

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Website: www.churchredeemeraz.org

Series: True Spirituality
Number: 4
Text: Galatians 6:6-10
Date: February 8, 2009 (a.m.)

Pastor/Teacher
Gary L. W. Johnson

TRUE VS. FALSE SPIRITUALITY

Fads and fashion trends come and go. The same can be said for a great many things that make a splash in the shallow waters of popular Evangelicalism. The most recent is the “Christian” novel *The Shack*, by William P. Young. To date it has sold over a million copies and sits at the top of *The New York Times* bestseller list for paperback fiction. Evangelical recording artist Michael W. Smith states, “*The Shack* will leave you craving for the presence of God.” Eugene Peterson, author of *The Message*, believes “this book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* did for his. It’s that good!” But others, like the highly respected Al Mohler, declared the book to be “undiluted heresy.” I will be giving a detailed analysis of *The Shack* over the next few weeks, but for now I want to once again direct our attention to the Apostle Paul’s remarks about True Spirituality in his epistle to the Galatians, and contrast that with what I have previously labeled ‘Secular Spirituality’ – the kind that takes its cue from our surrounding culture, and the kind that is promoted in *The Shack*. “One wonders,” writes Michael Scott Horton, “how much we, like the children of Israel, insist on worshipping a god who meets us on our terms, the god of modern church growth, who is there to please us, to show us how to find ourselves, enjoy ourselves, and glorify ourselves. And this god is very ‘practical,’ very ‘relevant.’ He is not holy or separate from His creation, but ‘He walks with me and talks with me’ in the garden ‘while the dew is still on the roses.’ How long will we train our eyes on the altars our hands have made—the clever, sure-fire, proven techniques, the programs, the worship styles? Do we think our salvation comes from these ‘high places’—modern altars of psychology, sociology, business and marketing strategies, political agendas and ideology?¹ We have been examining the nature of true spirituality, a subject that has become a hot topic in our society at large. “In 2000, Gallup reported that 80 percent of Americans now saw themselves as being spiritual, which was a stunning finding. All Western countries, according to Enlightenment dogma, should now have progressed beyond such infantile notions. This figure, of course, included those who were also religious, but within this 80 percent were many who were not. So it was that the mantra, “spiritual but not religious,” became a part of our language. We hear it on television, from our next-door neighbors, and from Hollywood starlets. What is being rejected by these newly aware spiritual people are truths that are divinely revealed, doctrines that put those truths into cogent formulation, ethical rules that are not self-originated, and expectations that spirituality should go hand in hand with some kind of corporate involvement, such as in a local church. If one is really serious about being spiritual, the new wisdom says, one will not be ‘religious’ in these old ways because they inhibit the discovery and expression of the self.”² Keeping in step with the Spirit is not to have an inexpressible mystical or ecstatic experience. Rather it is *seen* in the demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives (particularly in the church). Paul shows us that this is most evident in *how* we help support weak and often stumbling Christians (6:1-5). In 6:6-10 the Apostle will develop this further by pointing out how Christian fellowship is practiced. Finally, Paul will show how important our belief system really is by pointing out the gravity of attitudes and choices.

I. RESPONSIVENESS TO THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

One thing that this verse makes perfectly clear is the importance of oral instruction in the life of the church. The word translated “instruction” in the NIV and “taught” in the ESV, is $\text{KAT}\square\text{CHE}\square$, from which we derive *catechize*. It was used of legal instruction in the ancient world and came to be the most commonly used word in the life of the early church for doctrinal instruction. It seems obvious from texts like I Corinthians 14:19 and Galatians 6:6 that some kind of educational institution was an important part of the New Testament church (cf. Romans 2:18; Acts 18:25; 21:21, 24). “Jesus was a teacher. The crowds marveled at ‘his teaching’ (Matt. 7:28; Mark 1:22). This teaching, read within and against the framework of the Old Testament, is what the apostles expanded and applied to the churches under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They gave us the doctrine by which the people of God are defined and by which they should live. To be a believer is to believe this teaching. And that is the point made by an impressive array of passages. Sometimes, as we have seen and as John Stott has also noted, this apostolic doctrine is called the ‘teaching’ (Rom. 16:17), ‘the faith’ (Titus 1:13; 1 Tim. 3:9; Jude 3), ‘the truth’ (1 Tim. 2:4; 3:15; 4:3), and ‘the deposit’ (1 Tim. 6:20; 1 Tim. 1:14). It is called ‘the pattern of the sound words’ (2 Tim. 1:13), ‘the traditions’ (2 Thess. 2:15), ‘the apostles’ teaching’ (Acts 2:42; cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). Elsewhere it is ‘what we have heard’ (Heb. 2:1) or what was heard ‘from the beginning’ (1 John 2:24).”³ However, according to the author of *The Shack*, God puts little stock in theology, [the whole concept of formal theological training is treated with contempt] in fact whenever the Bible is mentioned in the story, God dismisses what is said and leaves the impression that the Bible was not divinely inspired and is merely the product of fallible men.

A. Sharing Responsibilities

There are two different interpretations of verse six. The most common one says that this verse teaches the duty-bound obligation to financially support those who labor in the ministry of the Word. This is taught elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Luke 10:7; 1 Corinthians 9:11). The second interpretation, and the one I am inclined to accept, understands the word $\text{KOIN}\square\text{NE}\square$ (literally, fellowship—the NIV has “must share”)⁴ as referring, not to money or temporal things, but the comprehensiveness of true spiritual fellowship between teacher and those taught. Why take this position over against the first one? Listen to the reasoning of S. Lewis Johnson: “There are some things that suggest that the apostle may not be referring to money here. First of all, the context is not very favorable, for the apostle speaks of the morally evil in vv. 1-5 and of the morally good in vv. 9-10. The temporal does not seem to be in his mind. Second, there is no indication of a problem of finances in Galatia and, further, who was the chief teacher of the Galatians? Was it not Paul himself? It would be very out of keeping with Paul’s other utterances to hear him asking for support, when the whole bent of his ministry is negative to that elsewhere (cf. I Cor. 9:1-23; 2 Cor. 11:20). There is good reason, then, for taking the apostle to be referring here to the ‘good things’ of grace, the principles outlined in the preceding chapters. He is telling the Galatians to have fellowship with the teachers of grace instead of with the Judaizers. It is they that have the good things, and the Galatians are to share in them in order that they may be enriched.”⁵ *The Shack* on the other hand, is overtly hostile to any concept of the institutional church. According to the Jesus of *The Shack*, he doesn’t create institutions – “never have, never will” (p. 178). The whole concept of the institutional church is “all false” (p. 179).

B. Sowing and Reaping

Verses seven and eight constitute a sobering warning. Why would Paul insert this piece of admonition at this point in his epistle? This verse is often appealed to as kind of a general maxim, and, granted, there is a universal application to what Paul is saying about sowing and reaping. But *that* is not the Apostle’s intention as the context makes plain. The

teaching of the Judaizers, if accepted by the Galatians, will eventually produce a crop. Their teaching gratifies the flesh (cf. 6:12-13). It makes the grace of God and the cross of Christ null and void (2:21). It renders regeneration and life by the Spirit unnecessary (3:2-5). The results of such doctrine are only corruption and eventual destruction. Don't be mistaken or deceived (literally, led astray). God is not to be mocked (from the Greek word ΜΥΚΤΩΡ for nose, literally, to turn the nose up, thus to hold in contempt). What we believe does matter! To live in the Spirit and to walk by the Spirit means we must sow in the Spirit as well—and this has to do with our grasping the message of Christ and Him crucified as the *only* means of our justification. Again, the contrast with the message of *The Shack* is striking. Young has God declaring that at the cross “mercy triumphs over justice because of love” (p. 164), and as such there is absolute total universal reconciliation, i.e., everyone (the Devil included) will be saved.

C. Keep on Keeping On

No one is immune to discouragement—even Apostles! (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:8-11). We are to take courage and persevere because God will see to it that our labor is not in vain. Note this: Keeping in step with the Spirit does *not* mean that we can go into cruise control and relax! It will entail effort and diligence and will likewise require mental alertness. Notice, once again, the exhortation to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit to those about us, especially to those of the household of faith.

CONCLUSION: I doubt if any of the Galatians who had welcomed the teachings of the Judaizers intended to *mock God*. They were sincere and actually believed that the Judaizers were good Christians who simply had a different perspective from that of the Apostle Paul. In reality, they were treating God with contempt. What a horrible thought! *The Shack* is guilty of this very thing. Spirituality, according to its author, is totally disconnected from *any* association with the church. The Bible is not important either. As such the kind of Spirituality on display in *The Shack* is *pagan*. David Wells writes of this kind of false spirituality. “The church, however, is courted in every age by the alternative, counterfeit spirituality, first in one form and then in another. Today the evangelical church is in a life-and-death struggle with this spiritual alternative, even as the apostles were in the New Testament period and the prophets were in the Old Testament. Today this pagan spirituality comes, not in barbaric forms of child sacrifice – assuming that abortion is more about convenience than spirituality – but in the innocent tones of popular culture. We meet it everywhere. Sometimes it is dressed up in sophisticated psychological language. More commonly we hear it in the everyday self-talk of our therapeutic culture. It is there in the television chatter, in the magazines near the checkout counter at the supermarket, and it is mentioned between neighbors. This understanding of being spiritual sounds plausible, compelling, innocent, and even commendable, but, let us make no mistake about it, it is *lethal* to biblical Christianity. That is why the biggest enigma we face today is the fact that its chief enablers are evangelical churches, especially those who are seeker-sensitive and emergent who, for different reasons, are selling spirituality disconnected from biblical truth.”⁶ Our fellowship (and everything this word so richly conveys) is with those who love the Gospel as set forth by the Apostle Paul. There is no other Gospel, and if we entertain *any* other view of the Gospel, we mock God, we sow to the flesh, and we will reap only misery. In the context of Galatians, this has to do with entertaining the distorted theology of the Judaizers. Bad theology produces bad spirituality (note the emphasis on the harm of tolerating bad theology in Rev. 2:14-20).

ENDNOTES

¹ M. S. Horton, *Beyond Culture Wars* (Moody, 1994), p. 136.

² D. Wells, “Living In The Matrix,” *Modern Reformation* (Jan/Feb. 2009), p. 21.

³ D. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-Lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Eerdmans, 2008) p. 228.

⁴ The root meaning of KOINΩNEΩ is “to be a partner in or with.” The word denotes close union and bond that is not easily broken (cf. Acts 4:32ff.). For the Apostle Paul this refers strictly to the relation of faith in Christ and Him crucified (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 13:13; Philippians 1:5). Cf. The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, I, ed. C. Brown (Zondervan, 1975), p. 643.

⁵ S. L. Johnson, Jr., Galatians: Believers Bible Bulletin (Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, TX, 1978), No. 15, p. 5.

⁶ Wells, op. cit. p. 178.