that we suffer for Him.

These are, of course, general statements that are true for all Christians at all times — and this is not an exhaustive list. To these "will of God" commands we could add all the revealed requirements, demands, and mandates found in the Word that are

applicable to the New Testament believer. But the bottom line is that we find the will of God through the careful study of the Word of God. This would include everything from a husband loving his wife as Christ loves the Church (Ephesians 5:25) to Christians not suing one another (1 Corinthians 6:1-8) to the restoration of a fallen believer (Galatians 6:1-2).

FINDING GOD'S WILL

What we are discovering is that God has not hidden His will from us, thus necessitating a secret formula to unravel His mysteries. His will for us is found in Scripture, ready to be plucked to the delight of all Spirit-indwelt children of God willing to read and apply the divine revelation. The goal, as expressed in the New Testament, is not to *find* the will of God, but to *do* the will of God. Because God wants you to do His will, be assured that He has not hidden it and then sent us on some kind of cosmic treasure hunt to find it. He is not daring us to discover the clues which will lead to His plan for our lives. Rather, His will is clearly imprinted on the pages of Scripture. It was to this end that Paul told Timothy to "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Many are simply unwilling to do the "diligent" work necessary to accurately handle the word of truth and are looking for shortcuts. The Lord does not call for shortcuts; instead diligence is prescribed.

A *sola Scriptura* understanding of the will of God and decision making might look like this example: Several years ago I was asked to go to Brazil for 17 days to minister to Brazilian pastors at a retreat, present a number of seminars on contemporary trends facing the church today, and preach at several churches. In addition, I would have the opportunity to observe the ministries of both Brazilians and missionaries and offer counsel.

Obviously, these are all good things — it would certainly seem to be the Lord's will to go. But offsetting the positive were a number of negatives.

It would take hundreds of hours to prepare the materials needed for the trip, in part because my PowerPoint presentations and notes would all have to be translated into Portuguese, a huge task which I personally could not do. Therefore, I would have to enlist a small army of others to help me in my preparations for this mission work. On the other hand, I was in a unique position in that a number of the members in my church speak and write Portuguese (certainly unusual for a church in the cornfields of Illinois). Volunteers lined up to produce the materials and do the translation work — and it all "seemed" like God was at work, but there were other obstacles.

For one, I would have to be gone from my own church and miss three consecutive Sundays, something neither I nor the elders of the church found desirable. And there were other projects — writing, counseling, preparing teaching materials — that could not be handled by others. I would come home to an almost insurmountable workload — and I would come home exhausted. There would also be a good chance that I would acquire some kind of exotic "bug" while in Brazil, something I often do when traveling abroad. Finally, there was the financial situation. This was an expensive trip and the expense would be all mine.

So, while a ministry in Brazil presented a wonderful opportunity, it offered many difficulties — the decision was not cut-and-dry. It certainly would have been nice if the Lord audibly told me what to do. Barring that, I could have used some reliable hunch or prompting. I would have been happy with just a little of the "peace of God" guiding me, but as usual I was both at peace and simultaneously anxious over either decision. Examination of circumstances and "open doors" led both ways and the "godly counsel" that I received was of little help.

In the end, I chose to make the trip. God had not spoken to me either audibly or mystically. Peace was elusive, as was good counsel. Doors were open in all directions. Obstacles were

equally evident at every turn. Even Scripture contained no verses saying, “Thou shalt (or shalt not) go to Brazil.”

BIBLICAL DECISION MAKING

I asked, “How could the *right* decision be made — one that would most honor God?” That presupposes there is only one right decision that could have been made to bring God honor. Had I chosen to stay home, attend to my local congregation, preached and taught the Word in the United States, focused on my extended writing ministry, and spent quality time with my family, that would have glorified God. Some might say that I would have been disobeying (shades of Jonah) had I stayed home. But the Bible says “No.”

Look for examples at how decisions were made in the New Testament:

- Financial giving was to be done on the basis of the choice of the heart (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- Travel to another country or town (except on the few occasions when God audibly stepped in) was left to the individual (1 Corinthians 16:5-7; Acts 20:16).
- Consumption of various foods was determined by the conviction of the eater (Romans 14:2-4; 1 Corinthians 8).
- Observance, or not, of special holy days was a personal decision — one not always shared by other godly people (Romans 14:5-9).
- Marriage, after proper obedience to biblical commands and principles, was left to the wishes of the individual (1 Corinthians 7:39-40).
- Those in church leadership should aspire to the office (1 Timothy 3:1).
- Those in business, while leaving room for the sovereign will of God to the contrary, were free to pursue their business as they saw fit (James 4:13-17).

In none of these examples and many more we could list, do we find the believer seeking the specific will

of God. No hunches, promptings, or experiences of inner peace come into play. These individuals went about their business obeying the revealed will of God, doing what they deemed to be the wisest and best for a given situation, and were always cognizant and open to the fact that God might change their plans. New Testament Christians did not always operate from a position of absolute certainty, nor did they seem to have the need to do so. It was not uncommon for Paul, for example, to take a course of action because he “thought it was best” (1 Thessalonians 3:1), or because he “thought it necessary” (Philippians 2:25), or “if it is fitting” (1 Corinthians 16:4).

This was the typical decision-making process in the New Testament by godly people. As they lived in obedience to the revealed will of God, they made decisions based on the best information they had as they sought to honor God. In the end they made wise, informed choices according to their own desires, while they lived in conformity with the Word of God and always kept as their goal the glory of their Lord. At that point there is no evidence that they agonized over possibly being out of the will of God. They were in the will of God by virtue of their obedient lives. They, therefore, had the personal freedom to make wise, godly choices according to the best information that they had at their disposal. In any given situation a number of decisions could have been made, all of which equally honored the Lord.

ABLE TO CHOOSE

Let’s plug all of this into my choice regarding the trip to Brazil. To the best of my knowledge I was living in the will of God by virtue of the fact that I was striving to live in obedience to Scripture. My life’s passion is to bring glory to our Lord. Whether I stayed home or headed to Brazil would not change either of these things — I believed myself to be in the will of God as described by the Word. So I did not agonize over my status before God. Either decision, I believed, could and should bring honor to the Savior.

Therefore, I reasoned that I have spent virtually my entire life in the United States. America has been the focus of almost all of my efforts in ministry — despite there being great needs in other places — needs the Lord has equipped me to meet. I harbored no thought that my ministry in Brazil would be earth-shaking. Still I knew that the Lord uses many different instruments to accomplish His purposes. I believed I had something to contribute to the Christians in Brazil.

In addition, the church I pastor was healthy with a number of good leaders to handle the ministry on the home front without me. The finances were in place and my workload could be managed.

In the end I decided to go to Brazil because I wanted to go and because I believed it would be the best use of my time and talents for the glory of God. Looking back I still believe it was the best choice. However, had I chosen to decline the trip, I could have done that for the glory of God as well. Either choice was a good one. Either choice was pleasing to God (2 Corinthians 5:9). Neither choice would place me out of His will.

As we try to make decisions that honor God we should freely examine circumstances, feelings, logic, and so forth, but we can never conclude from such things that the Lord is definitely leading us in a particular way. The biblical picture is that of God’s people making wise decisions based upon the clear commands and principles from the Scriptures. At the same time they were ever ready to bow before the will of a sovereign God who might at any time change their direction. Such Christians are not concerned about missing God’s will because they are living in God’s revealed will and they trust the Lord to take the initiative to make certain they are where He wants them to be.

In the New Testament we are not told to seek God’s will, but to make wise decisions based upon biblical commands and principles. The understanding of these principles gives the child of God wonderful freedom and

great confidence in their pursuit of lives that please their Lord.

Endnotes:

1. Alistair Begg, *What Angels Wish They Knew*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1998, pg. 13.
2. Charles Stanley, *How to Listen to God*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985, pg. 8.
3. Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994, pg. 138.
4. Cheri Fuller, "Hotline from Heaven," *PrayKids* (Hearing God), Colorado Springs, Colo.: Pray!, 2006, pg. 1, bold emphasis in original and printed in red ink.
5. Priscilla Shirer, *He Speaks to Me*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2006, pg. 207.
6. D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 1996, pg. 506, brackets in original.
7. Donald S. Whitney, "Unity of Doctrine

and Devotion," in John H. Armstrong, editor, *The Compromised Church*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1998, pg. 246, ellipsis and italics in original.

8. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Fellowship with God*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1993, pg. 95.
9. Sinclair B. Ferguson, "The Evangelical Ministry: the Puritan Contribution," in *The Compromised Church*, op. cit., pg. 272, brackets in original.
10. Udo W. Middelman, *The Market Driven Church*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004, pg. 61.
11. Jack Deere, "The Vineyard's Response to The Briefing," Vineyard Position Paper #2, May 1992, pg. 15. Document accessed at: vineyard.org.za/papers/paper2.pdf
12. Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1988, pp. 120-121, emphasis added.
13. Ibid., pg. 110, ellipsis in original.

14. David Wells, *God in the Wasteland*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1994, pg. 109.
15. John H. Armstrong, "The Evangelical Ministry: a Tragic Loss," in *The Compromised Church*, op. cit., pg. 295, italic in original.
16. R. Fowler White, "Does God Speak Today Apart from the Bible?" in John H. Armstrong, editor, *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1996, pg. 79.
17. Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Voice of God*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 1996, pp. 283, 284, italics in original.
18. *How to Listen to God*, op. cit., pg. 9.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., italics in original.
21. Ibid.
22. Gary E. Gilley, "God's Will: Lost or Found?," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 2007, pg. 4-13.

DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR?

(continued from page 1)

Creator wants to say to us? Now we can know how to recognize it."⁶

And her publisher says she "is a wife and mom first, but put a Bible in her hand and a message in her heart, and you'll see why thousands meet God in powerful, personal ways at her conferences."⁷

Shirer herself insists, "I mean, come on, do you really think He loved you enough to die for you, but not enough to talk to you?"⁸ But, according to Shirer, God speaking to you and me is not just limited to the written pages of Scripture. She says that God will give us "fresh words" and "insider information":

"As believers, we oftentimes get used to and even become dependent upon hand-me-down revelations about God. We allow others to spoon-feed us the Word of God. But as you mature spiritually, don't you want God to send to you a special gift-wrapped message with your name on it — for Him to reveal something very specific about your life? When that time comes,

you need to know how to listen for His voice."⁹

INTRODUCING PRISCILLA SHIRER

Priscilla is the second of four children born to Tony Evans, popular Christian speaker, author, and pastor. Evans is the founder and senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, a congregation that is said to have more than 10,000 members. *Charisma* magazine noted, "Evans has been both a model for and a mentor to Shirer from the time she was a child."¹⁰ The magazine further revealed:

"Shirer believes she is becoming a bridge between conservative and charismatic audiences as well. About eight years ago, God began to bring people into her life who 'were led by the Spirit of God, heard the voice of God, expected the power of God, believed in miracles from God — those kinds of people who had a radical faith and were willing to take risks,' she says."¹¹

While Shirer is called a "bridge," she is much more dedicated to a charismatic position. She writes:

"I believe that the 'word of

knowledge' and 'prophecy' (1 Corinthians 12:8, 10) are very real gifts of the Spirit that New Testament believers can be given as He chooses to distribute them. Yes, I fully understand the differences of opinion on this, but I see no reason for these gifts to be singled out for exclusion from the biblical text and listings. There, I said it. And even though I do not believe that prophetic messages that either add or take away from the Scriptures can be received as messages from God, I do believe that the Spirit gives to some people, on certain occasions, the divine ability to receive insight into another person's life. And when this happens, that believer has the opportunity (and responsibility, frankly) to share this scriptural message that applies to the other person's situation and affirms God's voice and direction."¹²

Shirer graduated from the University of Houston with a bachelor's degree in communication and from Dallas Theological Seminary with a master's degree in biblical studies. But her calling as an author and conference leader was not her original aspiration:

“Before I understood God’s calling on my life, I wanted to be a Christian singer. I prepared myself by rehearsing and singing at every opportunity. I surrounded myself with key people in the industry and successful Christian artists and sought advice on what steps to take and when to take them. Nothing happened.”¹³

She continues:

“When I graduated from college with a degree in communications, I wanted to work in television. Though I tried to get into the business, my phone calls weren’t returned, my résumé wasn’t reviewed, and all my efforts fell flat. Even the few television shows I was hired to work on were cancelled shortly after I arrived. All of these problems were major interruptions in my plans.”¹⁴

She did, however, find a measure of success in communications:

“When I first began speaking, I learned that motivational speakers are in high demand. As one of two female speakers with the Zig Ziglar Corporation and the only African-American speaker, I was a highly requested presenter. I was paid top dollar to speak to audiences in a corporate setting. But after several years of traveling as a motivational speaker, I sensed growing personal dissatisfaction. I closed seminars feeling unfulfilled. I wanted to do more than make an audience laugh — I wanted their lives to be changed. My bank account grew larger, but my spirit grew less satisfied.”¹⁵

Despite her dissatisfaction, her days with Zig Ziglar did yield an encounter with Jerry Shirer, the man who would become her husband:

“She met Jerry when she addressed the corporate team of Hilton Hotels, where he was an executive. Jerry approached Priscilla’s father for permission to date her, and about a year later, he asked him for the green light

to propose. Evans made him put his request in writing. They married in 1999 and Jerry quit Hilton to work for his father-in-law’s national ministry. After 10 years with Ziglar, Priscilla left to pursue women’s ministry full time.”¹⁶

Shirer herself says, “God told my husband and me that we were to leave our jobs and jump into full-time women’s ministry.”¹⁷ It was then that they established the Dallas-based Going Beyond Ministries.

HER SILVER SCREEN DEBUT

More recently Shirer has gained exposure with her film acting debut in the starring role as Elizabeth Jordan in the 2015 independent movie, *War Room*, which was released nationally.

Shirer’s character in the movie fits well into the fabric of her theological leanings.

War Room is the fifth Christian drama film created by brothers Alex and Stephen Kendrick. Wikipedia noted that the film “received generally negative reviews from critics, but became a box office success and a sleeper hit.”¹⁸ Yet the negative reviews — or no reviews altogether — by the mainstream media did little to thwart the film from making \$11.4 million in its opening weekend; a figure four times the amount it cost the filmmakers to create the movie. *The Washington Post* observed that, “Behind the film’s popularity was a deepening partnership between the filmmakers and a network of influential pastors, which delivered millions of viewers without the need for Hollywood’s typical promotion vehicles of expensive TV ads and global media tours.”¹⁹

While many Christian pastors, leaders, and laypersons have enthusiastically applauded all of the cinematic efforts of the Kendrick brothers, their films — while espousing faith and values — are consistently seasoned with an unbiblical paraprosperty message. That subtle message which resonates throughout the Kendrick brothers’ films is that once you get

right with the Lord and make Him your focus, *everything* turns out for the better. The failures and problems we face will be a thing of the past.

For example, their first feature film, *Flywheel*, tells the tale of a dishonest used car salesman who, being thousands of dollars in debt, is faced with foreclosure and the loss of his dealership combined with strained marital, family, and business relationships. This all leads him to a crisis of conscience and profession of faith in Jesus Christ. As a result of his new faith, his home life and business practices are reformed and he tells God to “handle it” as his auto dealership nears its end. Within days, customers show up and purchase every car on his lot, which allows him to escape foreclosure and catapults his company from imminent failure to overnight success. And, needless to say, there is victory in his marriage and family as well.

In *Facing the Giants*, the second Kendrick film, a high school football coach with a six-year losing record is coming under pressure by the some of the parents of his team who are calling for his replacement. Added to that, the coach is “facing” issues on the home front, with car and home appliance problems and the reality that he is the reason for his wife’s inability to conceive a child. As he asks God for help with these “giants,” his outlook begins to change and a revival occurs at school which affects the student body. His team then goes on a winning streak that leads to a post-season appearance. He gets a pay raise and a new pickup truck as a gift from a parent of one of his players. And his wife conceives not once, but twice, by the end of the film.

War Room is another story of a person’s problems disappearing after a rededication to Christ, mixed with some mysticism and unbiblical depictions of spiritual warfare. And so it goes with the Kendrick brothers’ films. While it cannot be said that the main objective of the Kendrick brothers’ films is to teach that getting right with God remedies life’s major problems, it is a concept that permeates their movies.

We must never lose sight of the fact that God — for His good purposes — may want to take us through an unpleasant situation rather than take us out of it. Yes, a strong relationship with Jesus Christ and our heavenly Father does provide stability and an inner joy and peace that can come from no other source. But while we are forgiven from the eternal penalties of sin, there are times when we still must face and accept the consequences of our sin. No one knew this better than King David (see 2 Samuel 12:13-18). Getting things “right” with God is no magic formula for ridding life of its problems. And we may even be called to have to suffer as a result of the sins of others. Scriptures, such as 1 Peter 2:19-21; 3:8-17; and 4:12-16, all make this very clear and instruct the believer in how to respond.

But perhaps making films that depict a life that has to endure the wages of our sin is a harder sell than one in which you have a Jesus who purges the negative consequences of sin and provides us with sales, pay raises, a winning football team, and an exemplary home life.

The Kendrick brothers were not Shirer’s first opportunity to work with a major media project. In 2006, she teamed up with Richard Foster, Beth Moore, Dallas Willard, and others to be part of *Be Still*, which was described as “an extraordinary film that demonstrates how contemplative, or ‘listening,’ prayer can be a vital way to find peace in the midst of a frenzied, fast-paced, modern world.”²⁰

On the video, she confessed that the practice of contemplative prayer was a new exercise in her life:

“And so I’ve just begun in my prayer life over the past year of my life to make a conscious effort to be in a time of prayer and, yes, to speak to Him but then to consciously say, ‘Okay, I’m done talking now because I’m just going to sit here in this stillness and wait to see what it is that You want to say to me.’”²¹

Further in the video, Shirer again admits she is new to the practice, and

then clearly expresses her unabashed — even sensual — mysticism:

“I think He wants to have a personal experience with each of us. It’s kind of like a man and woman that are intimate with each other. I mean we can’t give you specifics on how to make it happen because it’s going to be personal for you and your husband. And so with your personal time with the Lord it’s the same thing. He is going to create an intimate time with you that is going to be so different from anybody else. And so it’s okay to not have to follow a formula or follow what everybody else does in their quiet time. He wants to have personal quiet time with you. But a great place to start is just to be quiet — make a conscious effort to be quiet before Him — pour out your heart to Him, ask Him to cleanse your sin, and then you say, ‘Lord, this is Your time.’ And just put on some good music that you can listen to and just be quiet before Him and see what it is that the Holy Spirit wants to do.”²²

Contemplative prayer is the unbiblical practice of calling a person to silence by emptying their mind and then waiting and listening for God to “speak.” The techniques parallel those found in Transcendental Meditation and yoga, as well as being at the heart of Hinduism and Buddhism. Giving the practice a “Christian” flavor in no way makes it biblical.

I CAN HEAR CLEARLY NOW

Given the overt mysticism in her books, it is not surprising to see therein the names of and quotations from people like Beth Moore, Henry Blackaby, Philip Yancy, Bruce Wilkinson, and Hannah Whitall Smith. Many of these authors have probably helped to shape Shirer’s thinking on the subject.

Hearing God speak is an exercise that Shirer has developed and taught in the past decade. If you’re not hearing from God she wants you to know that she can relate:

“Perhaps, like me, you’ve spent far too many years of your life not hearing or at least not recognizing His voice. You’ve read in the Bible about people to whom He spoke. You’ve heard from believers today who talk about how God has spoken to them. But maybe only rarely, if ever, would you say that you’ve experienced this kind of connection with Him yourself. I can completely relate to that.”²³

And she acknowledges:

“My prayer time used to be a one-way conversation — all talk, all the time. I felt like every word was just hitting the ceiling and bouncing back. I felt no closer to God and certainly did not sense that any conversation had taken place between the two of us.”²⁴

But the days of one-way conversation are now apparently over. And Shirer further wants believers to know just how pivotal her concerns are:

“Please don’t misunderstand. This isn’t just some pie-in-the-sky religious issue. It’s down-to-earth and intensely practical. ... The Lord doesn’t speak in a whisper or in a dark corner somewhere where people can barely hear; nor does He try to trick us because He knows we can’t understand what He’s saying.”²⁵

What she has learned and now teaches is supposed to enable her readers to get into a position where they can hear from God. But beware, the “insider information” disclosed in her seminars and books comes with serious obligation. She cautions:

“I knew that what I was about to share would enable them [i.e., those attending her seminars] to begin recognizing the internal promptings of God’s Spirit. This would mean that they’d become accountable for obeying Him. That’s the divine responsibility that accompanies the divine privilege we have. So I’m offering you [i.e., the readers of her book] the same warning right

now, because I'm fairly certain you'll walk away from this chapter with the capacity to begin hearing God. And that means you'd better be prepared to do what He tells you. So, here goes... *Official Warning*: If you're not prepared to begin responding in obedience to the voice of God, please don't read any further."²⁶

But to those who are willing to heed her warning, she offers this:

"Now let's begin to prepare ourselves to hear from God. He is calling you by name. He has a special package with your name on it, and He's waiting for you to open it."²⁷

And Shirer describes, in extravagant fashion, what it will be that's coming your way:

"The Holy Spirit who lives within you will never speak to you without having received direct revelation from God. He doesn't create messages on His own initiative. ... The Holy Spirit — the only One with direct access to the truth of God's thoughts concerning you — also has a desire to *share divine revelations with you*."²⁸

She also wants us to know that it's not just in those times of quiet solitude when God will speak. It seems that God is much like Verizon's "Test Man" — here, there, and everywhere, He apparently is saying, "Can you hear Me now?" Shirer says:

"I'm in no way implying that it's impossible to hear God speak amid the regular rhythms of everyday life. On the contrary, we can, and He does. We can listen while we're exercising, clipping coupons, washing dishes, sitting in traffic, taking a shower, and doing all sorts of mundane tasks. We can be aware of His handiwork moving in natural things, making them supernatural."²⁹

She further wants you to know that even while you're out at the mall or sitting down at the dinner table, that

voice you are hearing just may be the Lord:

"The next time you're shopping and see an item you really want, but something inside says 'no' — it's probably God. The next time you're eating too much food and a sense of conviction tells you to stop — it's probably from God. The next time you're about to say something you shouldn't, and your conscience rises up to say you'd better not ... Don't. You've just heard from God. Obey Him."³⁰

In all of this, Shirer is emphatic: "God knows exactly who you are, never loses track of you, and has a *personal message with your name on it*."³¹

Her readers are lured into expecting a God encounter where He will communicate with them and, like her, change their "humdrum Christian experience from a discipline into a passion."³² She even wants her readers to know that, "As you get to know Him, you'll develop your own secret language with Him."³³

Shirer serves up a variety of methods for experiencing God and hearing Him speak. She poses the question, "How can we know that what we're sensing within is actually the voice of God?"³⁴ and then in response maps out for her readers many of the established ways that believers are told that God speaks:

"Turn your thoughts inwardly as you earnestly seek God. Consider what you are sensing in your 'gut.' ... keep your eyes open when reading His Word for the moment when a Scripture just grips you, speaking directly and appropriately, even if surprisingly, to a particular circumstance in your life. ... Take what you're hearing and direct it back to God. ... Take it up with Him in prayer and wait patiently and expectantly for His answer. ... Seek the counsel of a mature believer. Talk to someone whose wise, biblical counsel you trust, and see if their advice mirrors what you've been hearing from

the Word and from His inner witness."³⁵

So we are to regard a "sensing in your gut," the Bible, prayer, and counsel from others as the channels in which God now speaks to His children. Elsewhere she adds to the mix, "The sound of opening and closing doors is one way we hear from God."³⁶ Added to her cavalcade of ways in which God speaks, there is even more:

"So when a thought comes to you out of left field, consider — before you dismiss it — that it might be God's thought for you. Don't just ignore it. Check inward to see if the Holy Spirit is encouraging you to pursue it despite the challenge it presents."³⁷

SELLING THE BIBLE SHORT

For the most part, with Shirer, it's about *sensing* and *internal stirrings*. Her emphasis is geared toward a feeling oriented — what seems right at the time — way of knowing God's leading. Of course, lest one think Shirer is abandoning the Bible completely, she's not. She acknowledges that God speaks through the Bible, even admitting, "He speaks principally through His Word."³⁸ However, such a statement upholding Scripture is radically undermined with her qualifier "principally." For Shirer, the Bible is just one of several ways. And, unfortunately, when one considers the entire scope of her teachings on the subject, the Scriptures get tragically lost or at least muddled in the shuffle. This is borne out as Shirer writes:

"The most spectacular way God has ever spoken to His people is the way He speaks to us right now — through the indwelling, intimate, incredible gift of His Spirit and the timeless, living, holy Word of God. And if we insist on seeking to hear Him *only* or even *primarily* in sensational ways — the open parking spot, the flip of a coin, the blindfolded pointing at a single Bible verse — we will miss out on the most personal means of

communication possible with Him."³⁹

The scale of "the most spectacular way" has a propensity to tip in the direction of the subjective rather than the objective — the written canon of Scripture. And, at times, Shirer experiences new ways in which the Divine communicates with her. For example, she describes one of these "novel" mystical experiences:

"Several years ago, in fact, God very clearly spoke to me in a way that I'd never experienced before. It was new, it was a bit uncomfortable, but it was so obviously God that I'd have been a fool to mistake it for anything (or anyone) else. It all started when I began sensing that the Lord wanted me to take a new direction spiritually and personally. ... And I'd begun to sense this burning in my heart, compelling me to expand my territory and increase my capacity, preparing me to experience God in a novel and fresh way."⁴⁰

Although Shirer would maintain that the Bible is necessary, it is more useful as a formwork — which is a mold in which we are to pour, solidify, and confirm the impressions, inner voices, and revelations we have received. This is because, while the Bible is the Word of God, Shirer thinks that concerning every aspect and issue in life, it does not provide all we need for life and godliness. We need more to help us make those decisions we face in everyday life.

While maintaining that Scripture provides for us the black and white commands, Shirer goes on to say, "What's on your question plate right now is most likely an 'either/or' kind of thing."⁴¹ She includes: "Job questions ... cars ... raising children ... major purchases ... medical decisions ... even whose-family-to-disappoint-by-not-coming-for-Christmas issues."⁴² Elsewhere she expands her inventory:

"You may be wrestling with a decision about a job offer in another city — or an employee you need to hire. Maybe you're

trying to decide on which contractor to use for some remodeling work on your house or how to approach a friend who seems to be straying into sin. Perhaps it's a complete career change toward something you've thought about before but have never felt released to actively pursue."⁴³

And her list goes on. Furthermore, if one has any remaining doubt as to Shirer's conviction on the matter, she has this to say:

"The Bible does not expressly address every question or situation you may be dealing with at the moment. When you need to decide whether to move or stay put, whether to accept that job offer or keep looking, if you should teach Sunday school for another term or if it's time to pass the baton, you need God's specific guidance that's customized to you and your situation. And this is where His incredible Holy Spirit comes in. You can expect Him to lead you personally because He cares about even the most insignificant details in your life and is eager to tell you which direction you should take."⁴⁴

So, according to Shirer, there are the issues of life awaiting our determination in which the Bible is apparently lacking. In making these life decisions, she would have us listen for voices, rather than look for verses. Because in our feeling-based, experience-oriented world a disciplined life of actively reading, memorizing, studying, and rightly applying the Word takes hard work, it is much easier to opt for the more passive method of voices and impressions.

Additionally, in Shirer's teaching, "peace" overshadows Scripture thereby becoming the determining factor in making the critical and even mundane choices in life. She glibly asserts:

"Sure, you do have the Bible to consult for guidance, but you know you can't just open it at random, taking verses out of

context simply to affirm your own choices. *You genuinely want to hear from God.* You want to know whether the recent circumstances you've noticed around you are more than mere coincidence, or whether the comments you heard someone make to you might truly be a signal of God's will and direction."⁴⁵

Shirer would have us believe that God has a plan for our lives that includes a singular correct choice for the decisions with which we are faced. But it is all too easy for her readers to neutralize real peace and become crippled with a fear of making the wrong choice. Her instruction sets one up for false knowledge and an end result of failure and disappointment. It also robs the believer's freedom and subjects us to a paralyzing bondage of uncertainty.

There is no disagreement that every daily decision we face — like what shirt to wear, if we should buy gas on Monday or Wednesday, whether we should take our lunch to work or eat out, what color to paint our house — is not mandated in Scripture. There are, however, abundant biblical principles that can and do frame those types of decisions along with the fact that God allows His children creative and individual choices in non-essentials (Romans 14).

For example, in the city in which this author lives it is a consistent pattern that nearly every Tuesday, around noon, each and every gas station increases the price of gas around twenty-five cents a gallon. (And then by the end of the week, the price drops a few cents here and there, until it returns to a low point on Tuesday morning and the cycle begins anew.) So I do not have to seek a voice on whether to buy gas on Monday or Wednesday. I simply employ wisdom and a desire to be a good steward of the funds the Lord has entrusted to me — and I fill up my car's gas tank on Monday. But even if I happen to "gas up" on Wednesday, the fact is that while I may have a few less dollars in my wallet, I'm still in God's will.

Garry Friesen, in his definitive work on biblical decision making, effectively illustrates this freedom of choice using Adam and Eve in the Garden to make his point. Eve begins the conversation, telling Adam:

“I’m not sure which of these lovely fruits I should prepare for supper. I’ve prayed for guidance from the Lord, but I’m not really sure what He wants me to do. I certainly don’t want to miss His will on my very first decision. Would you go to the Lord and ask Him what I should do about supper?” ... Adam did as Eve requested. When he returned, he said, “I got the same answer as before: ‘From *any* tree of the garden you may eat *freely*; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.’” Adam and Eve were both silent for a moment. Then Adam said, “You know, Eve, the Lord made that statement as though it ought to fully answer my question. I’m sure He could have told me what to eat and how to eat it; but I think He wants us to make those decisions. ... Eve was incredulous. ‘Do you mean that it doesn’t matter which of these fruits we have for supper? Are you telling me that I *can’t* miss God’s will in this decision?’ Adam explained: ‘The only way you could do that is to pick some fruit from the forbidden tree. But all of these fruits are all right. Why, I suppose we could eat all of them.’”⁴⁶

Like eating apples *or* oranges, some choices are benign and of no consequence. Thus, the biblical principle of Christian freedom would cover these small benign decisions, so even with these choices the Bible is still in play with the truth of liberty in Christ. But for the ones that are weighty, like whether or not to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, we have guidance in the Scriptures.

Even medical decisions can grow out of the principle of our bodies being temples of the Holy Spirit, the

value of life, and the saving of life, as well as compassion on the hurting. Quality of life decisions can be made to glorify God and serve him better with better health. Every decision can be made with biblical wisdom and through a biblical grid. Proverbs gives us great and enduring principles for life’s decisions. Everything in one way or another relates to the Bible and its direct teaching or its principles.⁴⁷

Sometimes we do not know just what to do as it may take more time, prayer, and biblical research. But — like when faced with whether or not to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil — we always *know what not to do*.

New Testament professor Gary Meadors is right on target when he writes, “We have ignored the clear teaching of the Bible that God’s will is comprised of his revealed truth and instead have substituted a search for God’s will over a path of obedience in what we already know. Therefore, we paralyze ourselves by searching for a phantom of our own making.”⁴⁸ Meadors speaks further to the subjective process modeled by Shirer:

“The apostles’ standard operating procedure for the pursuit of God and godliness was to live out the Word of God they had received. They expected their followers to do the same. Neither Jesus nor the apostles left us a paradigm for knowing God’s will through a subjective process to figure out what God requires. Rather, they modeled living and making decisions on the basis of applying God’s truth to their world. The process is bathed in prayer and submission to God’s sovereign plan. A search for knowledge about the future in order to make a decision in the present is absent in apostolic instruction. Paul’s final letters, the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), present a paradigm of sound doctrine and judgment as the basis of discernment. No model of an appeal to miraculous guidance is present.”⁴⁹

Shirer first errs in her idea that Scripture is silent regarding the “either/or” concerns of life, and then adds further error with her subjective solution. There are no decisions we must make or issues that we face in life which are not addressed by either direct biblical command or precept. The Bible is not silent on such things, only our knowledge and ability to draw truth and application from Scripture. In the Word we can discern the righteous standard that God has revealed. Therefore, when we focus and feed on the Word of God, our will, our ambitions, our desires, and yes even the decisions we make, will be safely within the sphere of God’s will.

Because there is no deficiency in Scripture, we do not have to employ the mystical experiences prescribed by Shirer in order to satisfy or assure us that we are in the will of God. We simply need to be a student of the Word, seeking to the best of our abilities to please Him. When we do those things, we have freedom to make choices, and we can be assured that we are in His will — no voices necessary! The Apostle Paul, writing only a short time before his martyrdom, stressed to Timothy:

“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Concerning those verses, Puritan minister Matthew Henry (1662-1714) wrote:

“Those who would learn the things of God, and be assured of them, must know the Holy Scriptures, for they are the Divine revelation. The age of children is

the age to learn; and those who would get true learning, must get it out of the Scriptures. They must not lie by us neglected, seldom or never looked into. The Bible is a sure guide to eternal life. The prophets and apostles did not speak from themselves, but delivered what they received of God, 2Pe 1:21. *It is profitable for all purposes of the Christian life.* It is of use to all, for all need to be taught, corrected, and reprov'd. *There is something in the Scriptures suitable for every case.*"⁵⁰

God has given us a sure and firm Word for our direction and protection. Shirer stresses repeatedly that her personal extrabiblical guidance — the *something more* — must agree with the Bible. But the hard fact is that even if the *something more* agrees with the Bible, then we don't need it because we have the Bible. Author Curtis Crenshaw explains:

"If anything is contrary to Scripture, it is wrong. *If anything is the same as Scripture, it is not needed.* If anything goes beyond Scripture, it has no authority."⁵¹

In her effort to entice one into receiving those "specific messages" (that supposedly come from the Lord), Shirer devalues the Bible in yet another way — and in doing so shows a real ignorance of even basic theology. She claims, "Every time you open your Bible or sit under its teaching, *God gives you His general revelation.*"⁵² How Shirer, who earned a master's degree in biblical studies from a respected institution, could even make such a statement is beyond comprehension. Her mystical mission appears to have so disjointed her that she is incapable of stating even a rudimentary understanding of the doctrine of revelation.

God "speaks" — or has revealed Himself — in two principal ways: through *general* revelation and through *special* revelation. All men, in every generation, have received God's general revelation; for God has thus revealed Himself through nature (see Psalm 19 and Romans 1:18-21). But general revelation only tells us there is a God, it does not reveal the

manifold attributes or character of God, nor His solution to man's sinfulness. For that we are in need of special revelation, which is the Bible with its message of God's redemption through the person and sacrificial work of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, even Shirer's principle that the Bible is necessary because "God will never give us fresh words that contradict His written Word"⁵³ is conveniently ignored in one of her own life experiences about which she writes. She describes the episode:

"My friend Rachel had come to my house to show me a Bible study she'd been working on to help women make their home a sanctuary. ... She showed me the cover she'd designed for what she envisioned as a twelve-week Bible study, video series, journal, and gift booklet. Exciting stuff. So when, after laying all of this material in front of me, she asked if I'd consider being her coauthor on the project, I jumped at the chance. Didn't even ask God what He thought about it. Right then and there, I told her I was in. She could count on me. But after I had written the introductory chapters and sent them off to her, I knew I'd made a mistake. Through my personal Bible study and a clear, consistent impression from the Lord, He showed me that He wanted me focusing on something else at the time. My impulsive behavior had gotten me out of order. I'd put His will aside while plunging ahead with my own."⁵⁴

Shirer is able to break her commitment by saying that it was through her "personal Bible study and a clear, consistent impression from the Lord." But we must ask: Is it really the Lord who wanted Shirer to go back on her word, or was it of her own desire and doing? While declaring "personal Bible study" was one of two factors in her being able to tell her friend Rachel that she was out, Shirer never discloses the commands or precepts in Scripture which she says allowed her to do so. Perhaps this is because the Bible speaks against breaking one's promises and instructs us to be true

and faithful to our word. In other words, we are to fulfill our promises.

Christians are to be a people who can be counted upon, depended upon. As was said in times past, "Your word is your bond." That is the type of person the Bible tells us to be. Psalm 15:4 says that the one who dwells in the sanctuary of the Lord is he "who keeps his oath even when it hurts" (NIV). And Ecclesiastes 5:2 instructs us not to be rash with our mouths. We are not to make promises that we do not intend to follow through upon, or commit to things that we're not going to do.

Jesus, in Matthew's Gospel, put it this way: "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'" (5:37). For many, "Yes" means: If it's convenient, if I can get around to it, if I feel like it, if I can find the time. But that is not how believers are to operate or function according to Scripture. Our "Yes" must be "Yes," not "No" (or like Shirer, "I can't") depending how things work out.

There are commitments we make that we must be faithful in — mortgage, car loan, etc. — but we must also be faithful in the routine matters. We must be faithful in the insignificant (small things) and the important (big things). One Church Father from the fourth century said, "Faithfulness in little things is a big thing."⁵⁵ (See also, Luke 19:11-27; Matthew 25:21.) If we're not faithful in those small things, then we're not believable, we're not credible, we're not trustworthy, we're not acting as Christians should act. When we let others down with a broken promise, we destroy trust. Unfaithfulness cuts to the very heart of commitment. And like any other sin — or sinful habit — unfulfilled words become easier and easier to not act upon when unfaithfulness to one's word persists. Scripture tells us in Numbers 23:19 that God speaks and performs, He promises and fulfills.

Reflect back upon some of Paul's greatest heartache and trouble. It was as a result of a broken promise. Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10; Phygelus and Hermogenes in 2 Timothy 1:15;

Mark in Acts 15:38-39. The Bible calls us to be a people of truth, representing a God of truth, and a Christ who is truth. How can we do any less than tell the truth? We should model Onesiphorus, who stayed faithful and loyal to Paul (2 Timothy 1:16-17).

There are times when circumstances (like a health concern) will prevent us from being able to follow through on a promise. That is the way life works out some times. But in Shirer's situation — after telling her friend she "could count on" her — it was a result of wanting to focus on something else and to go in a different direction, and then blaming God.

MY PEACE I GIVE YOU

As earlier noted, Shirer's primary litmus test for knowing if the "voice" you hear is truly God or not is peace. Here is some of what she has to say:

"And as you grow in your relationship with Him, learning how to hear His voice and respond in obedience, peace becomes one of your determining factors in knowing when He is leading and speaking to you. ... You'll feel peace about it. Think of it as getting a 'green light.'"⁵⁶

"When peace reigns in a matter we're dealing with — when God's voice is accompanied by deep assurance and permission — pay close attention to what you're hearing and sensing."⁵⁷

"When it comes to discerning His voice, always remember ... Peace rules."⁵⁸

"You'll know it's the voice of God when His persistent, personal word to you leaves you with a sense of peace and assurance all the way around."⁵⁹

"Another way God speaks to us is through peace, or the lack thereof. Peace is a crucial component in hearing God's voice and deciphering His will."⁶⁰

In both of her volumes on the subject, Shirer employs Colossians 3:15 ("And let the peace of God rule in your hearts") in support of her pronouncement that "peace rules."

Shirer, however, is in error by making inner peace the criterion for a Christian to determine if God is "speaking" to them. And then she adds further error by repeatedly misusing Colossians 3:15 to try to establish her premise. For example, she writes:

"The Greek word for 'rule' is significant. It means to act as a judge or umpire. So Paul was telling the church that in the same way a modern day baseball umpire manages a game according to the rules, the Holy Spirit was to serve as the 'umpire of their hearts,' and the Colossians were to make decisions in accordance with His calls."⁶¹

As children of God, we know that peace is a blessing that comes from God (Psalm 29:11) and that we are commanded to seek peace (Hebrews 12:14). Likewise, peace is manifold in its dimensions, as we have peace *with* God (Romans 5:1), peace *from* God (Galatians 1:3), and peace *of* God (Colossians 3:15). Indeed, peace is a real and wonderful provision for the believer (Romans 5:1; Philippians 4:7). However, peace cannot and should not be confused with guidance. It is misleading and unbiblical to make peace a benchmark rather than that which it is — a by-product.

As stated, Shirer mishandles Colossians 3:15 by applying it to guidance. Clearly, the context of Paul's command in Colossians 3 is keeping peace in relationships. The context and proper application is borne out by taking careful note of what Paul writes in verse 13: "bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."

And then note again verse 15 in its entirety as it says, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts to which you were called into one body." The apostle is commanding us to be at "peace" in all our relationships. Similarly, Paul instructed the believers both at Rome and at Thessalonica to be peacemakers: "Live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18) and "Be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thessalo-

nians 5:13). The peace of which Paul speaks is not a feeling or emotion of God guiding the individual believer, but one of a commitment to maintaining unity within the body.

Jay Adams provides a sound and succinct biblical exegesis of Colossians 3:15:

"The misinterpretation of Col. 3:15 (as *individual* peace — 'I have peace about the matter' — as the basis for decision-making must be rejected). The entire passage speaks of *corporate* relations among the members of the church. Peace is the 'umpire' for the interpersonal relations of the parts of the body to the whole. This is peace *in the church*; there is nothing about guidance in the passage."⁶²

Perhaps Shirer should employ her own advice — "When reading His Word, it means approaching it with an open mind and heart that's not already bogged down with my own opinions and ideas of what the text is saying"⁶³ — in respect to Colossians 3:15.

And then for Shirer apparently it's not always about peace being *the determinator*. She writes of a time when "God's conviction" was "confirmed" to her "through an offhand comment made by one of [her] siblings who was completely unaware of [her] conviction."⁶⁴ Speaking, hearing, confirming — Shirer appears willing to accept and embrace just about any method under the sun and then attribute it to God.

OTHER PROBLEMATIC CONCERNS

Although Shirer's unabashed mysticism is the main focus of this article, there are other aspects of her theology — some of which are of graver concern than others — that are present in her books and should be addressed. Here are a few examples.

Open Theism: Perhaps unintentional or maybe just ignorant of its implications, Shirer says that, "Sometimes He just watches and waits to see what our next move will be — to see if we will obey the commands of His

Word.”⁶⁵ Is God really watching and waiting? Or does He, as Scripture affirms, possess comprehensive foreknowledge — having all knowledge: past, present, and future? Shirer’s statement is more in line with liberalism, the cults, and the neotheism of Gregory Boyd and the late Clark Pinnock. It is unfortunate that her editors at Moody Publishers allowed such a statement to be printed. But, perhaps they don’t even care.

Mistaken Miracles: Like many Charismatics, it appears as though Shirer wants to label as miraculous any of God’s involvement in the life of a believer. She writes:

“God still intervenes in our world to make sick bodies well. To heal fractured emotions. To remove addictive desires from people’s lips. To put \$150 in the pocket of someone whose specific need is not \$100, not \$200, but exactly \$150. Ask around, and you’ll find somebody who’s seen this sort of stuff happen up-close and firsthand. I know I’ve seen it. Miracles. God’s handiwork.”⁶⁶

Elsewhere she writes about a friend who also witnessed “God’s supernatural power”:

“I can think of numerous times when God has shown up so obviously and stunningly that it’s almost been too awesome to believe. Like the time when, as her husband struggled to find a new job, their home was saved from foreclosure at the last hour — not once, not twice, but three times ... She and I have often talked about this — why some believers like her seem to experience God’s supernatural power more often than others, while many Christians can live their entire lives without really witnessing God’s handiwork.”⁶⁷

Perhaps, in response to the enigma that she and her friend discussed, it is because of the way one defines the miraculous. What escapes Shirer is a basic understanding of miracles, providence, and concurrence — all of which are tools that God uses in the

life of a believer. Pastor Clint Archer addresses well the misconception presented by Shirer:

“Some Christians, in the sincere desire to prove God’s involvement in their life, promote a different type of God’s working to the status of miracle, but thus they unintentionally demote the extraordinary nature of God’s signs and wonders. So in the quest to prove that God still performs miracles as a normative part of the Christian experience, they redefine miracles to include a plethora of other ways God works. For example, they call it a miracle when they receive provision of a last-minute reprieve from rent that is due, when actually that is providence. Or they thank God for the long-time court decision that went in their favor by calling it a miracle when more precisely it is an example of concurrence. I don’t mean to be the vocabulary police here, but it is important to distinguish the different varieties of God’s involvement in our lives so that we give proper glory to God.”⁶⁸

When miracles become commonplace, they are no longer miracles; when the extraordinary becomes ordinary, it is no longer extraordinary.

Strange Admissions: Shirer periodically will make a statement which can be viewed as out of balance for a Christian — especially by one, like Shirer, who purports such an intimate relationship and communication with God. In one instance, Shirer confesses, “When lifelong friends note changes and maturity in me through the years, I’ve been able to trace it back to my life as a mom — challenges and all — that is pulling out what God wants to be seen in me.”⁶⁹

Yes, God does have a plan for every Christian to grow and mature and He expects every Christian to be growing and maturing. However, the method of change and maturity (sanctification) which Shirer indicates is nowhere expressed in the Bible. The biblical view of sanctification comes about through the involvement of the Godhead,⁷⁰ application of the Word,⁷¹

and the believer’s own hard work of “putting off” and “putting on.”⁷² While motherhood is one of God’s gracious provisions for women, it is not the biblical means for change and maturity. If it was, then any woman unable to give birth would be restricted in her sanctification — not to mention every male! Once again, Shirer’s comments are puzzling to have come from one so in tune with the Lord through inner voices and insider information.

Defective Anthropology: Shirer ascribes to a triplex or trichotomy view of man. That is, she writes, “All human beings, saved or not, are composed of three parts: body, soul, and spirit.”⁷³ And she is able to tether her view of the triplicity of man to her mystical underpinnings. In describing her trichotomy, she writes that at our conversion:

“Our spirits are no longer separated from God but are reborn, recreated, regenerated. We can now connect with Him and hear His voice — something we could never hope to do before. ... At this point the Holy Spirit immediately begins the process of renewing us from the inside out. First our soul, and ultimately our body. We call this process *sanctification*. ... So why the anatomy lesson here? Because understanding this incredible, inner change of events in your life changes everything about the way you hear His voice.”⁷⁴

She then tells us:

“When the Holy Spirit takes up residence in you, He doesn’t do away with your conscience. He awakens it. It’s no longer just your own voice bubbling up from within. Like the rest of your soul, your conscience is being actively transformed by the Holy Spirit and becomes the mechanism He uses to relay the direction of God to you as it steers you toward decisions that reflect His perspectives.”⁷⁵

Once again, Shirer’s observations weaken the importance and role that the Scriptures are to take in a

believer's life and in biblical sanctification. Moreover, her view of man is defective.

It is important to determine whether Scripture views the body, soul, and spirit as three distinct and separate parts of man. As we do, it is wise to ascertain the fact that the Bible clearly establishes the overall unity of man as created by God. God made man; He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being (Genesis 2:7). This verse tells us that Adam is a unified person with body and soul living and acting together. The word "soul" can picture the whole man, speaking of man in unity of material and immaterial elements as a living being. Soul also occurs in the Old Testament with the meaning of breath as the essence of life and at other times simply means the inner man as opposed to the physical body.

In a broad sense, the words "soul" and "spirit" are actually synonyms and are just different names for the same immaterial side of man. However, it is helpful to note that when we say terms are synonymous it does not necessarily mean these terms are identical. Therefore "soul" and "spirit" are synonymous in one sense in that they can represent aspects of the person and stand for the immaterial interchangeably. Yet this does not mean that they have linguistic equality. Obviously the biblical authors choose one word or the other depending on the nuance of their point. But this does not constitute a third essence of man's makeup.

Jay Adams says this:

"The Scriptures do not allow for the triplex (or trifold) view; indeed, the entire emphasis — from Genesis 2:7 on — whenever the Scriptures (reluctantly) speak of separation (remember, the stress is on unity), is that there are two elements that came together, and two (and only two that at death) part company temporarily. In addition to those already cited (and note, Gen. 2:7 allows only for two elements) consider the following: Don't be

afraid of those who kill the body but can't kill the soul; rather be afraid of the One Who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna [Matt. 10:28]. In this verse the thought is that the *whole* man suffers in Gehenna; the very emphasis is upon the *entirety* of eternal man suffering over against partial (bodily) suffering now. The statement, 'both soul and body' is duplex, not triplex. If triplexity were true, the spirit also should have been mentioned."⁷⁶

Numerous systematic theologies will lay out the "biblical data" or the scriptural basis for a dichotomy position. One example is *Abstract of Systematic Theology*⁷⁷ by James P. Boyce. Additionally, Louis Berkof, in his *Systematic Theology*, indicates that trichotomy originated in Greek philosophy.⁷⁸ Likewise, Charles Hodge in his *Systematic Theology* writes that trichotomy is "*anti-Scriptural*" and that, "This doctrine of a threefold constitution of man being adopted by Plato, was introduced partially into the early Church, but soon came to be regarded as dangerous, if not heretical."⁷⁹ Finally, Wayne Grudem, in his own *Systematic Theology*, lays out a series of strong biblical arguments for the dichotomy position.⁸⁰

Dubious Bible Exposition: As earlier noted, Shirer misuses Colossians 3:15 when she uses that verse to establish "peace" as "a crucial component in hearing God's voice." But her untrustworthy Bible application and interpretation doesn't just stop there. She also misuses Psalm 46:10, the hallmark verse among those in the contemplative prayer movement. Chapter 10 of her book, *He Speaks to Me*, bears the title "Be Still" and features as its focus Scripture verse Psalm 46:10.⁸¹ In this chapter, Shirer writes:

"God asks us to be still enough so we can hear what the Great Physician has to say to us and get the medication He wants to give us. I've discovered that God doesn't shout over my noise. He waits until I'm quiet. A calm and composed spirit is *open to divine revelation* and comfort."⁸²

Notwithstanding her claim of "divine revelation," Shirer has taken this verse from its proper context and uses it to support her mysticism. Psalm 46:10 has absolutely nothing to do with hearing God's voice. The setting of this passage is God's power, might, and majesty against those who war against Him. The use of Psalm 46:10 as evidence of the concept that one can hear God's voice (or call) through a subjective means demonstrates just how destitute and bankrupt Shirer's position really is.

In another narration, Shirer relates how during a Bible study, the leader gave to her a prophetic message, confirming it by using Isaiah 43:18-19. Shirer describes the event:

"'Young lady, I believe the Lord wants to do something new in your life, and it's going to be hard for you to imagine because it will be something you've never seen or experienced before. But there's no need to be afraid, because the old, strong, solid foundation of His Word will be what this upcoming work will find its footing on.' ... "'Forget about what's happened,'" he said, quoting from Isaiah 43:18-19 (THE MESSAGE). "'Don't keep going over old history. Be alert; be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it? There it is!'" Well, well. Needless to say, this message shook me to the core. To be honest, I didn't know what to do with it other than believe it was God Himself. Hearing Him like this was unconventional for me. But I couldn't deny the relevance of what the teacher had said. Based on the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, I knew God was speaking to me."⁸³

Shirer's thinking (and patronage to the use of Isaiah 43) is more in line with the song learned as children in Sunday school (*Every promise in the Book is mine, every chapter, every verse, every line*) than it is with sound exegesis. That childhood hymn, while simple and memorable, is false. While some promises (or verses) in Scripture

are intended for all, clearly others were intended only for specific individuals. Isaiah 43:18-19 are verses which fall into this latter grouping. Those verses unquestionably speak of God's promise to the nation of Israel; that the same power He used in delivering them from Egypt and through the Red Sea (v. 16) would be used anew in their redemption and return from captivity in Babylon.

Shirer is shameful and without any biblical foundation in her effort to apply the Lord's promise to Israel spoken through the prophet Isaiah to her own life and ministry.

THE FINAL WORD

"Hearing" from God as expressed in Scripture always points to the words of the prophets and apostles (e.g., Matthew 22:31b; 2 Peter 1:19). For believers, the *final word* is the *written Word*. It keeps us guided, guarded, and grounded. Shirer's view offers only guesswork and, with that, uncertainty. She admits as much:

"We're not infallible, of course. What you say to others, or what advice you get from one of your good church friends, may not always be 100 percent trustworthy. ... *Turns out, there are no experts at hearing from Him.* Each of us is still learning on the job."⁸⁴

In the end, the aspect of Shirer's message that should disturb Christians the most is that such a claim is bearing false witness against God. Apart from the written Word, God didn't tell her anything; she speaks from the desires of her heart and imagination. There also exists a real danger that those who adopt and put into practice the methods outlined by Shirer — no matter how innocent or sincere they may be — are moving themselves from the sound foundations of Scripture and into a deep sea of mysticism and subjectivism with its harmful undertows. And, even worse, these practices may be opening a doorway to the occult.

Escaping the quicksand of subjectivism so prevalent in evangelicalism today may seem like an impossible

task, but it's not. This is because we have all that we need for life and godliness in the Scripture. The Word of God gives us the security that we do not have to stumble our way through a maze of subjective feelings or kowtow to those who purport their special revelations.

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

According to a news article, "Priscilla calls her vocation Going Beyond Ministries: her goal is to help women go beyond the humdrum experience of 'church as usual,' and go beyond sectarian divides to focus on the Gospel."⁸⁵

But given the propensity of her mysticism, there is what could be said a more ominous application of her ministry's name. Paul, writing to the believers at Corinth, entreated them, "Do not go beyond what is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6, NIV). Paul instructed them to trust and live faithfully according to the Scriptures. The underlying message of Shirer is that the Bible is not enough and that, in order to hear from God, the Christian should go beyond what is written.

Endnotes:

1. See further, Theresa Howard, "'Can you hear me now?' a hit," *USA Today*, Feb. 22, 2004.
2. Priscilla Shirer, *He Speaks to Me*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2006, back cover.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, pg. 12.
5. Priscilla Shirer, *Discerning the Voice of God*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012, pg. 1.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 217.
8. *Ibid.*, pg. 11.
9. *He Speaks to Me*, op. cit., pp. 13-14.
10. Carol Chapman Stertzer, "Like Father, Like Daughter," *Charisma*, February 2010, pg. 32.
11. *Ibid.*, pg. 33.
12. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit.,

- pp. 70-71.
13. *He Speaks to Me*, op. cit., pg. 133.
14. *Ibid.*, pg. 165.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 176.
16. Molly Worthen, "Housewives of God," *The New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 12, 2010. Document accessed at: www.nytimes.com/2010/11/14/magazine/14-evangelicals-t.html?_r=0.
17. *He Speaks to Me*, op. cit., pg. 116.
18. "War Room (film)" from Wikipedia. Document accessed at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_Room_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_Room_(film)).
19. Cecilia Kang, "'War Room' displays box office clout of a faith-based audience," *The Washington Post*, Sept. 1, 2015. Document accessed at: www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/war-room-displays-box-office-clout-of-a-faith-based-audience/2015/09/01/c3c4174e-5062-11e5-8c19-0b6825aa4a3a_story.html.
20. *Be Still*. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006, back side of DVD case cover insert.
21. *Ibid.*, 4:08 timemark of the "Contemplative Prayer" chapter.
22. *Ibid.*, 0:33 timemark of the "The Sound of Stillness - Interview with Priscilla Shirer" chapter.
23. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit., pp. 9-10.
24. *Ibid.*, pg. 30.
25. *He Speaks to Me*, op. cit., pg. 14.
26. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit., pp. 37-38, ellipsis and italics in original.
27. *He Speaks to Me*, op. cit., pg. 16.
28. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit., pg. 133, emphasis added.
29. *Ibid.*, pg. 27.
30. *Ibid.*, pg. 49, ellipsis in original.
31. *Ibid.*, pg. 91, emphasis added.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 26.
33. *He Speaks to Me*, op. cit., pg. 164.
34. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit., pg. 46.
35. *Ibid.*, pg. 47.
36. *He Speaks to Me*, op. cit., pg. 134. It should be noted that the "open/closed doors" method lacks any biblical support. In the New Testament, the subject of an *open door* appears only five times (Acts 14:27; 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3; Revelation 3:8) and the context of each of these mentions is opportunity, never guidance.
37. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit., pg. 125.
38. *Ibid.*, pg. 127.
39. *Ibid.*, pg. 68, italics in original.
40. *Ibid.*, pg. 70.
41. *Ibid.*, pg. 21.
42. *Ibid.*, pg. 20, ellipsis in original.
43. *Ibid.*, pg. 110.
44. *Ibid.*, pg. 94.
45. *Ibid.*, pg. 21, italics in original.
46. Garry Friesen with J. Robin Maxson, *Decision Making and the Will of God*. Portland, Ore.: Multnomah Press, 1980,

pp. 165-167, italics in original.

47. In addition to Friesen's volume, other helpful books in this discipline are: Gary E. Gilley, *Is That You Lord?* Webster, N.Y.: Evangelical Press USA, 2007; Gary T. Meadors, *Decision Making God's Way*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2003; James C. Petty, *Step By Step: Divine Guidance For Ordinary Christians*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1999; and Dave Swavely, *Decisions, Decisions*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2003.
48. *Decision Making God's Way*, op. cit., pg. 128.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.
50. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, public domain, pg. 1310, commentary on 2 Timothy 3:14-17, emphasis added.
51. Curtis I. Crenshaw, *Man as God: The Word of Faith Movement*. Memphis: Footstool Publications, 1994, pg. 222, emphasis added.
52. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit., pg. 149, emphasis added.
53. *He Speaks to Me*, op. cit., pg. 87.
54. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit., pg. 207.
55. This quotation is attributed to Saint John Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407).
56. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit., pg. 108.
57. *Ibid.*, pg. 110.

58. *Ibid.*, pg. 111, ellipsis in original.

59. *Ibid.*, pg. 115.
60. *He Speaks to Me*, op. cit., pg. 134.
61. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit., pg. 109. Also see, *He Speaks to Me*, op. cit., pg. 134 where she also employs Colossians 3:15.
62. Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling (More Than Redemption)*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979, pg. 31, footnote 30, italics in original.
63. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit., pg. 19, italics in original.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 191, 192.
65. *He Speaks to Me*, op. cit., pg. 86.
66. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit., pg. 69, italic in original.
67. *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.
68. Mike Abendroth, Clint Archer, and Byron Yawn, *Things That Go Bump in the Church*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2014, pg. 107. Archer's chapter, "Providence, Concurrence, and the Miraculous" (pp. 97-109) is an excellent study of the subject of knowing the ways in which God operates in a believer's life.
69. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit., pg. 204.
70. For example, the Father purges (John 15:2); the Son cleanses (Ephesians 5:26); and the Holy Spirit transforms (2 Corinthians 3:18).
71. The Word of God is active in our sanctification according to 2 Timothy 3:16-

18; John 17:17; and Romans 12:1-2.

72. See Ephesians 4:22-24. "Putting off" means forsaking the habits of our old sinful ways of thinking and acting. "Putting on" means to adopt and employ new godly ways of thinking and acting (which emulate Jesus Christ).
73. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit., pg. 39.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 42, italic in original.
75. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.
76. *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, op. cit., pg. 111, italics in original.
77. James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*. Escondido, Calif.: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1887, pp. 194-200.
78. Louis Berkof, *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, pg. 191.
79. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, Vol. 2, pg. 48, 51.
80. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994, pp. 473-477.
81. *He Speaks to Me*, op. cit., pp. 111-117. The focus verse (Psalm 46:10) is cited on pg. 111.
82. *Ibid.*, pg. 117, emphasis added.
83. *Discerning the Voice of God*, op. cit., pp. 71-72.
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 88, emphasis added.
85. "Housewives of God," op. cit.

EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

of situations in which God would have us disobey those in authority over us.

In Exodus 1:15-21, we see that the Jewish midwives were instructed to murder all male children born to Jewish women. Because the midwives feared God (v. 17) they disobeyed this direct command from Pharaoh. That this action pleased God is evident from verses 20 and 21 where we find God rewarding them. An analysis of this situation reveals individuals who were commanded by governing authorities to personally do something which would entail violating the command of God.

Scripture also tells how Rahab, the harlot from Jericho, refused to give up the Jewish spies to the authorities, but rather hid them and provided them a way of escape (Joshua 2:1-6, 15). The writer of Hebrews reveals to us that this action brought her great reward from God (11:31). Because to turn the spies over to the king of Jericho would have almost certainly cost them their lives, we again have a situation where an individual is asked (by the authorities) to personally do something which would result in disobedience to God's revealed will.

In the book of Daniel we read of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refusing to worship Nebuchadnezzar's idol, thus they were thrown into the fiery furnace as a consequence (3:4-6, 12-30). God obviously approved of their act of civil disobedience as demonstrated in His miraculous deliverance on their behalf. The pattern is similar to the ones above: individuals were ordered to personally disobey a direct command of God. Their refusal to do so has been an example of God-honoring courage ever since.

Also, in Daniel 6:6-22, there is the famous story of Daniel and the lions' den. This is perhaps the best known biblical story of righteous civil disobedience. Daniel reasoned that it would be wrong to cease worshiping his God in daily prayer, even though the king had decreed praying to the true God an illegal act. Daniel's rescue proved (as in the previous example) that the Lord was pleased with Daniel's disobedience of an ungodly human law. As in the other examples, for Daniel to obey the king would have necessitated personal sin.

Then in Acts 4:15-20 and 5:27-29, when the Sanhedrin demanded that the apostles cease preaching the Gospel, it was a clear cut case of the dictates of man contradicting the commandments of God. Jesus had sent out the

apostles to preach the Gospel (Matthew 28:19-20); to disobey Him would be sin. The apostles had to make a personal choice; they chose to obey their Savior.

Finally, in Acts 16:35-40, Paul explained that he was concerned about future opportunities to preach the Gospel. He insisted on his legal rights as a Roman citizen. This is a rather unique situation, but from it we can learn that Christians can (and often should) stand up for their legal rights, especially when the cause of Christ is involved.

Therefore, from all of this biblical evidence, we have learned that there are definitely times in which believers must disobey governing authorities. These times come when we must personally choose between obeying the command of God or the decrees of man. However, at no time in the Word of God do we find a believer interfering and attempting to keep another individual from disobeying God's command (in this type of scenario).

For some Christians, civil disobedience became a practical course in response to the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision by the United States Supreme Court which allowed legalized abortions. It is argued that if the ruling was overturned it would not only save the lives of millions of babies, but would greatly improve the moral climate of our society. All Bible-believing Christians understand that abortion is morally wrong, and has far-reaching consequences in our world. We would therefore love to see abortion abolished, not only legally, but totally.

There are some Christians who are so passionate that they block abortion clinics in an attempt to shut them down through the use of non-violent resistance. And in extreme vigilantism cases, there even have been a few who have reacted with violent resistance by murdering a doctor who performs abortions. The critical concern here is that these methods — whether killing a doctor or simply barricading a clinic's entrance — are illegal, resulting in the arrests of the "rescuers."

But what say the Scriptures? Is there biblical support for this type of conduct? The short answer is, "No." In both the Old and New Testaments infanticide was not uncommon. Yet, at no time did believers attempt to stop this horrible sin through the use of force. We do find the Old Testament prophets often preaching out against such practices; primarily because such sins revealed the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel. On the other hand, in the New Testament (as the Church infiltrated a pagan society) the apostles were silent about the sins of the unsaved world around them.

Yes, Scripture declares abortion morally wrong because it is the murdering of a human life (compare Psalm 139:13-16; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:41). God would then, obviously, condemn the sin of abortion regardless of what the laws of the land decree. Thus if we apply the principles learned above, we can definitely know the following: *No Christian should ever have an*

abortion, no Christian should perform an abortion, and we as believers must speak out against the evils of abortion.

But do we have a biblical mandate to break the laws of our country in order to stop someone else from having an abortion? The Scriptures would not command, permit, or encourage such action, neither is there any example of godly people (in the Bible) attempting to force God's principles upon unbelievers in this manner. In addition, while it would be wonderful to stop legalized abortion in our country, such action will not in any sense change the moral fiber of our country.

The same holds true for other forms of civil disobedience that have gained widespread attention and acceptance in recent months across the United States. Social injustice against minorities has become a fertile seedbed for civil disobedience — a civil disobedience which is vigorously cultivated and encouraged by some "Christian" leaders and pastors. For example, one minister in the Saint Louis area (who is associated with a Missionary Baptist Church) leads training sessions in nonviolent civil disobedience. And then there's the Rev. Al Sharpton, who boasts in pragmatic fashion, "So don't tell me that demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience do nothing when history continuously shows us the opposite." While the local pastors who advocated the civil disobedience, such as protests and shutting down Interstate highways, would condemn the looting and arson that often follow, their encouragement of civil unrest can and often does lead to the provocation of behaviors that turn violent and criminal.

Biblically speaking, the mission of these local pastors, like the apostles of the first century, is to bring people to Christ, not attempt to remedy all the social ills of a fallen society. The teachings of the New Testament underscore that not only is the spiritual more important than the social, but that the only real solution for societies' ills is spiritual transformation, not political reformation. It is not a Black or White or Hispanic problem, but a sin problem. Ours should be achieving a goal that glorifies God, and in so doing we must not dishonor God by the methods that we use.

If the teachings of the New Testament and the examples of the early Christians serve as our guide, then we should be focusing the bulk of our time and energy on the transforming of men and women spiritually, rather than working to create an outwardly moral society. Scripture does not prohibit being involved in the political or social process, but we must realize that lasting change takes place only by bringing resurrected life to fallen creatures.

Robert L. Dean wisely observes:

"To try to impose God's righteousness upon society apart from regeneration is a task doomed to failure. Yet, that seems to be exactly what so many Christians want to do. In their frustration over apparent lack of success and the moral decline of

American society they have given up on the Biblically mandated practices of evangelism, prayer, and holding forth the standard of righteousness and have followed the humanistic tactics (passive resistance) of men like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. in order to achieve their goal. ... The answer to the world's social problems is not Christian activism and revolution, but the preaching of the Gospel and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit" ("A Biblical Look at Operation Rescue," *Biblical Perspectives*, Vol. II, No. 4, pg. 6).

Our call as believers is to change people through the Gospel, not society through social activism or civil disobedience.

—GEG

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

activity," alleging the pair solicited more than \$2 million of designated donations and then used the money for other purposes.

The Trinity Church meets at the Glass and Garden Drive-In Church. The Glass and Garden's 1,400-seat church and adjacent drive-in was built in the mid-1960s by Pastor Floyd Goulooze, who moved to the Phoenix area from Southern California and tried to model the success of Robert Schuller and his own drive-in church. Taking three years to construct, Goulooze held his first service on Easter Sunday 1966. Driscoll's first service marked the 50th anniversary of the church. The drive-in is no longer operational.

According to a post on The Trinity Church's website, "Pastor Mark believes that God has supernaturally provided" the church facility. It also stated, "Like most older church buildings, this one needs some service projects and financial investment to make it a good home, but we are excited about its potential."

—MKG

CERULLO UNVEILS PLANS FOR BIBLE-THEMED PARK

A Christian-themed resort appears to be a dream that continues to capture the attention of televangelist Morris Cerullo. In the early 1990s, Cerullo unsuccessfully tried to rescue and redevelop Jim Bakker's failed Heritage USA, a South Carolina resort and amusement park.

Now the 84-year-old Cerullo wants to launch an ambitious \$125-million theme park resort in San Diego. Cerullo hopes to draw tourists with attractions such as a 20-foot-tall recreation of Jerusalem's Western Temple

Wall, hologram-filled Roman catacombs, an interactive biblical museum, and a domed theater. The project will be built on the 18-acre site of the Mission Valley Resort that Cerullo purchased in 2011 out of foreclosure for more than \$18 million.

In addition to the biblical highlights, the *Los Angeles Times* said, "Plans for the resort call for 127 time-share units, a spa, a fitness center, and retail and fine dining options." The site will also be home to the Morris Cerullo Legacy International Center, which is to spotlight "Cerullo's more than six decades of evangelical missions and teachings" and "will also serve as the new headquarters of his operation," the *San Diego Union-Tribune* reported.

Christian-themed parks have dotted the landscape of evangelicalism for years. In addition to Bakker's defunct Heritage USA, Marvin Rosenthal built the Holy Land Experience, a first-century Judean-themed park in Orlando, Fla. It opened in 2001, and then six years later was sold to the Trinity Broadcasting Network. It was said to be \$8 million in debt at the time of the sale to TBN. In the mid-1980s, Kenneth Copeland announced plans to build "Kingdom Park," a Disney World-like amusement park outside Dallas. Those plans were never realized.

Cerullo's plans for his theme park and resort must be approved by the San Diego City Council.

—MKG

GOTHARD LOSES ECFA ACCREDITATION

The lawsuit against Bill Gothard and his Institute in Basic Life Principles organization, which alleges a cover-up of the sexual abuse of sixteen women and two men, has yielded more repercussions for the popular teacher and his ministry. In March, the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability pulled its endorsement of IBLP by removing it from membership. The ECFA is a foundation which provides accreditation to non-profit Christian groups that display a compliance with a set standard of financial guidelines. Currently, the ECFA accredits nearly 1,900 organizations.

While the ECFA would not provide specifics as to IBLP's failure to comply with its standards and resulting termination, a report in *Christianity Today* stated, "'When a ministry encounters failure — or even worse, scandal — its difficulties can almost always be traced to a breakdown in governance,' states ECFA's explanation of Standard 2."

Gothard and IBLP have filed motions to dismiss the lawsuit against them. In February, Gothard's attorney, Glenn Gaffney, told the Religion News Service that if the lawsuit is not dismissed, Gothard is considering a countersuit because he "has been defamed."

—MKG



Books in Review

THE JESUS ANSWER BOOK

by John MacArthur

Thomas Nelson, 206 pages, \$14.99

Pastor and best-selling author John MacArthur has drawn from a handful of his previous writings to compose *The Jesus Answer Book*. This volume is divided topically, in a Q&A format, to explore and explain important aspects of the person, teachings, and works of Jesus Christ. It is an effective and useful book that has application to a wide audience.

For one considering or just beginning to learn the truth about Christianity, this work is a wonderful reservoir of the essentials of who Jesus is and what it means to trust Him as Lord and Savior. The Gospel is clearly communicated throughout and the reader is given the basics to understand the methods and reasons of Jesus' teachings. In this section, MacArthur succinctly unpacks the Beatitudes (pp. 73-75), and then emphasizes:

"Each one of these eight qualities is radically at odds with the world's values. The world esteems pride more than humility; loves merriment rather than mourning; thinks strong-willed assertiveness is superior to true meekness; and prefers the satiety of carnal pleasure over a thirst for real righteousness. The world looks with utter contempt on holiness and purity of heart, scorns every plea to make peace with God, and constantly persecutes the truly righteous. Jesus could hardly have devised a list of virtues more at odds with His culture — or ours" (pg. 76).

MacArthur helps clarify issues that may be a stumbling block for the new believer. For example, he answers if Jesus is the perfect and sinless Son of God why did He undergo a baptism of repentance. He also explains why Jesus, with all the full divine attributes in His being, did not know some things and why Scripture tells us that He grew "in wisdom and stature."

But this book is not just practical for those being introduced to Christianity. It is also beneficial for the mature Christian and/or the versed apologist, as there are well-spoken reminders of the ways and means of contending for the faith. MacArthur suggests what today's defenders of the faith should learn:

"Jesus knew something Christians today often forget: truth doesn't defeat error by waging a public relations campaign. The struggle between truth and error is spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:12), and truth has no way to defeat falsehood except by exposing and refuting lies and false teaching. That calls for candor and clarity, boldness, and precision — and sometimes more severity than congeniality" (pg. 104).

The apologist will be able to mine other nuggets of motivation as well. MacArthur also instructs, "False religion always needs to be answered. Love may cover a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8), but the gross hypocrisy of false teachers desperately needs to be uncovered — lest our silence facilitate and perpetuate a damning delusion. The truth is not always 'nice'" (pg. 129).

A century ago, perhaps one could say that Jesus was pre-eminent (or at least prominent) in the fabric of our society. But that has long since changed and in large part it may now be said that Jesus — especially the Jesus of the Bible — is hardly even popular. Today, the Jesus of choice is the gentle Jesus with children on his lap, the one who will prosper you, and the one who says, "Neither do I condemn you." MacArthur repudiates such a view:

"By the way, the contemporary craving for shallow sermons that please and entertain is at least partly rooted in the popular myth that Jesus Himself was always likable, agreeable, winsome, and at the cutting edge of His culture's fashions. As we have seen, even a cursory look at Jesus' preaching ministry reveals a totally different picture. Jesus' sermons usually featured hard truths, harsh words, and high-octane controversy" (pg. 133).

In one of the several places where the Gospel is presented, MacArthur maps out a saving faith as repent, turn, trust, and follow (pp. 202-203). It is a simple and clear way in which to communicate what it means to embrace Christ as Savior. It is a great method to add to one's repertoire of evangelism.

The Jesus Answer Book is a hardcover book, a bit smaller than the normal-sized trade publication. It is an excellent resource to edify one already a believer, but also a great gift to give to a family member, co-worker, or neighbor who is a potential believer. (It even has a *presentation page*.)

—MKG

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 \$3.00 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.