

## The Gift

What is it about Christmas that draws us every year to celebrations of this holiday? What is so special about Christmas?

Christmas is a special time because of the happiness it brings. It's a time of giving and receiving, a family time, a time when we feel especially close to friends and loved ones. It is a time of happy reminiscing; remembering the carefree happy days of our childhood. We hear an old favorite carol, we catch the scent of balsam, we see the bright lights; and then, if we're lucky, we get that blanket of white, and we are transported back to lighter days. Yes, Christmas is a happy time.

Yet, if we were to talk to counselors, we would find the picture is not all rosy at Christmas. Suicide is up and depression is rampant ... Does this mean Christmas is not a very special time after all? No ... the opposite is true. Aren't people sad because they *know* it is a special time, and the holiday they are experiencing just doesn't live up to the expectations of the day that they hold in their hearts? Some folks are grieving over a recent loss. Perhaps this is the first Christmas without mom, or dad, a beloved spouse, or a child. Christmas heartache is the worst heartache of all. The bright gaiety of the season might even seem to mock their pain.

Some are sad because they are pining for the ideal childhood Christmases of hazy memory. What current Christmas could compare with the Christmases of innocence? For some people, it may be the years when their children were small that they miss most of all. It is such a joy to see Christmas magic reflected in the eyes of a child.

Or, maybe the opposite is true ... Many people are pining for the ideal Christmas or the ideal childhood they never had. Not all families are happy; not all childhoods are ideal.

Maybe it's a simpler thing ... Do we miss the carefree days when someone else was making the day special for us? I think women especially feel this keenly because women, as a rule, are the ones who feel the greatest responsibility to make the holidays special for their

families.

"God Rest You Merry Gentlemen," the carol says. And what are the

merry ladies doing while the merry gentlemen are resting?

They are out there *killing themselves at the mall!!!* Then today, as never before, women are caught in a vicious time squeeze. Much more likely than their mothers to be working full time, they still try to do it all. And what often happens? Work and entertaining overload meets energy and appreciation deficit.

But there is something even more special about Christmas, isn't there, that produces a longing in us, a yearning for something. What is it?

We mourn the passing of the innocent faith of childhood. We long to believe in someone or something again ... long to see goodness in the world, to believe in peace on earth, to experience sharing and caring, giving, and loving. We want to believe there really is a good God in heaven and to feel His presence in our lives.

What happens to us in our lives that robs us of this childlike joy, this childlike love of goodness and peace? Life happens, doesn't it? We tend to develop a layer of cynicism as we grow up.

(Continued on page 2)



The Merry Gentlemen Are Resting. . .

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(Continued from page 1)

We've seen more fighting and strife than peace on earth. We've witnessed selfishness and greed and, if we're honest, we have to admit we've participated in it as well. We've seen televangelists fall into disgrace, and priests and ministers stand accused of sexual escapades and child molestation. Yes, even those we classify as "good people" have a bad side, don't they? So we have become disillusioned, and it has made us wary of believing in anything or anyone again. And our faith in a good God has been shaken by the evil we see in the world around us. We keenly feel the disappointment of seeing the world as it is, not as we once believed it was.

The Christmas carol, "I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day," really sums up what I am trying to say.

**I heard the bells on Christmas day,  
their old familiar carols play.**

**And wild and sweet, the words repeat,  
Of peace on earth goodwill to men.**

**And in despair I bowed my head,  
there is no peace on earth, I said.  
For hate is strong and mocks the song,  
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men.**

We want so bad to experience the holiness and the peace deep down in our souls, but it eludes us. Yes, Christmas can be a sad time, but is sadness and disillusionment the final word on Christmas? No, I don't think so. The last verse of the song conveys to us what I believe is the final word on Christmas ...

**Then pealed the bells both loud and deep,  
God is not dead, nor does He sleep,  
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,  
with peace on earth, goodwill to men.**

Much of the appeal of Christmas is the renewal of hope and faith. At Christmas time our cynical "adult self" is reminded through carol, candle, and whatever else it is about Christmas, of our childhood hopefulness, our childlike trust in the ultimate triumph of God and His goodness. Peace on earth; goodwill toward men!

The notion calls us, strikes a longing chord within us, and reawakens our need to believe in something greater than ourselves. We want to experience God's presence in our lives. I think that often, even very secular people do really feel some of the presence of God at Christmas time. People may impersonalize His felt presence by calling it "Christmas spirit," but I feel it is no less than the tug of the Almighty that warms our hearts.

But then, after Christmas, God is often put away, up in the attic, with the lights and the trimmings and the little nativity scene. Why do we do that? Why do we distance ourselves from the love and goodness, indeed the God, that we all need?

Most people tend to see God as way up there, while they are way down here. The gulf between our sinfulness and God's holiness seems too large to bridge ... Human beings really do not understand the love God has for them, and they often view God in almost an antagonistic light. They don't know what it is He wants from them.

What *does* God want from us? If you took a survey among the people you know, asking them what God requires from them in order to gain His acceptance, what do you think they might answer? I think most people would say God wants us to be good; to keep the ten commandments, to follow the golden rule. God wants us to go to church. God wants us to give to the poor, be kind to strangers, be nice to our family members. Some people might stress the "don'ts" over the "do's." Don't get drunk, don't cuss or swear, don't smoke cigarettes.

And how well do people succeed in living up to the expectations they think God has of them? Not very well, do they? So I believe the reason most people put God away with the trimmings is that trying to be good, when you're human, is like trying to get over an impossibly high wall without a ladder! People do make the effort to run up against that wall, to try to scramble over, but grow weary of the game when they fall back every time. So I think it is with some sadness, some sense of loss that we go our way, and try not to think of the ways we fall short.

But it doesn't have to be this way! The good news of Christmas is that God does not want us to *give* Him something. God wants us to *receive something* from Him! It's a FREE GIFT, with no strings attached! No matter how many Christmases you have lived, whether 20 or 50, you may have missed the best gift of all!

**John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."**

**Ephesians 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no man can boast."**

Here's God's Christmas gift to us; He wants us to *receive* something ... the gift of His Son and gift of salvation.

What does this gift cost us? That's a silly question, isn't it? Gifts, if they are truly gifts, don't cost the receiver, do they? If it has a price tag, it's not a gift, is it? Have you ever been offered a "gift" to hostess a Tupperware party, or to open an account at a bank? We know they are not truly gifts at all; they're rewards. We have to *earn* them.

Why would we want God's Christmas gift anyway? What do we gain by the "salvation" offered to us by God? It means the forgiveness of our sins, the release of a debt we have no hope of paying. We all owe a debt to God. We've done things wrong; we've violated God's rules, broken his commandments. We have all failed to love as we should, failed to forgive the failures of others. We have done unto others what we certainly would *not* want done to ourselves! Isn't this the reason we put God away?

How do we react when we owe someone an impossible debt? We avoid them ... We see the person coming, and we cross the street to the other side of the road. Fear, guilt, and pride are relationship killers.

So the release of this debt that allows for our reconciliation to God is the best gift anyone could receive. Jesus died to pay for our sins, so that the Father can declare our debt has been paid in full. Colossians 2:14 tells us our IOU was nailed to the cross.

It's as if God is now saying to you and me, "Hey, don't avoid me. I covered your debt. I love you; put your pride away and come to me."

The question is, will we accept his love and forgiveness or spurn His precious gift? It's up to us. I could stand here all day holding out to you a gift of great value, but until you take it, it is of no value to you!

People have been making this choice since the gift was first offered in the first century.

**John 1:11-12** "He came unto His own, but His own did NOT receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."

There are two things to notice in this passage. First of all, many people did not receive God's gift. And secondly, *only* those who *do* receive it become children of God! Many people today believe everyone is a child of God. And many do not understand what it means to "believe in Jesus," confusing that concept with believing things *about* God or Jesus. It's the difference between knowing facts about a person and actually *knowing* the person.

**John 17:3** "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

We gain eternal life by knowing God the Father and Jesus

personally. But what does it mean to receive Christ, to believe in Him, to know Him? Let's use the example of Bill Clinton. Since he was elected, I have learned a great deal *about* him, but do I *know* him? No. Chelsea does, Hillary does, but I do not. And if I continue to learn things *about* Bill Clinton from now until doomsday, will I actually know him any more than I do now? Of course not! Many people make this very mistake about Jesus, though.

Jesus, in speaking about the judgment day, talked about this common mistake people obviously have made down through the centuries.

**Matthew 7:22** "Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?' "

Note that these were religious people. They called Jesus "Lord," obviously considering themselves to be Christians. They had done many good things, even performed miracles in the name of Christ. But how did Jesus respond to these folks?

**Matthew 7:23** "And I will declare to them, I never knew you!"

You see, in Christianity, it's not what you do, but who you know that matters. And to know someone involves personal contact.

**Romans 10:9-10** "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved."

This is the believing part. These are the specific things we must believe and confess *about* Jesus in order to be saved ... that He is God Almighty, the Lord, and that He was raised from the dead. Yet, many people do believe these things without *knowing* Jesus any more than I know President Clinton by *possessing knowledge* of him. The problem is they have never received Him!

In order to actually get to know President Clinton, what must I do? I must *meet* him! Perhaps I could call him up on the phone ... "Hi Bill, this is Joy here ... I've been wanting to get to really know you!" Well, okay, realistically that

probably won't work with President Clinton. I probably wouldn't get past his secretary if I could get that far, even if I was a Democrat! But with Jesus, you can get right through. He will personally answer your call!

**Romans 10:13** "For whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

How do we call Jesus? Is there a communications system that connects heaven and earth? Yes, it's called prayer. Pray to Jesus. Acknowledge your debt and ask Him personally for His

(Continued on Page 9)



... While The Merry Ladies Are Out  
Killing Themselves At The Mall.





# And Along Came A Spider...

## The Celestine Prophecy:

*A Handbook to a New Age World View* by Marcia Montenegro

**L**earning to see energy around plants and people, feeling that the universe is an extension of your body, being guided by whatever might first come to your mind at the moment — what if you were told that these were spiritual teachings? These and other similar ideas can be found in the best-selling book, *The Celestine Prophecy*, by James Redfield. On the surface, it is a fictional tale of an American man who travels to Peru in search of an ancient manuscript which contains nine insights; however, this book actually leads the reader into the maze of mystical, New Age thinking.

In the first 15 pages, while the plot is still forming, at least eight basic New Age ideas are introduced: a spiritual awakening is occurring in the world (p.4); humanity is evolving into a higher spiritual consciousness (p.4); the individual is encouraged to seek the experiential (p.5); coincidences have spiritual significance — synchronicity (p.6); the knowledge contained in the manuscript's insights has been hidden from most of the world (esoteric, secret knowledge) (p.8); Christian beliefs are viewed as limiting man's spiritual progress (p.9); truth is discovered through personal experience (p.10); and when a spiritual seeker is ready for a teacher to guide him into deeper spiritual matters, the universe mysteriously brings the student and teacher together — a popular New Age saying is "when the student is ready, the teacher appears" (p.15). These ideas are not always expressed in so many words, but their principles are. For example, the book does not use the term "esoteric," yet the basis of the story is that the spiritual insights humanity needs are hidden in an ancient document and must be uncovered if mankind is to advance spiritually. Not everyone, according to the story, is ready for or able to comprehend these teachings. The insights are for those spiritually ripe, the spiritual elite. The book implies that, in time, others will accept these ideas, but for now the more advanced must lead until a critical mass of people have grasped the insights.

This New Age idea of spiritual evolution has a built-in prejudice against those less evolved. Everyone is on a path, and some are ahead of others. As one character in the book says, there are "people who can't begin to grasp what we're doing ..." (p.45). Those who are less evolved are portrayed as ignorant, afraid, spiritually shallow, and/or selfish; people must discard "their traditional beliefs" before they can understand the insights (p.81). It is ironic that, while the New Age philosophy and this book preach peace and togetherness, the very core of the spiritual-evolution doctrine places people into categories of more spiritual versus less

spiritual, thereby promoting a sort of spiritual-class consciousness.

The New Age is a mixture of Eastern (especially Hindu), occult, pagan, and humanist principles. It is more a patchwork of ideas than a well-integrated, consistent, belief system. Yet, there are basic beliefs foundational to most New Age thinking presented in *The Celestine Prophecy*: 1) we should be guided by our experiences and intuitions; 2) there is one energy, a life force, uniting all matter and humanity, and this energy is God; 3) nature has consciousness; and, 4) we are in a process of spiritual evolution which eventually will lead to vibrating at a higher level until we transcend our bodies. There are other New Age ideas in the book; however, this article will only address these four and will also give a response to them from this writer's vantage point of having been a New Ager.

The narrator of the story, who is the main character, is seeking copies of the nine insights in an ancient Peruvian manuscript. He comes across the insights in numerical order, since that is how one must understand them. Overcoming an initial skepticism, the narrator's understanding grows with each insight.

The first two insights are that coincidences have a deep significance and that one should be guided by these in decision making. Later insights build on this, teaching the narrator he should be guided by daydreams, intuitions, and thoughts that may flash in his mind. So, at the very beginning of the story, the subjective is valued over the objective. The truth is not outside ourselves but exists in us; we only have to learn to recognize and follow it. If, indeed, this is truth; then there are no absolutes. Your truth is your truth, and my truth is my truth. No one can judge another's inner experience of truth; therefore, there can be no right or wrong. Yet, the book implies there are wrong ways of thinking when it refers to the "traditional beliefs" one must reject in order to understand the insights. Apparently, some truths are more true than others!

Not only should we base truth on our own experiences, but one day everyone will be guided this way and "will know precisely what to do and when to do it, and this will fit harmoniously with the actions of others" (p.223). The author does not raise the problem of conflicting intuitions or inner guidance among people. It is assumed we will be directed in similar ways. On the one hand, we base truth on our own experience as individuals, but yet, the result will be that we will cooperate as one large body acting together. In this instance, the New Age fails to resolve an inherent contradiction. It appears to exalt the individual following his own truth and spiritual path, and yet, the goal is the same for everyone. High value is

placed on conformity to the needs of the group so that one's actions are perfectly blended in with everyone else's. It rather brings to mind a well-organized ant colony or a hive of anonymous worker bees.

The next several insights are based on the belief that the universe is comprised of pure energy "that is malleable to human intention and expectation" (p.42). Later, the narrator states, "I perceived everything to be somehow part of me," and he realizes his real body is actually the universe (p.98). Connecting to this energy field is essential to spiritual development, since this energy is life, love, and God. The narrator is advised love exists "when one is connected to the energy in the universe which, of course, is the energy of God" (p.153). The narrator learns how to see energy fields around plants and people.

These teachings about energy are called *monism* and *pantheism*. Monism means all is one and one is all; pantheism means all is God and God is all. The book teaches these concepts without using the terms. An essential ingredient of New Age thinking is that we are all part of one force that binds the universe and everything in it together. We are not really individuals, and matter is only a denser form of the energy or, perhaps, only a temporary reality we have created because we have mistakenly identified ourselves with the material world. The energy in the trees and rocks is the same energy in us and in the animals. We all, basically, are part of this energy, which is God; and, therefore, there actually are no distinctions between us and a rock, dog, or a fish. The idea of this "energy" or "life force" is a belief of many Eastern religions as well as a belief related to the gnostic teaching that we are really spirits trapped in matter.

If, indeed, the universe is really your body, and you are not distinct from it, then what value do we have over a tree or an insect? Is the only difference that of one life form being more evolved than the other? Or is it that differences really don't exist at all? In that case, our individuality does not exist because we really are part of a cosmic glob of energy. This is very similar to the Hindu teaching that our sense of self is an illusion and a barrier to the realization that we really are God in essence. Here again, we have a contradictory principle. Being part of this energy is a major spiritual discovery in this book, but who can be happy about believing that his individuality is not real, especially after working so hard on discovering his own special spiritual path? Who will be first to voluntarily discard his identity and individuality?

The idea that nature has consciousness is a logical conclusion to the belief that everything is part of one energy. So, for example, since food has energy, eating should be "a holy experience." Moreover, since energy is everywhere, the spiritual seeker can learn how to take in, or absorb, energy without actually eating (p.110). Another example is when the narrator experiences giving love to a tree (p.113). He also learns throughout the book that the forest has energy that can "build up" if a man refrains from injuring or destroying the forest (p.222). It is only a short step from this to actual adulation of nature: "We'll see trees and rivers and mountains as temples of great power to be held in reverence and awe" (p.224). The environmental movement partly has roots in the New Age view of nature as pure and sacred (which is also a view of neopaganism and contemporary witchcraft). This is not an issue of taking care of the earth or avoiding pollution; it goes deeper than that. Believing the earth is sacred is idolatry and is also pantheistic. It violates the biblical teaching that God is separate from the earth and that the earth is in a fallen state (Genesis 1:1; 3:17-19; Romans

8:19-22). Nature is not pure or holy and offers us as much danger as it does beauty.

The story builds as the narrator encounters each insight which leads him into a state where he is able to understand the next insight. The culmination is a realization that spiritual evolution is moving one's energy into a higher vibration. Matter is the densest form of energy and, therefore, less evolved. As one evolves and the energy vibrations accelerate, one becomes more free of the body and the material world.

This concept is introduced as the narrator describes a vision he has of the history of the universe in terms of scientific evolution. Energy somehow coalesced into matter which then "leaped" past simple forms into more complex forms (p.99). The narrator realizes that each emerging species represented matter "moving into its next higher vibration" until finally "at the pinnacle stood humankind" (p.100). Humankind is at the pinnacle and, yet, it is nature that is holy. Man vibrates at a higher level, but the universe is his body. If moving into a higher vibration is the goal, then should we not want the trees and rivers to progress to that point? Is nature capable of this and, if so, how would it be done? The book does not offer the reader any insight on this dilemma.

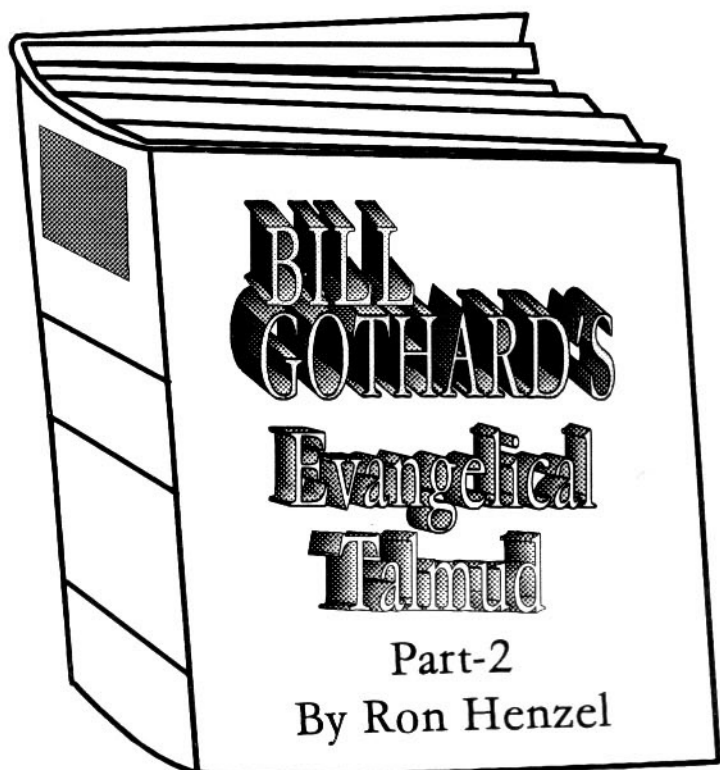
It is typical of New Age beliefs to ignore the hard questions because of their experiential, mystical bias. The reader, along with the narrator, is told over and over to rely on feelings, hunches, and experiences. Thinking, in fact, is considered a barrier to enlightenment because the mind gets in the way of spiritual progress. In Eastern religions such as Hinduism and forms of Buddhism, the mind is viewed as part of matter and the ego or self-identity and, therefore, part of the problem. Transcending the mind is essential to spiritual enlightenment in order for the seeker to free himself from the bondage of illusion or false identification with material reality. This is the purpose of Eastern meditation techniques; meditation has nothing to do with reducing stress or relaxation and everything to do with liberation from the barriers of rational thinking and individuality. As meditation expert Daniel Goleman says of Transcendental Meditation in his book *The Meditative Mind*, "In God consciousness, the meditator surrenders his individuality" (p.71) and of yoga practices, the yoga student's "mistaken belief in himself as a separate, unique individual apart from God will be overcome" (p.72).

Since we are evolving into a higher vibrational state, according to the book, we will eventually one day reach a vibration so high we will transcend matter. The ninth insight offers this teaching as a crowning revelation. The narrator is told that Christ walked on water because he was vibrating at a high frequency (p.241), and one day we will all be vibrating "highly enough so that we can walk into heaven, in our same form" (p.242). Fear lowers the vibration, so the narrator is told man must conquer fear in order to maintain a high vibration level. While the narrator is taught this insight, one of the characters achieves this high vibratory level and disappears. Heaven actually already exists here on earth, but until we are spiritually advanced and are vibrating at the higher level, we cannot see it (p.243).

Early gnostic thinkers thought we were spirits trapped in matter. Matter was considered evil and the goal was to escape matter and return to the world of light and spirit. Similarly, Hinduism teaches that matter is illusion, and our bondage to this world comes from identifying with it. Buddhism teaches that suffering is caused by desire; the cure is to cultivate detachment from desire which, in

(Continued on Page 10)





**I**n part one of this series, we traced the history of the rise of Bill Gothard's Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts (IBYC), the fact it grew during a very tumultuous time in American history (especially for the youth of this country), and that thousands of parents and church leaders sent their young people to these seminars without adequately evaluating the content. This does not mean voices of concern were not raised. In this installment, we will listen to what one concerned Christian was saying and examine Gothard's specific teachings from their beginnings in the 1960s through the end of the '70s.

For the first 20 years or so of Bill Gothard's seminar ministry (from around 1964 to 1984), his teachings received little public scrutiny. A notable exception was Wilfred Bockelman's book, *Gothard — The Man and His Ministry: An Evaluation* (Milford, MI: Quill Publications, 1976). As far as we know, this has been the only book-length treatment of Gothard's ministry ever to be marketed to the general Christian public. (There have been some other substantial published works, but they have had a very limited circulation.) While Bockelman worked hard to be evenhanded and found positive things to say, he also had some serious theological disagreements with Gothard, especially on the subject of God's grace.

Nonetheless, Bockelman's book does not appear to have had much impact on the evangelical community. One reason for this might have been that his publisher was not exactly a major force in the evangelical community, and the book probably suffered from poor distribution. Another factor might have been the immense popularity Gothard was enjoying in the mid-'70s (especially among parents and grandparents), and so anyone criticizing him naturally would have been viewed with suspicion.

Another thing to consider was Gothard's unique strategy for marketing his own books and materials: you could *only* get them by attending his seminars. Gothard sold nothing over the counter at Christian bookstores or anywhere else. His was the original, "This Offer Not Available In Stores" approach, except operators were *not* standing by. You had to get in your car and go to one of his public seminars.

As Bockelman wrote:

And if you think you'd like to slip away an extra copy to a friend who could really use one, forget it. This book [the seminar notebook] is intended only for the use of those who go through the whole program.

During the week there will be twelve times when portions of the book are distributed. In the front of the book is a little card that lists all twelve times and the name of the material to be distributed then. When you receive yours, that card will be checked off, so you can't go back and get a second copy. (pp.39-40)

One effect of this was that no one, who had not actually attended a seminar, had access to what Gothard was teaching. Thus, very few had the opportunity to privately and objectively scrutinize his materials outside the arena of his seminars. Not only that, but at his seminars Gothard publicly discouraged attendees from even discussing the materials outside of the seminars. As Bockelman, who actually did attend a seminar, wrote:

Bill Gothard is perfectly justified in saying, "If people want to know what the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts is all about, let them come to the seminar." He even has the right to say, "You can't form an opinion unless you've attended the whole Institute." He has reason to be dissatisfied with those who have never attended one of his Institutes, but who nevertheless pontificate on them.

Still, I don't think Gothard is being particularly reasonable when he suggests that people attending the seminar not even discuss the handbook outside the meetings. (pp. 19-20)

To many Christians in the 1970s, Bockelman's book was probably reminiscent of someone "crying wolf." But now, reading his comments from the post-Jonestown, post-Waco perspective can be rather troubling. True, Gothard did not set up a hermetically-sealed, cultic community along those lines, but there is one feature he appears to have in common with them: the avoidance of accountability through the control of information — specifically, the control of information about himself and his teachings.

The absence of Gothard materials outside of his seminars (and the ironic suppression of their content by Gothard himself) meant that objectionable portions of his teachings were kept out of the Christian public's view. Since attendees (whom Gothard dubbed "alumni" after they attended) were discouraged from discussing them, outsiders knew of no reason for alarm.

Since you could not just go out and buy a Gothard book at a Christian bookstore, Christian book reviewers could not read them and point out any problems found with them. Therefore, no one would read any critical reviews of Gothard's work. It also meant his books generally were unavailable to Bible professors, theologians, and those engaged in apologetics ministries. Thus, as thousands of Christian college kids filed into Gothard's seminars, their instructors were unable even to comment on this alternative source of teaching, unless they, themselves, took time out of their busy schedules to attend. And, since Gothard was so widely praised (frequently by those who, themselves, had never been to his seminars), there seemed to be no reason to check up on him.

Gothard materials understandably are difficult to track down these days, unless you actually know some "alumni" who will let you borrow their copies. But, some copies of seminar materials from the '60s and '70s have found their way onto library

shelves and into used book stores, and we used these as the basis for evaluating the content of his early seminars.

### How Gothard Says He Interprets the Bible

An examination of Gothard's materials, from their earliest days, shows there *was* a great deal about which to be concerned. Gothard knew how to disarm his audience, assure them of his competence, and allay potential misgivings. Thus, in his large, red, *Basic Seminar Textbook* from 1979, he seems to lay out a sound foundation for what follows in his book:

WORKING THROUGH THE TEXT: Before any application of Scripture can be made, there must be a thorough understanding of what the text is actually saying.

Why was it written?

To whom was it written?

What were the conditions at the time?

What is the precise meaning in the original language?

What related Scriptures explain it further? [p.3]

These are, of course, standard procedures for Biblical interpretation — indeed for *any* kind of interpretation.

But, it's one thing to know the rules of interpretation and to be able to quote them; it's quite another thing to practice them. Not very far into the *Textbook*, we begin to encounter uses of Scripture that fly in the face of the very sound procedures Gothard himself advocates. For example:

Undue concern for clothes may be an attempt to cover up or compensate for unchangeable physical features which are rejected. Jesus linked these two thoughts in Matthew 6:27, 28 "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment?" [p.12]

Gothard makes it sound like Jesus was addressing the problem of shame over unwanted blemishes, a big nose, etc. A glance at the context, however, reveals that He had nothing of the sort in mind, but instead was addressing the sin of habitual worry:

*"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" (Matthew 6:25, NIV)*

Jesus by no means was linking the two thoughts of clothing and a poor self-image. By teaching that Jesus was, Gothard also

commits the error of anachronistic (chronologically misplaced) reasoning by projecting, if you will, the assumptions of 20th-century psychology into the teachings of Jesus.

### How Gothard Actually Interprets the Bible

Examples like this are not very disturbing at first and seem to be offset by other examples of correct Scriptural application. But, over the course of nearly 200 pages, the errors begin to multiply, especially in areas where Gothard's views tend to be the most unique. For instance, on page 20, when Gothard begins discussing his favorite subject of "authority:"

The essence of submission is not "getting under the domination of authority but rather getting under the protection of authority." Authority is like an "umbrella

of protection," and when we get out from under it, we expose ourselves to unnecessary temptations which are too strong for us to overcome. This is why Scripture compares rebellion to witchcraft - "Rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft." (1 Samuel 15:23) Both terms have the same basic definition - subjecting ourselves to the realm and power of Satan. [p.20]

Here a pattern emerges not only of citing Scripture that does *not* prove his point but also of not giving *any* Scriptural support for something Gothard considers essential. His citation of 1 Samuel 15:23 is not related even tangentially to his definition of "submission" as "getting under the protection of authority." And, instead of providing us with a Scripture verse that *does* prove that point, Gothard diverts our attention to another issue entirely. He smoothly glides into a comparison of rebellion to witchcraft that is designed to establish the following thesis: Rebellion is evil; there-

fore, submission is righteous.

This idea sounds Biblical enough so that to most seminar attendees — who are usually busy balancing a three-ring binder on their knees, feverishly taking down notes, while trying to catch everything on Gothard's overhead presentation — it is not obvious Gothard has just misused the Bible. But then, who *doesn't* occasionally quote a Scripture verse in support of a point it does not prove? We all make this mistake from time to time. That doesn't mean our teaching is dangerous, does it?

While this reasoning may quickly pacify the conscience of a seminar attendee, it will also set that person up for difficulty be-

(Continued on next Page)

# CHAIN



# OF AUTHORITY

cause: 1) Gothard's view of submission to authority is the foundation on which he builds *many* of his other unique teachings; and 2) by the time Gothard deals with the subject of authority, quoting verses that do not prove his point has already become something of a habit for him. So, for a person to have read all the way to page 20 in the *Basic Seminar Textbook* without being alarmed by this trend means either: a) that person is not very familiar with the Bible; and/or b) that person is being kept too busy by the pace of the seminar to notice. Only the more informed and alert seminar attendees would be likely to pick up on these problems.

Even if it is true that all rebellion is evil and, thus, all submission is good, it is still not the same as saying submission means "getting under the protection of authority." When is Gothard going to supply us with a Scriptural basis for this idea? He isn't. He basically expects us to accept his assertion and follow him quickly to his next point, before we have the opportunity to notice he is not teaching Scripture but rather his own ideas. His citation from 1 Samuel, therefore, reads more like a sleight-of-hand than a reference for a Biblical principle.

But there is more to consider in Gothard's teaching on authority, because an intrinsic part of it can be found in his statement, "Authority is like an 'umbrella of protection,' and when we get out from under it, we expose ourselves to unnecessary temptations which are too strong for us to overcome." With this, Gothard has shifted away from the "authority paradigm" that has been historically presented to young people.

Most young people in the '60s and '70s were taught authority was to protect people from social chaos. We need to have government, a police force, a military, and all the structures and powers of authority, so the standard explanation went, in order to keep evil from running rampant in the world. It is no secret many people in their teens and twenties, especially during the '60s, rejected this line of reasoning.

Nevertheless, it is the central rationale provided by the Apostle Paul in Romans 13:3-4, and we have to wonder why Gothard felt the need to supplement Paul's teaching with the notion that not submitting to authority somehow exposed us to "unnecessary temptations which are too strong for us to overcome." Is it not enough we should fear the inevitable social ills that result from disregarding authority, must we also fear some mystical, spiritual ill as well? And mystical it will remain, in more ways than one, because Gothard never shows us from the Scriptures how this is so.

#### **The Links in Gothard's "Chain-of-Authority"**

Gothard teaches that God had three primary purposes for instituting human authority:

- 1) "To [help us] grow in wisdom and character;" 2) "To gain protection from destructive temptations" (as outlined above); and 3) "To receive clear direction for life decisions." (p.20)

To prove his first point, Gothard writes:

The only recorded incident in the life of Christ between the ages of two and thirty was a discussion with His parents which involved authority. This occurred when He was twelve. Should He follow His spiritual calling and be about His Father's business (Luke 2:49), or should He become subject to His parents and leave His ministry at the temple? He did the latter, and the following verse reports, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." (Luke 2:52) [Ibid.]

Here Gothard has taken a story from Luke, which was designed to illustrate the identity of Christ as the Son of God and Messiah, and has twisted it into a conflict over the parental authority of Joseph and Mary, so he could fit it into his own system. We *know* the reason Luke recorded this account from its climactic scene (which Gothard omits), in verses 48-49:

*When his parents saw him, they were astonished.*

*His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."*

*"Why were you searching for me?" he asked.*

*"Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"*  
(NIV)

This is also the only record we have in Scripture of Jesus ever being scolded by His human parents. But, if we believe in the doctrine of the sinlessness of Christ, then it was a scolding He did not deserve. The sinless Christ, at age 12, answered His parents' question with His own questions: *Don't you know Who I am?* And don't you know that *Who I am* dictates *where I am*? So the basic issue was: Why didn't they think of coming to the temple *first*? It would have saved them a lot of unnecessary worrying! Contrary to Gothard, this story has nothing to do with any conflict Jesus was facing over whether to stay in the temple or go home with His parents. Jesus was not contemplating entering the ministry at age 12!

So, if this is not a story about Jesus making the tough choice to "leave His ministry at the temple" so He could submit to His parents, then neither is it a story about how His choice to submit was why He "increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." It wasn't the point of Luke's story. Luke was simply describing the progress of young Jesus' life. Thus, Gothard misused Luke's story to create a false cause-and-effect relationship between submission to human authority and character development. There are many people who have submitted in this way but have *not* "increased in wisdom and stature," or "in favor with God and man." The Nazi party comes to mind at this point.

In order to justify his statement that submission to authority is necessary to "receive clear direction for life decisions," Gothard writes:

Correct decisions are based on faith; that is, visualizing what God intends to do. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Romans 14:23) One of the most basic aspects of faith is to realize how God gets His directions to us through those He has placed over us. [Ibid.]

Here, again, we are confronted with two questionable statements and a Bible verse that proves neither of them sandwiched in between. How did Gothard come up with his definition of faith as "visualizing"? He doesn't say. Where does the Bible say following "those He has placed over us" is "one of the most basic aspects of faith"? Gothard doesn't help us out here, either. But he goes on:

After the centurion asked Jesus to come and heal his servant, it occurred to him that just as his life was structured around a "chain of responsibility," so the kingdom in which God operates must have a similar structure of authority. [Ibid.]

The account Gothard is referring to here is found in Matthew 8:5-10 (NIV):

*When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible*



suffering." Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith."

Is the point of this story that God's kingdom is structured around a "chain of responsibility" (or "umbrellas of authority") similar to that of the Roman Empire? No. The point of this story is the centurion had such great faith in *Who* Jesus was, that he knew Jesus did not *need* to come to his house in order to heal his servant. Jesus was God. He could heal long-distance.

The main point of *every* story in the Gospels is to highlight for us *Who* Jesus is! By distracting us with his "authority" teaching, Gothard not only is violating the rules of proper interpretation, but he is frustrating the intent of the Gospel authors, and diverting our attention from the glory of Christ's person.

Alas, Gothard is relentless. He interprets Matthew 8:5-10 as yet another passage which corroborates his view that submitting to a "structure of authority" will help us "to receive clear direction for life decisions." Once again, when we look for a connection between Gothard's thesis ("to receive clear direction") and Gothard's proof-text (Matt. 8:5-10), we come up empty. If anything, here we have a story where the *centurion* was telling *Jesus* what to do ("just say the word, and my servant will be healed") *instead of receiving* "clear direction" by submitting to Jesus' authority! It soon becomes apparent Gothard cites Matthew 8 primarily to support his underlying *premise* (since it does not support his immediate *point*), which is that Christians must get under one of his all-important umbrellas of "protection of authority."

In his book, *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible* (InterVarsity Press, 1980), James W. Sire refers to this method of proof-texting as "The Biblical Hook"

When Scripture is quoted, especially at the beginning of an argument which turns out to promote a cult doctrine or point of view, it may be that it is being used primarily as a hook to grasp the attention of readers or listeners. "The Bible says" gets the attention, but what follows the quotation may be far from traditional Christian teaching and far from the intention of the Bible itself. (pp.41-42)

We do not mean to imply Gothard is a cult leader. Nor, on the other hand, is this the *only* way in which Gothard misuses Scripture. The examples we have provided thus far are simply consistent with Sire's description of "The Biblical Hook."

Gothard's persistently incorrect (but strategic) citation of Bible verses creates the illusion he is teaching "Biblical principles." This leads us to the next problem which we will address in Part 3 of this series: *Just how many "Biblical principles" are necessary to live the Christian life?* Ω

The *Journal* would like to thank Ron Henzel for his work on this series of articles. Ron and his wife Wendy, belonged to a "spiritually abusive group" (with an evangelical Statement of Faith) in the past and now spends part of his time counseling others who have been hurt by spiritual abuse. Ron is also a graduate student at Wheaton College located in Wheaton, Illinois.

"Gift" (Continued from Page 3)

gift of forgiveness. Tell Him you want to receive Him.

But isn't that too easy? Many people have said that to me. I like to turn it around on them ... WHY SHOULD IT BE HARD? Does God really want us to receive His gift or not? If I want to give you a gift, would it make sense to offer it to you but then make it nearly impossible for you to actually *receive* it? Receiving a gift should be easy, and it *is*!!!

If there are any reading this who realize that although they have known things *about* God for all their lives, they have never really *known* him, please call on Him today. Receive God's Christmas gift this Christmas. Ω

Love to all,

*Joy*

#### O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

How silently, how silently  
The wondrous gift is given  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of His heaven  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell  
O come to us, abide with us  
Our Lord Immanuel  
No ear may hear His coming  
But in this world of sin  
Where meek souls do receive Him still  
The new Christ enters in

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Guest: **Clete Hux**

**October 18**

"Answering Atheists"

Guest: **Richard Howe**

**October 25**

TBA

**November 1**

"Creation vs. Evolution"

Guest: **Dr. Walt Brown**

**November 8**

"Hinduism"

Guest: **Jerry Yamamoto**

**November 15**

"The Christian Identity Movement"

Guest: **Dr. Bob Hart**

**November 22**

"Law vs. Grace"

Guest: **Jim Kirkwood**

**November 29**

"Six Enemies of Apologetic  
Engagement"

Guest: **Dr. Doug Groothuis**

**December 6**

"The Roots of Liberal Politics"

Guest: **Dr. H. Wayne House**

**December 13**

"Postmodernism and Its Impact  
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## "Prophecy" (Cont. from Page 5)

some forms of Buddhism (especially Zen), means detachment from the ego, the bodily senses, the emotions, and the world. These belief systems are dualistic, contrasting matter (bad) with spirit (good).

New Age thinking has adopted this dualistic philosophy, teaching that matter is a denser form of energy, or energy vibrating at a lower level, as explained in Redfield's book. Therefore, almost anything not material and not rooted in the rational mind is good: intuition, dreams, meditation, transcending the body. Not only are these things considered good, but they are considered spiritual because they are viewed as an opposition to the material world of the five senses. (Eyes, ears, taste, smell, and touch are part of the body.) A good diet is important because the wrong food is denser and lowers the spiritual vibration or upsets the flow of life force in the body. Far from advocating health for health's sake, the New Age promotes good health because it is connected to the New Age concept of good spirituality. Although the New Age is credited with a holistic view of health because of its emphasis on the connection of body with mind and spirit, it is actually anti-holistic since it tends to value the spiritual over the material and views the body only as a temporary form for the spirit and life force.

In contrast to dualism, passages in the Bible speak of our bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Furthermore, those who are in Christ are told that our bodies will be resurrected one day as a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-49). This spiritual body does not mean a non-material or ghostly body because our example is the resurrected body of Jesus. After He rose from the dead, Christ was touched by both Mary and Thomas, and He cooked fish on the beach and ate it with His disciples (John 21:1-15).

Unlike the gnostic, Eastern, and New Age beliefs, Christianity does not dismiss the body as an illusion, a temporary shelter for a spirit or a dense vibrational form. The body, created by God, is precious and is part of who we are. Ironically, it is New Age thinking that devalues the body, not Christianity.

If you know someone who liked this book, ask that person these questions:

What hope is offered in  
*The Celestine Prophecy* for  
humanity?

To evolve into a higher  
vibrational invisible form?

To have our individuality  
swallowed up in an imper-  
sonal cosmic identity?

To be left behind if we do  
not catch on to esoteric doc-  
trines?

And what are we evol-  
ving toward?

Spiritual advancement implies a stan-  
dard by which we are measured; other-  
wise, the idea of progress is meaningless.  
What is this standard and where does it  
come from? Who set up the standard; who  
is running the show? How do we know  
that what this book, describes as spiritual  
evolvment is good? And how is "good"  
defined anyway? The silence of *The  
Celestine Prophecy* on these issues lingers  
on long after the book's nine esoteric in-  
sights have been revealed. Ω

The *Journal* would like to thank  
Marcia Montenegro for untangling this  
issue's spider's web. Before salvation in  
Christ in late 1990, Marcia was a profes-  
sional licensed astrologer for eight years,  
served on the Atlanta Board of Astrology  
Examiners for four years (three as chair-  
person), was President of the Metropoli-  
tan Atlanta Astrological Society, taught  
astrology for more than five years and  
wrote for astrological/New Age publica-  
tions. In addition to astrology, Marcia  
studied and participated in Eastern reli-  
gious practices, psychic techniques, and  
various forms of the occult for more  
than 15 years. Her world view was com-  
pletely based in these belief systems;  
she found *The Celestine Prophecy* to be  
very familiar territory.



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# A FLY ON THE WALL

by Joy A. Veinot

**Householder:** "Aren't Jehovah's Witnesses a cult?"

**\*JW:** "Why no, we're not. Did your Pastor tell you that?"

**Householder:** "No. Actually, I have heard that they fit the criteria associated with cults, such as much use of fear and guilt to gain and control members, deceptive recruiting practices, information and thought control, etc."

**JW:** "Oh no. We don't do those things."

**Householder:** "Do you mean to say you have given thought to this?"

**JW:** "Why no, I don't have to think about it. Awhile back, in the Feb. 15, 1994 issue, the *Watchtower* told us all about these destructive cults, and said that we Jehovah's Witnesses are definitely not one."

**Householder:** "Do you always believe everything they say?"

**JW:** "Of course. Why would they lie? They are God's channel of communication on Earth!"

**Householder:** "How do you know that?"

**JW:** "The *Watchtower* told me so!"

**Householder:** "Are you sure that you can trust them?"

**JW:** "Oh yes! In fact, the April 1, 1972 *Watchtower* says that they are God's prophet."

**Householder:** "Have any of their prophecies ever come true?"

**JW:** "Er, not yet ... but we never claimed to be inspired."

**Householder:** "I've heard of true and false prophets in the Bible ... I have never heard of an uninspired prophet before."

**JW:** "Well, I know for sure that, although the Society has given false alarms, they are not a genuine false prophet."

**Householder:** "How do you know? Did you ever really look into it?"

**JW:** "Well, not exactly ... I read it in the March 22, 1993 *Awake!*."

**Householder:** "Do you think that, if they were a false prophet, they would tell you? I can't remember any false prophet admitting to being one."

**JW:** "You've got this all wrong ... the *Watchtower* never claimed to be infallible ... they make mistakes."

**Householder:** "Here's my problem with that. If the 'meat in due season' is transmitted to the Governing Body through angels, as has sometimes been claimed, or the Holy Spirit, why would these 'truths' be false?"

**JW:** "Well, you see, they are true when they are transmitted, but they become false at a later time."

**Householder:** "That doesn't make sense to me."

**JW:** "You have to read the *Watchtower* to understand all about new light and so forth."

**Householder:** "Doesn't the Bible tell us not to listen to those who promulgate false prophecies?"

**JW:** "But they are not really false prophecies, just mistakes ..."

**Householder:** "Would an Old Testament false prophet get off the hook by claiming that his false prophecies were merely 'mistakes'?"

**JW:** "The March 22, 1993 *Awake!* explains that the Society never claimed that they spoke the words of Jehovah."

**Householder:** "What about the January 15, 1959 *Watchtower*, p.41, or the *Holy Spirit* book, pp.175-176, where the claim is made that Jehovah has put his word into their mouths. They use those very words."

**JW:** "They never said that!"

**Householder:** "But they did ... would you like to see a photocopy of this?"



**JW:** "NO! I'm sorry, but I can't look at apostate material! I guess I shouldn't be talking to you anymore."

**Householder:** "What makes the old *Watchtower* material 'apostate'?" And anyway, if you can't read something which may be critical of the Society, isn't that 'information and thought control' as employed by destructive cults?"

**JW:** "I don't think there is anything more to discuss ... you don't seem very 'meek and teachable' ..."

**Householder:** "If I was too meek and teachable, couldn't I get caught up in a cult???"

*\*Jehovah's Witness*



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## ***IN THIS ISSUE!***

- **The Gift** Pg. 1  
 Joy A. Veinot
- **The Celestine Prophecy** Pg. 4  
 Marcia Montenegro
- Bill Gothard's Evangelical Talmud Pt.2** Pg. 6  
 Ron Henzel