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The Neglected Bible The Tragedy of and Remedy for the Illiteracy of Scripture

by Gary E. Gilley

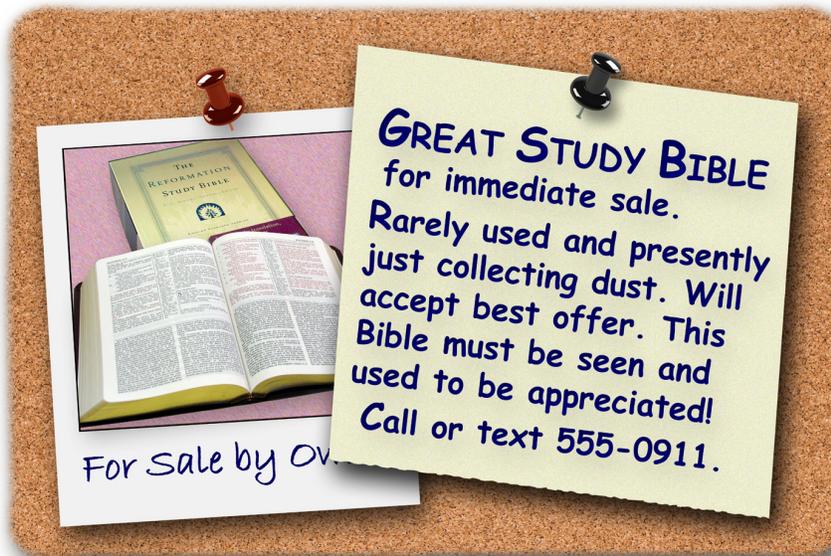
Both statistical research and anecdotal observation have reached the same conclusion: America, a nation once steeped in Scripture, if not always living in obedience to God, has joined the ranks of the biblically illiterate from around the globe. Theologians and sociologists both speak of our “post-Christian” culture, while to some extent is still being fueled by the capital of Christianity, which is now all but coasting on empty.

More than a quarter century ago, pollsters George Gallup, Jr. and Jim Castelli reported, “Americans revere the Bible — but, by and large, they don’t read it. And because they don’t read it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates.”¹ As a result, Gallup and Castelli informed us that, “Fewer than half of all adults can name Matthew, Mark, Luke and

John as the four Gospels of the New Testament, while many do not know that Jesus had twelve disciples or that he was born in Bethlehem.”²

Another more recent survey, this one conducted by The Barna Group, revealed an outcome that was even more alarming: 82 percent of Americans believe that “God helps those who help themselves” is a quote from the Bible, 12 percent of adults believe Joan of Arc was Noah’s wife, a large number think Billy Graham preached the Sermon on the Mount, and more than 50 percent of graduating high school seniors think Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.³

If drawn from secular society, these findings and stories
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THE MYTH OF THE MYTHICISTS

While in grammar school many of us learned Aesop's fables. Fables teach a point, but the details are mythical. Many people today see the Bible as a fable and a myth.

For years, we have been hearing the liberal mantra that Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus, never existed as a Jewish town in the first century. Less than a decade ago, the idea of Nazareth as a myth was again revived with the release, in 2008, of René Salm's book, *The Myth of Nazareth: The Invented Town of Jesus*. The book's title says it all and Salm leaves little guesswork about his hypothesis. However, Salm himself is referred to by some as a "mythicist," because he refers to biblical truths as myths. Salm argues that someone invented the Jewish town of Nazareth of the first century. Yet once we visit the facts, we will see who invented what.

Jesus is called a "Nazarene," that is, a native of Nazareth. Additionally, Nazareth is mentioned 29 times in the Gospels and in the book of Acts. Jesus spent His childhood and up to approximately 30 years of age in Nazareth. Salm rejects wholesale the Bible's testimony regarding Nazareth. His bias and presupposition is that the Bible is unreliable and, in many cases, a fabrication. Modern-day liberals would have us believe that speaking of Nazareth is like referring to the Land of Oz.

Much is made by Salm and other skeptics of the fact that Nazareth is never once mentioned by Josephus or in the Jewish Mishnah or Talmud. The fact that Nazareth is not mentioned by Josephus or in the Mishnah or Talmud can easily be explained. For example, many other small Galilean towns are also not mentioned by Josephus or in the Mishnah or Talmud.

Could it be that because the Jews saw Jesus as a false Messiah that they ignored Nazareth? We know that Jesus' own Jewish town folk rejected him (Luke 4:16-30).

Moreover, first-century Nazareth was nothing more than a back-water town occupied by a few dozen Jewish families. It could easily be ignored. Joseph Holden and Norman Geisler explain, "Lack of identification does not mean lack of *existence*; it's a logical fallacy to argue from silence" (*The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, pg. 321, italic in original). In other words, as the old saying goes, "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence."

Today in Nazareth one can visit what is called Nazareth Village. Local Christian Arab actors dressed in biblical apparel recreate what life would have been like at the time of Jesus. Biblical lifestyle and customs are explained to visiting tourists.

Until recently, archaeological work in Nazareth had been limited and had produced little archaeological data. Because of its now dense population, digging there was
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RUSSIA INTENSIFIES ATTACK ON JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Little time was wasted by Russian authorities in acting upon a court ruling that designated Jehovah's Witnesses as an extremist group. In April, the Russian Supreme Court "formally banned Jehovah's Witnesses as an extremist organization and ordered the state to seize its property in Russia," *USA Today* reported. In making its determination, a Justice Ministry attorney claimed that the Watchtower organization "poses a threat to the rights of the citizens, public order and public security," as well as the group's ban on blood transfusions violating Russia's health care laws.

For years and on an individual level, Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia have suffered persecution — including physical attacks, arson, and public humiliation of school children — from neighbors, schoolteachers, and others who opposed the religious group. Now, however, planned opposition is coming from police officers and other governmental authorities and includes disruption of their religious services and arresting members.

In May, more than a dozen armed agents of Russia's internal security and counterintelligence service (FSB) raided a home where Jehovah's Witnesses had gathered for a worship service. Arrested in the raid was Dennis Christensen, a Danish national, who, according to *USA Today*, "was accused of committing a 'serious crime' under the laws pertaining to an extremist organization and ordered held until trial." Other men in the worship service were also arrested, but were released the following morning after spending the night in jail. Christensen was ordered by a judge to be held because his Danish citizenship made him a flight risk.

In an article on its website, the Watchtower responded to the increase in persecution, stating, "Russia's prosecutors are misapplying the Federal Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity as the basis for charges of extremism against Jehovah's Witnesses. After the law was modified in 2006, the definition of extremism no longer required appeals to violent acts, only 'incitement of ... religious discord.' This loose definition allows authorities to portray anything that contradicts the teachings of traditional religions or promotes another belief as inciting religious enmity. Gregory Allen, a lawyer assisting the defense of the Witnesses' religious freedom in Russia, stated: 'Russian authorities use this elastic definition to label as "extremist" any religious beliefs they don't consider orthodox.'"

According to a report by the Religious News Service, "Hare Krishna, Muslims, members of Falun Gong, atheists and other evangelical Christians have also suffered. But only the Witnesses have been officially labeled extremists. They sit on a list of groups that includes the Islamic State and al-Qaeda."

—MKG

GRANDDAUGHTER OF TBN FOUNDERS AWARDED \$2 MILLION

A jury in Southern California has awarded \$2 million in damages to the granddaughter of the late Trinity Broadcasting Network founders Jan and Paul Crouch.

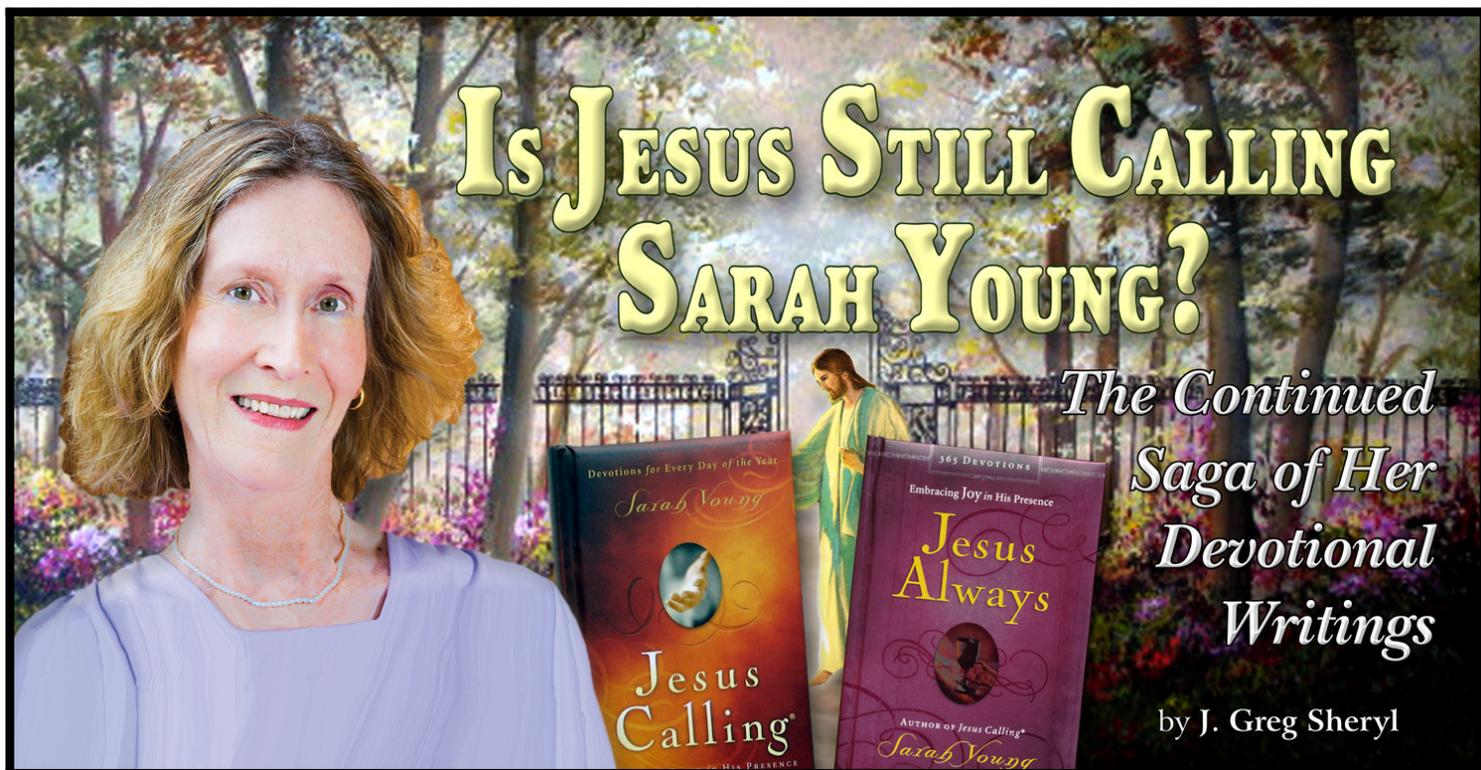
Carra Crouch said that in 2006 she was drugged and then sexually assaulted by a TBN employee in an Atlanta hotel room. Crouch, now 24, was 13 at the time. Her assailant was 30. She was in Atlanta with her grandmother, who was there for a ministry fund-raising telethon.

Crouch said that after returning home to California she reported the incident to her grandmother, who then began berating the teenager and telling her that it was her fault. Drawing from comments from David Keesling, Crouch's attorney, the *Orange County Register* reported, "Jan Crouch, as an ordained minister, was legally required to report the incident under California's mandatory reporting laws, he said, but she never called police because she was more concerned about the 'bad press.'"

The \$2 million judgment was only a third of the \$6 million that Crouch was seeking. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "Jurors found that Jan Crouch was liable for 45% of her granddaughter's emotional harm, which makes Trinity Christian Center of Santa Ana, the TV network's parent organization, responsible for \$900,000 of the verdict. Carra Crouch's mother was found to be liable for 35%, and the man who allegedly assaulted her liable for the rest, but since neither was named in the suit, they will not be forced to pay, Keesling said. Lawyers said the unusual split of the verdict will likely be an issue for an appellate court."

In its report of the trial, the *Register* stated that, "Jurors believed Carra Crouch and found that her grandmother acted recklessly. However, jurors rejected the allegation that Jan Crouch failed in her duty as a mandated

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While Sarah Young's devotional, *Jesus Calling*, has enjoyed immense sales success since its publication in 2004, it also has drawn scrutiny and criticism from some sectors of the Christian community.

Young has made a name for herself in publishing. One article noted, "Jesus Calling has become a veritable industry unto itself," and suggested that the book "has become a cash cow for its author and publisher."¹ *Jesus Calling*, which has sold 10 million copies in 10 years,² has been followed by sequels and spinoffs: the *Jesus Calling Devotional Bible*, editions of *Jesus Calling* for women and various age groups, a *Jesus Calling Bible Storybook*, a coffee mug, calendars, Bible study guides, and a book of favorite quotations.

Young has also written four more adult devotionals: *Dear Jesus*, *Jesus Lives*, *Jesus Today*, and *Jesus Always*.

But questions about Young's writings and methods persist, which have been exacerbated by the unwillingness of Young and her publisher, Thomas Nelson, to address these questions head-on.

Young and her husband, Stephen, have served as missionaries among the Japanese people around the world. They currently live in Nashville, Tenn., "ministering to the Japanese people through a multi-cultural PCA [Presbyterian Church in America] church in Cool Springs, Franklin."³ The Presbyterian Church in America is a conservative and evangelical denomination of the Presbyterian Church.

Young, 71,⁴ says she has been in poor health for many years. In *Dear Jesus*, she states, "Over the years I have contended with numerous health problems and surgeries."⁵ In her 2012 devotional, *Jesus Today*, she spends the greater part of the book's introduction describing her health struggles.⁶ In her most recent devotional, she states:

"I have been contending with impaired health for many years — since August 2001. In my quest to find healing, I've gone to a number of doctors and tried a variety of medical treatments."⁷

She has identified the ailment that struck her in 2001 as "chronic fatigue syndrome."⁸ Later, she identified it as

Lyme disease.⁹ In *Jesus Calling*, she also mentioned "four surgeries, including two for melanoma"¹⁰ that occurred during the period that she and her husband waited to "receive permanent residency visas" for their mission work in Australia.¹¹ In addition, since 2008, she has had "chronic vertigo" and no longer drives.¹² She says she leads a quiet life because of these problems.¹³

CONCERNS ABOUT SARAH YOUNG'S DEVOTIONALS

The Quarterly Journal in a feature article critiqued *Jesus Calling* in 2013¹⁴ and a subsequent editorial raised questions about Young's methods and lack of accountability.¹⁵

The primary concern with Young's writings is her method of "listening," which she picked up from the book *God Calling*.¹⁶ *God Calling's* two anonymous "listeners" seemed to regard the messages they believed they received from the Lord to be as inspired as Scripture and perhaps even more useful than the Scriptures, because they were receiving personal, contemporary revelations. The *Journal's* critique also noted that the two

“listeners” who received some “words from the Lord” were problematic.¹⁷

A second concern was Young’s practice of writing in “first-person Jesus,” as if Jesus Himself were speaking to the reader. She said that she did this — at least in her first four adult devotionals — because she believed she was writing words from Jesus.¹⁸

In the book *Right Thinking in a Church Gone Astray*, Jesse Johnson states in the chapter he wrote on *Jesus Calling* that:

“[Young’s assembled writings] are given as a series of messages from Jesus to Sarah, which she then edits to give the impression that they are given from Jesus directly to the reader. ... The messages from Jesus to Sarah are presented as if they apply to every reader personally.”¹⁹

If the words Young has “heard” from the Lord are the actual words of Jesus, we either should publish new editions of the Bible including Young’s “words from the Lord” or publish them separately, as the Mormon church has done with its new revelations. Along this line, the *Jesus Calling Devotional Bible*, of which Young is the general editor, includes some of her devotionals interspersed with the biblical text — although they are clearly distinguished from the text of Scripture. Young, in the introduction of her devotional Bible, addressed the placement of her writings:

“Since my writings are rooted in the infallible, unchanging Word of God, having them appear alongside the biblical text would seem to be a natural place for them.”²⁰

David Crump, a religion professor at Calvin College, said:

“[S]he puts her thoughts into the first person and then presents that ‘person’ as the resurrected Lord. Frankly, I find this to be outrageous. ... I’m sure she is a very devout, pious woman, but I’m tempted to call this blasphemy.”²¹

Further problems include the fact that what “Jesus” says at times in some of the devotionals is inaccurate and questionable. Tim Challies sees another problem:

“*Her tone does not match the Bible’s*. It can’t be denied: The Jesus of Sarah Young sounds suspiciously like a twenty-first century, Western, middle-aged woman. If this is, indeed, Jesus speaking, we need to explain why he sounds so markedly different from the Jesus of the gospels or the Jesus of the book of Revelation. Nowhere in Scripture do we find Jesus (or his Father) speaking like this: ‘When your Joy in Me meets My Joy in you, there are fireworks of heavenly ecstasy.’ Or again, ‘Wear my Love like a cloak of Light, covering you from head to toe.’ And, ‘Bring me the sacrifice of your precious time. This creates sacred space around you — space permeated with My Presence and My Peace.’ Why does Jesus suddenly speak in such different language?”²²

Johnson agrees with Challies’ assessment, saying Young’s “version of Jesus does not sound anything like the Jesus revealed in Scripture.”²³ He also observes that the Jesus who speaks in *Jesus Calling* “sounds more like a sappy motivational speaker, always wanting to hold us close in His wonderfully radiant Presence.”²⁴ He concludes, “That sentimental tone may sell millions of books, but it does not match the way Jesus speaks in the Bible.”²⁵

ADDING SOME CONTEXT

Other authors have claimed to have transcribed the words of God. New Age works such as Levi H. Dowling’s *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, Helen Schucman’s *A Course in Miracles*, and, more recently, books by Neale Donald Walsch, including his *Conversations with God* trilogy, are among the list. One of Walsch’s books begins with:

“This is the word-for-word transcription of a holy conversation.

It is a conversation with God about being Home with God [after death]. It is the last installment of an extraordinary dialogue covering nearly 3,000 pages in nine books written over eleven years and touching on all aspects of human life.”²⁶

Such claims are not a recent phenomenon. *The Book of Mormon* by Joseph Smith is claimed to be inspired scripture by the members of the Latter-day Saint church and the writings of Ellen G. White are regarded as inspired by Seventh-day Adventists.

There also have been Christian efforts, in addition to *God Calling*, that preceded Sarah Young’s book. These include some late twentieth-century devotional books by Frances J. Roberts,²⁷ the most well-known of which may have been *Come Away My Beloved*. Other books that Roberts wrote include *Dialogues with God*, *Progress of Another Pilgrim*, and *Make Haste My Beloved*.

Also, in the same year that *Jesus Calling* appeared, Back to the Bible radio broadcaster Woodrow Kroll engaged in a “first-person-God” mode in his book, *An Interview with God*. To his credit, in the book’s preface, he gave this disclaimer:

“The Bible is inspired by God and flawless. This [book] is a gathering and interpretation of what God has already said, but it is *not* on the same level as the highest authority we’ve been given, the Bible. After years of Bible study and Bible teaching, I have searched for God’s answers, but do not presume that the content of the following chapters is word-for-word from His mouth.”²⁸

As commendable as the admissions above are, later statements leave the reader not so sure about how Kroll regards his writing:

“You don’t have to like God’s answers, but they are His answers. They come directly from His Word, the only book God ever wrote. Let God answer for Himself. If you’re interested in

what He has to say, you've come to the right place. Let down your guard for a while. Set your worldview aside and just let God the Father speak to you in answers compiled from Scripture."²⁹

In any event, it is unfortunate that Kroll found it desirable to put his biblical interpretations into the mouth of God.

YOUNG'S RESPONSE IS NO RESPONSE

Young appears to have decided that the best way to respond to criticisms of her methods is not to respond at all. She cites her health as the reason for avoiding face-to-face interviews even though she has engaged in a counseling ministry, which presumably involved personal contact with her clients.

In 2013, an article on Young in *Christianity Today* noted:

"Jesus is one of the few calling Young; she is not available for interviews, whether in person or over the phone. After offering CT an exclusive phone interview, Young eventually declined to participate due to additional health setbacks. (She later agreed to answer some of CT's questions for this story via e-mail through [Thomas Nelson representative Laura] Minchew.)"³⁰

Likewise, in a 2014 article on *Jesus Calling*, Ruth Graham (not to be confused with the late wife of evangelist Billy Graham, of the same name), wrote:

"Its author, Sarah Young, is a reclusive missionary and rarely grants interviews; both the *New York Times* and the influential evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* had to settle for email interviews when they profiled Young's success last fall. Young's editor at Thomas Nelson, a Christian subsidiary of HarperCollins, told *Times* religion columnist Mark Oppenheimer she has met Young 'several times,' but few others in the publishing

world have done so. Young says vertigo and Lyme disease have kept her seriously ill for years."³¹

This writer didn't get any farther:

"My apologies for the delay in contacting you about the interview with Sarah Young. At the moment, Sarah is not participating in any interview opportunities while she completes edits on a forthcoming book. So that we may keep your request in mind for when she is available, can you please send me information on the publication you're writing for? Thank you in advance!"³²

Six months after supplying the requested information there still has been no response.

THE THOMAS NELSON/ SARAH YOUNG COVER-UP³³

In her article for *The Daily Beast*, Graham noted:

"Thomas Nelson has clearly heard the complaints that *Jesus Calling* is heretical; the introduction to recent editions of the book includes subtle but significant changes."³⁴

Thus, Thomas Nelson and Sarah Young also have tried to quell criticisms of *Jesus Calling* by significantly altering the book's introduction and some of Young's devotional entries — words that were supposedly given by Jesus Himself — without notifying the reader.

THE DISCOVERIES OF WARREN B. SMITH

Warren B. Smith, who has told the story of his involvement in the New Age movement and his exodus from it in his book, *The Light That Was Dark*,³⁵ also wrote "*Another Jesus' Calling*,"³⁶ in which he detailed his problems both with *Jesus Calling* and *God Calling*. Smith detected New Age methodology, terminology, and flavor in both books.

Smith pointed out statements in *Jesus Calling* that seemed at variance with things the Bible either said or indicated. He noted that in the Janu-

ary 28 entry of *Jesus Calling*, Young's "Jesus" erred in stating that His last words to His disciples prior to His ascension were, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). In Acts 1:8, we read the actual last words of Jesus before He ascended into heaven.³⁷

An editor's note following the endnotes for the first edition of Smith's book said:

"As our editors were checking endnotes for this book, we discovered a discrepancy between our edition's August 23rd entry in *Jesus Calling* and Warren Smith's edition. Both had a copyright date of 2004, but while Warren's edition spoke disparagingly about Abraham's relationship to his son Isaac, our edition spoke disparagingly about Jacob's relationship to his son, Joseph. The shock of this alternate entry was compounded by the fact that five sentences in the two accounts were the same. ... Inexplicably, it appeared that many of the words from the Abraham account could have been cut and pasted to the Jacob account. Troubled by the alternate account, we contacted the publisher, Thomas Nelson, seeking an explanation. Here is what we were told, coming from one of the editors for *Jesus Calling*: The Abraham/Isaac entry was published first, but both it and the Jacob/Joseph versions 'are still in print' and 'both are correct.' No explanation was given as to why there were two accounts and why such similar wording in both accounts. To transfer the same disparaging remarks regarding Abraham onto Jacob is not credible. And it is an insult not only to the true Jesus Christ, but also to the undiscerning reader who is trusting Sarah Young's 'Jesus.'"³⁸

In the second edition of his book, "*Another Jesus' Calling*," Smith wrote:

"Soon after the original edition of '*Another Jesus' Calling* was published in 2013, Sarah Young and her publisher, Thomas Nel-

son, changed, altered, and deleted a number of key problematic areas in *Jesus Calling* that I had exposed in 'Another Jesus' *Calling*. These changes were made in the new printings of their book that were sent to bookstores without any explanation or apology regarding the revisions made to Sarah Young's original text. Their obvious quick-fix editing caused understandable confusion as a number of my footnotes [actually, end-notes] in 'Another Jesus' *Calling* would no longer have any point of reference in these new revised printings of *Jesus Calling*. A special 10th anniversary edition of *Jesus Calling* in 2014 made even more changes in their ongoing effort to do damage control for their seriously flawed book. In this new expanded edition of 'Another Jesus' *Calling*, four new appendices have been added to help clear up some of the confusion created by Sarah Young and her editorial team."³⁹

A second edition of Smith's book would seem to have been unnecessary, if not for the four new appendices, because these appendices make up the major difference between the original edition and the expanded second edition.

EDITING "JESUS"

In the expanded second edition of his book, "Another Jesus" *Calling*, Smith shows where Thomas Nelson and/or Young have significantly changed the original edition of *Jesus Calling*. Of grave concern is the fact that some of these changes were made to the devotional entries that were supposedly words given to Young by Jesus Himself.

In the original edition of the introduction to *Jesus Calling*, Young wrote, "I have continued to receive personal messages from God as I meditate on Him"⁴⁰ and further wrote:

"This practice of listening to God has increased my intimacy with Him more than any other spiritual discipline, so I want to share

some of the messages I have received. In many parts of the world, Christians seem to be searching for a deeper experience of Jesus' Presence and Peace. The messages that follow address that felt need."⁴¹

Young does try to distinguish between her "messages" and the words of Scripture. Prior to the first quotation above, she states, "I knew these writings were not inspired as Scripture is, but they were helping me grow closer to God."⁴² And after the second quotation cited above, Young states, "The Bible is, of course, the only inerrant Word of God; my writings must be consistent with that unchanging standard."⁴³

However, if it is the same God speaking to Young as the God who gave the Scriptures, it is unclear why there would be any qualitative difference between what God spoke to Young and the God-breathed Scriptures. It is also unclear as to how Young views her "messages from God" are to compare or contrast with the words of the Bible. In short, Young's attempts to distinguish her "messages from God" from the words of Scripture are unclear and inadequate. Perhaps she herself is uncertain as to how her supposedly divine messages compare with Scripture regarding authority and accuracy.

Smith enumerates some significant changes made to several of Young's devotional entries ("messages from God") in later printings and editions of *Jesus Calling*. Smith points out specific alterations in the introduction to *Jesus Calling*, as reflected in subsequent printings and editions.

A copy of *Jesus Calling* purchased several months ago (printed in 2016, from the 87th printing) still has a copyright date of 2004, as do all copies of the book. But there is no indication on the copyright page that any changes to the book have been made. However, this subsequent printing of the book contains all the changes mentioned below that Smith details in the expanded second edition of "Another Jesus" *Calling*.

CHANGES MADE TO JESUS CALLING

What follows are important changes to *Jesus Calling*, pointed out by Smith (and presented in six points). For clarity, the remainder of this article will distinguish between the original edition and the later printing. All citations of *Jesus Calling* up to this point have referred to the original edition.

1. In the January 28 devotional entry in the original edition it reads: "I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS. These were the last words I spoke before ascending into heaven."⁴⁴ In the later printing, the January 28 entry now reads: "I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS. I spoke these words to My disciples after My resurrection."⁴⁵

Likewise, the October 15 entry of the original edition says: "My final statement just before I ascended into heaven was: *Surely I am with you always*."⁴⁶ The later printing for October 15 was changed to: "After My resurrection, I assured My followers: *Surely I am with you always*."⁴⁷

In summarizing these changes, Smith writes:

"Sarah Young might argue that because Jesus never contradicts Himself, she must have heard it wrong. But if that were the case, she had to hear it wrong on two separate occasions because the unbiblical statement is in two different messages."⁴⁸

2. Next Smith notes:

"Sarah Young's 'Jesus' said that Abraham was a man of 'undisciplined emotions' and was guilty of 'son-worship' and 'idolatry.' Many believers have recoiled at these strange, extra-biblical remarks."⁴⁹

Smith is here referencing Young's August 23 devotional in the original edition, regarding parental idolatry, which says:

"Remember the extreme measures I used with Abraham and Isaac. I took Isaac to the very point of death to free Abraham

from son-worship. Both Abraham and Isaac suffered terribly because of the father's undisciplined emotions. I detest idolatry, even in the form of parental love."⁵⁰

While Young is not alone in believing that an inordinate or idolatrous attachment to Isaac was the reason that God called Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22, the Bible neither says nor implies this.

The above words in her devotional in the later printing have been replaced with:

"Joseph and his father, Jacob, suffered terribly because Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons and treated him with special favor. So Joseph's brothers hated him and plotted against him. Ultimately, I used that situation for good, but both father and son had to endure years of suffering and separation from one another. I detest idolatry, even in the form of parental love, so beware of making a beloved child your idol."⁵¹

3. In the December 25 entry of the original edition devotional, "Jesus" describes the night of His birth. Part of the description includes the statement, "That was a dark night for Me."⁵² The same entry in the later printing was changed to read, "There was nothing glorious about that setting."⁵³

4. Young credited *God Calling* in the original edition with inspiring her method of receiving guidance from God.⁵⁴ There is no mention of *God Calling* in more recent printings of her book⁵⁵ — even though they continue to bear a copyright date of 2004.

Smith observes:

"Sarah Young and her editors somehow missed the fact that *God Calling* is a channeled New Age book. *God Calling* is a collection of channeled messages presented in the form of a daily devotional. The messages were channeled through two English women in the 1930s and could

easily have been titled *Jesus Calling* because it was reputedly dictated by 'The Living Christ Himself.'"⁵⁶

Smith also states:

"In recent editions of *Jesus Calling* — including the 10th anniversary edition — [Young's explanatory paragraph in the original edition about how she obtained her inspiration for receiving and writing messages from Jesus] regarding *God Calling* has been removed from the author's long-standing introduction."⁵⁷

5. Next Smith states:

"In recent editions of *Jesus Calling*, all ten references to the words 'message' and 'messages' [to refer to her supposed extra-biblical 'words from the Lord'] have been deleted from her otherwise longstanding introduction. What were originally described as 'messages' she 'received' from 'Jesus' are now being described as 'writings' and 'devotions' that she 'gleaned' in her 'quiet moments.'"⁵⁸

Smith then gives examples of these changes in wording.⁵⁹

6. Finally, there also appears to be a different conversion-experience story. In the original edition, Young makes it appear that she came to Christ as the result of a walk she took one night in a French Alpine village at L'Abri, the Christian ministry founded by Francis and Edith Schaefer, where she had gone to seek for truth. She writes:

"Suddenly I felt as if a warm mist enveloped me. I became aware of a lovely Presence, and my involuntary response was to whisper, 'Sweet Jesus.' This utterance was totally uncharacteristic of me, and I was shocked to hear myself speaking so tenderly to Jesus. As I pondered this brief communication, I realized it was the response of a converted heart; at that moment I knew I belonged to Him. This was far more than the intellectual answers for which I'd been search-

ing. This was a relationship with the Creator of the universe."⁶⁰

However, Smith notes that in the later printing, Young's account is totally different: she came to Christ *prior* to that walk in the woods on a moonlit snowy night. In the later printing, she met with a counselor from L'Abri, whose ministry to Young resulted in her becoming a Christian and which occurred before her walk in the woods.⁶¹ Smith summarizes:

"Instead of 'God's glorious creation' transitioning into her mystical moonlight conversion, now it's her new conversion account that transitions into her considerably toned down walk in the moonlight."⁶²

Moreover, Young has made other changes, not cited by Smith, in her introduction from what appears in the original edition. The later printing states that the book, *Praying: Finding Our Way Through Duty to Delight* by J.I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, "has been helpful" to her.⁶³ From it, she culls a quotation from Martin Luther that seems to justify her procedure of listening to God and writing down what He says to her.⁶⁴

In this way, Young avoids crediting *God Calling* with her method of receiving and writing down "messages" from the Lord and, instead, makes it appear — whether correctly or incorrectly — that Martin Luther advocated the same procedure that she uses.

The Luther quotation that Young cites from Packer and Nystrom's book reads:

"If the Holy Spirit should come and begin to preach to your heart, giving you rich and enlightened thoughts, ... be quiet and listen to him who can talk better than you; and note what he proclaims and *write it down*; so will you experience miracles as David says: 'Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law' (Ps 119:18)."⁶⁵

The quotation that Young cited comes from the devotional book, *A Simple Way to Pray*, which Luther

wrote as a letter to his barber. Luther said that when praying, “if in the midst of such thoughts the Holy Spirit begins to preach in your heart with rich, enlightening thoughts, honor him by letting go of this written scheme; be still and listen to him who can do better than you can. Remember what he says and note it well.”⁶⁶ Luther, therefore, is not advocating Young’s practice of sitting still in God’s presence, waiting for Him to speak, and then transcribing and publishing what He says as being the very words of God.

More telling is the fact that Packer and Nystrom’s book that Young says was “helpful” was printed in 2009, whereas the recent printings of *Jesus Calling* in which Young’s statement appears still bear a copyright date of 2004. At worst, this is deceptive on Young’s part, and at best, it is confusing, because Young could not have cited this book at the time she first wrote *Jesus Calling* in that *Praying: Finding Our Way Through Duty to Delight* had not as yet been published.

Whether or not Thomas Nelson and Young made the above changes in the later printings of *Jesus Calling* because of the original edition of Warren B. Smith’s book, “Another Jesus” *Calling*, the fact remains that Smith criticized at least the first four above-mentioned items in the first edition of his book. Smith also made additional criticisms of her devotional and now those concerns, too, have been changed in *Jesus Calling*. It certainly appears that Thomas Nelson became aware of the problems in *Jesus Calling* that Smith addressed in his book and, taking his criticisms and those of others into account, made changes to *Jesus Calling* as they deemed to be necessary.⁶⁷

Young would not speak with Smith regarding his concerns. The second expanded edition of his book states:

“**Note:** Our attempts to speak with Sarah Young about the problematic issues in *Jesus Calling* have been to no avail. Thomas Nelson has repeatedly stated that she is not available for interviews.”⁶⁸

YOUNG’S NEW BOOK, JESUS ALWAYS

Jesus Always, published in October 2016, contains an entry for each day of the year. However, unlike the original edition of *Jesus Calling*,⁶⁹ Young doesn’t make an explicit claim in *Jesus Always* that she is hearing and writing the words of the Lord.

In the “About the Author” pages at the end of *Jesus Always*, there appears to be a conscious effort to portray Young as orthodox and conservative:

“Sarah Young’s devotional writings are personal reflections from her daily quiet time of Bible reading, praying, and writing in prayer journals.”⁷⁰

It also calls “the Bible — the only infallible, inerrant Word of God.”⁷¹ And it assures us, “Sarah endeavors to keep her devotional writing consistent with that unchanging standard.”⁷²

The biographical sketch also states:

“Sarah is biblically conservative in her faith and reformed in her doctrine. She earned a master’s degree in biblical studies and counseling from Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. She is a member of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), where her husband, Stephen, is an ordained minister. Stephen and Sarah continue to be missionaries with Mission to the World, the PCA mission board.”⁷³

While in *Jesus Always* Young doesn’t claim to be writing the very words of Jesus, she continues to write in a “first-person-Jesus” mode, making one wonder if she still believes she is writing, in some sense, the words of Jesus.

The subtitle of *Jesus Always* is *Embracing JOY in His Presence*. Because Young has chosen “joy” as her theme for this devotional, it is of little surprise that she uses words such as “joy,” “enjoy,” “joyful,” “joyous,” and “rejoice” some 500 times or so in this book. Likewise, she speaks of God’s presence about 300 times.

Young also likes hyphenated words. Some seem appropriate, such as “Savior-God”⁷⁴ and “grace-vision,”⁷⁵ and some unnatural, such as “Glory-Light”⁷⁶ and “God-Friend.”⁷⁷ Some seem bizarre, such as “Glory-strength,”⁷⁸ “Man-Savior,”⁷⁹ and “Joy-Light.”⁸⁰

Young capitalizes nouns that she associates with the Lord, such as Joy, Light, Presence, Peace, and so forth.

There are themes that recur in *Jesus Always*, such as exhortations to be thankful, to be thankful always, to enjoy and seek God’s presence, to rest and relax in God’s presence, and to worship God. There are reminders that God is always with us, that God always loves us, and that nothing can separate us from God’s love.

Young writes some good things and it is apparent that she has a compassionate and tender heart. Her words are soothing and encouraging. She appears to have a good understanding of the way of salvation, as shown by entries such as those of April 18, April 23, July 7, and November 21.

However, Young’s devotional is equally punctuated with a number of entries which sound strange, especially in that they are supposedly coming from Jesus Himself. Her devotional for April 19 states, “I had My eye on you long before you were interested in Me. I noticed everything about you and followed you everywhere.”⁸¹ Here, Jesus either sounds like a divine stalker or a man who has his eye on a girl in whom he is interested. Later, in the same devotional, she says, “The more you realize the immensity of My ardor for you, the more fully you can love Me.”⁸² Jesus again sounds like someone who has romantic designs on a person.⁸³

Another strange entry is found on December 4, where we read this maternal-sounding advice from the Lord’s mouth, “Pure water is a much healthier choice than canned drinks full of sugar or chemicals. Similarly, thirsting for Me first and foremost is crucial for your spiritual health.”⁸⁴ On December 9, we are told, “The brightness of My Presence helps you in

multiple ways. ... As you soak in this Love-drenched Light, *I give you strength and bless you with Peace.*"⁸⁵ Then on March 4, we are offered this counsel:

"Some of the good things I offer you reside in the future. While you obediently wait on me, you are building up equity for those not-yet blessings. ... The very process of waiting for Me is beneficial. It keeps your soul on tiptoe, as you look up to Me in hope."⁸⁶

In the devotional for June 28, Young sounds as if she has taken a class in yoga or contemplative prayer:

"Most people don't recognize the wonder of inhaling My Life continually. Yet it was only when I breathed *the breath of Life* into Adam that he *became a living being*. As you sit quietly in My Presence, try thanking Me silently each time you inhale. As you exhale, affirm your trust in Me. The longer you do this, the more relaxed you will become."⁸⁷

In her November 3 devotional, she writes, "I want you to enjoy times of smooth sailing and be thankful for them."⁸⁸ For the discerning reader, the biggest problem with *Jesus Always* is Young's continued use of a "first-person-Jesus" mode. Her directives come across as though Jesus were giving them. Young either believes she is transcribing the Lord's words to the reader or is usurping His role by speaking in His name.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS

Young has become successful by marketing what she claims are the present-day words of Jesus. While in *Jesus Always* she has not claimed to be transcribing the words of Jesus as she had in her previous books, nevertheless, her practice of writing in a "first-person-Jesus" mode is both troubling and unnecessary, because she can convey the same thoughts by writing them as Sarah Young, rather than masquerading as "Jesus-speaking-directly-to-you-through-me."

Then there is the matter of Thomas Nelson and Young making significant, unacknowledged, and unexplained changes in later printings of *Jesus Calling* from what appeared in the early printings, without any notification whatsoever to the unsuspecting reader. This creates a credibility problem for both publisher and author.

Warren Smith has written:

"It seems a bit disingenuous for Thomas Nelson Vice President Laura Minchew to deny the various New Age implications of *Jesus Calling* — even as they are deleting much of the very material that substantiates the New Age implications charge."⁸⁹

Smith also contends:

"[W]hen an author and a publisher make significant changes to spiritually controversial material, they should provide some kind of explanation as to why those changes were made."⁹⁰

"O, WHAT A TANGLED WEB WE WEAVE ..."

This cover-up by Thomas Nelson and Young would have been entirely unnecessary, except for Young's claims to have been receiving and transcribing the very words of Jesus. Young's claim would appear to put her in the category of a writing prophet, such as Isaiah or Jeremiah. What Thomas Nelson and Young have done is reminiscent of some things stated in a manuscript published by Jerald and Sandra Tanner entitled, *3,913 Changes in the Book of Mormon*. In that work, the Tanners begin by stating, "In this study we will show that there have been at least 3,913 changes made in the Book of Mormon from the time it was first published in 1830."⁹¹

The Tanners further wrote:

"According to Joseph Smith's testimony there should not have been any reason to make changes in the Book of Mormon. He stated that when he and the witnesses went out to pray concerning it, a voice spoke from heaven telling them that the

translation of the Book of Mormon was correct."⁹²

To which the Tanners also noted:

"On another occasion Joseph Smith stated: 'I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the MOST CORRECT OF ANY BOOK ON EARTH, ...' (History of the Church, Vol. 4, p. 461)."⁹³

The Scriptures state:

"Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:5-6).

Instead of covering up, Thomas Nelson and Young should come clean and admit that changes have been made to the original text of *Jesus Calling* and confess that Young does not stand in the office of a writing prophet. The Scriptures declare:

"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

As the poet has written, "O, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!"⁹⁴

Young has avoided responding to the controversies that she and Thomas Nelson have created. She could appoint a representative to respond to questions on her behalf. She is surely aware of the controversy connected with her writings, otherwise she would not have made or authorized changes to her book. Her silence raises doubts about the integrity of both her and her publisher.

God speaks to people through His Word, the Bible. The Scriptures don't portray a continual daily dialogue between God and man, nor do they indicate that God is dictating books to people such as Sarah Young, who wait in His presence.

Endnotes:

1. Ruth Graham, "The Strange Saga of 'Jesus Calling,' The Evangelical Bestseller You've Never Heard Of" from *The Daily Beast* website, online post dated February 23, 2014. Document accessed at: www.thedailybeast.com/the-strange-saga-of-jesus

calling-the-evangelical-bestseller-youve-never-heard-of.

2. "Gold/Platinum/Diamond Book Awards Winners" from the Christian Book Expo website. Document accessed at: <http://christianbookexpo.com/sales-awards/>.

3. Stephen and Sarah Young prayer card, accessed at: www.mtw.org/missionaries/details/steve-and-sarah-young.

4. Sarah Young, *Jesus Calling*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004, n.p., however if the copyright page had been numbered, it would have been pg. IV.

5. Sarah Young, *Dear Jesus*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007, pg. 6.

6. Sarah Young, *Jesus Today*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012, pp. IX-XV.

7. Sarah Young, *Jesus Always*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016, pg. X.

8. *Jesus Today*, op. cit., pg. IX.

9. Ibid., pp. X-XIV; Sarah Young, General Editor, *Jesus Calling Devotional Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011, pg. V.

10. *Jesus Calling*, op. cit., pg. IX.

11. Ibid.

12. *Jesus Always*, op. cit., pg. X. She apparently experienced the onset of vertigo in October 2008, "the day after I finished writing *Jesus Lives!*" (*Jesus Today*, op. cit., pp. IX-X).

13. *Jesus Always*, op. cit., pg. X.

14. J. Greg Sheryl, "Is That Really Jesus Calling? How the Subjectivity of Sarah Young Draws People from Scripture," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2013, pp. 1, 13-21.

15. J. Greg Sheryl, "Having One's Cake and Eating It Too," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2014, pp. 2, 22-23.

16. "Two Listeners," A.J. Russell, Editor, *God Calling*. New York: Jove Books, 1978.

17. "Is That Really Jesus Calling?," op. cit., pp. 14-15.

18. See *Jesus Calling*, op. cit., pp. XI-XIV; *Dear Jesus*, op. cit., pp. 6-8; *Jesus Lives!*, op. cit., pp. 2-3; *Jesus Today*, op. cit., pg. XVI.

19. Jesse Johnson in Nathan Busenitz, General Editor, *Right Thinking in a Church Gone Astray*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2017, pg. 70. The chapter by Johnson is appropriately entitled, "Is This Jesus Calling?"

20. *Jesus Calling Devotional Bible*, op. cit., pg. VI.

21. David Crump cited in Melissa Steffan, "Sarah Young Still Hears Jesus Calling," *Christianity Today*, October 2013, pg. 42.

22. Tim Challies, "10 Serious Problems with Jesus Calling," bold type italics in original. From Challies' website, online post dated November 11, 2015. Document accessed at: www.challies.com/articles/10-serious-problems-with-jesus-calling/.

23. *Right Thinking in a Church Gone Astray*, op. cit., pg. 74.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Neale Donald Walsch, *Home With God:*

In a Life That Never Ends. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006, pg. V. The title page gives this description of the book: "A wondrous message of love in a final Conversation with God."

27. A brief, informative entry about Frances J. Roberts may be found at the Christianity 201 website, online post dated July 30, 2012. Accessed at: <https://christianity201.wordpress.com/tag/frances-j-roberts-biography/>.

28. Woodrow Kroll, *An Interview With God: Questions You're Asking and How the Bible Answers Them*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004, pg. 14, italic in original.

29. Ibid., pg. 26.

30. "Sarah Young Still Hears Jesus Calling," op. cit., pg. 40.

31. "The Strange Saga of 'Jesus Calling,' The Evangelical Bestseller You've Never Heard Of," op. cit.

32. E-mail from HarperCollins representative dated Dec. 12, 2016. Copy on file.

33. The discovery and much of the material in this section about the attempted "cover-up" by both Thomas Nelson and Sarah Young comes from Warren B. Smith, "Another Jesus" Calling (Eureka, Montana: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2013); and especially from the expanded second edition of Smith's "Another Jesus" Calling (Magalia, Calif.: Mountain Stream Press, 2016). See also a summary of some of Smith's discoveries about the changes made to *Jesus Calling* in his 20-page pamphlet, *Changing Jesus Calling: Damage Control for a False Christ* (Eureka, Montana: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2014). As far as I can tell, Smith's three pamphlets on *Jesus Calling*, including the pamphlet mentioned above, appear to correspond to Appendices A through C in the second edition of "Another Jesus" Calling. While I greatly appreciate some of what Smith says in his book, especially regarding the changes made in *Jesus Calling*, I don't necessarily endorse everything that he writes about the supposed New Age aspects he believes are in *Jesus Calling*.

34. "The Strange Saga of 'Jesus Calling,' The Evangelical Bestseller You've Never Heard Of," op. cit.

35. Warren Smith, *The Light That Was Dark: From the New Age to Amazing Grace*. Magalia, Calif.: Mountain Stream Press, 2011. Because I haven't read this book, I cannot endorse or recommend it.

36. "Another Jesus" Calling, op. cit.

37. Ibid., pp. 59-61, citing *Jesus Calling*, pg. 29. This error was also noted in "Is That Really Jesus Calling?," op. cit., pg. 16.

38. "Another Jesus" Calling, op. cit., pg. 168.

39. "Another Jesus" Calling (second edition), op. cit., pg. 13.

40. *Jesus Calling*, op. cit., pg. XI.

41. Ibid., pg. XII.

42. Ibid., pg. XI.

43. Ibid., pp. XII-XIII.

44. *Jesus Calling*, original edition (OE), op.

cit., pg. 29, upper case italics in original. Cited in "Another Jesus" Calling (second edition), op. cit., pg. 138.

45. *Jesus Calling* (LP), op. cit., pg. 29, upper case italics in original. Cited in "Another Jesus" Calling (second edition), op. cit., pg. 138. While all printings of *Jesus Calling* bear a 2004 copyright date, for his edition of a later printing (LP), Smith cites Sarah Young, *Jesus Calling*, 10th Anniversary edition printed by Thomas Nelson in 2014. This author is using a 2010 printing of *Jesus Calling* for the OE and a 2016 printing for the LP.

46. *Jesus Calling* (OE), op. cit., pg. 302, italics in original. Cited in "Another Jesus" Calling (second edition), op. cit., pg. 138. (Smith slightly misstates the quotation as "went to heaven," although the meaning is the same.)

47. *Jesus Calling* (LP), op. cit., pg. 302, italics in original. Cited in "Another Jesus" Calling (second edition), op. cit., pg. 138.

48. "Another Jesus" Calling (second edition), op. cit., pg. 139.

49. Ibid., pg. 140.

50. Ibid., quotation rendered in bold type in original. Smith is citing *Jesus Calling* (OE), pg. 246.

51. Ibid., pg. 141, quotation rendered in bold type in original. Smith is citing *Jesus Calling* (LP), pg. 246.

52. Ibid., pg. 142, quotation rendered in bold type in original. Smith is citing *Jesus Calling* (OE), pg. 376.

53. Ibid., quotation rendered in bold type in original. Smith is citing *Jesus Calling* (LP), pg. 376.

54. *Jesus Calling* (OE), op. cit., pp. X-XIII.

55. *Jesus Calling* (LP), op. cit. Young's previous allusion to *God Calling* has been removed from her Introduction. Smith points out this deletion in "Another Jesus" Calling (second edition), op. cit., pp. 132-135.

56. "Another Jesus" Calling (second edition), op. cit., pg. 132. Smith is referencing "Two Listeners," *God Calling*, op. cit., n.p., however if this page had been numbered, it would have been pg. 5.

57. "Another Jesus" Calling (second edition), op. cit., pg. 133.

58. Ibid., pg. 136.

59. Ibid., pp. 136-137.

60. *Jesus Calling* (OE), op. cit., pg. VII. Cited in "Another Jesus" Calling (second edition), op. cit., pp. 159-160.

61. "Another Jesus" Calling (second edition), op. cit., pp. 160-161, citing *Jesus Calling* (LP), pp. VII-VIII.

62. "Another Jesus" Calling (second edition), op. cit., pg. 160.

63. *Jesus Calling* (LP), op. cit., pg. XIII.

64. Ibid., citing J.I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Praying: Finding Our Way Through Duty to Delight*. Downers Grove: Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006, pg. 288. While published with a 2006 copyright,

the edition of this book which is cited by Young was released in April 2009. The original edition, under the title *Praying: Finding Our Way From Duty to Delight*, was published in England by IVP in 2006.

65. *Praying: Finding Our Way Through Duty to Delight*, op. cit., pg. 288, italics and ellipsis in original.

66. Martin Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000, pg. 38. The translation of *A Simple Way to Pray* quoted in the book by Packer and Nystrom reads slightly different from the edition of the book that I have cited for the Luther quotation.

67. It should be noted that Thomas Nelson and Young didn't make changes to all the problems that Smith found in *Jesus Calling*; only to some of them, such as those noted in items 1-4 above.

68. "Another Jesus" *Calling* (second edition), op. cit., pg. 219, bold type in the original.

69. *Jesus Calling* (OE), op. cit., pp. XI-XIII.

70. *Jesus Always*, op. cit., pg. 383.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid., pg. 384.

74. Ibid., pg. 17.

75. Ibid., pg. 160.

76. Ibid., pg. 98.

77. Ibid., pg. 110.

78. Ibid., pg. 169. Young obviously likes this one, because she uses it three times in this devotional for June 10. It comes from that day's Scripture reference of Colossians 1:11 using Eugene Peterson's *The Message*.

79. Ibid., pg. 376.

80. Ibid., pg. 378.

81. Ibid., pg. 114.

82. Ibid., italic in original.

83. Young is just one of several contemporary women authors who have designed Jesus as a cosmic boyfriend or lovesick suitor. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "Jesus Is Your Boyfriend?," *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 2017, pp. 2, 20-21.

84. *Jesus Always*, op. cit., pg. 353.

85. Ibid., pg. 360, italics in original and intended to indicate words from Psalm 29:11.

86. Ibid., pg. 67.

87. Ibid., pg. 187, italics in original and intended to indicate words from Genesis 2:7.

88. Ibid., pg. 322.

89. "Another Jesus" *Calling* (second edition), op. cit., pg. 161.

90. Ibid., pg. 162.

91. Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *3,913 Changes in the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, n.d., pg. 1.

92. Ibid., pg. 2.

93. Ibid., upper case in original.

94. Sir Walter Scott, *Marmion*. Cited in Margaret Miner and Hugh Rawson, editors, *The New International Dictionary of Quotations*. New York: Signet, 2000, pg. 104.



THE NEGLECTED BIBLE

(continued from page 1)

would not surprise us too much — after all, biblical instruction is seldom found today in our schools, media, clubs, or any place else apart from the local church. But sadly, coming from those claiming a Christian heritage it is all too evident that the church is catching up to society.

Last spring, pollster George Barna⁴ and the American Culture and Faith Institute, where he serves as the organization's executive director, released findings from three nationwide online surveys which were conducted from February 22 through April 27, 2017.⁵ The headline read, "Where Born Again Are Missing the Mark," and stated, "The born again population maintains a combination of biblically accurate and indefensible beliefs."⁶ The report also noted, "In light of the previously-reported finding by ACFI that only 30% of born again adults have a biblical worldview, the hodgepodge of beliefs is not unexpected."⁷

Barna's survey revealed puzzling statistics regarding Scripture. It first stated that 76 percent of born again believers view the Bible as God's Word and that it contains no errors.⁸

However, the findings later indicated that only 64 percent say the "Bible is totally accurate in all the life principles it teaches."⁹ And still further in the survey it was revealed that less than half of those polled — 47 percent — say that absolute moral truth exists and is contained in the Bible.¹⁰ Equally disturbing is the fact that only 52 percent of the born again adults responding to ACFI's poll believe that, "While in earth, Jesus Christ lived a sinless life."¹¹

LIGONIER STUDY

In 2014, a study was conducted by LifeWay Research for Ligonier Ministries in which self-identifying Evangelicals were also found to have unorthodox views concerning several essential doctrines such as those dealing with God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, salvation, and the inspiration of Scripture. These views were often equal to, or worse than, views held by their secular counterparts.

Questioning the results of this survey, some analysts assumed that allowing individuals to self-identify as Evangelicals skewed the outcome. This is a real possibility, especially because there has been widespread confusion in recent times over exactly what an "Evangelical" is and who can

claim to be one. The standard definition is one developed by historian David Bebbington. Bebbington claimed an Evangelical, at least since the mid-1800s, had four distinguishing marks: belief in conversion by faith alone, the final authority of the Bible, the substitutionary death of Christ as necessary for our salvation, and activism, especially in the sense of sharing the Gospel with others.¹²

Bebbington summed up these enduring priorities of the evangelical movement as "crucicentrism, conversionism, biblicism and activism."¹³ Recently the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and LifeWay Research (Southern Baptists) sought to sharpen the definition to better understand and analyze their research by providing the following tool containing four statements. Respondents are expected to strongly agree to the four statements to be considered Evangelicals by belief (as opposed to merely self-identifying). Those primary beliefs are:

- The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe (a somewhat weakened form of Bebbington's biblicism, in which Bebbington's "final authority" is reduced to NAE's "highest authority," allowing for competing authorities).

• It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior (Bebbington's activism).

• Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin (which falls short of Bebbington's crucicentrism of penal substitution).

• Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's gift of eternal salvation (which leaves out the Reformers' "faith alone" and thus abandons *sola fide*).¹⁴

As can be seen, the NAE/LifeWay definition of an Evangelical is not quite at the level of Bebbington's understanding of the word as used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And, at best, it is a minimalistic doctrinal statement which leaves room for unbiblical dogmas of many kinds. (For example, nothing is said of the Trinity or the person and work of the Holy Spirit.) For survey and research purposes those now considered Evangelicals "by belief," not merely self-identified, may in fact hold to many errant views. Nevertheless, this is the definition most common today and it is superior to the nebulous definitions which are the norm. At least it is an attempt to define an Evangelical.

We are now ready to compare what Evangelicals, by the NAE/LifeWay definition, believe in contrast to what the public believes. Because the 2014 survey in which Evangelicals self-identified yielded discouraging results, a new study was commissioned in which self-confessed Evangelicals had to pass the four-statement test highlighted above. The theory was that this study, published in September 2016, would surely yield better results than the previous one. Unfortunately, it did not. In the new study, 47 statements about Christian theology were presented to 3,000 American adults, approximately 900 of whom met the NAE/LifeWay definition of an Evangelical. Here is a sampling of the results:¹⁵

• While 97 percent of Evangelicals believe in the Trinity, oddly 71 per-

cent said Jesus was the first and greatest being "created" by God, thus identifying with the ancient heresy of Arianism. This doctrine of a "created" Jesus Christ is essentially what is taught by the Jehovah Witnesses, Latter-day Saints, and most cults today. Amazingly, 52 percent of the general population believes that Jesus was *not* created, which means that concerning the deity of Christ the secular public is more orthodox than Evangelicals.

• And the Holy Spirit fares even worse. The Holy Spirit is a force, not a personal being, according to 56 percent of Evangelicals. In addition, 28 percent say He is a divine being, but is not equal with God the Father or Jesus. This is a rejection of the revised version of the Nicene Creed of A.D. 381 which affirmed the person of the Holy Spirit.

• Fifty-four percent of Evangelicals agreed with the statement, "Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature." This means that 46 percent of Evangelicals do not recognize the fallen, depraved nature of humanity as expressed in Scripture.

• If depravity is not understood by Evangelicals, it is no wonder that they are also confused concerning salvation and how one comes to faith in Christ as well. Eighty-six percent believe that the sinner must take the first step in seeking God and then the Lord responds to him with grace (vs. 65 percent of Americans in general). And a disturbing 76 percent of all respondents believe that, "An individual must contribute his or her own effort for personal salvation." However, when asked to respond to the statement, "By the good deeds that I do, I partly contribute to earning my place in heaven," only 39 percent agreed. This clearly demonstrates the confusion even Evangelicals have regarding salvation.

Those who believe that their merit is necessary for personal salvation would be buying into the ancient heresy of Pelagianism, which says either that mankind can come to Christ on their own, or at least aided Christ in their salvation (synergism), often called semi-Pelagianism. No

wonder many today claim that, "God helps those who help themselves" is a favorite verse of Scripture, even though it is not found in the Word of God.

• That God accepts the worship of all religions including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam is embraced by 67 percent of the public (no surprise here), but strangely 48 percent of Evangelicals agreed.

• Sixty-four percent of Evangelicals agreed that, "Heaven is a place where all people will ultimately be reunited with their loved ones." Sixty percent of Americans agreed. Thus, some form of universalism is apparently accepted by both groups.

• More than half of Evangelicals agree that the Bible is the highest authority for what they believe, but only 30 percent see biblical interpretation as left up to the individual and 17 percent believe the Bible is not literally true and contains myths.

• Church attendance among Evangelicals did not fare so well either. Forty-two percent believe that, "Worshiping alone or with one's family is a valid replacement for regularly attending church." R. Albert Mohler, Jr., president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, places the blame for such biblical and doctrinal ignorance on "churches that marginalize biblical knowledge. Bible teaching now often accounts for only a diminishing fraction of the local congregation's time and attention."¹⁶

UNDERSTANDING THE STUDIES

Surveys of this type can be interpreted several ways. At best, this one demonstrates the confusion among those who meet today's recognized definition of an Evangelical, a confusion resulting from wide-scale lack of scriptural teaching and minimized attention or interest in theology within our churches and parachurch organizations. Almost anything else besides careful instruction from the Word will draw crowds, raise funds, and sustain ministries and therefore not surprisingly, exposition and Bible teaching have fallen largely by the wayside.

Many have recognized this inattention to Bible teaching and general lack of interest in theology to be at the root of the illiteracy problem. For example, “[Howard] Snyder blamed the overall lack of orthodoxy on the fact that ‘most evangelical churches have largely abandoned catechesis (or a functional equivalent). ... Theologically informed discipleship is mostly absent from churches.’”¹⁷ Beth Felker Jones, professor of theology at Wheaton College, states:

“The survey underscores our desperate need for sound doctrinal teaching in the local church, ... I fear that we’re spending too much time in cults of personality around charismatic superstar pastors, who often focus more on their personal theological idiosyncrasies and pet ideas than on basic Christian orthodoxy.”¹⁸

Kenneth Briggs, author of *The Invisible Best Seller: Searching for the Bible in America*, says “the faith he finds in ‘mega-type churches’ is a ‘Bible-less,’ ‘alternative version of Christianity.’ Scripture ... has become ‘a museum exhibit, hallowed as a treasure but enigmatic and untouched.’”¹⁹ And G. Shane Morris summarizes the results of the survey as an embarrassment to us and states, “they should also serve as a kick in the pants to re-familiarize ourselves with our own religion.”²⁰

NATIONAL STUDY OF YOUTH AND RELIGION

The bad news does not end with LifeWay’s latest survey. Consider the most comprehensive study on the religious views of teenagers ever conducted. The Associated Press cited a four-year effort led by sociologist Christian Smith called the National Study of Youth and Religion saying:

“The majority of American teens believe in God and worship in conventional congregations, but their religious knowledge is remarkably shallow, and they have a tough time expressing the difference that faith makes in their lives, a new survey says. ... Though the phone survey depicted broad affinity with reli-

gion, the face-to-face interviews found that many teens’ religious knowledge was ‘meager, nebulous and often fallacious’ and engagement with the substance of their traditions remarkably shallow. Most seemed hard put to express coherently their beliefs and what difference they make. Many were so detached from the traditions of their faith, says the report, that they’re virtually following a different creed in which *an undemanding God exists mostly to solve problems and make people feel good*. Truth in any absolute, theological sense, takes a back seat. ‘God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist’ who’s on call as needed, Smith writes.”²¹

It should be observed that this survey, begun in 2005, is 12 years old and these teens are now grown up and have apparently carried over their view of God and truth into adulthood, as the LifeWay survey indicates. Indeed, there is some evidence that because of this understanding of God and Scripture, most of the evangelical church has now become infected with a social disease. The disease is popularly called MTD, or Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

A generation which has been trained by its elders (intentionally or by neglect) to believe in “an undemanding God” who “exists mostly to solve problems and make people feel good,” can be excused for confusing biblical Christianity with a sickly, unhealthy mimic. After all, moralism can appear at first to be godly living, therapeutic psychobabble can have similarities to biblical principles for sanctification, and deism fits well into a worldview that finds God unnecessary except during times of emergency.

When one is infected with MTD, the knowledge of truth (if it exists at all) is superfluous and unwanted baggage. The study of Scripture or theology has no real relevance to those who have reduced their religion to how to solve problems and feel good. If one subscribes to “pan-theology” —

it will all pan out in the end, then why sweat the details? — does it matter that Jesus was born of a virgin or that He has always eternally existed in contrast to being the first thing created by God? Does it matter if Jesus Christ died as our substitute or if He was bodily resurrected?

Essential doctrines such as these matter less and less among those claiming an evangelical faith. As an example, it is interesting to examine church websites and search for a statement of faith. What is commonly found on most church websites yields either minimal results or none at all. An article last year in *Christianity Today* highlighted some fast-growing churches. One in my area was featured, so I looked at its website. What I found about their published beliefs is representative:

“Having witnessed first-hand the transforming power of Jesus Christ in our own lives, the community at Renaissance strives to create an environment where the ‘un-churched’ as well as the ‘de-churched’ will feel unconditional acceptance. We gather weekly to share stories of courage and sacrifice; stories that have the power to change our lives and the lives of others. ... We value the power and authority of the Living Word of God and the life changing effects it has. Therefore, our community has been founded on the principles discovered within the Bible.”²²

Life-changing effects are mentioned, as are “principles discovered within the Bible,” but there are no details as to what these effects and principles might be. The emphasis is on an environment in which everyone, including the “un-churched” (most likely meaning the unsaved) and “de-churched” (whoever they are) get to share their stories and are comfortable. From these statements one would expect in attending this church to have a good time, be accepted, be instructed in some general principles for living, and go home relatively happy.

Few will notice that this philosophy of church life is virtually the very definition of MTD and does not represent the New Testament view of the Christian faith. It is almost certain that the leadership of this church, and others like them, intend no harm to the body of Christ. Their philosophy of ministry appears to be working, numbers are growing, enthusiasm is high, and all seems well. But appearances are often deceiving. If we use the mirror of God's Word, rather than culture, we discover that the church was designed by God for the believer as a place of worship, ministry, instruction, and fellowship (Acts 2:42). It was not designed for the "un-churched" or "de-churched."

The church in the New Testament is not a place where those who do not know Christ — and thus who are under the wrath of God (Romans 1:18) — are comfortable. The church is not the place where people are given a few principles found in the Bible, but rather a place where the Word of God is seriously preached and taught passionately (2 Timothy 3:16-4:5). Churches which are being organized to please the culture instead of God are steadily growing spiritually sick. However, because they are growing numerically, offer enthusiastic worship services and outreach opportunities, and have perfected the art of meeting felt-needs, the symptoms of MTD are being ignored.

INERRANCY IN CRISIS

Reasons for biblical illiteracy are many: a lack of emphasis and teaching of the Bible in our churches, youth programs that major on entertainment rather than the Word of God, Bible colleges and seminaries that prepare ministers to be CEOs rather than shepherds who feed the flock a rich diet of Scripture, and confusing MTD for biblical Christianity. But one other culprit surely is the increasing challenge to biblical inerrancy. If Christians do not believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, then by default they believe the Bible contains errors and therefore it cannot be trusted. If this is the case, then why bother reading it?

Major attacks on the truthfulness and reliability of God's Word have been prolific from the writings of new atheists such as Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, along with skeptics such as Bart Ehrman. But theologians closer to the core of the faith are also adding fuel to the fire. Some might recall the celebrated "Battle for the Bible" which took place between 1955 and 1985. (J.I. Packer called this "The 30-year War.") Harold Lindsell's 1976 book by this title brought the discussion to a head as he first accused and then documented how Western seminaries and denominations were abandoning their grip on the infallibility and authority of the Scriptures.

Shortly thereafter, a gathering of over 200 leading American theologians produced the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" (CSBI) in 1978.²³ The hope at the time was that this statement, with its numerous accompanying articles of explanation, would do for Scripture what the Nicene Creed did for the deity of Christ: virtually close the door to all meaningful debate on the trustworthiness and truthfulness of the Bible among Evangelicals. This has not been the case and today we find the Scriptures under renewed and significant challenges from many who claim to love it.

The CSBI definition of inerrancy is quite detailed, but most believe Paul Feinberg pulled all the pieces together in his more concise version:

"When all facts are known, the Scripture in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences."²⁴

The dust had barely settled on the CSBI when leading Evangelicals began to nuance the definition and there has been a gradual abandonment, by many leading Bible scholars, of inerrancy in the subsequent years. The editors of a 2013 volume entitled *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* asked five prominent evangelical theologians to

state their understanding of inerrancy. Following is a summary of the men and where they stand, which reveals the chaos and confusion over this vital doctrine.

R. Albert Mohler, Jr. is in step with the CSBI. His view is well summarized when he writes, "*when the Bible speaks, God speaks.*"²⁵ Mohler does not think evangelicalism can survive without inerrancy as defined by the CSBI,²⁶ and summarizes his response to co-author John Franke's thesis (see below) by saying that "he has revealed the destiny of evangelical theology if it surrenders the inerrancy of the Bible."²⁷ Mohler is the only one of the five authors of the book who clearly and consistently affirms that the three difficult passages, which each man was given to interpret, can be resolved through the use of a literal, grammatical-historical hermeneutic and do not need to be reinterpreted because of apparent internal contradictions, modern archeological, or scientific discoveries.

Peter Enns is a biblical scholar teaching at Eastern University who strongly rejects the CSBI, writing that inerrancy assumes God shares modern views on accuracy (which, Enns assures us, He does not).²⁸ Instead we must read the Bible through ancient, not modern, eyes.²⁹ He rightly claims that "literalism is the default hermeneutic of the CSBI,"³⁰ although he distorts what literalism means. Enns laments that those who embrace literalism disallow the study of ancient history or scientific discoveries to overturn what the Bible says.³¹ And he dismisses the notion that if we accept that portions of the Bible are in error then we have started down a slippery slope theologically.³²

In addressing the assigned difficult passages, Enns not only denies the fall of Jericho and the Exodus account,³³ but also claims the "biblical writers shaped history creatively for their theological purposes."³⁴ Enns redefines inerrancy by saying it is "a *descriptive* observation rather than a *prescriptive* declaration."³⁵ Mohler calls Enns' view a "tragically minimal statement about the Bible."³⁶

Michael F. Bird is Lecturer in Theology at Ridley Melbourne Ministry and Mission College and believes the debate over inerrancy is largely an American issue and should not cause such a fuss.³⁷ He believes the CSBI relies too heavily on modern presumption of precision and, in fact, thinks contradictions in Scripture can and do exist.³⁸ Bird sees the CSBI as based on foundationalism,³⁹ which Franke says in his article, has been thoroughly discredited⁴⁰ and to which Enns apparently agrees.⁴¹ Accordingly, the fall of Jericho did not likely happen in the way the Scripture claims,⁴² after all, "Ancient historians were storytellers, not modern journalists, so naturally they were given to creativity in their narratives and filled in the gaps on details where necessary."⁴³

Kevin J. VanHoozer is Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He supports inerrancy but what is needed, he says, is a "well-versed" version, which hails back to Augustine.⁴⁴ He says, "*God's authoritative Word is wholly true and trustworthy in everything it claims about what was, what is, and what will be.*"⁴⁵ He agrees essentially with the CSBI, but registers three concerns: the definition of inerrancy needs refinement,⁴⁶ truth and language need definition,⁴⁷ and a closer connection with Nicaea is warranted.⁴⁸ He writes, "Well-versed inerrancy puts a premium on the responsibility of the interpreter to understand the text correctly."⁴⁹ Yet when VanHoozer turns to the assigned passages, it is clear that he sees the events as not entirely accurately revealed.⁵⁰

John R. Franke is Professor of Missional Theology at Yellowstone Theology Institute. He defends a "fallibilist" position in which absolute certainty is impossible.⁵¹ This post-conservative, postmodern view, when applied to Scripture, means the Bible points us in the right direction but without the necessity of actually being precise.⁵² It is not that truth does not exist, for God knows truth with a capital "T", but we can only know truth with a small "t".⁵³ As such,

small "t" truth is pluralistic.⁵⁴ Biblical contradictions, or errors, are no problem for Franke⁵⁵ because the purpose of Scripture is not to provide precise details, but to bless the world (a missional understanding).⁵⁶

On many levels, *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* is a disturbing book. Inerrancy is one of the most important of doctrines and is supposedly a hallmark of evangelicalism, yet if the views presented in this volume are representative of evangelical scholarship in the twenty-first century, it is obvious there exists a wide diversity on what it means and how it is applied. Three of these authors clearly state — and one is conflicted — that the Scriptures do not accurately report many events found in the biblical texts and they challenge the veracity not only of history that is recorded, but also of statements addressing nature, creation, and the internal makeup of mankind.

Given that the Bible is unreliable concerning such issues, why should we believe it is reliable when it comes to doctrinal concerns? How can we be certain that Scripture is dependable when it comes to its description of God, Jesus Christ, His redemptive work on the cross, His resurrection, or our salvation, when it is in error about so many historical and scientific events? Enns, Bird, and Franke assure us that the Scriptures can be trusted concerning these theological issues even though they do not report the truth when it comes to other matters.

When faced with these kinds of discrepancies and inconsistencies, the average believer might very well question the importance of Scripture at all.

The challenges to inerrancy are not merely an American problem. The Master's Academy International recently published a book, *The Implications of Inerrancy for the Global Church*,⁵⁷ written by teachers from the 18 Master's Academies in 17 countries in existence today. Leaders of the academies each wrote a chapter discussing the unique implication of inerrancy in their respective countries and cultures. In most situations inerrancy

is outwardly affirmed, at least by the evangelical community, but in reality and in practice, inerrancy is denied or revised to mean something different from the official definition (as per the CSBI).

This collection provides both convincing and disturbing evidence that there has been a gradual abandonment of inerrancy since the publication of the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" in 1978.⁵⁸ Some of the specific culprits that are identified as leading to the erosion of belief in inerrancy throughout the world include: claims of corruption of the biblical manuscripts,⁵⁹ development and spread of the historical-critical methodology,⁶⁰ popularity of egalitarianism,⁶¹ abuse of contextualization,⁶² an evolving and revised Roman Catholic understanding which could be labeled "limited inerrancy,"⁶³ the growth and influence of the prosperity gospel and Pentecostal theology,⁶⁴ an increasingly popular "hermeneutic of the Spirit" which begins with Scripture but adds additional revelation,⁶⁵ integration of secular psychology,⁶⁶ increased acceptance of syncretism,⁶⁷ Barthian neo-orthodoxy,⁶⁸ existentialism,⁶⁹ oral traditions trumping the written Word,⁷⁰ and adoption of evolutionary theory.⁷¹

CRITICAL, BUT NOT HOPELESS

Author and Bible teacher Kay Arthur addressed the condition of believers when she wrote:

"I believe we're in a generation of biblical illiteracy. I believe it's our greatest sin and our greatest weakness. If I'm not in the Word of God, then I am running on my own steam, thoughts, and impressions. Some Christians are bypassing what is essential for living as God intends. Many don't realize that if they don't know His Word, they don't know God."⁷²

So we see that biblical illiteracy is well-recognized today. There are many reasons why not only the general population but also the evangelical church has little understanding

and knowledge of Scripture. With all the attacks on the trustworthiness of Scripture, coupled with a general lack of biblical knowledge and apathy toward what it proclaims, it would be easy to despair for the future of Scripture. But God's Word always accomplishes that which it is sent forth by the Lord to accomplish (Isaiah 55:1), which is to teach, reprove, correct, and train His people in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

Additionally, we have the promise of Jesus that His Word will never pass away (Matthew 24:35). So rather than despair, we should make every effort to pass along the Lord's truth to the next generation (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 145:4).

At this point we need to consider some means to do so. We first need to establish the importance of biblical literacy. To many believers today it seems to be optional: one of those things that is nice to have, but hardly necessary for vibrant Christian living. But that is not the position expressed in the Bible itself. We could turn to many texts in Scripture to demonstrate this, but let's focus our attention on the pastoral epistles of Paul: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.

THE BIBLICAL MANDATE

The centrality and importance of scriptural knowledge and understanding, as well as the directive to teach it clearly and consistently, permeate the pastoral epistles. One of the most important things we can do when determining where the Lord wants us to place our emphasis is to study carefully where He places His. Many extremes could be avoided if we would lay aside our own ideas and the popular fads of the moment and simply look at what God did and taught. The pastoral epistles are instructive in this regard.

In these three brief letters, we are given the final inspired written words of the Apostle Paul, a man who had dedicated his life to spreading the Gospel, establishing churches, and providing instruction to the disciples of Christ. As he neared the end of his earthly life what did he think, as moved by the Holy Spirit, was most

important for those he had mentored to emphasize after he was gone? These letters give us the answer.

Paul said that the Lord had entrusted him with a message and a mission (2 Timothy 2:2) and he repeatedly proclaimed he was entrusting the same thing to Timothy and Titus (1 Timothy 1:11, 18; 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:12, 14; 2:2; Titus 1:3). What was he entrusting to them? While there were several items he discussed in these three epistles such as church leadership and finances, the theme he returned to repeatedly was theology. Approximately 60 times in these three short books, using four synonyms, he emphasized the importance of sound doctrine. Without solid theology, drawn directly from the Word of God, the church has no reason for existence. The four synonyms demonstrate this well:

Doctrine — Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus, while he moved on to Macedonia, for the express purpose of having Timothy provide instruction to the church (1 Timothy 1:3). Paul begins with the negative, writing, "that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines" (v. 3, NASB). The Greek word translated "strange doctrines" (*heterodidaskaleo*) is an unusual word in the New Testament, found only here and in 1 Timothy 6:3. It means "different" or "of another kind." Greek scholar Randolph Yeager explains that the word is a combination of *heteros* (other) and *didasko* (teaching) and further instructs:

"Hence, to teach a different (*heteros*) doctrine. To be heterodox. With reference to false teachers at Ephesus whom Timothy was charged to refute - 1 Tim. 1:3; 6:3."⁷³

Some at the church at Ephesus were engaged in teaching things that did not come from Christ or the apostles. Worse yet, they were claiming their teachings were as authoritative as those of the inspired writings of the apostles. Timothy was instructed to refute and expose these teachings for what they were: myths and false pronouncements (v. 4).

Titus was given similar instructions in his selection of elders. Elders were to be men who could refute "those who contradict" sound doctrine (Titus 1:9). On the positive side, both men were charged to preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:2) and exhort in sound doctrine (Titus 1:9). At the close of 1 Timothy, Paul writes, "O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust" (6:20). And what had been entrusted to Timothy that he was to guard? Sound doctrine. What happens when instructions concerning guarding and teaching biblical theology are neglected? We have a people who claim to be Christians yet have no idea what they believe. And because they do not know what they believe, they ultimately do not know how to live. As Paul wrote, "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience and from sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5). Doctrinally sound instruction leads to godly and biblical living.

Teach/instruct — Doctrinal teaching and instruction have fallen on hard times in the modern church. But, according to the New Testament, a church that neglects biblical exegesis and theology is not fulfilling the function that the Lord has given it. The elders of a local church must be able to teach the Word (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9). This is the only qualification for elders that concerns giftedness. All the others are character requirements (see 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:1-9).

Timothy is specifically commanded to prescribe and teach doctrine (1 Timothy 4:11); to devote himself to reading, exhortation, and teaching (v. 13); and to pay close attention to himself and his teaching (v. 16). He is to preach the Word even when it is not popular or desired (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

In addition, it should be observed that doctrinal teaching also deals with issues such as finances, family, and work (1 Timothy 6). What happens when a biblical worldview that relates to our everyday lives is not taught? It becomes a free-for-all concerning how

we live and what we expect out of life.

The Truth — Many people in our postmodern world reject the idea that universal, absolute truth exists. Even some biblical scholars will say that, if it does exist, it is knowable only to God and not accessible to humans. But the Scriptures do not agree with this view. Below are some examples drawn from the pastoral epistles:

- To be saved we must come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). Salvation is not possible where the knowledge of the truth of the Gospel is not understood. As Paul writes in Romans 10:17, “So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” One of the most important mandates for the church is the proclamation of the Gospel to the ends of the earth, but we have no Gospel to proclaim if we do not know the contents of the good news — its saving truth.

- Repentance is necessary if we are to know truth (2 Timothy 2:25). Paul calls on the Lord’s servants to gently correct those who oppose the Lord with the hope that He will “grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth.” The roadblock to the knowledge of the truth is sin and sin is removed through repentance. When that happens those held in the bondage of sin will come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil who has held them captive to do his will. Such freedom is not possible without the knowledge of truth.

- The church is the pillar and the support of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). While the local church can do many things, it has been specifically designed to be “the pillar and ground of the truth.” Many fine organizations can fight for justice, work toward good government, provide for the needy, and focus on any number of social issues, but only the church has been commanded and equipped by God to undergird and showcase God’s truth. It is fulfilling this design that should be front and center for the church.

- We are called to accurately handle the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15),

for if we don’t we will be led astray from the truth (v. 18). Without serious study, Scriptures are routinely ripped from their context and presented as messages from God. Rather than a message from God, too often it is a message from a preacher who has failed to do diligent study. Paul made certain to Timothy and all of us by extension, that such careless teaching is not an option. We must be serious students of Scripture so that we present what the Word of God teaches. We must “be handling accurately the word of truth” (v. 15, NASB).

“The Faith” — This is a term often used in the pastoral epistles denoting the body of New Testament truth (1 Timothy 1:2, 19; 3:9, 13; 4:1; 5:8; 6:10, 21; 2 Timothy 2:18; 3:8; 4:7; Titus 1:1, 13; 3:15). It is a synonym for doctrine. The Lord warns us that in the latter times some will fall away from “the faith” and will instead turn to demonic doctrines (1 Timothy 4:1). Practically speaking, striving after riches can be a cause for the believer to wander from “the faith” (1 Timothy 6:10), as can involvement in nonsensical philosophical discussions (v. 21). As one of the stated purposes of Scripture is to reprove us when we are headed in a wrong direction, so the servant of Christ will have cause at times to use the Word to reprove others (Titus 1:13). Personally, Paul was thrilled to confirm that at the end of his life he had kept “the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

THE CHURCH

The central purpose of the church is to exalt Christ. We do that through evangelism, worship, fellowship, prayer, and making disciples (Acts 2:42-43). The primary means by which disciples are made is through the transforming power of the Scriptures as the Holy Spirit uses the inspired Word to change lives (Romans 12:1-2). Therefore, it is vital that the local church provide a variety of specific means by which the life-changing truth of God’s Word is taught and applied to God’s people.

The life work of every pastor who identifies with the Ephesian elders

charged by the Apostle Paul (Acts 20:28-32) will be how to feed and protect the flock entrusted to him. He does this by communicating God’s Word in such a way that it transforms lives. His mission is one of making more and better-equipped disciples (Ephesians 4:11-12). What follows is not an exhaustive list, neither is it being purposed as a dogmatic roster or agenda to be meticulously employed. That being said, it is good to cast out many nets (means or opportunities) with the hope that, while a great number of people may fall through some of the nets (that is, not take advantage of or express interest in many of the opportunities), one or more of the nets will “catch” them and they will become engaged in the study and application of Scripture. Here are some of those nets:

Leadership model — This is foremost, for if the leadership of the local church is not modeling Christian living (1 Timothy 3:1-7), prayer (1 Timothy 2:8), and the importance of the instruction of the Word (1 Timothy 4:12-16) before the congregation, then it cannot be expected that the church body will recognize the importance of these things. Public prayers, the reading of Scripture, and Bible exposition (2 Timothy 2:15) by church leaders all lay out a pattern for the congregation to follow.

Expository sermons — This method of preaching not only teaches the Word in context, it demonstrates how the Word should be approached, interpreted, and applied. Even though most church goes today apparently have little appetite for sound doctrine, nevertheless pastors are instructed in the New Testament to “preach the Word” (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

Sunday school classes — Classes for all ages based on Scripture are essential. In other countries Sunday school classes, or their equivalent, are often not offered. This trend is growing in America. The popular church paradigm at present is sometimes called the “simple church” in which there is a weekend “celebration” that is geared toward the “un-churched” and the “de-churched.” For more in-depth Bible study, small groups are

organized. These groups are often uneven in their study of Scripture, depending on the leadership of the group. In most simple churches, the study of Scripture is not paramount. Many opportunities throughout the week must be offered if a good diet of biblical truth is on the menu. Sunday school remains an important part of that diet.

Sunday and Wednesday evening services — Like the Sunday school classes, Sunday evening and Wednesday evening mid-week services are vanishing. However, both these offer great opportunity to go even deeper into the things of God. The focus could be on systematic theology, hermeneutics, and other important biblical themes.

Bible studies — To complement Sunday school and evening services, Bible studies scattered throughout the week in various places and times can also be effective. While some of these studies could be based on a book handling a specific theme or topic, others could center on direct study of the Bible.

Small groups — This format provides members of a church body to participate in ongoing fellowship (e.g., have a meal together), spend time discussing a Sunday morning sermon and make application, praying together, and holding one another accountable in their Christian life.

Women's ministries — In reference to the women of a church, sound Bible-based teaching programs are vital. We live in a day and age when the local church is inundated with the embellished mysticism, flawed hermeneutics, perverted Bible interpretations, and outright heresy of such popular women's Bible teachers as Beth Moore, Priscilla Shirer, Joyce Meyer, and many others. So much of what is being offered to women today is presented from the subjective life experiences of these best-selling — but biblically deficient — authors. Therefore, it is essential to have a doctrinally sound alternative geared directly toward women. Resources by Martha Peace, Elyse Fitzpatrick, and

Carol J. Ruvolo are a few which warrant consideration.

Men's ministries — While quite often men may say that their spare time is at a bare minimum, opportunity for them to engage in an in-depth exploration of Scripture should not be overlooked. A theological study forum will not only enrich lives but will further connect pastor and select men from the church. It is also an excellent occasion for a father and his teenage son to further connect spiritually.

Parachurch ministry resources — Teaching materials, including books, newsletters, conference recordings, website postings, and so forth, are made available from a variety of ministries like Personal Freedom Outreach which are committed to sound doctrine and to the integrity and sufficiency of the Word of God. These ministries are often able to assist in specific areas of teaching and discernment. We all need help in learning and in being more discerning overall. These organizations help us in this regard (Proverbs 27:17).

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE BELIEVER

However, the church alone cannot develop disciples. Individual believers must take responsibility for their own spiritual growth. While the local church can and should provide as many "nets" as possible to aid in our people's maturity, the believer must step up and take advantage of these nets, as well as develop and work a plan for personal Bible reading and study. Most people who know Christ want to spend time in the Word, but lack a structure to adequately help them be successful. Nagging and making people feel guilty are not good motivators, so a more constructive way in helping them desire to be students of the Scriptures should be sought. To offset the negative approach:

- Encourage and aid in personal Bible study by providing a reading schedule which, if followed, would guide the users through the Bible every three years.

- Encourage projects such as reading certain sections of Scripture, perhaps in tandem with a Bible class they are attending.

- Encourage people to develop a simple Bible reading program. Ask them to first determine the best time of day for them to spend time reading. And, if they have never done this before, ask them to carve out just 15 minutes per day because far too many people begin with an hour on Monday and give up by Thursday. In addition to the time commitment, request that they find the best place in their world for reading. This needs to be a quiet, out-of-the-way location, free from the distractions of children, cell phones, computers, televisions, and countless other hindrances. This may be a nook in the basement, an isolated room at work, an outdoor building, or even the bathroom. At this location it is best to keep your Bible, notebooks, pens, and other study aids handy. Committing to just 15 minutes a day alone with the Lord can be life changing.

- Encourage finding an accountability partner. Not everyone does, but many need accountability. If two or three people would meet weekly over coffee and share what they have read, it would be most helpful on many levels.

- Encourage listening to good sermons. These are available via the Internet and apps, as well as on radio and CDs (for those yet to transition to more modern electronic forms). The above media outlets provide ample choices to hear good exposition throughout the week.

- Encourage use of audio Bibles. Some struggle with reading and comprehension but have found listening to the Scriptures helpful. Many Bible apps, such as YouVersion, offer audio Bibles in many translations. What a great use of time especially as one travels in their car or while exercising. Rather than spending all that time listening to music or talk radio, use some of it to listen to Scripture.

The Bible clearly calls on us to study the inspired Word of God personally (2 Timothy 2:15), as well as

be taught the Word of God by others (Ephesians 4:11-12). Both are essential and the church of Christ in the twenty-first century needs to take the importance of this far more seriously than it sometimes does. Only the Word of God is designed to transform us by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2).

CONCLUSION

When believers feed on a steady diet of biblical truth they have little craving for cotton candy fads. Why would anyone trade in the fountain of life for cisterns that can hold no water (Jeremiah 2:13)? Of course, many have and do, but the solution is not to crawl into the cistern, it is to showcase the fountain. Church growth gurus tell us today that people have little interest in the Word of God and we will never build a "great" church if teaching truth is the focus of our ministries. They have a point. In most cases, big churches have grown due to church growth techniques, marketing, excellent music, exciting programs, and mirroring the culture by telling people what they want to hear. But no matter the size, whether 20 or 20,000, a great church must be defined by God, not culture.

We must remember that it was the richest and most prosperous church of Asia that the Lord said He would spit out of His mouth (Revelation 3:16), while those churches which seem to be insignificant received the Lord's commendation (Revelation 2:8-11; 3:7-13). Let us strive to please our Savior by obeying His instructions to proclaim the Word and make disciples.

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 35. Ibid., pg. 114, italics in original. (See also pp. 120-123, 135.)
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 49. Ibid., pg. 223.
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thought to be nearly impossible. But in the last decade that attitude has changed and archaeological exploration in Nazareth is yielding significant discoveries. So, the idea of Nazareth as a myth has turned out to be its own big myth. There has been a dramatic, incontrovertible reversal. Abundant evidence has now silenced the mythicists. Their faulty scholarship and presuppositional biases are now being exposed for what they are.

The emergence of new archaeological information in Nazareth started with the “Nazareth Village Farm Report,” which was released the very same year that Salm’s book was published. The Report shows Jewish occupation of Nazareth in the mid-first century B.C. to the first half of the second century A.D. It also shows that Salm, who is not an archaeologist, had been totally in error in his interpretation of the pottery data (*ibid.*, pp. 321-322). Whether he knew it or not, Salm twisted the evidence.

Present-day Nazareth is an all-Arab city of more than 70,000 residents. It is one very large traffic jam every day and uncomfortably congested. People crowd the streets. By contrast, in Jesus’ day, it was a tiny village in a remote valley. Archaeologists believe that it was so small and so remote that it was spared the Roman destruction of other Galilean towns in A.D. 70. There is no destruction level in Nazareth during that period, only a continuous Jewish presence.

Added to the above “Report” is a little-known discovery (now made public) at the Mary of Nazareth International Center (MNIC). Author Robert Hutchinson tells us that finds included cisterns and deeply buried grain silos. The Israel Antiquities Authority investigated the small rooms of a house and courtyard along with pottery, cups, bowls, and coins, all of which date to the time before, during, and after Jesus (*Searching for Jesus*, pp. 98-100). As well, there has been the discovery of a first-century stone house with its original floor.

The Byzantines later built a church over the remains of the house, perhaps indicating some connection to Jesus and His family. Along with that is the discovery of a rolling stone from a first-century tomb. This is very hard and dramatic evidence for the Jewish Nazareth of Jesus’ family. And then only yards away from the MNIC, the unearthing of a second house is taking place. It was discovered in the 1880s, but largely ignored until excavation started in 2006.

Under the subheading, “House from time of Jesus,” an article from the MNIC reveals, “Workers preparing the centre were digging up an old courtyard when they uncovered the walls of an ancient house. Archaeologists then found two rooms, a courtyard with a rock-hewn cistern in which rainwater was collected from the roof, and fragments of clay and chalk vessels. They also found

a pit whose entrance was apparently camouflaged, presumably used by Jews to hide from Roman soldiers during the First Jewish-Roman War in AD 67. The Israel Antiquities Authority declared the remains were of the first residential building dating to the time of Jesus ever discovered in Nazareth” (document accessed at: www.seetheholyland.net/mary-of-nazareth-international-center/).

We are grateful for the founding of the State of Israel and grateful for Israeli archaeologists. As Robert Hutchinson relates: “On a practical level, the founding of Israel also means that much of the biblical landscape has been heavily excavated by professional archaeologists over the past century — although Israeli archaeologists would be the first to admit that they’ve only scratched the surface, and that limitations of time and money mean that there is still a lot of work to be done. Still, we now know more about the archaeology of the New Testament than we have at any other time in history. Virtually every year, archaeologists and researchers working on digs all across Israel announce discoveries that are changing how scholars understand biblical places and times. This is particularly true of the New Testament” (*Searching for Jesus*, pg. 101).

So shame on the mythicists. It is they, not the Bible, who have been promoting the myths all along.

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

reporter. Trinity attorney Michael King said the organization disagrees with the jury verdict and plans to appeal. King said the organization was absolved of allegations of a coverup because of jurors’ findings on the mandated reporter issue.”

Jan Crouch died in May 2016 of a stroke; Paul Crouch died in November 2013 from chronic heart problems. During the final years of their lives, the founders of the world’s largest Christian television network were beset with lawsuits and charges of fiscal improprieties, not only from employees but from family members as well.

—MKG

CHARISMATICS SAY GREATEST AWAKENING IS ON THE HORIZON

Leaders from within the charismatic camp are always assuring us that the “greatest-ever awakening” is just about to happen. It is a message that they never tire of

preaching and, it appears, those listening to them never tire of hearing.

The latest report of worldwide revival is from Youth With a Mission (YWAM) founder Loren Cunningham and *Prayer That Rout Demons* author “Apostle” John Eckhardt and comes via *Charisma* founder Steve Strang in his “Perspective” column in the June 2017 issue of his magazine.

Strang tells readers that Cunningham “recounted how major events seem to happen in history every 500 years.” And Cunningham also says that, “This year marks 500 years since Martin Luther’s 95 Theses posted on the church door in Wittenburg [sic], Germany, sparked the Protestant Reformation.

Strang further writes that Eckhardt “agrees that a great move of God is about to happen” and “says the move will occur among Millennials, likening it to the Jesus Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s.” In his editorial report, Strang shows his disdain for doctrine, telling his readers, “Young people are tired of ‘talking and theology,’ Eckhardt told me. ‘They are looking for an experience — what I call glory encounters.’ One example is the combining of prophetic ministry and worship music.”

Over a decade ago, faith healer Benny Hinn teamed up with the late End-Time Handmaidens founder Gwen Shaw to prophesy that “the greatest revival of the Spirit” would start in Germany and spread across Europe. That prediction, like other such proclamations before and after, has gone unfulfilled.

Yet it seems that not all are on board with what Strang currently proposes — even some from within his own publishing empire. In the very same issue of the magazine, *Charisma’s* Senior Editor Jennifer LeClaire also writes about “The Root of Awakening.” LeClaire, however, doesn’t see that the “move will occur among Millennials,” but rather opines that, “God is moving on Native American reservations. Could First Nations people hold the key to the next great move of God?” She further writes, “Over the past 40 years, prophecy after prophecy has been released about Native Americans holding the key to awakening in the land. Most recently, the Cindy Jacobs-led Apostolic Council of Prophetic Elders issued this report: ‘An awakening sound is coming to the First Nations peoples; villages already are seeing revival, and this will continue on an even greater scale. The voice of Native Americans will sound as an awakening bell.’”

A month earlier, in May, Jonathan Cahn, Messianic Jewish pastor and self-styled revealer of Bible “mysteries,” posted on YouTube his latest teaching sermon which presents his “New Harbinger Cycles 2017-2018.” One viewer of Cahn’s message commented, “Awesome message! America get ready for dark days. I see no signs of repentance or revival.” Strang’s *Charisma* publishing

group has been the primary outlet for much of Cahn’s popular writings.

Apparently, neither Strang, LeClaire, nor Cahn see a conflict of ideas here.

Nevertheless, Strang’s current promise of the greatest-ever awakening will perhaps once again fuel the fire of revival enthusiasts for the here and now, to eventually smolder and be forgotten, only to be rekindled in the future by yet another such proclamation.

—MKG

SMITHSONIAN DISPLAYS MORMON ARTIFACTS

For years, leaders and missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have claimed a connection with the Smithsonian Institution. Because *The Book of Mormon* is purported to be a historical record of Jewish people who came to the Americas in 600 B.C., the claim is often heard that the Smithsonian uses this Mormon scripture for its archaeological and scientific purposes. However, the Smithsonian has never used *The Book of Mormon* as a guide. The Smithsonian has prepared and circulated a “Statement Regarding the Book of Mormon” which dispels the claim, as well as indicates the historical, archaeological, and anthropological problems of the LDS church’s founding scripture.

Now, however, the Mormon church does have a legitimate connection with the Smithsonian Institution, it just doesn’t come with the clout or significance of the earlier claims.

In June, rare artifacts from the LDS church went on display as a part of the Smithsonian’s “Religion in Early America” exhibit in Washington, D.C. Among the items included in the display are an 1830 first edition of *The Book of Mormon*, a page from the original manuscript of the volume, and rare currency and coins minted by the church during its early years.

According to *The Salt Lake Tribune*, “The original manuscript is the most important record in possession of the church,” Brandon Metcalf, archivist at the Utah-based faith’s Church History Department, said in the news release. “This is the first time we’ve ever loaned a page of the original manuscript because it is so rare. Many of the pages that did survive are illegible, and so it’s one of our most treasured collections.” Metcalf further stated that only 28 percent of the original manuscript has survived its more than four decades of storage within a cornerstone at the Nauvoo House in Illinois, the *Tribune* reported.

Only 5,000 copies of the first edition of *The Book of Mormon* were printed in 1830, very few of which are still in existence today.

The exhibit will also feature a Torah scroll on loan from Congregation Shearith Israel in New York, founded in 1654, and an Arabic manuscript written in the 1800s by Bilali Mohammed, a West African Muslim who was enslaved on Sapelo Island of Georgia. The exhibit runs through June 3, 2018.

—MKG

THE MESSAGE AUTHOR IGNITES FIRESTORM

Author and Presbyterian pastor Eugene Peterson, whose Bible paraphrase *The Message* has been used by a confusing mix of well-known Christian leaders, found himself engulfed in a flood of criticism after comments he made in a recent interview with Jonathan Merritt of the Religion News Service were published. Merritt asked Peterson if he, as a pastor, would officiate at a same-sex marriage ceremony. Peterson replied, "Yes."

That reply reflected not only the progressive stand on homosexuality by Peterson's denomination — Presbyterian Church (USA) — but apparently mirrors his own belief about same-sex relationships. In 2014, the PC-USA lifted its ban and began allowing homosexual marriages.

In the interview Peterson said, "I wouldn't have said this 20 years ago, but now I know a lot of people who are gay and lesbian and they seem to have as good a spiritual life as I do. I think that kind of debate about

lesbians and gays might be over. People who disapprove of it, they'll probably just go to another church. So, we're in a transition and I think it's a transition for the best, for the good. I don't think it's something that you can parade, but it's not a right or wrong thing as far as I'm concerned."

Peterson's comments caught the attention of many, including LifeWay Christian Stores, an affiliate of the Southern Baptist Convention and one of the last brick-and-mortar retailers of Christian books. A spokesman for LifeWay told *Christianity Today*, "We are attempting to confirm with Eugene Peterson or his representative that his recent interview on same-sex marriage accurately reflects his views. If he confirms he does not hold to a biblical view of marriage, LifeWay will no longer sell any resources by him, including *The Message*."

Within a day of the firestorm, Peterson retracted his statement. In an article in *The Washington Post*, Peterson wrote, "With most interviews I've done, I generally ask for questions in advance and respond in writing. That's where I am most comfortable. When put on the spot by this particular interviewer, I said yes in the moment. But on further reflection and prayer, I would like to retract that." Peterson also admitted, "I regret the confusion and bombast that this interview has fostered."

Peterson's *The Message* is said to have sold more than 16 million copies and has been promoted by Rick Warren, Richard Foster, Max Lucado, David Jeremiah, J. I. Packer, and other popular Christian leaders.

—MKG

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

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



Books in Review

RIGHT THINKING IN A CHURCH GONE ASTRAY

by Nathan Busenitz, General Editor

Harvest House Publishers, 249 pages, \$15.99

Right Thinking in a Church Gone Astray is a collection of essays written by a dozen men associated with The Master's Seminary, Master's University, and/or Grace Community Church and edited by Nathan Busenitz, who is professor and Dean of Faculty at TMS. Some years earlier a similar book, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, was published from the same source dealing with ethical and social issues. This present volume supplements nicely the earlier work, however, focusing more directly on matters related to the church.

There are three sections of five chapters each: The Church and Contemporary Issues, The Church and Sound Doctrine, and The Church and the Great Commission. Within each section there are chapters dealing with contemporary and pressing challenges to truth, the church, and the Christian life. As expected with multiple authors, various styles and approaches are evident, but each writer covers his subject with obvious research and biblical insight. Subjects addressed include Christian celebrityism, Muslim debates, homosexuality, mystical approaches to Christian living, doctrinal concerns, Church history, and evangelism.

Each chapter is well worth reading and it is always with caution that a reviewer recommends particular articles found in such a volume. Preference is dependent upon the reader's needs and interests at the moment. Nevertheless, some highlights for this reviewer were: an excellent critique of the popular and dangerous book, *Jesus Calling*, by Sarah Young; a biblical and wise overview of homosexuality; a call to truth in a culture dominated by feelings; a balanced and thoughtful discussion of the church's involvement with social justice issues; and an important overview of threatening trends within evangelical missions.

One of the most helpful chapters was written by the editor himself and titled, "The Charismatic Question." Here the reader will find a defense of cessationism, which "is the belief that the revelatory gifts (like

prophecy and tongues) and the miraculous sign gifts (like the healings performed by the apostles) passed away, or ceased, shortly after the apostolic age ended and the canon of Scripture closed" (pg. 115).

This premise is followed by an extremely insightful discussion of the charismatic movement, demonstrating that the miraculous spiritual gifts being touted by some today are not the same gifts as found in Scripture. Busenitz writes, "When we approach the continuationist/cessationist debate by first defining the gifts biblically, it becomes apparent that modern charismatic practice does not match the New Testament precedent" (pg. 119). For example, tongues in the New Testament were the supernatural ability to speak authentic foreign languages unknown to the speaker. But virtually no one in the charismatic movement today would make such a claim. D.A. Carson, himself a continuationist, confirms that, "the few instances of reported modern xenoglossia [speaking foreign languages] are so poorly attested that no weight can be laid to them" (cited on pg. 240, brackets in original). Modern "tongues" are not languages as they were in the Scriptures.

Turning to prophecy, we find biblical prophecy authoritative, inspired, and inerrant, but such is not the case concerning modern prophecies, which can be in error, partially given by God and partially from one's imagination. The best known supporter of this latter view is Wayne Grudem, who writes in his *Systematic Theology*, "Prophecies in the church today should be considered merely human words, not God's words, and not equal to God's words in authority" (cited on pg. 239). Even Jack Deere, who claims to be a prophet himself, admits that modern prophets are prone to errors and mistakes and says, "Prophets are really messy. Prophets make mistakes" (cited on pg. 239). When we turn to miracles and healings, the same disconnect between Scripture and contemporary practices is evident. Deere is shown to admit that modern healings are not on the same level as the healings found in Scripture. Whatever is going on today in the charismatic movement is not on par with what was taking place in the New Testament.

The common thread running throughout *Right Thinking* is a call to evaluate every trend, every fad, every movement, every doctrine by the authoritative Word of God. The authors within this volume not only lay down this challenge, they model it in their handling of the various subjects. This book comes highly recommended.

—GEG

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