

Weighed Down With False Doctrine

by Joy A. and L.L. (Don) Veinot

We must admit that doing research on, or writing about, a weight-loss program, is not something that had previously crossed our minds. That is until Monday and Tuesday, August 22 and 23. On those dates, we received between 25-30 e-mails and phone calls regarding one program in particular—the *Weigh Down Workshop*, and its leader—Gwen Shamblin. Several discerning women had found some odd statements by Shamblin on the *Weigh Down Workshop* web-site that upset them, and they called to see what information we might have on the subject.

We immediately surfed over to her web-site to check it out. What we found disturbed us greatly.¹ After speaking with Gwen personally and finding her theology to be greatly in error (and not simply a problem with wording), we set about spreading the word via e-mail lists and radio broadcasts, etc. The response has been huge. As of this writing, we have received hundreds of e-mails and phone calls from distressed or confused people needing the information we have gleaned from our telephone discussion with Shamblin, from her web-site, her books, and e-mail updates she sends to her *WDW* coordinators, and to those who visit her web-site.

The Diet Craze

So many today want to be thin, because thin is in. It seems “thinness” is next to Godliness ... ☺ As all of our readers are undoubtedly aware, there are gazillions of weight-loss programs available today. All of these programs seem to work to some degree for some people. The key to success with these various plans seems to hinge upon whether a particular person can follow the prescribed diet. How long can the dieter stand to eat meat without potatoes—or potatoes without meat, bread without butter—or butter without bread?

Some of these programs are extremely complicated, while others

take the work out of dieting by offering prepared meals. Some rely heavily on exercise, while others promise no exercise is needed because the Guinea pig, er, I mean, dieter, is told he or she can rely on metabolism-raising “energy” drops or pills to burn off that excess fat. Every diet, however, seems to have its championing “guru,” who explains why *their* program is the right plan for everyone. High-protein diets come and go, high-carb diets do the same. Some count calories, others count fat grams, while the diet gurus happily count the money pouring into their bank accounts.

We have been told that weight-loss books are the third most popular book category, raking in millions of dollars from folks desperate to lose that extra poundage. It is no exaggeration to note that we are obsessed with our weight—to the point that millions of Americans (especially young girls) suffer with various eating disorders resulting from the quest for bodily perfection. Most Americans have tried at least some of these programs, and most of us have been disappointed in the end. Some folks lose weight and keep it off, it’s true; but many more of us lose some and gain back most within a short period of time.

This is not to say there is something inherently wrong with trying to lose weight and be as physically fit as possible. Nonetheless, as the Apostle Paul points out, bodily discipline is only of *little* benefit compared to “weightier” matters of true godliness—which entails holding to *sound doctrine*. After warning the flock that “*in the latter days, some would follow false teachers and forsake the faith,*” Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:6 that holding to sound doctrine is the discipline that truly matters, since it does not pass away with this life but builds into the life to come.

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"... For bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds, promise for the present life and also for the life to come." (1 Timothy 4:8)

Who cares about doctrine, anyway?

Gwen seems confident that modern Christians, women in particular, do not agree with Paul. She seems to believe this current uproar about her denial of the Trinity is but a minor doctrinal flap that will not harm her ministry in the long run, because " 'People don't care about this,' Shamblin told CT. 'They don't care about the Trinity. This is going to pass. What the women want is weight loss.' " ² Girls just wanna have fun ...

Gwen's confident statement is, of course, a terrible slap in the face to Christian womanhood. Happily, though, we are finding she has badly underestimated the depth of "the sisters" devotion to "the faith once delivered"—it has been Christian women overwhelmingly that have led the charge to expose Shamblin's false views on the Trinity doctrine. ³

The Weigh Down Guru

The *Weigh Down Workshop* has been an extremely popular program among Christians—currently there are 30-35,000 workshops (mostly in churches), in over 60 denominations in 70 countries around the world. But who is Gwen Shamblin? According to her bio, she "is a registered dietitian with a master's degree in food and nutrition, and was a full-time faculty member at the University of Memphis for five years. She worked as a nutritionist for the state health department and has focused her consulting practice in the area of weight control since 1980. In 1986 she founded *Weigh Down Workshop, Inc.* ..." ⁴

In 1992, Shamblin began distributing audio and video cassettes, and also workbooks of her program. Twenty churches signed up almost immediately. The program quickly crossed denominational lines and throughout 1992 it added about 20 churches per month. By January of 1993, this number grew to 60 per month and the secular media started to pay attention. Over the next several years, Gwen was featured in a number of major periodicals and newspapers, such as *Woman's Day*, the *New York Times*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Self*, *USA Today*, and *National Enquirer*. In 1997 her first book, *The Weigh Down Diet*, was published by Doubleday and sold more than a million copies. Soon she

appeared on *Hard Copy*, *A Current Affair*, *James Robison*, *The 700 Club*, ABC's *The View*, *20/20*, and *Larry King Live*. She gained international renown by being interviewed on foreign media outlets. In 1998, she launched a second program called *Out of Egypt* to deal with other addictions.

This year (2000), Thomas Nelson Publishers published Shamblin's second book, *Rise Above*. It was launched with a 25-city publishing tour with expected sales of 2,000,000. Currently, this book has sold over 185,000 copies. ⁵ The cost of the workshop is \$103.00 for a first-time participant with a \$50.00 additional fee for a second family member. Over 1,000,000 people have taken or are currently taking her workshop. All in all, the money pouring in to *Weigh Down's* coffers is probably enough to make a televangelist jealous. ☺

No Pain, All Gain—Move Over Richard Simmons!

Why is her program so popular? In a day of very confusing diet regimens, Gwen's program seems uncomplicated by contrast. Exercise, which just happens to be a very unpopular feature of dieting to most people, is said (by Gwen) to be completely unnecessary to your dietar success and is, indeed, harmful, since causes you to focus on yourself instead of God. Counting calories or grams, another onerous component of many diets, is said to focus the dieter's attention on food instead of on God. Either way, God is getting shortchanged while you—Diane and Danny Dieter—are merely getting frustrated.

Gwen's premise is simple—if your relationship with God is right, you will not be overweight, and you will also effortlessly conquer other addictions and relationship problems. On the surface, that sounds like a very good thing. After all, Christianity is about being redeemed from the sin which separates us from God, and cultivating, in the years that remain, an intimate relationship with the wonderful God Who saved us. Could any program promising to help Christians build that relationship be harmful to anyone?

Give The Pastor's A Bit Of A Break

In all fairness, most pastors and church leaders probably did not even consider that Gwen and her *Weigh Down Workshop* would be teaching any kind of theology to their flocks—much less heretical theology. We're guessing that, to most pastors and

church leaders, WDW was “just a diet thing.” If their people were losing weight and discovered a closer relationship with God in the process, well, all the better. And, how bad could WDW be, since after all, the program was in 30,000 churches in 60 denominations in 10 countries, featured on the *700 Club*, and published by Thomas Nelson. In short, Gwen had the Evangelical imprimatur—she must be okay. We Evangelicals do tend to let down our guard and simply trust folks who are trusted by other Evangelical Christians. We don’t follow a Pope, but we do sometimes follow each other into folly.

Without assigning blame, however, it has become apparent that, despite her expanding popularity in Christian circles, all is not well as far as Shamblin’s doctrinal soundness is concerned. A few discerning people who were taking or leading the workshops began looking at the material a little closer and wondering, “Where is the gospel of *GRACE* in all of this?” “Why does she mention Jesus so little?” and “Why, when she talks about God, does she generally refer only to the Father, but rarely the Son?” It wouldn’t be long before these “Bereans” got their answer, which brings us to the here and now.

The Phones Start Ringing

In mid-August, WDW changed the “*Statement of Faith*” on their web-site, and that is when our concerned calls and e-mails started pouring in. The new *Statement of Faith* denies the doctrine of the Trinity—one of the fundamentals of the historic Christian faith.

We quote WDW’s *Statement of Faith* directly from their web-site:

“As a ministry, we believe in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. However, the Bible does not use the word “trinity,” and our feeling is that the word “trinity” implies equality in leadership, or shared Lordship. It is clear that the scriptures teach that Jesus is the Son of God and that God sends the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not send God anywhere. God is clearly the Head. Note this passage from 1 Corinthians 15:27-28: “For he ‘has put everything under his feet.’ Now when it says that ‘everything’ has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.” Philippians 2:6 says that Jesus “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.” Therefore, we feel that we grieve Jesus when we do not watch our words and their meaning—especially a word not found in either the Old or New Testament, writings that span centuries of God’s inspired word. If God had wanted us to refer to Himself, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit as the “trinity,” He would not have left this word completely out of the Bible.”⁶

This statement, both its content and wording, set off alarm bells in us (familiar as we are with cultic doctrine), because it sounds much more like Jehovah’s Witness argumentation than Orthodox Christian doctrine. After spending a fair amount of time reviewing her web-site, we called Gwen Shamblin on Wednesday, August 23. We had hoped that, perhaps, Gwen’s statements reflected mere ignorance on the subject—that she might have been employing imprecise or incorrect language without understanding the issues involved. We hoped we might be able to persuade her to correct her statement before we were forced to sound the alarm. Certainly, we reasoned, she had not intended to deny a fundamental teaching

that the church universal (as well as all the churches that sponsor her workshops) holds as a cardinal doctrine. Sadly, our conversation only confirmed that Gwen is even more deeply entrenched in heresy than we had surmised from her web-site pronouncements, and she is not at all open to reexamining her position.

In our discussion, Gwen categorically denied the doctrine of the Trinity, asserting that it is “unbiblical.” As quoted above in her web-site statement, she repeated to us her specious argument that “the word ‘Trinity’ is not found in the Bible,” which is a common straw-man argument employed by anti-Trinitarians. The argument implies, of course, that if the *word* is not found in the Bible, the *concept* must be “man-made.” We responded by pointing out there are many valid theological terms that are not found in the Bible, for the very good reason that the Bible is not a theology book. For example, the word “Bible” is not found in the Bible, but the term is not unbiblical. As Anton Hein points out:

“A person who claims the doctrine of the Trinity is false because the word “Trinity” is not found in Scripture is as foolish as someone who claims 3½ inches, or, say, 5¼ centimeters do not exist because his ruler only shows whole numbers. The doctrine of the Trinity is presented in Scripture clearly enough for spiritual people to recognize, and solidly enough for unspiritual people to stumble over.”⁷

After acknowledging our argument was valid,⁸ Gwen insisted the doctrine of the Trinity is a pagan doctrine brought into the church in the third century. This, of course, is yet another familiar argument employed by JWs and other cult groups to deny the Trinity and shows Gwen’s abysmal ignorance of both Biblical teaching and Church history.

The Early Church “Paganized” the Faith

What Gwen is probably alluding to is the fourth-century (325 AD) Council of Nicea. Anti-Trinitarians like Gwen often argue that since the doctrine was *codified* at that time, the early church fathers just grabbed the concept out of either pagan tradition or thin air. This simply is not true. The Council was called to combat Arius who arose with the heretical idea that Christ was a created being brought into existence by the Father at some point in time. At Nicea, the church merely formalized (put in writing) what the Church *had been teaching up to that time* in order to expose Arius’ false view. For the first three centuries, there was no argument about Jesus’ deity—all Christians believed He was God—so there was no need to formally declare it to be so. It was only when the doctrine was *challenged* by Arius and those with him that it became necessary to codify the teaching and work out the exact language that would best explain precisely what the Bible taught (and the church believed) about the relationship between the Father and the Son. They didn’t make up the *concept*, but the *language* used to identify the concept.⁹

Aside from the Biblical passages that reveal Jesus is indeed God, the early church Fathers (such as Justin Martyr) believed that the Jesus Christ of the Gospels was YHWH or Jehovah of the Old Testament *long before the Council of Nicea*. In his *Dialogue With Trypho*, Justin Martyr devotes his entire argument to Jesus being YHWH. Trypho, like Gwen, struggled with this:

“And Trypho said, ‘You endeavor to prove an incredible and well-nigh impossible thing; [namely], that God endured to be born and become man.’”¹⁰

Justin responds using the LXX or Septuagint translation:

“... This very man who was crucified is proved to have been set forth expressly as God, and man, and

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as being crucified, and dying ...”¹¹

And far from the idea that the Trinity doctrine was made-up at the Nicean Council in 325, we find that, as early as the late second century in a dialog with Praxeas, Tertullian wrote,

“If the number of the Trinity also offends you, as if it were not connected to simple unity, I ask you how it is possible for a Being who is merely and absolutely One and Singular, to speak in plural phrase, saying, ‘Let us make man in our own image, and after our own likeness’; whereas He ought to have said, ‘Let me make man in my own image and after my own likeness ...’”¹²

Many times those who deny the doctrine of the Trinity do so because it doesn’t fit their worldly idea of what God’s nature *must* be like if we are to “understand” Him perfectly. The thinking is that if they cannot fully understand the nature of God as it is revealed in Scripture, they are free to reject some portion of that revelation. God must, above all, “make sense” to their rational minds. Because human beings are singular, personal beings, a tri-personal being doesn’t “make sense” and *must* be rejected. But much confusion is avoided when we recognize God is not just like us—He is a whole different “life form,” so to speak. His nature doesn’t have to follow our rules. It also helps to have a working knowledge of hermeneutics—the methodology of scriptural interpretation. We want to understand what the writer of the text in question meant by what he said, rather than force our own understanding onto the text.

Lack of Understanding

Gwen asked me, “When you get to heaven, will you see one person on one throne or two persons on two thrones?” This question exposes a lack of understanding of the Bible’s use of a literary technique known as anthropomorphic language. When Scripture speaks of Christ sitting at the “right hand of God,” it is not teaching that Christ is sitting in a physical location, next to the Father’s physical “right hand,” attached to the Father’s physical body, sitting on a physical throne. The Scripture is speaking in human terms (anthropomorphism) describing the Son’s position of authority as the Father’s “right-hand man.” To be at someone’s right hand, then, is to be in a position of power.

God the Father is Spirit and does not have a physical body (John 4:23-24), but believing that God is a finite being is yet another heresy Gwen apparently shares to some extent with the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormon’s and other groups. God, according to the “finite god” view, is like a really big man—very powerful but limited by space and time constraints. He exists in a physical location, has a body, doesn’t know everything, cannot be everywhere at once, and is not all-powerful.¹³ In her book *Rise Above*, she writes about God the Father:

“God is so good-looking, so athletic, so powerful, and so charming that upon first sight, we would all immediately bow down and adore Him. So He made Himself invisible to make the contest a little more fair. On top of that, He is such a humble gentleman that He took us to Egypt and allowed us to meet His rival face-to-face.”¹⁴

It seems the finite god she portrays is also limited in knowledge:

“He is going to let us “date around” – that’s plan A – so we can appreciate what a great choice He is. But unfortunately, some of His children – in fact, a *lot* of His children – have lost their focus and become distracted, and therefore found their hearts enslaved to Egypt, with no idea of how to get out of this relation-

ship. This was not part of Plan A. So God had to resort to Plan B: a duel – a boxing match – a fight.”¹⁵

Interestingly, those who reject it often label the Trinity doctrine a pagan teaching, but it is truly the “finite god” view that comes directly from pagan sources. For example, the Greco-Roman gods such as Zeus, Apollos, and Thor, were very much like the god of the JW’s and the Mormons. The gods of the pantheon had bodies and many characteristics of mortal men and women. This undeniably made their gods easier to identify with than the Holy and unique triune God of the Bible, but they were nevertheless *false* gods. YHWH in Exodus 3:14 reveals His name to Moses as “**I AM that I AM.**” Jesus revealed Himself to be that same person when he told the Pharisees in John 8:58, “**Before Abraham was, I AM, which is why they immediately picked up stones to execute Him for blasphemy.**” God is what He is—we must accept Him as He has revealed Himself to be in His word.

Defining the Trinity

Before going further, it behooves us to define the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Using the terms “*nature or being*” as meaning “*genus, sort or essence*” and “*person*” as meaning “*character*,” the true definition, constantly misstated and twisted by heretical teachers, is as follows—

Within the *nature* of the one true God, there exist three equal and eternal *persons*, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Trinitarians do not believe in three gods, nor do we believe the three persons of the godhead are merely different modes or manifestations of the same person. The Father is not the Son—the Son is not the Holy Spirit.

Jesus the Firstborn

In response to Gwen’s question about the number of thrones in heaven, we asked her if, in her view, the Father and Son are two separate beings. Her immediate reply was “Absolutely!” She then turned to Colossians 1:15 and asserted that since Jesus is here called the “**first-born of all creation**” he came into existence at a point in time. This would in effect mean Jesus is merely a created being, the first creation of God the Father. Again, Colossians 1:15 is another favorite verse employed (and twisted) by JW’s and other anti-Trinitarians to lower Christ to the status of a mere creature.

At this point, we must ask how is it Gwen unerringly chooses the exact verses and arguments used by heretical groups to buttress her position? It has taken the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society over a century to perfect their Scripture-twisting techniques to promote their heretical dogmas. Are we to believe Gwen came up with these exact same arguments all on her own—without being influenced in some way by one or more of the heretical groups that have been around for awhile? In any case, judging by her bedfellows, Gwen is keeping very bad company indeed.

Having said that though, let’s examine the verse (Colossians 1:15) Gwen cites—why IS Jesus called the “firstborn?” What does it mean? Right off the bat, we can easily prove it does not mean “first-created” without even turning a page! Jesus *never* had a beginning, and He created all things that ever came into being as the passage clearly goes on to state.

“**For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him.**”

(Colossians 1:16-17)

John 1:3 adds to this by saying,

“All things came into existence by Him, and apart from Him, nothing came into being that has come into being.”

These two passages alone make it very clear: IF Jesus is a creature who came into existence at some point in time, he would have had to have created Himself!

So, what does the phrase *“firstborn of all creation”* mean if it has no reference to Jesus coming into existence at some point in time? As we explained to Gwen, the term “first-born” is a title denoting that Jesus Christ is the One who has the right to rule over creation. (Why? Because He created it!)

Biblical usage of the term “firstborn” has to do with preeminence—the one with the right to rule. It is a title, station or position. For example: In Exodus 4:22, even though Israel was not the first nation to come into existence, God calls His chosen people the *“first-born.”* David was likewise called the *“first-born”* in Psalm 89:27, even though he was the youngest—the last-born son of Jesse. We find in 1 Chronicles 5:1 that the title or position, *“first-born”* can be lost or forfeited to another. Reuben lost his rightful pre-eminent position in the family of Israel (his “first-born-ness,” if you will) due to evil behavior. Esau sold his birthright as the *“first-born”* to his younger brother Jacob for a pot of stew. By comparing Genesis 41:51-52 to Jeremiah 31:9, we see that Manasseh was the first born of Joseph’s sons, but later God calls Ephraim the *“first-born.”*

The entire teaching of Colossians is communicating the preeminence of Christ over all of creation. He existed before anything was created, and when everything WAS created, He created it!

The Jesus-plus Plan

The Bible teaches people are saved by God’s grace alone, (Eph. 2:9) through faith alone in Christ alone, apart from works or human effort. Salvation is a *GIFT* (Rom. 6:23). Praise God! ☺ Sadly, like all cults and pseudo-Christian groups, Gwen ridicules this teaching as “cheap grace” which supposedly gives people license to sin.

And, like all cults and pseudo-Christian groups, Gwen’s salvation scheme, as laid out in her writings, could rightly be called “the Jesus-plus plan.” It is a works-centered salvation where the sacrificial death of Jesus will only be applied to those who perform the right types and amounts of works. The “right types and amounts” differ from cult to cult, but the core idea is the same.

Working Hard For Eternal Life

Gwen’s idea of salvation involves earning God’s approval by our own Herculean efforts. In her view, grace is cheap—works are what matter! In her archived e-mail #22 and audio tape #4 from the *Out of Egypt* series, she talks about the book of James and concludes, “So you see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.” Here again, Gwen finds herself in bad company.

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (along with numerous other “works-for-salvation” groups) misuses the Bible book of James *in exactly the same way as she does* to convince their hapless adherents they must continually try to earn God’s favor by continuously proving their “loyalty” to Him. It’s a hamster’s wheel of a life—round and round and round you go friend, and you better not slow down, and don’t even think about stopping for a rest.

Let’s address this issue in the book of James and what the quoted passage means before moving on. First of all, we must clarify terms—does the word “justification” mean the same thing wherever it is used? No. Like many Biblical terms, its meaning is

determined by the context in which it is used. To be “justified” does, of course, mean “to declare righteous” in some Biblical places where it is used but certainly not all of them.

The book of Romans, for example, chapter 3, verse 4, speaks of God Himself being “justified” when He was “judged,” yet God has never had to be “declared righteous” by some higher authority in order to gain salvation, as we indeed must. This verse is speaking of God being judged *by men* and being “justified,” proved right and righteous, in the eyes or opinion *of men*. Here in James the word has that same application of being *proved* righteous, and being shown by their actions *to be* righteous. It also has the idea of having our human righteousness proved to be of benefit or “useful, vital, alive” to others in a practical way. If our faith has no works, it is indeed “dead” or useless to a brother or sister who is hungry or in need of shelter. Without going into great detail here, the context of James is justification before *men*, not before God. This fits well with Paul’s statement in Romans, chapter four, when he says that *if* works did indeed justify anyone (even Abraham), such “justification” would not mean justification *before God*.

“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say” ‘AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.’ Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.” (Romans 4:1-5)¹⁷

Gwen’s Bible-Plus Plan

Many cults are what we call pseudo-Christian groups, in that they use Christian wording in their presentations and even seem to promote regular Bible reading. In so doing, many Christians are caught off guard, and do not recognize these wolves in sheep’s clothing. (See attached article on page 15.) Of course, such “Bible study” is really more or less a guided tour through such passages as can be twisted to propagate the cult’s doctrine. The group leader’s *interpretation of the Bible* is what is really important and must be gleaned from their material (which is required reading) and which, in effect, sits on top of the Bible.

The Mormon Church uses the King James Version of the Bible and even gives them away, but the Bible alone will not teach you the truth. For that, you need the *Book of Mormon* and the other “scriptures” of the Latter-day Saints. The LDS Eighth Article of Faith states they accept the Bible “insofar as it is translated correctly.” They also accept the *Book of Mormon* and other Mormon books as scripture, but without this qualifying statement.

Jehovah’s Witnesses are required to read and study their Bible, but they are taught that they cannot hope to understand it without the “help” of their boys in Brooklyn. To stay in “the truth” (as they term it), one must read all their publications and believe all that one reads.

Gwen’s misuse of James is only the beginning building block in her works/salvation house. She seeks to tie an individual’s salvation, his or her hope of being “born again,” to repetitiously reading and devotedly absorbing “God’s word,” by which we presume that she means the Bible, AND her material and workshops.

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Such fidelity to God's word and her material, she claims, will cause one to be "born again."

"After conceiving this truth, stay in God's Word, and stay in your workbook, the tapes, the videos, and the class, all the while continuing to ignore the lies and letting this truth grow. Repeat it every day, all the time. Believe it, and after five weeks you will have been born again of Holy Seed."¹⁸

"Born again of Holy Seed?"—Somehow we doubt the Apostle Peter had the *Weigh Down Workshop* in mind when he penned those words in 1 Peter 1:23. See how Gwen seems to promote the Bible while twisting and destroying its life-giving message? And she uses Christian terminology (born again) while obviously changing its meaning to suit her fancy.

True Prophet or False?

On what basis does Gwen make such astounding and disturbing claims about her prominent role in the salvation of others? Shamblin considers herself a prophetess ... She says,

"I feel like I have the same calling that Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Amos, Zephaniah, and Micah all had ..." ¹⁹

"How and why this message has been left out of the most basic church teaching is a mystery, but in many ways, we now have an opportunity to go back and plant the Good News inside both non-Christians AND the lukewarm pew-warmers that we all have in our own churches. In other words, this is true evangelism and true missionary work, and all of you are planting true 'holy seeds.' "²⁰

With incredible hubris, she tells her followers,

"You need to be able to take this message back to other people, because we are turning God's church and kingdom around in the year 2000."²¹

Will the "true remnant" please stand up?

The remnant of faithful Israel, spoken of in the Bible (about true *Jewish Israelites*, we maintain) has really gotten around in recent centuries. Adventists of all stripes, from the 1800's and forward, consider themselves to be that faithful remnant, as do the Jehovah's Witnesses and other pseudo-Christian sects. All of them have believed themselves to be "restoring true Christianity" to the world after it was "lost" by the big bad church at some point in Christian history. Gwen looks to be jumping into that leaky rowboat hoping to restore that "true remnant" just one more time. Our question is: Who is going to tell the others? ☺ Will they leave *their* "true remnant" to join Gwen's? Stay tuned ...

Gwen's Remnant Arising

In order to facilitate their mission of "evangelizing the church," three couples (Gwen Shamblin, Joe Langsdon, their spouses, and another couple) started a church called Remnant Fellowship about 18 months ago. It started out as a Bible study and has grown to a fellowship of about 80 people. When we called *Weigh Down Workshop* to talk with Gwen, option five on her answering machine was offering information about this new entity—Remnant Fellowship. Our curiosity aroused, we left a message requesting information—Joe Langsdon returned our call. According to Mr. Langsdon, not only does Remnant Fellowship share the phone system with WDW; the newly formed group meets in the WDW warehouse.

This is America, the land of the free, so Gwen and her followers have every right to start their own church ... even a heretical one. But the churches that sponsor her workshop need to be aware her agenda is nothing less than to pull their people away from them and

place them into her "true church." As we have pointed out, she intends to "evangelize and revolutionize" the church in the year 2000. It is ironic the churches have given her a platform and provided the finances she is now using to steal their members from them.

Judging The Churches

In an e-mail which Joe Langsdon sent out in preparation for an upcoming meeting about the Remnant Fellowship, he asks the WDW coordinators (and other readers) to consider whether other churches out there in their communities are *really* spiritual.

"While you are pondering about what to do [about leaving your church and joining the Remnant Fellowship], listen to the prayers being offered at local fellowships and what is said at communion or what is emphasized in the sermons in your city or town. Are they truly producing the fruit of total repentance? Are people aware that Jesus warned, "Repent or perish"? Does everyone talk and encourage one another to die to self? Do people really live as if they are excited about total Lordship of Jesus Christ or has church become more of a social club? Is leadership unified over these issues, or is there division?"

Joe is telling the folks to judge their church by WDW criteria to determine if it is everything it should be. Does their church emphasize what Gwen emphasizes in the same way as she does; OR is it just a disunited social club with no one stressing the "total Lordship of Jesus Christ?" ("Total Lordship" as defined, of course, by Gwen.) Do they preach the grace-less "repent or perish" theology of Shamblin's, or do they teach what Gwen refers to as "cheap grace"—salvation by grace through faith as, incidentally, taught by the Apostle Paul? But then, who is Paul? He never called himself a prophet, and never mentioned weight loss, so maybe he really did not understand true faith.

Now, we agree that Christians ought to be discerning—even or, maybe, especially about what is going on in their own churches; but Gwen & Company's motives are highly suspect since they are seeking to draw folks into *their* fellowship.

Babylon the Great

One almost universal characteristic of cult groups is their hatred and extremely harsh criticism of the church in general. Gwen is increasingly taking on this characteristic. Her very negative opinion of the churches that are trustingly hosting her workshops is very troublesome to say the least. Says Gwen,

"Most of us have simply created a God that is not found in the Bible, a Jesus that is not to be found in the Word of God, a religious institution that is not found in the book of Acts, and a set of rules that cannot be backed up by Scripture – and we are bowing down to that."²²

"We are to rebuild the walls and ruined temple. But we are going to have to wake up and realize that we have been in Babylon. We have actually been sitting in religious institutions that have allowed increasing rebellion to God. So before you can even start rebuilding the temple, most of us are going to have to understand God's word well enough to know that we have to pack our bags and get out from underneath leadership that has allowed a grace message that gives people a license to sin"²³

We don't know of *any* Bible-teaching, grace-believing churches who give people a "license to sin." We have yet to hear a sermon promoting adultery, stealing, etc., in order to receive

more grace. This “come-out-of-Babylon” rant does not reflect a sincere desire to encourage Christian holiness as much as it reflects Gwen’s utter contempt for the teaching of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, by Christ alone. And here again, Gwen is in bad company—another characteristic of cults is their propensity to refer to the churches contemptuously as “Babylon,” and appeal for folks to leave “her” and come join the “true church.” When you remember the book of Revelation teaches “Babylon” is the great whore which God is about to destroy, you get some idea of Gwen’s feeling for YOU, Pastor.

Question Your Church Leaders— Don’t Question Me

Gwen’s audacity is astounding—on the one hand she strongly encourages her followers to question their church leadership, but they are NOT to question her or Remnant Fellowship! According to Joe Langdon’s e-mail, questions in the minds of the followers came from Satan:

“I am praying for all of you. I know that Satan is putting questions in your minds, but hold to the ‘good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit’ quote from Jesus.”

Again, we have heard this many times before. Cults always tell their people that any doubts or questions about their group or its leaders come from Satan himself. Questioning *your church*, of course, is different—that’s just spiritual discernment.

I’m From God—Believe Everything I Say

Gwen tells us we must listen to and follow EVERYTHING she says and not to “arrogantly pick and choose” which teachings strike us as correct.

“The people who have less trouble with the deceitful lies that keep you overeating are the people who watched Weigh Down’s Orientation Video and decided for themselves freely from the start that I was a leader from God, so they submitted themselves freely to the teachings on the tapes and followed EVERYTHING. They did not arrogantly pick and choose some of the teachings, but ALL of them, because they knew they were from the Lord ...”²⁴

Here’s a little tip for you, friends. When someone, ANYONE, claims: “I’m from God so you have to believe everything I say,”—this is your cue to head for the exit! Do not pass go, do not collect \$200! If you care at all about your fellow man (and as a Christian you should) *as you are leaving* say to the person next to you, “Let’s get outta here!”

To say it is “arrogant” to “pick and choose” (in other words, THINK about what one is being taught and to decide what to accept or reject) is in, itself, breathtakingly arrogant. Only cult leaders say such things. In fact, that’s WHY we call them cult leaders.

Independent thinking is a very good thing, sometimes a lifesaving exercise. In the world of cults, it just may keep you from drinking that poisoned Kool-Ade, or it may induce you to allow your injured child to receive a life-saving blood transfusion. Remember, for a moment, those deluded folks who were in the Heaven’s Gate cult a few years back. What if they had decided it was okay for them to “pick and choose” what to believe of what Applewhite was teaching them. They may have “chosen” to believe there was a spaceship behind the Hale-Bopp comet, while “picking” NOT to believe it was in their best interests to castrate and kill themselves. Cult leaders always discourage “picking and choosing.” It’s their M.O.* ...

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society also does not encourage their folks to pick and choose what to believe of what they are taught by the organization bosses in Brooklyn, NY, but are commanded to submit to these men as if to God Himself, since God supposedly appointed them:

“If we have love for Jehovah and for the organization of his people we shall not be suspicious but shall, as the Bible says, ‘believe all things,’ all the things that The Watchtower brings out ...”²⁵

“Recognize and accept this appointment [by Jesus] of the ‘faithful and discreet slave’ and be submissive to it.”²⁶

“The apostate makes himself a decider of what is true and what is false, of what is ‘good and bad’ in the way of spiritual food.”²⁷

So on the one hand, Gwen wants pastors and other church leaders to be scrutinized and judged; and if their teachings differ from her WDW, they are to be considered part of Babylon and people should pack their bags and leave. Presumably, *this* “picking and choosing” is not arrogance but Biblical discernment. On the other hand, Gwen is to be seen as “a leader from God” whose teachings should not be questioned—“EVERYTHING” she teaches should be followed.

Beware of False Prophets ...

In Matthew 7:15 and following Jesus warned, “*Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.*” It happens that this passage is the one which Gwen appeals to as validation of her ministry. After all, look at all of the changed lives which have resulted from her program. But is that the fruit to which Jesus is referring to?

Several important things are taught in this passage. First of all, it is not necessary to go looking for false prophets to follow—they will come to you! Some will come to your door—others will come right into your church! Second, these false prophets will be dressed in sheep’s clothing—they will LOOK LIKE CHRISTIANS! They will probably be carrying and quoting Bibles (with a twist); and they will probably employ Christian-like terminology, although the definitions will be noticeably “off” to a discerning person.

They will all attempt to point you to the “fruit” of their “changed lives,” even though every single cult group can make the same claim. Many JWs and Mormons are clean-living, good and moral people with successful lives and careers. But they are not Christians, just imitations.

One flaw Christians share with all other people is our human tendency to trust what we see with our own eyes. But Jesus has warned us this method will not work to judge false prophets, because the false will LOOK JUST LIKE the true! If they are not a good counterfeit, they will not be very successful at cult leading. A successful cult by default will be one which BEST mimics true Christianity, while denying its core teachings. The fruit of a false prophet is not changed lives or Christian appearance but false prophecies and teachings. So we are to be “fruit inspectors.” Does their “fruit” accurately match what the Scriptures teach regarding the nature of God, the nature of salvation, and true discipleship? WDW fails on all counts and Gwen Shamblin, who claims prophetic status, must be judged on this basis as a false prophet. We can’t say how she got here—we have no idea if she at one time understood the Gospel and then fell into Galatian and Arian errors,

(Continued on next page)

or if she has never really understood the Gospel of God's Grace at all. But we can say with great confidence, regardless of the possible weight-loss benefits of her program and teachings, she is presently proclaiming a false Jesus, a false gospel, and is usurping God's rightful place by requiring unquestioning obedience to her teachings. What we are witnessing is nothing less than the birth of a cult!

Don't Let 'Em In The House

A verse commonly misused to discourage believer's from witnessing to those in cults and false religions is 2 John 10,

"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting."

John is not telling us to keep non-believers out of our private homes. If that were the case, you couldn't have the Sears deliverymen bring your new refrigerator into your home. They'd have to leave it outside unless, of course, you knew they were Christians. The historical setting and context help us to understand what John meant. The early church met in homes. (The first known church building dates from about the third century). During that time, there were traveling Christian teachers who would arrive in town and be invited into the local house fellowship to stay for a period of time and teach. In other words, they were given the pulpit to train the early believers. So here, John is instructing the house-church leaders to judge the teachings of these itinerant teachers to determine whether their teachings were true before letting them into the church where they could influence or even destroy the flock.

If it was determined these traveling teachers were false prophets or teachers, they were not to be invited in to stay and teach at the church. Instead of receiving a warm welcome, these false teachers were summarily sent on their way without so much as a fare-thee-well. "... do not receive them into your house and do not give him a greeting." This sounds harsh to tolerance-enlightened, modern American ears; but protecting the flock from wolves is very serious business. As the Apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders just prior to his leaving,

"Be on guard for yourselves, and for the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the flock of God, which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." (Acts 20:28-30)

Not All Bad News

How can we evaluate this situation? On the one hand, this whole thing saddens us. It is very distressing to find yet another ravenous wolf has crept into the sheep fold, and is intent upon ravaging the flock, and ironically, picking the pockets and the pews of the churches that have unwittingly allowed her in to speak.


We do not yet know, of course, how this will shake out—how many people will actually leave their churches and follow Gwen into Remnant Fellowship, where they will find very little grace and learn to deny the Lord Who bought them (2Pet. 2:1). We don't know yet if or how many churches might be divided by this or how many church leaders will be misjudged as being "soft on sin, offering 'cheap grace.'" Only time will tell.

But there is encouraging news to relay. We have been very


pleased by the response of many churches and pastors, who immediately cancelled Gwen's workshops when they were apprised of the situation. The Christian Communication Network and other Christian organizations have removed Gwen Shamblin from their speaking rosters. *Christianity Today* magazine, Crosswalk.com, and the *Baptist Press* have already written pieces exposing her error. Thomas Nelson Publishers cancelled her third book, *Out of Egypt*, at great cost to themselves—Gwen, regardless of her false teachings, has been a very popular author whose books sold very well.

Most gratifying of all, so far, has been the great response of Christian women who have done so much to expose this heresy to as many people as possible as quickly as possible before more damage could be done. Two modern-day heroines of the faith we must mention are Helen Mildenhall and Lynette Hoy—both of Calvary Memorial Church of Oak Park, IL. They are the ones who brought this matter to our attention and spent much time and effort researching Gwen's material, and making church leaders and Christian organizations aware of the problem. We honor them for their discernment and perseverance in "*contending for the faith once delivered to the saints.*" (Jude 3)

Also, most of the calls and e-mails we initially received about this issue were from women, which makes it fairly apparent that women DO care about such important doctrines as the Trinity, and are not nearly as shallow as Gwen believes them to be.

This story is still breaking. More and more releases are coming from Gwen everyday, decrying her "persecution," and attempting to defend her views. She is bringing up MANY more issues which we would like to address, so we hope to do a follow-up article in the next **Journal**. 

Love to all,



*Method of Operation
ENDNOTES

¹ To Gwen Shamblin, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not co-equal and co-eternal as the church universal believes and teaches. She teaches the Father is the Supreme Deity, Jesus the Son is a separate being who came into existence at a point in time, and the Holy Spirit is God's will or mind. Her views and argumentation are closer to that of Jehovah's Witnesses than anything resembling the historic Biblical faith.

² John W. Kennedy with additional reporting by Todd Starnes. "Gwen in the Balance." *ChristianityToday.com* (<http://www.christianityonline.com/ct/2000/136/51.0.html>), p.3.

³ We want to express our extreme appreciation to two such women—Helen Mildenhall and Lynette Hoy of Calvary Memorial Church in Oak Park, IL. Not only were these women some of the first who raised this concern but who also have dedicated countless hours in research, sending out material to churches and individuals as well as keeping their church web-site up to date.

⁴ Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet*, Doubleday, 1997, back inside flap.

⁵ Thomas Nelson Publishers canceled the publication of her next book, *Out of Egypt*, due to this new information at great expense to themselves. (It was also expected to sell 2,000,000 copies.) We take our hats off to Michael Hyatt and Thomas Nelson for their stand for Orthodoxy in this case.

⁶ The *Weigh Down Workshop* web-site, FAQ, question 18, "Does Weigh Down Workshop have a Statement of Faith?" (Underline added for emphasis.)

⁷ Anton Hein of Apologetics Index (www.apologeticindex.org).

⁸ Interestingly, after acknowledging her argument does not prove her case, Gwen continues to use the argument to prove her case!

⁹ The earliest battle about the nature of Christ was for Christians to prove Jesus was *also* human, as well as God. The Gnostics denied His humanity, because they believed all matter was evil, and therefore, God could not touch matter. So, God sent out emanations from Himself. One of those emanations was "Christ" who settled on the man Jesus at His baptism and departed from Him at His crucifixion.

¹⁰ Justin Martyr, "Dialogue With Trypho," *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI., 1989, vol. 1, p.232.

¹¹ Justin Martyr, "Dialogue With Trypho," *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI., 1989, vol. 1, p.234.

¹² Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI., 1989, vol. 3, p.606.

¹³ Gwen Shamblin doesn't necessarily subscribe to all of these "finite god" elements.

¹⁴ Gwen Shamblin, *Rise Above*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000, p.24-25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹⁶ It should be noted there is but one throne—Revelation 22:3 talks about the throne (singular) of God and of the Lamb.

¹⁷ Underline added for emphasis.

¹⁸ *Weigh Down Workshop* archived message #34.

¹⁹ *Weigh Down Workshop* archive e-mail #22.

²⁰ *Weigh Down Workshop* archive e-mail #37.

²¹ *Weigh Down Workshop* archive e-mail #15.

²² *Weigh Down Workshop* archive e-mail #31.

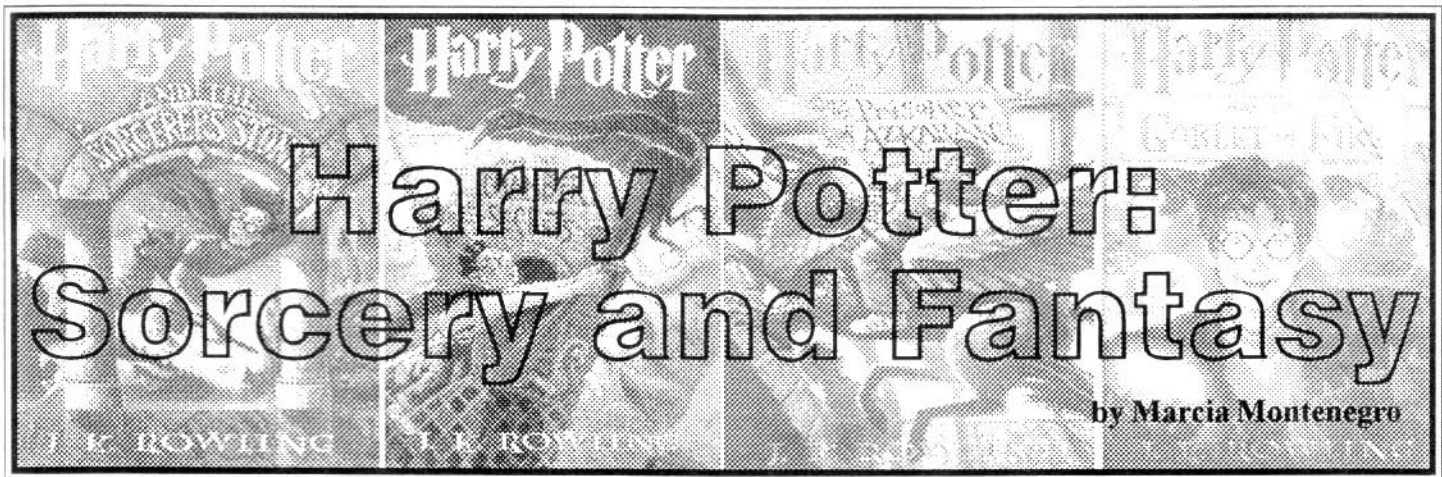
²³ *Weigh Down Workshop* archive e-mail #41 (Underline added for emphasis.)

²⁴ *Weigh Down Workshop* archive e-mail #29. (All cap emphasis in the original, underline added for emphasis.)

²⁵ *Qualified to Be Ministers*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1955, p.156.

²⁶ *WATCHTOWER*, October 1, 1967, p.587.

²⁷ *WATCHTOWER*, August 1, 1980, p.20.



Harry Potter is a character in a series of books written by J. K. Rowling about a young boy who discovers he really is a wizard, (in other words, a sorcerer). Four books have come out in the *Harry Potter* series, with 3.8-million copies of the fourth book released in the U.S. on July 8, 2000. Worldwide, 35-million copies of the first three books are in print, with about half of total sales in the U.S. (*USA Today*, 6-22-00, p. D-1). The first book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, was released in England as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. The "Philosopher's Stone" is part of the lore of alchemy and Medieval sorcery, and supposedly was a stone which could be used to turn base metal to gold and was the Holy Grail of sorcery (Bill Whitcomb, *The Magician's Companion*, St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1994, pp. 351, 485, 527).

Rowling has been hailed as a clever, imaginative writer who has enticed children into reading books again. No doubt this is true. Yet, however clever or imaginative the stories are, they do center on a character who is learning the arts of sorcery and witchcraft. One defense, or minimization of the sorcery in the *Harry Potter* books, is that the stories are just a normal part of a child's fantasy world. The stories of C. S. Lewis and J.R. Tolkien are often brought up as examples. But are Lewis and Tolkien the standard for discernment? Even so, Lewis did not endorse the occult. And if Tolkien did, does that make it okay? (When I was an astrologer, my witch clients and friends loved Tolkien, by the way.) Yes, Lewis and Tolkien did write fantasy novels that included magical elements. The question for Christians should be: Is the fantasy (in any story) centered on the occult, and what does God say about the occult?

It is pointed out that Harry Potter represents "good" fighting "evil", and therefore, in the context of fantasy, this is okay. These views, however, raise several questions: Is the sorcery and magic in *Harry Potter* just fantasy? If not, are fantasy stories using occultism as a model healthy reading? Is it Biblical to accept the use of "good" magical power if it is used to fight evil? Is there such a thing as "good" sorcery? Any popular children's book set in an occult environment offering a hero who practices the occult arts warrants careful examination and a Biblical response. Occult sources are used for this article to make the point that occultism is real and is part of a serious practice, philosophy and spirituality that is opposed to historic, Biblical Christianity.

Sorcery And Witchcraft Are Real

Although Harry Potter attends the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, what is really being described in the book is sorcery. Sorcery and witchcraft in some cultures are the same thing.

According to one source, "European witchcraft grew out of sorcery, the casting of spells and divination" (Rosemary Guiley, *Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, New York: Checkmark Books/Facts on File, 1999, p.315). Since there is no Hebrew word for witchcraft, some Bible translations will use the term "witchcraft" while others will use "sorcery." Rather than using a label, Hebrew describes the practices of what is translated by each culture as sorcery or witchcraft, such as using potions (or poison), incantations to spirits, communing with the dead, etc. Each culture and its language comes up with the label of witchcraft or sorcery according to particular cultural understanding and practices. [See Note A at end of article for further explanation].

Contemporary witchcraft, especially in the United States, is a form of religious Neo-paganism and is not sorcery, which is an occult practice. Although varied in its beliefs from group to group, witchcraft and Wicca usually encompass the views of honoring nature as sacred, monism (all is one energy), polytheism (many gods), and pantheism (all is God/Goddess) or panentheism (God/Goddess is contained within the world). A well-known witch couple state that "The rationale of Wicca is a philosophical framework into which every phenomenon, from chemistry to clairvoyance, from logarithms to love, can be reasonably fitted" (Janet and Stewart Farrar, *A Witches' Bible*, Custer, WA: Phoenix Publishing, 1996, p. 106). While witches and Wiccans might practice magick (occult magick is often spelled with a 'k') or cast spells, they would more likely consider it "white magick" and not sorcery. [See the CANA document on Wicca/Witchcraft at <<http://cana.userworld.com>>.]

Those who practice sorcery may adopt some pagan beliefs, but do not usually identify with witchcraft. Contemporary sorcery is based on a belief of accessing and manipulating energy through various methods. There are those who practice ritual magick, an involved form of sorcery based on teachings going back to ancient societies. Some equate ritual magick with 'High Magic,' described in one book as teaching "how to reach one's personal genius, the Guardian Angel who watches over each individual life and who is waiting faithfully and patiently to make man's every wish come true" (Migene Gonzalez-Wippler, *The Complete Book of Spells, Ceremonies & Magic*, St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1996, 2d edition, p. 64). Many ritual magicians may also use some of the writings and philosophy of infamous magician Aleister Crowley, who died in 1947. [By the way, Crowley was not a Satanist, although some Satanists use him as a model and adopt his Thelemic Law, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law" allegedly given to Crowley by his Guardian Angel/spirit guide, Aiwass, (Guiley, 71-72)].

(Continued on next page)

"Potter" (Continued from page 9)

Magic is "the art of changing consciousness and physical reality according to will," and sorcery is "the manipulation of natural forces and powers to achieve a desired objective" (Guiley, 212, 314). Another definition of sorcery is offered by Lewis Spence as using "supposed supernatural power by the agency of evil spirits called forth by spells by a witch or black magician" (*An Encyclopedia of Occultism*, Citadel Press/Carol Publishing, 1996, p. 373). Here is a definition by a magician: "Magic is a collection of techniques, dating back 70,000 years, aimed at manipulating the human imagination in order to produce physical, psychological, or spiritual results" (J. H. Brennan, *Magick for Beginners, The Power to Change Your World*, St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1999, p. 44). This latter book, by the way, was given to me by a 14-year-old teenager attending a Christian youth group.

Highly respected (by occultists) ritual magician Donald Tyson states in his booklet, *The Truth About Ritual Magick*, (Llewellyn, 1994): "Ritual is a mechanism for changing all four levels of being: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual" and "Through magic a channel of awareness can be opened between the spirit or Higher Self, and the ego or ordinary self allowing the Higher Self, which always knows who it is and what it wants to do, to direct and shape the ego, thereby restoring a balance to the emotions and improving health" (p. 20). We see that sorcery/magic is not just a practice, but has a spiritual context. A 16-year-old boy raised in a Christian home once quoted Tyson to me when discussing his "dabbling" in the occult.

An unnumbered page in the front of Tyson's booklet tells us Tyson "devotes his life to the attainment of a complete gnosis of the art of magic in theory and practice. His purpose is to formulate an accessible system of personal training composed of East and West, past and present, that will help the individual discover the reason for one's existence and a way to fulfill it." *Gnosis* means knowledge, and usually implies an esoteric knowledge through which one gains spiritual wisdom. Gnosticism, the term for a religion which was one of the primary enemies of the early church, came from this word.

Crowley's definition of magick: "Magick is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will" (as quoted in Whitcomb, 5). Whitcomb himself describes magic as "a way of creating the world" and "a pragmatic approach to changing the human psyche and, through it, the surrounding world" (6, 7). Sorcerers take their practice very seriously; it is no fantasy, but a very real part of the occult arts. [See Note B at end of article for further information.]

Some of what is taught at Hogwarts could be part of either sorcery or contemporary witchcraft, or both: studying the movement of the planets, the history of magic, herbology, potions, spells, and charms. Although it is valid to clarify witchcraft vs. sorcery, whether Harry Potter is called a witch, wizard, or sorcerer is irrelevant when looking at the content of these books to determine if they are appropriate for young people. Sorcery is nothing less than the attempt to replace God, since it is one's will that is primary in practicing sorcery. What must be examined are the ideas and teachings contained in the book. This essay is based on the first book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, which has more than ample material to discuss. [All quotes from the first Scholastics trade paperback printing, September 1999.]

The Philosopher's Stone And Alchemy

Central to the plot (and part of the title) is the sorcerer's stone—

in actuality "the Philosopher's Stone," (title changed for books in the U.S. and France). The Philosopher's Stone is connected to alchemy—an occult practice that combined the exploration of minerals with Gnostic practices of sorcery seeking to turn base metal into gold, and through that, attain an inner spiritual transformation. Alchemy is defined by one occultist as "the process of the transmutation and purification...of the soul via the discipline of purifying and combining physical materials and chemicals which are symbolic of spiritual transformations," and the Philosopher's Stone was a "metaphor for the illuminated mind," and the "First Substance from which all other metals derived" (Whitcomb, 485, 527).

Further descriptions of alchemy reveal its metaphysical nature: "High magic and alchemy are twin branches of the magical system known as Hermetism ...," and "There is an intrinsic link between alchemy and the Kabbalah ... Like alchemy, the Kabbalah sees three planes in nature — the mental, the astral, and the material [...] Thus, the alchemist, a Hermetic magician, bases his physical and spiritual work on the Kabbalah, particularly the Tarot ..." (Gonzalez-Wippler, pp. 61 and 63). The Kabbalah is too complex to describe here; suffice it to say that it is an occultic Gnostic perversion of Judaism which "is a complete system of symbolism, angelology, demonology, and magic" (W. B. Crow, *A Fascinating History of Witchcraft, Magic, and Occultism*, Hollywood: Wilshire Book Company, 1968, p. 82). The Tarot are a set of cards used for divination.

Rowling refers to Nicolas Flamel in the first *Harry Potter* book (103, 219) as the partner in alchemy of Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts. Harry and his friends search through the library, looking for Flamel's name to see who he is (197-8) and finally read about him as the "only known maker of the Sorcerer's Stone" which can turn metal into gold and gives immortality through producing the "Elixir of Life" (219, 220). In *Harry Potter*, Flamel has achieved immortality because he is 665 years old (220).

According to Jacques Sadoul in *Alchemists and Gold* (G. P. Putnam's Sons: New York; 1970), Flamel was a "Fourteenth century French adept and Public Scrivener" (p. 243) and a key figure in the story of alchemy. An "adept" is a master of esoteric knowledge including occultism. Flamel is also mentioned several times in the well-known *Witchcraft, Magic & Alchemy*, (Grillot de Givry, Dover publications, 1971, pp. 216, 349, 352, 360, 367, 378, 384) and in a book by the editors of *GNOSIS Magazine* (Richard Smoley and Jay Kinney, *Hidden Wisdom, A Guide to the Western Inner Traditions*, New York: Penguin/Arkana, 1999, p. 184).

Rowling's book mentions Flamel's wife as "Perenelle," and that Flamel and his wife are over 600-years old due to Flamel's success with the Philosopher's Stone and discovery of the Elixir of Life, rendering him immortal (220). In Spence's *Encyclopedia of Occultism*, Flamel's wife is rendered as Petronella (there are probably several variations of this name). Spence states Flamel first studied astrology before coming across a book with instructions and pictures of serpents which purported to be an occult book by an alchemist and magician named Abraham, circa 1400 (1-2). This led Flamel to further studies finally achieving the ability to turn mercury into gold and the discovery of the Elixir of Life (162), just as it is stated in Rowling's book. Flamel gained a reputation as a magician and "his followers believed that he was still alive though retired from the world, and would live for six centuries" (162). Spence's book devotes over three pages to alchemy (9-12). If Flamel was a partner with Dumbledore, (the fictional headmaster of Hogwarts) then that naturally makes Dumbledore a practitioner of occultism. Dumbledore is fictional, but Flamel and alchemy are part of the history of occult practices.

Sadoul quotes someone named Claude d'Yge at the beginning of his book, who cautions against seeing alchemy as entirely mundane or entirely spiritual, and urges instead to see that "Alchemy is but a symbol used to reveal by analogy the process of achieving Spiritual Realisation" — in a word, that man is at once the prime matter and the *athanor* of the Work — let them pursue it with all their might." The "Work" refers to the "Great Work" of alchemy. Even more pointed is this description: "In essence, alchemy has to do with the liberation and transformation of consciousness. But it is a transformation of a very specific kind. One might say that *the gold of the alchemists is the body of resurrection*," which is a "divinization" and immortality of self (Smoley and Kinney, 192). Alchemy seeks to make man a god—one who can create and transform by his will, secret knowledge, and magical access to forces.

Sorcery is not a matter of mechanical actions or pretense at power, but is based on underlying occult principles and spirituality. As Rowling plainly tells us, "There was a lot more to magic, as Harry quickly found out, than waving your wand and saying a few funny words" (133). Indeed, as any book on sorcery will bear out, this is true!

Muggles

Non-witches, called "Muggles," usually are portrayed quite negatively in this book. The family who adopted Harry after his parents died (his mother's sister and her husband) are painted in the worst possible way. Their admittedly bad character and opposition to witchcraft (which they see as "weird") are combined, so that one is left with the impression that opposition to witchcraft and the occult is silly, narrow-minded, cruel and the result of stupidity and ignorance (pp. 1-8, 36, 40, 53, 59).

One sees this dismal portrayal of "Muggles" even more clearly in foreign translations of the books. In Italian, "Muggles" is translated as "Babbani" which sounds like "babbioni" — meaning idiots; and the Dutch word is "Dreuzel" sounding like "dreutel" — slang for a clumsy person ("The Magic Words: Potter Is a Hit in 33 Languages," John Kelly, *The Washington Post*, "KidsPost," 7-7-00, p. C-13)

Naturally, part of this is a plot device so Harry can finally escape a painful environment, and many children may identify with this. However, what is Harry escaping to? The Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry! In fact, many troubled teens do "escape" to the world of the occult which seems to offer empowerment, meaning, and a sense of belonging. Are not these what Harry is seeking at Hogwarts? Is a model based on the occult a safe place of escape?

Ghosts

Ghosts populate the first book. Each of the four houses at the Hogwarts school has a resident ghost. Also, Harry allegedly sees his dead parents in a special mirror (which is later used for divination) and communicates with them (208-209, 210, 212). The mirror is explained by Dumbledore as something which "shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts" (213) which leaves the question open as to whether Harry really saw his deceased parents. Nevertheless, how will young children interpret this? It is most likely a child will take this literally and believe Harry could see his parents, especially since the parents respond. God forbids spirit contact and contact with the dead (Leviticus 19:31, 20:6; Deuteronomy 18: 10-11; Isaiah 8:19). We are told the dead have departed to either be with Christ or be in a place of suffering and cannot be contacted (Luke 16: 19-31; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-23).

In our culture, we mistakenly have accepted fictional "friendly"

or humorous ghosts (think of Casper the Friendly Ghost). This has desensitized us to God's commands against spirit contact and communication with the dead (Deuteronomy 18: 10-11; Is. 8:19), so that we substitute fiction for truth or downplay the idea of belief in ghosts. Children are often confused about ghosts and whether real people hang around after they die. According to the Bible, this cannot happen, and it is wrong to contact the dead, yet this book promotes the view that it is possible and a good thing.

Astrology

In the Forbidden Forest, Harry and others meet up with some centaurs (mythical half-man, half-horse creatures) whom Hagrid calls "stargazers," (254). Apparently, the centaurs seek guidance in astrology (257, 259). As one says, "... we are sworn not to set ourselves against the heavens. Have we not read what is to come in the movements of the planets?" and "Centuars are concerned with what has been foretold," apparently by the studying of the planets (257).

Although Harry's friend, Hermione, later repeats a critical remark about astrology (which she heard from a professor and which she says to comfort Harry) as an "imprecise branch of magic" (260), it is still considered an occult art and Hermione is not saying astrology is to be avoided.

In contrast, God condemns astrology (Isaiah 47:13-15; Jeremiah 10:2; Amos 5:26-27; Acts 7:42-43) and all forms of divination (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; 2 Kings 17:17; Acts 16:16). (Astrology is divination.)

Divination, Spells And Occult Worldviews

This book is full of references to and sometimes outright use of divination tools, spells, and occult views.

Harry gets a glimpse of his dead parents in the Mirror of Erised ('desire' spelled backward), and the mirror is used later by Quirell and Harry to locate the Philosopher's Stone (289-92). When Harry looks in the mirror to get a vision that will give him the stone's location, he supernaturally gets the stone in his pocket (292). Mirrors, still bodies of water, crystals and other reflective surfaces are used as divination tools in the occult—a method called scrying or crystallo-mancy (de Givry, 305-08; Farrar, 201, 326; Guiley, pp. 307-08; Spence, 111-12). The object favored by witches was a magic mirror in which they would see visions or receive mental images after staring into the mirror (Guiley, 398). There is a long history of mirrors used in the occult, including tales that witches taught Pythagoras how to divine (fortunetell) by "holding a magic mirror up to the moon," and magicians who stared into mirrors until they went into a light trance and "saw visions that answered the questions that were put to them" (Guiley, 229). Scrying in *A Witches Bible* is "any form of divination which involves gazing at or into something (crystal ball, black mirror, pool of ink, etc.) to induce psychically perceived visual images" (326). Divination (the practice of obtaining unknown information through supernatural, esoteric means, occult tools, or through reading hidden meanings) is strictly forbidden by God (Deuteronomy 18:10-11; Acts 16:16). Harry does use the mirror as a form of divination to locate the stone and he seems to know the occult principle of gazing into the mirror because he tries to stop Quirell from "giving his whole attention" to it (290).

Subjective feelings and intuition have priority in the New Age and the occult. Making a decision is often based on feeling "right" about something. When Harry is buying a wand, many wands pass through his hands until he finally gets the "right" one which

(Continued on next page)

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causes him to feel "a sudden warmth in his fingers" (85). In fact, it is not Harry who chooses his wand, but "it's really the wand that chooses the wizard" (82). This is a very occult view of how things work in the world—a view of magical correspondence at work between people and objects. It is almost a form of animism—the belief objects contain intelligent forces or spirits.

Wands, which were also known as divining rods, are well-known in occult arts and are used for purifying, divination, focusing energy in a spell, finding water or treasure, and invoking spirits [including the devil in black magick] (de Givry, 106-108, 311-320). In contemporary witchcraft, a wand is a magical working tool and is "the instrument of invocation of spirits" (Guiley, 380). The Farrars quote another book that a wand is used "to call up and control certain angels and genii" and is often marked with occult symbols (257-58) [genii were believed to be inferior deities attached to each mortal, (Spence, 239)]. One book depicts a photograph of the aforementioned Aleister Crowley, a "magic wand" in his right hand (Gonzalez-Wippler, 287). Occultists often believe Moses was a magician who triumphed over the Egyptians and the Red Sea through sorcery with his staff (de Givry, 311; Guiley, 380). However, the Bible tells us it was God who performed these miracles using Moses (Exodus 4, 6-11, 14:21).

Before Harry learns he is a wizard (witch, sorcerer), he visits the zoo and discovers he is able to communicate with one of its residents. Which animal would that be ... a noble lion, a mischievous monkey, a swift gazelle? No, it's a snake—a boa constrictor. Harry's actions allow the snake to escape magically after there has been a silent communication between the two (pp. 27-28). It is interesting it is the snake with whom Harry discovers his magical ability to communicate with animals since snakes have a special place in the occult, usually as symbols for wisdom, enlightenment, fertility, or feminine power (Jack Tresidder, *Dictionary of Symbols*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998, 184-87). "The snake was above all a magico-religious symbol of primeval life force, sometimes an image of the creator divinity itself" (Tresidder, 184). It is not suggested here that the author intends these associations, but it is a point of interest considering Harry is a natural sorcerer.

Owls are used as messenger birds for the students at Hogwarts. Rosemary Guiley notes that in the Middle Ages, "demons in the forms of owls attended witches, accompanying them on their broomstick flights and running errands of evil for them" (251). (Of course, witches never rode broomsticks; this is part of folklore. Nevertheless, it is interesting that owls were messengers for witches in this folklore and show up in the *Harry Potter* book also as messengers).

A "sorting hat" is placed on the children's heads in deciding which of the four houses at the school each child should join. The hat decides this and apparently can read minds (121). Of course, no hat or object can do these things, but the practices are real. The attempt to read minds (telepathy) is a psychic art and is taught in psychic development and other occult classes. Of course, only God is omniscient and knows the minds and hearts of men (Job 38:4, Psalms 44:21, Luke 11:17, Luke 16:15). Spells are taught at Hogwarts and are used throughout the book, even when Harry's friends use a "body-bind" spell on their friend, (273). Interestingly, there is a spell for binding in *A Witches' Bible* (141). Interest in spells is promoted as a healthy thing when the children are on the train to Hogwarts and Ron is asked to perform a spell. When he can't do it, Hermione brags she's already practiced spells by doing

"a few simple spells" and they worked (105). Books with spells are easy to find at any bookstore and even easier on the Internet. They have been seen in magazines for teenage girls. Witches and others do spells today; this is not a charming fantasy (pun intended). Silver Ravenwolf, a witch, has written several books aimed at teens including 1998's *Teen Witch*. It sold so well that bookstores could hardly keep it on the shelves. *Teen Witch* and other similar books are full of instructions for casting spells. Whether these spells work or not is beside the point; casting spells and sorcery are occultism and clearly forbidden by God (Deuteronomy 18: 10-11; 2 Kings 17:17, 20:6; Isaiah 47: 10-15; Malachi 3:5; Acts 8:11, 13:6; Revelation 18:23, 21:8).

The Dark Side

References are made to the villain Voldemort (the last part of this name "mort," is French for "death") and others as having gone over to the "dark side" (54, 110). The implication is that people are not inherently bad but either basically good or morally neutral, and can go either way (55). This view, based on the idea of polarity, ultimately downplays evil itself and the idea of absolute good and evil. Morality with no absolutes is no morality at all, because it changes according to experience, culture, definition, or historical context.

It is similar to the Taoist yin-yang philosophy, which is based on the belief opposites in the world are equal forces. These are perceived as opposite, but are actually part of the whole, and are in a constant state of fluctuation, merging into each other. That is why there is a white dot on the black side and vice-versa. This view has been popularized in "the Force" of the *Star Wars* movies, in which one can go over to the "dark side." [See CANA article on Yin-Yang at <<http://cana.userworld.com>>].

The idea of polarity is essential in occult philosophies and denies a conflict between good and evil. The Farrars say it well: "The Theory of Polarity maintains that all activity, all manifestation, arises from (and is inconceivable without) the interaction of pairs and complementary opposites ... and that this polarity is not a conflict between 'good' and 'evil,' but a creative tension like that between the positive and negative terminals of an electric battery. Good and evil only arise with the constructive or destructive application of the polarity's output ..." (107). They further state that monotheist religions are trapped in the belief that good vs. evil is a polarity: and when evil is vanquished, only good remains. The Farrars claim that "Under the unchallenged rule of a non-polarized Creator, nothing can happen" (111). In other words, a world without this polarity cannot exist or is bland if it does; good cannot exist without evil. Of course, "a non-polarized Creator" describes exactly the one true living God, and He is absolutely good: "And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

Rather than accepting God's view that all of us have a fallen, sinful nature, which is only redeemed through faith in a crucified and risen Christ (John 3:18-20; Romans 3:23-25; Colossians 1:13-14), the occult philosophy believes we have a "dark side" and by choice can be good—totally avoiding the "dark side." Prof. Quirell, who serves the villain, cannot touch Harry, because Harry has been so deeply loved by his mother (human love can ward off evil) (295-299). There is no need for redemption in this worldview. Good and evil are two sides of the same coin, both part of a greater oneness and of each other; so there is no absolute good or evil. Even the villain Voldemort, who is supposed to be evil, is "not ... truly alive [so] he cannot be killed" (298). In the absence of absolute good and

evil, who needs redemption? In the absence of absolute good and evil, at what point does one go over to the "dark side" and who draws the line? The occult, and the book, have no answer for this.

White Magick, Black Magick

A popular claim made by witches today is they are "white" witches, or they practice "white" magic and use their powers for good. This idea is central in this *Harry Potter* book, since Harry is learning how to use sorcery in a "good" way. Spells are sometimes used on Muggles (251). Characters in the book use sorcery to fight "dark" or "black" magic (190-91, 217, 227), and there is even a course at Hogwarts teaching students how to protect themselves against "the dark forces" (67, 134), all the while they are studying the very stuff of sorcery—charms, potions, spells, etc. God condemns all sorcery (see previous passages cited), so there is no such thing as "white" or "dark" magick; it all comes from the same place. The only people who make these distinctions are occultists. Remember, Harry is not learning magic tricks; he is learning magick.

It is interesting to note what happens at the end of the book, however, after the school has warned the students "not to use magic over the holidays" (307). Harry, in defiance and rebellion, not only purports to use magic but to use it to get back at his hated cousin, Dudley. "They don't know we're not allowed to use magic at home. I'm going to have a lot of fun with Dudley this summer ..." (309). This is the closing sentence of the book.

In light of God's Word, how should we view a book where the hero is learning sorcery and teaches the very principles of "white" magick and witchcraft? If a Christian thinks it is okay for Harry to do "white" magick, then can he/she in all sincerity tell a witch "white" witchcraft is wrong? To accept Harry Potter as a fun hero for children may make it seem hypocritical for you to criticize contemporary witchcraft, Wicca, and white magick.

The Occult And Its Twin, Death

The Hogwarts' course on Transfiguration is said to be "complex and dangerous" by the teacher (134). Dumbledore tells Harry that men "have wasted away" before the Mirror of Erised or "been driven mad" by it (213). Prof. Snape talks about how his brews are "bewitching" to the mind and "ensnaring" to the senses (137); and there are books in the Hogwarts library which contain "powerful Dark Magic" (198). In a *New York Times* article (7-10-00, B-1), the reporter writes about Rowling: "She intimated that as the series progresses the mood may darken. The death of one character in the fourth book, she said, is 'the beginning of the deaths.'"

But the best hurrah for death comes near the end, when *Harry Potter* learns Nicolas Flamel and his wife will die after the Sorcerer's Stone has been destroyed. Harry is sad; but an amazing statement is made by Dumbledore: "After all, to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure" (297). This is repeated later by Harry to his friends, Ron and Hermione (302).

The occult is always connected to death, whether in disguise or blatantly. Children all over the world reading this book can now think of death as "the next great adventure" just as so many kids who have dabbled in the occult have discovered before them. Just check out occult-based comics, games, books, videos with lots of sorcery, and what do you find? Images of death; death as a good or necessary thing, as a journey, an escape, a glorious ending, or a deserved punishment. Just as I found a comic book in a mall store about a beautiful girl named Death who tells the hero "Death is a friend" and whom the hero wants to follow. The occult and death go together like hand in glove.

After his death remark, Dumbledore says truth is a "beautiful

and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution" (298). So, truth should be treated with caution but death is an adventure?

Conclusions: Fantasy And The Occult

There are elements of fantasy and good story-telling in this book. At the same time, the whole story is set in an occult context with references to real occult practices and views mixed in with fantasy. The hero of the book is a wizard/witch/sorcerer whose goal is to learn how to use his powers through the occult. Much is made of the fact that the author wrote while on welfare on scraps of paper at a cafe. This makes it sound like everything is totally from her imagination. However, she did not imagine alchemy, charms, scrying, Nicolas Flamel, astrology, the Dark Side, or many of the other occult concepts and information. It is only reasonable to assume Rowling did some research or has had some exposure to occult and magical practices.

The idea of using sorcery to fight evil (or using "good" magic to fight "bad" magic) is a major component of the plot. In 1996, a movie called *The Craft* taught the audience that using witchcraft to fight evil is good. This movie helped to galvanize the growing Wicca/witchcraft movement and attracted a lot of teen girls to Wicca. Ask any Wiccan how to defend the practice of witchcraft, and many will respond it is okay to use one's powers "for good." How does this message differ from the *Harry Potter* books? *Harry Potter*, far from teaching against the occult, gives a rousing cheer for it. Those opposed to witchcraft or wizardry are mocked and painted as stupid.


We are not in a world where witches are crones with black robes and pointed hats, or where wizards and sorcerers exist only in Disney movies. We are in a world where ordinary people seriously practice witchcraft, sorcery, spells, and other occult methods. Many witches, psychics, Neo-pagans, and others involved in the occult were my clients when I practiced astrology. A June 14, 1999 article of *Publishers' Weekly Online*, discusses how popular pagan books have become among younger readers. At that point, *Teen Witch* had sold more than 50,000 copies. Llewellyn's director of trade sales stated his company (which publishes occult titles) started "repackaging 'classic' pagan titles with more youthful covers, and sales often jumped tenfold as a result" (Michael Kress, "Bewitching Readers With Pagan Lore, <www.bookwire.com/pw/images2/relig2.jpg>). One of the books discussed is a book on "white witchcraft." Essential to this philosophy is to not go over to the "dark side" and practice "dark" or "black" witchcraft ... exactly what is taught in *Harry Potter*.

There is a difference between fantasy and the occult. Fantasy can be used in a way that totally leaves out references to the occult. But this is not what happens in this book. Instead, fantasy feeds on the occult and is fueled by it. Yes, this is just a story, but stories can teach and influence. Stories can present ideas and endorse worldviews. Does this book desensitize children to the occult? What happens when they get older and encounter peers who practice magick, cast spells, and attempt spirit contact? These practices are becoming more popular, and are already widespread among adolescents.

Harry Potter glorifies the occult. God condemns the occult. Should we take lightly a book that endorses what God has so seriously forbidden?

If your children are already reading these books, then use the books as a tool to teach them from God's Word what He says about
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"Potter" (Continued from page 13)

the occult. Teach them how to share this information gently and lovingly with their friends. It is essential they be equipped to deal with the increasing acceptance of the occult in our culture. 

ENDNOTES:

(A) Biblical terms for occult practices:

Several terms are used in both the Old and New Testaments to describe practices similar to magic and sorcery. There is an Old Testament word *qacam* from which comes *divination* in some Bible versions while in others it is translated as *witchcraft*. In addition, there are several Old Testament words from which one can derive *sorcerer*, *witch*, *astrologer*, or *magician*. Many of these words share origin in meaning even though the words themselves differ. For example, a word translated as "*astrologer*" might come from a root word meaning to "divide up the heavens." Some words for *witch*, *sorcerer*, or *casting spells* in the OT come from a word meaning "to whisper or hiss, to mutter magical words or incantations; to enchant; to practice magic, to be a sorcerer, to use witchcraft"—*kashaph*; so the noun form, *kashshaph*, means "an enchanter, sorcerer or magician" ["Lexical Aids to the Old Testament," *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, ed., Spiros Zodhiates, AMG Publishers, 1990, p. 1737 (lexical sources on p. 1705)]. The use of this word is an onomatopoeia because it is meant to sound like the hiss or whisper of one doing spells.

In the New Testament, *sorcerers* is used in Rev. 21:8 and 22:15 while *sorceries* is used in Rev. 9:21 and 22:15. The words used here (Strong's #5332 and 5331) are *pharmakeus* meaning "a druggist or poisoner and by extension, a magician or sorcerer" (Strong's, "Greek Dictionary of the New Testament," 95). In Gal. 5:20, this same word is translated as *witchcraft* in the King James Version.

There is a tremendous crossover and overlap in the translation from the Hebrew and Greek into English due to the fact all these practices relate to occult arts. Giving the English translation for these words depends a lot on context and the particular occult practice which could have included many things. What is being done seems more important than an exact term for it. The most common English translations seem to be *witch*, *sorcerer*, *spiritist*, *magician*, *soothsayer*, and *divination*.

(B) Brief overview of magic/sorcery:

Magic as a ritual or technique to supernaturally manipulate forces goes back as far as early man and is found in cave paintings. Magic is common in Greek mythology, Homer, Canaanite religious literature, Akkadian myths, and Egyptian religion and myths (Colin Brown, ed. and trans., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2 Grand Rapids: Zondervan and Paternoster, 1976, 552-4). Magic is found in Egyptian papyrus dating from the third and fourth centuries AD; and in Greece, magic was a combination of Greek and Egyptian influences. This included belief in creatures half-man, half-animal and in the magical power of words. Magical practices infiltrated Judaism, often using the name of God (*New Int'l. Dictionary*, 556), although these practices were strictly forbidden in Hebrew Scripture (Deut. 18: 9-12; Lev. 19: 26, 31, 20:6; Jer. 27: 9-10; Malachi 3:5).

Magic, also known as sorcery, can be defined as casting spells using a special formula of words or actions to gain control and also as a technique for manipulating supernatural forces to attain certain ends through contact with spirits and psychic realms. White magic was believed to be used for good ends; black magic for evil ends (*New Int'l. Dictionary*, 552, 6). A *magician* can be defined as one possessing occult knowledge as a diviner, or an astrologer. It is one who tries to bring about certain results beyond man's normal abilities. In Egypt and Babylon, magicians were educated and wise in science: they were priests. They were thought to possess special knowledge and so were used by rulers to interpret dreams (*Zondervan*, vol. 4, 38).

The New International Dictionary lists *pharmakos* as a related term (though a different word) because herbs were traditionally gathered and used for spells and to invoke spirits at magical ceremonies (p. 558). *Python* is also listed as a related term because of its connection to the Delphi oracle. Delphi was where Apollo killed the serpent Python that guarded the oracle. *Python* came to mean a spirit of divination; also, a ventriloquist was believed to have this spirit in his belly. This term is used in Acts 16:16 for the girl in Philippi who had the *pneuma pythona*, a spirit of divination or literally, a spirit of a python (p. 558).

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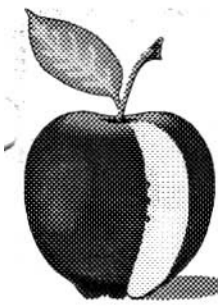
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You Shall Know Them by Their Fruits...

by Joy A. Veinot

The most used and abused verse of Scripture among cults and pseudo-Christian groups, in my opinion, is Matthew 7:16 where Jesus said to His disciples, “*You will know them by their fruits.*” Every cultic group, by ignoring the context, misuses this verse to prove to outsiders that *they* are the true Christians. The common attitude of the cults is, “LOOK AT OUR GOOD WORKS AND JUDGE FOR YOURSELVES WHETHER OR NOT WE ARE THE TRUE CHRISTIANS.” The Jehovah’s Witnesses (JWs) boast, “We don’t participate in war, and we are the only ones going door to door.” The Mormons brag, “We are the only group that has a living prophet and apostles, and we also have the strongest and closest-knit families.” “Oh, you think *that’s* Christian?” Marshall Applewhite (of Heaven’s Gate fame) might have retorted. “We have *left* our families to follow Christ, and we are the only ones who have truly followed Jesus’ advice about cutting off any offending body parts,” the Heaven’s Gate crowd might have crowed. “Isn’t it obvious from our fruits that WE are ‘the truth’?”

Sorry fellas. Jesus Christ said that He, not any organization or religion or church, is “the truth” (John 14:6). And you’re really going to have to give Matthew 7:15-20 another look, because it does not say what you try to make it say. Jesus was not talking about identifying Christians at all! He was warning them to beware of *false prophets* (verse 15), and telling them to judge whatever prophets come to them *by their fruits!* And what, my dears, are the “fruits” of false prophets? **False prophecies!** Apple trees bring forth apples, pear trees bring forth pears, and false prophet trees bring forth *false prophecies!* You can bank on it. These false prophecies can be in the form of false predictions of future events, or they can be in the form of false teachings that contradict scripture. Cults usually have both. Did the end come in 1914, 1925, or 1975 as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (JWs) predicted. Is Jesus actually Michael the archangel whom has already returned “invisibly” as they also claim? Can human beings become gods as the Mormons teach? Was there, after all, a space ship behind the Hale-Bopp Comet as Applewhite asserted?

Why did Jesus warn the people to look for false prophecies and false teachings to help them identify the false prophets? Shouldn’t they have been able to judge them by their “works”? No. In fact, Jesus cautioned them that the false prophets who came to them would be wearing sheep’s clothing. If one is wearing sheep’s clothing, what is one going to look like? A sheep! People cannot identify false prophets by the way they appear, because *they look like true prophets* (or true Christians)!

False prophets, false Christians, and false religions *will* be able to show you good works, but do not be fooled — GOOD WORKS DO NOT A CHRISTIAN MAKE.

You say, “But wait a minute, Joy! The New Testament is full of exhortations to Christians to do good works, imitating the love and goodness of their Father in heaven.”


That is very true. In fact, Paul told us that we were “*created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*” (Ephesians 2:10). But *faith in Christ* is what makes one a Christian. Salvation is a free gift with *no strings attached*. Along with salvation comes a new nature; the good works Christians do come out of hearts that have been changed. Let me give you my apple-tree illustration:

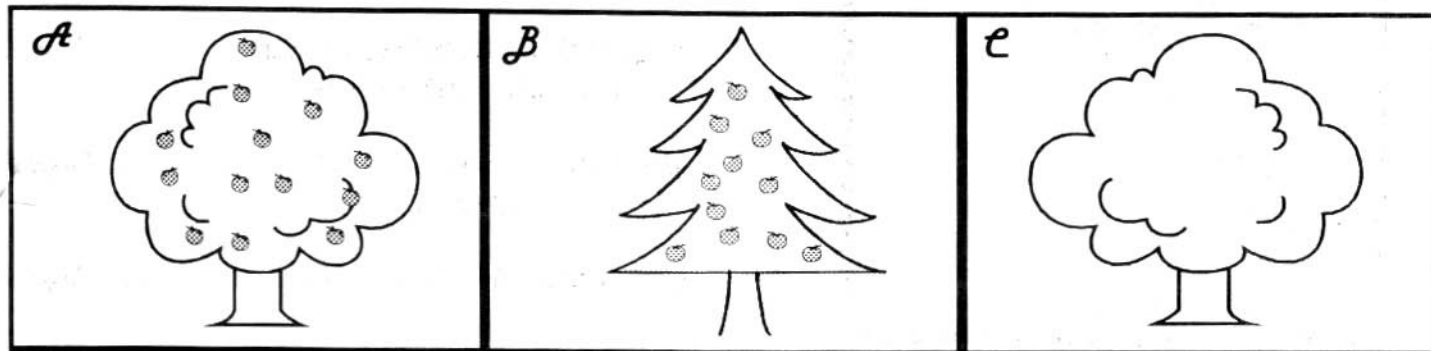
Apple tree (A) represents a true Christian. See the apples? They are his Christian works produced from *his very nature* as an apple tree. The new nature is one of love and love always produces good works.

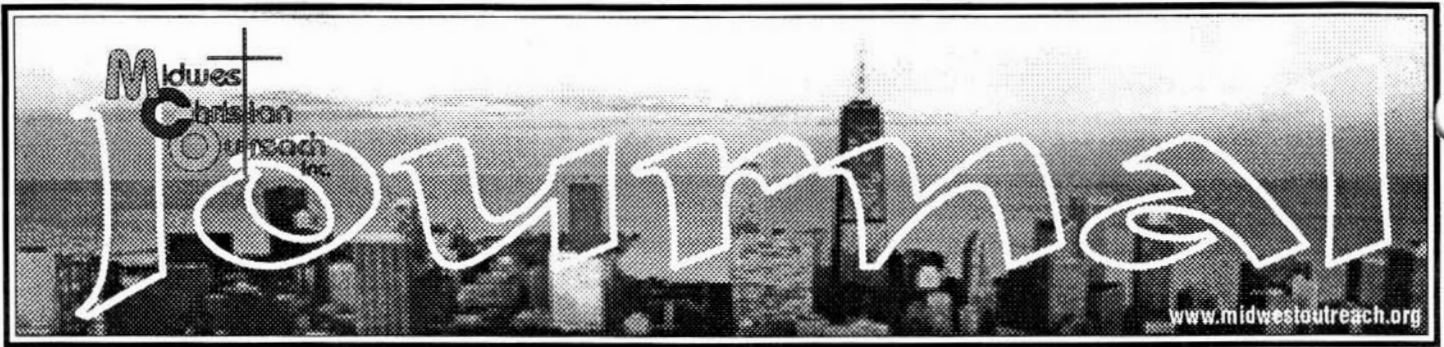
But what about tree (B)? Does the fact that this tree has apples fixed onto it make this tree an apple tree? No! This is obviously an evergreen tree in apple-tree clothing! Beware! On the outside he may be decked out like an apple tree, but inside he is a ravenous evergreen! So instead of checking out the apples, we should be looking for the “pinecones” of false predictions and teachings.

Can we always tell a tree by its apples? What if we were to find a genuine apple tree with no apples on it (C)? Would we then label that tree an evergreen? That would be silly, because an apple tree, with or without fruit, is not an evergreen tree. We know that in nature, there are sometimes good reasons why a tree might not be bearing fruit. It may be out of season or, perhaps, it is merely immature. Maybe it suffered an injury from a particularly bad winter, a late frost, or a crippling storm. By the same token, we all know someone who claims to be a Christian, and yet, our inspection does not turn up any evidential apples. Does this mean the fruitless one is not a Christian? Perhaps. But sometimes we need to be patient. Then the miracle happens. The tree matures, blossoms, and then—APPLES!

How is an evergreen tree transformed into an apple tree, and gain eternal life and acceptance into God’s family? Paul tells us in Romans 4:5, “*To the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned [credited or counted] as righteousness.*”

You do not have to “try to be a Christian.” Only believe. Leave the rest to God. 





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"Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?"

- Galatians 4:16 -

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