Hermeneutics: Accurately Interpreting Bible Teaching

Don Closson provides a good understanding of hermeneutics, the ways in which one interprets the Bible with accuracy and integrity. He provides a step by step guide to understanding and interpreting Scripture in a consistent way. He helps us understand how to deal with the cultural, historical and language barriers we face in dealing with a text written in a different language and culture than our own.

Understanding the Bible

If you have ever had a prolonged discussion with a Jehovah's Witness, Mormon, or New Ager over a passage of Scripture, you might relate to an experience that I had recently. I sat down with someone who had obviously spent considerable time in the Bible, who stated a desire to know God's truth and was willing to work diligently to please God, sacrificing both time and money. However, when it came to determining what the Bible taught concerning how we might please Him and what we must do to be saved, we found little we could agree upon. At times it felt as if we were reading two completely different texts.

The problems I encountered were the result of different rules of interpretation. These rules are part of a discipline known as hermeneutics, which many consider to be both an art and a science. The rules that one uses to interpret Scripture play a vital role in determining the meaning of a passage, and thus, our understanding of God and ourselves. Does John 1:1 refer to Jesus as the co- creator of the universe, existing with God the Father eternally, indeed, being of the same essence as the Father? Or is Jesus' divinity somehow inferior to the divinity of God the Father, a view that Jehovah's Witnesses hold? The way we interpret this passage will be determined by the rules of interpretation we bring to our study. It is obvious that

both interpretations cannot be correct. When John wrote the words for his Gospel, and specifically for the first chapter, he had one meaning in mind. He may not have understood all of the implications of what he was writing, nor could he have imagined all of the applications possible in future contexts. However, via the inspiration of the Holy Spirit John's words were to communicate a specific truth about God.

There are three good reasons why we have difficulty understanding the biblical text. First, we are separated from the historical events written about by thousands of years of history. Second, we live in a dramatically different culture, and third, the biblical texts were written in foreign languages. These obstacles to understanding can be daunting to those who want quick and easy comprehension of the Bible. They also make it possible for others to place their own agenda over the text, knowing that few will take the time to uncover what the writer's original intent might have been.

Our goal should be to exegete, or draw meaning from the Scriptures, rather than to impose meaning onto them. Jehovah's Witnesses have decided that Jesus cannot be God; they claim that it is an irrational doctrine. As a result, they have worked hard at interpreting direct references to His deity as something else. In Hebrews 1:6 the angels are told to worship Jesus. Since the Witnesses at one time taught that Jesus was an angel, they translate the word found in the passage as obeisance rather than worship. More like a gesture of respect than the worship of the one true God. Unfortunately, they have to misquote a reference work in order to justify their translation. Their New World Translation has changed numerous passages in order to keep their doctrines intact.

In this essay we will review some of the principles of hermeneutics that have been accepted by the majority of conservative Protestants for many years. Our goal in doing so is that we may be able to rightly divide the Word of truth.

God’s Communication Link

One of the first steps to correctly interpreting Scripture is being aware of what the Bible says about itself and understanding how it has come down to us through the centuries.

Rather than causing a complete text about Himself and His creation to simply appear, God chose to use many individuals, over thousands of years to write His words down. God has also revealed something of Himself in nature. General revelation, in the world around us, gives us an indication of God’s glory and power. However, without special revelation, the specific information found in the Bible, we would be lacking the redemptive plan that God has made available through Jesus Christ. The Bible clearly claims to have revealed information about God. Deuteronomy 29:29 declares that, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.” In 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 the writer adds that, “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.”

The unique nature of the Bible is made clear by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16. Paul tells Timothy that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

None of the original writings, or autographa, still exist. Nevertheless, textual criticism has confirmed that the transmission of these writings have been very accurate. The accuracy of the Old Testament documents are attested to by the Dead Sea Scrolls which gives us copies of parts of the Old Testament almost a thousand years closer to the original texts than previously available. The dependability of the New

Testament is confirmed by the availability of a remarkable volume of manuscripts which were written very near the time of the original events.

Once we appreciate what God has done to communicate with us, we may begin to apply the principals of interpretation, or hermeneutics, to the text. To be successful this process must take into account the cultural, historical, and language barriers that limit our understanding of the original writings. There are no shortcuts to the hard work necessary to accomplish this task.

Some have wrongly argued that knowledge of the culture and languages of biblical times is not necessary, that the Holy Spirit will interpret the text for us. The role of the Holy Spirit is to illumine the believer in order to accept and apply what is found in Scripture. The Bible says that the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:14). The Greek word for "accept" means "to take something willingly and with pleasure." The key role of the Spirit is not to add information to the text, or to give us special translating abilities, but to soften our hearts in order to receive what is there.

The goal of this process is to be mature in Christ. The Bible is not an end, it is a means to becoming conformed to the image or likeness of Christ.

What Is a Literal Interpretation?

Prior to the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, biblical interpretation was often dominated by the allegorical method. Looking back to Augustine, the medieval church believed that every biblical passage contained four levels of meaning. These four levels were the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the eschatological. For instance, the word Jerusalem literally referred to the city itself; allegorically, it refers to the church of Christ; morally, it indicates the human soul; and

eschatologically it points to the heavenly Jerusalem.(1) Under this school of interpretation it was the church that established what the correct meaning of a passage was for all four levels.

By the time of the reformation, knowledge of the Bible was scarce. However, with a new emphasis on the original languages of Hebrew and Greek, the fourfold method of interpretation was beginning to fade. Martin Luther argued that the church shouldn't determine what the Scriptures mean, the Scriptures should govern what the churches teach. He also rejected the allegorical method of interpreting Scripture.

Luther argued that a proper understanding of what a passage teaches comes from a literal interpretation. This means that the reader must consider the historical context and the grammatical structure of each passage, and strive to maintain contextual consistency. This method was a result of Luther's belief that the Scriptures are clear, in opposition to the medieval church's position that they are so obscure that only the church can uncover their true meaning.

Calvin agreed in principle with Luther. He also placed great importance on the notion that "Scripture interprets Scripture," stressing that the grammar, context, words, and parallel passages found in the text were more important that any meaning we might impose on them. He added that, "it is the first business of an interpreter to let the author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.(2)

Another approach to interpretation is letterism. While often ignoring context, historical and cultural setting, and even grammatical structure, letterism takes each word as an isolated truth. A problem with this method is that it fails to take into account the different literary genre, or types, in the Bible. The Hebrew poetry of the Psalms is not to be interpreted in the same way as is the logical discourse of

Romans. Letterism tends to lead to legalism because of its inability to distinguish between literary types. All passages tend to become equally binding on current believers.

If we use Jesus as our model for interpreting Scripture we find that He treated the historical narratives as facts. Old Testament characters and events are talked about as if they actually existed and happened. When making applications from the Old Testament text, Jesus used the normal, rather than allegorical meaning, of the passage. Jesus condemned the Scribes and Pharisees for replacing the original intent of the Scriptures with their own traditions. Jesus took a literal approach to interpretation which took into account the literary type of the passage.

Paul tells Timothy that he is to do his "best to present himself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." Having the right method of interpretation is a critical precursor to accomplishing this admonition.

Applying the Hermeneutic Process

Next, we will look at how one might approach a specific text. A first step should be to determine the literary genre of the passage. A passage might be legal, narrative, polemic, poetry, wisdom, gospel, logical discourse, or prophetic literature, each having specific guidelines for proper interpretation. For instance, the wisdom literature found in Proverbs is to be seen as maxims or general truths based on broad experience and observations. "They are guidelines, not guarantees; precepts, not promises.(3)

Now, it would be helpful to identify the use of figurative language in the passage. Various forms of Hebrew poetry, simile, metaphor, and hyperbole need to be recognized if the reader is to understand the passage's meaning. Hyperbole, for example, uses exaggeration to make a point. John says that the

whole world would not have room for the books that would be written if everything about Jesus's life was written down (John 21:25). John is using figurative speech. His point is that there were many things that Jesus did that weren't recorded.

The Hebrew language of the Old Testament is filled with examples of figurative text. Judges 7:12 claims that "The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore." Were there actually billions of camels in the valley, or is this an overstatement for the sake of making the point that there were many camels present? Interpreting a passage begins by looking for the plain literal meaning of the text, but if there are obvious contradictions of known facts we look for a figure of speech. Clues for interpreting a figure of speech are usually found in the immediate context.

After a passage's literary type is determined and figures of speech are identified, we can begin to focus on the content of a section of Scripture. Four levels of study are recommended. Word studies come first. Words are the building blocks of meaning, and by looking at the root origin or etymology of a word; its historical development over time; and the meaning of the word at the time of its use in Scripture we can gain insight into a passage's meaning.

Much is to be gained by focusing on the verbs and conjunctions within a text. In the Greek language, verbs have a tense, a mood, a voice, and a person. For instance, Ephesians 5:18 says to not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit. Does "be filled" mean a one time event? Do we accomplish this via hard work? Actually, the passive voice and present tense of the Greek word used translates better as "be kept being filled in Spirit." It implies an ongoing process that God performs as a result of our submission to Him, not as a result of our personal

efforts.

Connective words like “and” or “for” are important when reading long or difficult passages. The word “for” introduces a reason for a preceding statement. In Romans 1:15-17 Paul says that he is eager “to preach the gospel . . . **for** I am not ashamed . . . **for** it is the power of God for salvation . . . **for** in it the righteousness of God is revealed.” And, in Romans 8, “for” occurs 15 times.

Other techniques for studying words include looking at synonyms, antonyms, and cross references. Cross-references might be verbal, parallel (using the same words), or conceptual (using the same idea).

Continuing the Hermeneutic Process

Syntax is the way in which words are grouped together within phrases, clauses, and sentences. Two types of phrases are prepositional, like “in Christ” and “from God our Father,” and participial, such as “speaking the truth in love” or “making peace.” There are dependent clauses like “when we pray for you” and independent clauses such as “we always thank God.” There are simple and compound sentences, simple ones having only one independent clause, compound ones having at least two.

Why do we need to know about syntax? Because without it we have no valid assurance that our interpretation is the meaning God intended to convey. Since God used languages that function within normal grammatical rules, knowing these rules is necessary in order to discern the meaning of a text.

The next level of study should be context. First locate the beginning of an idea and its topic sentence. Start with the paragraph, and then consider the chapter and the entire book. Determine who is being addressed, who is speaking, and what the occasion is. Hebrews chapter six has been interpreted in a

number of different ways depending on how one answers these questions. Since the book was written to Jewish believers, deals with Christian maturity, and begins by exhorting the reader to leave elementary teachings and press on to maturity, many feel that the passage deals with Jewish believers tempted to return to Temple worship and the Jewish community. It warns not of the loss of salvation, but the negative impact on their Christian life if they return to the Jewish community and worship. In other words, they cannot start over if they ruin their testimony among the Jews.

Finally, ignoring the cultural context of a passage is one of the greatest problems in Bible interpretation. By culture we mean the behavior of a people as reflected by their thoughts, beliefs, social forms, speech, actions, and material artifacts. If we ignore culture, we often wrongly read into the Bible our twentieth century ideas. Knowledge of the religious, economic, legal, agricultural, architectural, and domestic practices of biblical times will decrease the likelihood of misinterpreting difficult passages.

God’s plagues on Egypt is one example of how cultural knowledge can help us to understand a text. The specific plagues sent by God spoke directly against the Egyptian gods. Turning the Nile into blood invalidated the protection of Isis, a goddess of the Nile, as well as Khnum, a guardian god of the Nile. The plague of frogs defied the Heqet, the goddess of birth who had the head of a frog. The plague of gnats ridiculed Set, god of the desert. Other plagues mocked Re, a sun god; Hathor, goddess with a cows head; Apis, the bull god; Sekhmet, goddess with power over disease, as well as others. God was communicating very clearly with the Egyptian people concerning His role as the creator and sustainer of the universe.

Reference works like Bible dictionaries, concordances, word study books, and commentaries are available to assist us in our study of the Bible. The goal of this process is to apply

God’s Word to our lives, but we must first have accurate knowledge of what God’s Word means. Understanding precedes application.

As Psalm 19:1 explains, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” Paul, in Romans 1:20 says, “…since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”

Notes

1. Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 63.

2. Ibid., p. 67.

3. Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1991), p. 132.

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Satanism: The World of the Occult – A Christian View of Demonic Worship

Russ Wise provides a good understanding of why people are attracted to a negative sounding practice: the worship of Satan. Looking at this issue from a biblical worldview, he presents information on how God can free people who have bought into this lie. From a Christian perspective, we don’t need to fear them but instead stand ready to offer them the

deliverance found only in Jesus Christ.

[*Webservant's Note: Since this article was written in 1994, a "new face" of Satanism has emerged, consisting of pagans and atheists who claim to not believe in Satan yet who have appropriated the name "Satanist" for themselves. Many of these young "neo-Satanists" (to coin a phrase) deny the concepts of good and evil, worship themselves, and take great offense at articles like this that describe a Satanic-oriented description of their chosen set of beliefs.*

Nonetheless, we believe Russ Wise's original article is still worth offering because of the high numbers of people drawn into the openly occult practices described herein.]

The Growing Problem

The occult is on the rise; many young people are seeking their spiritual identity through Satanism.

Satanism has become an issue of great concern in our society. It is a phenomena that crosses the city limits into the rural areas of our nation. Satanism is not just a big city problem. The news wires carry story after story about young children being kidnapped, only to be found later as victims of some bizarre ritualistic crime. To help us gain a balanced perspective of the subject, C. S. Lewis in his book *Screwtape Letters*, says this about Satan:

> There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and to feel an unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.

As satanic involvement among our youth increases, we begin to see the primary goal of such activity. It has become clear, according to the data thus far analyzed by those who

investigate satanic involvement, that the primary goal is to alter people's values and turn them against themselves, their beliefs, family, God, and society.

When we begin to take a close look at the occult, it becomes necessary to define terms. There is a great difference between cults and the occult. The term *cult* refers to a group of people polarized around one individual who is often a magnetic personality. This individual has his or her own understanding of truth, who God is, man's relationship to God, the existence of heaven and hell, as well as a number of other issues of faith. In most cases such individuals incorporate some degree of biblical truth into their teachings in order to gain a certain amount of credibility and in order to deceive the unwary.

The term *occult* means "hidden" or those things or teachings that are "unknown" or secret. So, the occult is the seeking after knowledge of unknown information, knowledge that is gained beyond the five senses. Therefore, knowledge is received by some supernatural involvement or connection.

Anton LaVey of the First Church of Satan in San Francisco, California, says that

> Satanism is a blatantly selfish, brutal religion. It is based on the belief that man is inherently a selfish, violent creature… that the earth will be ruled by those who fight to win.

Satanism challenges the biblical teaching regarding man's relationship to others. We are to esteem others better than ourselves, and we are to be team players. In 1 Corinthians we read about being a part of the body of Christ, whereas, Satanism esteems the "self" over others.

Young satanists believe that the strong will rule with Satan. Once they are sufficiently involved, they often make a pact with Satan. They commit themselves to a future date when they

will take their own lives by suicide. They believe that if they submit themselves to Satan in death, they will come back in another life as a stronger being and rule with him forever. According to recent statistics, fourteen young people a day take their own lives. A major concern for those who uphold a Judeo-Christian worldview is that this generation is becoming detached and is losing all sense of morality. Many have lost their mooring. It is imperative for the church, as a corporate body, and we as individuals, to share the message that Jesus Christ is the only possible solution to our emotional and spiritual needs.

The Power that Entices

Power has become an obsession with young satanists. It is sought after on the physical, mental, and spiritual levels. According to one former occultist, the greatest lure into the occult is “power” and “knowledge.” Not just corporate power but personal power. Gaining knowledge that others do not possess is another aspect of the occult. When an individuals have more knowledge it affords them a degree of power over those who do not have access to that knowledge.

Likewise, Satanism offers its lure to the youth in our society. Drugs and sex have become the bait that so often ensnare the unsuspecting.

With the increase of satanic activity, a profile of those involved in Satanism has emerged. They are generally from a white, middle to upper-middle class family. In most cases they are bright and do well in school; however, they are often bored and are not challenged to meet their full potential. They tend to have a low self-worth and are unable to distinguish between right and wrong because of their relative ethical system. They often have problems in the home and in relating to other people around them. They use drugs and are sexually promiscuous. It is a rare occasion when these last two elements are not present in the mix.

Abuse, both physically and emotionally, is another aspect of this mix. Young satanists are often abused children who know no other way to relate to people. Some are a part of a multi-generational family involved in worshiping Satan as savior.

Anton LaVey, Satanist High Priest of the First Church of Satan in San Francisco gives us a glimpse of how Satan is seen in his book *The Satanic Bible*:

> We hold Satan as a symbolic personal savior, who takes care of mundane, fleshly, carnal things.

Satan has attempted to usurp the place of Christ in redeeming mankind. He has endeavored to establish himself as a god who is equal to or greater than Jehovah and in a sense render God ineffective. LaVey goes on to say that "God exists as a universal force, a balancing factor in nature, too impersonal to care one whit whether we live or die."

Therefore, the Judeo-Christian God is inaccessible and has no compassion. Thus, Satan becomes the solution to man's deepest needs.

Satanism leads one into bondage through mind control and fear, whereas Christianity allows the individual the freedom of choice. We have the opportunity to either accept God's free gift of life or reject Him and simply exist separate from God's love.

An Agent of Change

Music has always been at the center of the youth culture. The problem arises when the lyrics promote aberrant behavior. The Night Stalker, Richard Ramirez of Los Angeles, believed that Satan made him invincible. Police say the style of the brutal rapes and 16 murders Ramirez committed resembled the lyrics of the song "Night Prowler" on AC/DC's LP "Highway to Hell."

Along with Ramirez' fascination with AC/DC, he used cocaine

and PCP in conjunction with a deep interest in Satan worship. He believed that Satan would protect him and not allow harm to come to him. According to a *People* magazine article as long ago as September 1985,

> Rock ‘n roll is turning too often to sex, Satanism, drugs and violence for its major themes and corrupting the values and views of unwary young people.

The lyrics of the last few years of the 1980s have continued on a downward slope. Rachel Matthews, an artist and repertoire representative for Capitol Records, recruits new groups for her company. Her comments regarding a newly signed band reveal what she, as one individual representing the music industry, is looking for in a band:

> I was just going, ‘Oh (expletive)! I’ve never heard anything like this!’ I’ve heard plenty of metal and speed metal, but it was just so intense and out of control, just like this caged psychosis going on. I loved it, because you could actually understand the lyrics. And even if they’re morbid and gruesome, it’s really cool that you could understand what they’re saying. It just makes it twice as evil. I like that.” (*Dallas Life Magazine*, 1 July 1988)

The demo that interested Ms. Matthews in the group contained songs like “Die in Pain” and “Foaming at the Mouth.”

The music that causes the greatest concern is the various types of “metal” music. Metal has been classified into three types. First, is party metal, and it represents the most popular style of music. Groups like Bon Jovi, Motley Crue, and Def Leppard are representative of party metal. They tend to glorify sexuality and the party spirit.

The second type is “thrash metal” represented by groups like Metallica, Anthrax, and Megadeth. The primary focus of “thrash metal” is violence and death.

The third type is known as “black metal” and is overtly satanic. The lyrics encourage such activities as incest, necrophilia, rape, torture, and human sacrifice. Black metal is represented by groups like Venom and Slayer.

King Diamond is perhaps the most satanic of all “black metal” groups. He openly professes Satan and incorporates a large amount of satanic activity into his performances.

Music has always been an agent of change in our society. It tends to shape the moral attitudes of each generation. As Christians we should be especially concerned about the lyrics in the music of the youth culture. We cannot afford to allow another generation to become polluted with the immoral themes found in today’s music. As parents it is imperative that we maintain open communication lines with our young people. Without open communication it becomes improbable that we can affect the listening habits of our children. Second, we cannot be hypocritical in our personal listening habits. Third, we need to become familiar with the type of music our children listen to and be willing to acknowledge the good and be prepared to positively criticize that which is not appropriate within our household.

Last, we as parents need to recognize that if our child is involved in rebellious music, we must attempt to understand what unmet need in his life is being met by his musical diet.

Galatians 5:19-21 says that

> The deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery . . . those who practice such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, it is imperative for us as adults and youth to only listen to and think upon those lyrics that would honor God and His principles.

The Games of Destruction

Satan has used a number of tools over the centuries to ensnare the naive. The Ouija Board has proven to be particularly useful. According to the Dictionary of Mysticism the Ouija Board is “an instrument for communication with the spirits of the dead.” The Ouija Board is an open door into the world of the occult and demonic activity. Disembodied spirits speak to the living through the medium of the Ouija Board. This information is believed to be truth from the other side and is not recognized for what it is: Lucifer’s delusion to gain our allegiance.

Jane Roberts, the author of *The Seth Material*, relates her story regarding the Ouija Board. She was about to write a book on ESP, and to stimulate her thoughts, she and her husband used a Ouija Board to gain perspective. After a few sessions they were able to receive messages from someone who later identified himself as Seth. The use of the Ouija Board and the gradual, but ever-growing, influence of Seth in Jane’s life brought her to the point of possession. Her mind would enter a trance state and a deep male voice would begin to speak, indicating he had a message to get across to our world the wisdom that it was only now ready for. Over a period of ten years Seth produced through Jane over 5000 typewritten records of alleged higher esoteric truth. Then Seth tried to kill her. Though she had not previously believed in demons, this experience changed her mind.

Internationally-known observer of the occult, Kurt Koch, says that by the use of the Ouija Board revelations from the past and predictions about the future are made.

Edmond Gruss tells us in his book *Cults and the Occult in the Age of Aquarius* that there have been “many cases of ‘possession’ after a period of Ouija Board use.” Supernatural contact is commonly made through use of the board and has become a primary tool of Satan in reaching young people.

The Rev. Donald Page of the Christian Spiritualist Church reports that most possession cases he has dealt with are people who have used the Ouija Board. Francoise Strachan's book, *A Company of Devils*, states that the Ouija Board is "one of the easiest and quickest ways to become possessed."

The greatest danger of the Ouija Board is that an individual begins to place his trust and future hope in the message the board brings. As a Christian our only source of revelation regarding future things is to be God's Word. We are to look to Jesus Christ and His teachings to properly understand our problems and seek a solution. Deuteronomy 18 tells us to beware of mediums and those who practice divination.

1 Chronicles 10 tells the story of Saul who was unfaithful to the Lord and consulted a medium, seeking guidance and did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore, the Lord slew him and turned the Kingdom over to David.

Christians can offer several reasons as to why one should not be involved in the use of the Ouija Board. One is simply that the Bible condemns it as being involvement in the occult (Leviticus 19:31, 20:6). Another relates to the tragic experiences of those who have been involved with this medium. And then there's the fact that the messages received are often false and misleading. They are often obscene and contrary to biblical teaching.

The following passages in Scripture give us, and those who would seek God's perspective, where to go for truth.

"And when they shall say unto you, seek unto them that have familiar spirits and into wizards . . . should not a people seek unto their God?" (Isaiah 8:19)

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, . . . and it shall be given him." (James 1:5)

The Great Delivery

God is able to deliver those who seek Him. Victory is ours. But first, we must receive God's power.

We have been discussing the problems of satanic involvement. Whether we become deceived by use of the Ouija Board, music, divination or by Dungeons and Dragons, the end result is the same occult bondage.

Mark Bubeck's Moody Press book, *The Adversary*, gives us a sound basis for applying sound biblical doctrine in resisting the devil as he attempts to infiltrate our lives. Basic to all victory of the believer over Satan is the absolute truth of biblical doctrine. There is no substitute. The greatest key in warfare against Satan is when we recognize that God's truth is our only offense.

Bubeck refers to "doctrinal prayer" as an effective tool to use in spiritual warfare. The sixth chapter of Ephesians tells us that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces. We cannot effectively engage Satan in warfare on the natural plane; we must enter the spiritual dimension to adequately challenge Satan and defeat him and his host. According to Bubeck, doctrinal prayer

> …is the practice of praying or applying the objective, absolute truths of the Word of God as the hope and basis of resolving our prayer burden.

Doctrinal prayer presupposes that we have a deep understanding of the Scriptures. Bible memorization is a must for this type of prayer.

Another aspect of our spiritual warfare is that of resistance. We are called to resist the devil. The term "resist" basically means to stand, to stand invincibly or successfully. We can stand firm and remain invincible because of the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. Jesus was victorious over Satan at

the cross. As God’s people, we are victorious over Satan because of Jesus. We can successfully resist Satan as we stand in right relationship with Christ. Since we are in Christ, and He has all authority in heaven and earth, we are in the only place of victory.

Ephesians 6 speaks of our spiritual armor. With the exception of the sword, this armor is defensive in nature. We have the victory; it has been won we simply need to stand our ground. Satan has been defeated at the cross (Colossians 2:8-15) and made powerless (Hebrews 2:14-15). The believer needs to stand in his rightful position in Christ as victor; Jesus has already won the battle.

The Holy Spirit of God shows us the way to righteousness and restoration. Satan attempts to convince us that we are so bad that God wouldn’t want anything to do with us. He seeks to convince us that there is no forgiveness for what we have done or that we have committed the unpardonable sin.

The Holy Spirit uses God’s Word to give us hope and assurance of God’s love and forgiveness, whereas Satan creates despair, doubt, resentment, and anger toward God, His Word, and His people. Satan intends for us to feel as though no one as bad as we are could ever really be saved.

Doctrine and right understanding is important to our spiritual welfare. It is the foundation upon which everything stands. Without it we are subject to every wind that blows, every false teaching that Satan would use to lure us.

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who have trusted in His blood atonement, we have a vast number of tools to render the enemy ineffective. Power, position, authority, total victory over Satan’s world belong to us. All that remains is for us to appropriate God’s promises and recognize our position in Christ, focus our attention against the devil’s work, and to rest in what our Lord has done for us.

Satanism is a growing concern in our culture. With this growth comes a great deal of confusion and a lack of understanding. The following information is designed to help you understand the problem by clearly defining the different aspects of the occult and giving you concise information that you can use.

Defining the Occult

Cult

A cult is a group of people polarized around an individual with a magnetic personality, who deviates from orthodox Christianity by distorting the central message of the Bible by additional revelation or by introducing their personal understanding of primary biblical doctrines such as the person of Jesus Christ, heaven, hell, salvation, atonement, the virgin birth, etc.

Occult

Secret or hidden knowledge. This knowledge is not discerned by the five senses and is therefore, supernaturally received through the practice of divination.

Witchcraft

The use of scripturally forbidden supernatural powers to manipulate people and events. Commonly known as the “craft of the wise” or “wicca,” the worship of nature and feminine energies mother nature. Witchcraft is manifested in two opposing views: white magic, and black magic or witchcraft (see Deuteronomy 18:10)

White Magic

The use of supernatural power to manipulate a person or an event to bring about good. The practice of divination is used to bring about “positive” results such as knowledge, healing, etc.

Black Magic

The use of supernatural power to manipulate a person or an event to bring about evil or destruction. Manipulation is achieved by use of rituals and the casting of spells.

Satanism

Unlike Witchcraft, Satanism is the worship of Satan, formerly known as Lucifer, and the practice of Black Magic. Satanism is a reaction against the Christian church and the Word of God in particular. Satanism promotes a do-what-you-want attitude and is ultimately the worship of oneself.

Categories of Involvement

Individuals involved in satanic activity fall into one of four categories:

- Multi-generational international organization
- National organizations
- Independent self-styled groups
- Individual dabblers

The greatest increase in involvement is among the latter group the dabbler. The dabbler is, in most cases, from a middle to upper- middle class, caucasian home and is a user of drugs and other controlled substances.

The larger concern is not in the number of young people involved in satanic activity but what they are capable of doing when they become absorbed in the worship of Satan.

Satanism centers around involvement in animal sacrifice, blood ritual, sex, the use of drugs and sometimes murder. According to “The Addiction Letter” (1/89),

> Most Satanism revolves around a drug and alcohol dependent lifestyle which glorifies violence, hate, lying, stealing, and vandalism. The involved youngster craves a higher power

to validate . . . chemical dependence and Satan fills the spiritual void.

The Mental Profile of the Dabbler

- Rebellion
- Boredom
- Low self-worth

Warning Signs of the Dabbler

The dabbler is likely to have difficulty relating to peers and in most cases, they have withdrawn from their family and religious heritage. They tend to become involved in a variety of the following:

- A drop in grades
- Burglary
- Drug use
- Physical and sexual abuse
- Mind control
- Animal mutilation
- Increased hatred
- Murder
- Suicide

Drug abuse is the common denominator in all levels of Satanism. Drugs have become the primary source of mind-altering experiences for the Satanist, thereby, giving him a false sense of power and spiritual potency.

Characteristics that may indicate satanic involvement

- Avoiding family members
- A change in friends
- Becoming secretive about activities
- Loss of interest in extra-curricular activities
- Personality changes
- An unusual interest in books, movies, videos, etc. with an

occult theme
- Use of drugs and alcohol
- Lack of attendance of worship with family

Individuals are recruited into satanic groups by any number or combination of the following:

- Free drugs or sex
- Companionship
- Power
- Money
- Pornography
- Personal choice

Satan's Goal

According to scripture (Matthew 4:9, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Revelation 12:9), Satan's goal is to deceive man by blinding him to the truth of the gospel and to receive worship for himself (Isaiah 14:12-14). On a more practical level Satan desires to alter an individual's values and turn them against themselves, their beliefs, family, God and society.

The Church of Satan

Anton Szandor LaVey formed the Church of Satan in 1966. LaVey, the author of *The Satanic Bible,* is perhaps the most common source of satanic ritual and understanding available to young people today. It can be found in most large secular bookstores. The Satanic Bible has sold more than 600,000 copies since it was first published by Avon Books in 1969.

Secret things

Another common denominator in satanic groups is secrecy. Individuals keep a journal of activity, rituals, charms, or messages in a notebook, blank book and sometimes even a floppy disc. This information is often written in an alphabet that is not widely known. Alphabets commonly used by occultists are:

the witches alphabet, the celtic alphabet used by the Druids, the Enochian alphabet, the Egyptian and others.

Personal Initiation

Initiation plays a major role in group activity. Through initiation an individual is given a chance to declare total allegiance to Satan by participation. Often one will sever a portion of a finger or a toe to indicate their commitment to the unholy one.

Other acts include being a participant in a ritual where mutilation of an animal or human is a part of the activity. These acts are usually video-taped to be used at a later time to keep the individual in line if need be. In some cases a criminal act is perpetrated where the initiate is involved in a key role. An unholy communion of sorts is taken during initiatory rituals where a cup or chalice (usually stolen from a church) is used containing a mixture of wine, blood (human or animal) and urine. Satanism is not for the faint-hearted.

Other methods of initiation include body markings. An inverted cross may be burned into one’s forearm or chest, etc.

Body Markings

Commonly used markings include the following (it is important to note that body markings can be used for the preparation of a sacrifice, as well as initiation into a group):

- Goathead
- Inverted cross
- Skull
- Pentagram
- Baphomet
- MENA (amen)
- Black rose
- Swastika

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Jehovah's Witnesses and the Trinity: A Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran provides Christians with a biblical perspective on countering the false teaching of Jehovah's Witnesses regarding the nature of God and the Trinity. Countering these non-Christian views will enable you to get to the heart of the matter in sharing Christ with members of this cult.

The Trinity

In another essay (Jehovah's Witnesses: Witnessing to the Witnesses) I discussed effective evangelistic strategies when sharing the faith with Jehovah's Witnesses. We covered some effective techniques such as the Witnesses' record of false prophecy, the name "Jehovah", the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the personality of the Holy Spirit. In this essay I would like to teach you how to defend the doctrine of the Trinity, a truth clearly denied by Jehovah's Witnesses. Before we can defend this doctrine, however, we must have a clear understanding of the Trinity. Too many Christians lack a solid understanding of the Triune nature of God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is the belief that there is one God who has revealed Himself in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three persons make up the one true God. These three persons are of the same substance, equal in power and glory. It is important we understand this doctrine because the wrong Jesus or the wrong God cannot save us from eternal death. Paul makes a clear warning of this in 2 Corinthians 11:4.

The Bible clearly states that there is only one God. Deuteronomy 6:4 states, “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.” Isaiah 44:6 states, “I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides me.” Clearly, these verses reveal that there is only one God. Yet, there are three separate persons in the Bible who are called God and have the characteristics only God can have. The Trinity is a difficult concept to grasp, because we are finite beings trying to explain an infinite God who is beyond our understanding.

Let’s take a look at some verses that back up our doctrine of the Trinity. The Father is obviously called God as seen throughout the Bible. No one will argue that point. So there is one member of the Trinity, the Father. Jesus the Son, is a separate person but He is also called God. John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Titus 2:13 says, “Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” So here we see clearly, the Son is also called God.

The Holy Spirit is also a separate person, and He is also called God. First, let us understand, the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force. He is a person and has the characteristics of a person. He can be grieved (Eph. 4:30), He speaks (Acts 13:2), and He can be lied to (Act 5:3-4). In Acts 5:3-4 the Holy Spirit is called God, “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?…You have not lied to men, but to God.'”

So we see clearly that there are three persons in the Bible, and all three are called God. Yet, we must remember, there is only one God according to the verses we looked at Deuteronomy 6:4 and Isaiah 44:6. Therefore, we come to the conclusion that the Trinity is made up of three separate persons who are the one true God. At this point we need to look at verses Jehovah's Witnesses use to attempt to disprove the Trinity and learn how to refute these arguments. Then we will look at the best verses to use in demonstrating the truth of the Trinity to Jehovah's Witnesses.

Jehovah's Witnesses and the Bible

I run in to many Christians who tell me, "The Jehovah's Witnesses know their Bible so well, and they've got so many verses memorized." The truth is, they don't know their Bible well, it's just that we Christians are lacking in our Bible knowledge. When it comes to the Trinity, Witnesses only know about 8 verses to defend their view. We'll be studying the main verses they use to try to disprove the Trinity.

In one approach they attempt to show that Jesus cannot be God because He was created. The verse they use here is Colossians 1:15, "And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation." Here the Witnesses say Christ is the *first-born* which they say means, "first created being of God." Therefore, they conclude Jesus cannot be God since He was created.

The key to understanding this verse is understanding the term *first-born*, what does it mean? The Greek word for "first created" is the word *Protoktioti*. If Paul wanted to say Christ was the first created being, he would have used this word but he does not. He uses another term, *Prototokos*. Paul is referring to the Jewish use of the word *first-born* which not only means first one born but also is used as a title of sovereignty and pre-eminence.

Here's an example of the meaning of the word. In Psalm 89:27 God says of David, "I also shall make him My first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth." Let's take a good look and see how first- born is used here. Is David the first-born son of Jesse? No, he is the eighth and youngest son of Jesse. Then how is it that David is the first-born? In the Old Testament use of the word, he is first- born in that he is pre-eminent or sovereign of all the kings of the earth.

Now stick that usage of *first-born* into the context of Colossians 1:15, and it fits perfectly. Not only that, have the Witnesses read on with you to verse 18. Verse 18 shows that Paul is clearly talking about the pre-eminence of Christ for he says, "He is also the head of the body" and "the first-born" for the purpose, "that in everything he might be pre-eminent." If we were to replace *first-born* in verse 18 with the term *pre-eminent*, it would fit perfectly in the context. However, if we replaced it with *first created*, it would not fit in that context.

Another verse the Witnesses use to show Jesus was created is Revelation 3:14, "And to the angel of Laodicea write: 'The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the Beginning of the creation of God….'" Here the faithful witness is Jesus and He is called, "The Beginning of the creation."

The Greek word for beginning is *arche*, which is used in many ways. It is used to mean "origin or source of, or ruler," but not first creation. Turn with the Witness to Revelation 21:6. In these two verses, Jehovah calls Himself the beginning. Does that mean Jehovah was created? No. Therefore, the Witnesses use of the term *beginning*, is incorrect.

Jesus was never created. John 1:1 states, "In the beginning was the Word" Jesus was with God from eternity past; Jesus has no beginning because He is the eternal God.

Is Jesus Inferior to God?

Is Jesus inferior to God? Another way the Witnesses try to disprove the deity of Christ is to show that Christ is inferior in nature to God. The verses they use here are John 14:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:3.

John 14:28 reads, “You heard that I said to you, ‘I go away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I.” They will ask you, “How can Jesus be equal to God if here He states ‘the Father is greater than I’?”

The term *greater* refers to position, not nature. The term *better* refers to nature. Here is a good example I use in illustrating this passage. The President is greater than you or I, correct? Yes, as Chief Executive Officer of the United States he is greater than you or I. The Jehovah’s Witness will agree. But, is the President *better* than you or I? What I mean is, is there anything about the President that makes him a superior being to you or me? No.

You see, *greater* refers to position, not nature. We see in Philippians 2:6-8, that Christ though He was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself and submitted Himself to the Father and took on the form of a servant. Though Jesus emptied Himself, He was always in nature God and equal to the Father in nature. If Jesus wanted to say He was inferior to God in nature, He would have said, “The Father is better than I.”

Here is an example of the use of the term *better* in Hebrews 1:4 (NAS); it says speaking of Jesus, “having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.” The NI V reads, “So he became as much superior to the angels….” Here we see that Jesus is a being superior to the angels, so the term *better*, is used. Remember, in explaining this verse, the term *greater* refers to position,

not nature.

Another verse the Witnesses will use is 1 Corinthians 11:3, “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” Here they say since the head of Christ is God, Jesus must be inferior to God.

Once again you use the same concept of equal in nature, but Christ submitted Himself to the Father. Here the principle of headship and submission established by God is displayed both in marriage and in the Trinity. Now show the Jehovah’s Witnesses that in this passage, the head of the woman is man. “Does this mean that the husband is a superior being to his wife?” The answer is obviously, “No.” The husband is greater than his wife by way of position but not by nature. The same applies to the Father and the Son. The Father is greater by position, but not better by nature.

Remember when you’re Witnessing, you are not there to win an argument, but to show them the error of their ways in a loving and Christ-like manner, but also you are not to be afraid to boldly defend the faith.

Proving the Deity of Christ

One of the best defenses is a good offense. When defending the Trinity to Witnesses, take charge of the conversation. Don’t let the Witnesses run you in circles. You pick the topic and keep them on the topic you choose, instead of having them ask you all the questions, you have some questions ready for them to answer.

The best way to do this, when they appear at your doorstep, is ask them, “What organization are you with?” They will reply, “We are Jehovah’s Witnesses.” Then ask them, “Whom do you say is the God of the Apostles?” They will reply, “Jehovah.” You then reply, “How do you explain the fact that Jesus is the God

of the Apostles?" They will be surprised and say, "No, that's not true, where do you find that?" Here you have taken over the conversation. Now, stay in charge of the conversation and don't let them break off on another tangent.

Next, you turn to the first text John 20:28, where Thomas, after seeing the resurrected Lord, proclaims to Jesus," My Lord and My God." Here, Thomas calls Jesus *God*. The Witnesses have two responses to this. One, they may say, "Well, Thomas was so surprised at seeing Jesus that he shouted, 'My Lord and My God,' in surprise just as we shout, 'Oh, my God,' when we're surprised." There's a problem with that. Thomas was a devout Jew and never would have shouted "my God" in surprise for that would be blasphemy for a Jew. A second response they have is, Thomas looked at Jesus and said, "My Lord," then looked to heaven and said, "My God." There's a problem with that too because the context does not say that. If you look at the passage, Thomas says, "My Lord and My God" to Jesus. So Thomas saw clearly that Jesus was God.

The next verse to turn them to is John 1:1. Now here the Witnesses will think you're falling into their trap for they have a different translation. Their translation says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was ***a*** god."

Well, the first thing to do is to show them that *both* translations can't be right. Someone is wrong. Ask them, "If we were to go to the local library here, we would find over thirty translations of the Bible. How many would translate it your way?" The truth is only one would, theirs. Then ask them, "Are you willing to say all the translators for the past centuries have been wrong and only yours is correct?" If they're honest, they'll think about it. Others will say, "Yes, ours is the only true translation."

It is then you say, "Let's say your translation is correct and mine is wrong, you still have a problem. How many gods do you

have in that verse?" Then you take their Bible and count the number of gods with them. Say, "Well, here is one God with a capital **G**, what kind of god is He?" They'll say, "A true god." Then you go on and say, "Here's another god with a small **g**, what kind of god is He?" They must say," a true god." Then you ask them, "How many gods do you have?" This is where they get stuck for they must either say two gods and be polytheists or deny their translation. These are two great verses to use when witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Alpha and the Omega

As I have witnessed to many Jehovah's Witnesses, I have found some verses that work most effectively in proving the deity of Christ. Here are two of my favorite combination of verses.

The first verse is Revelation 1:8. I am reading from the Jehovah's Witness Bible, and it reads, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says Jehovah God. Ask the Witness, "What does Alpha and Omega mean?" They'll reply,"The beginning and the end." Then ask them, "How many Alphas and Omegas can you have?" They'll answer, "Only one." Make sure you get this point across, there is only one Alpha and Omega.

Then turn to Revelation 22:12-13 which says, "Look I am coming quickly, and the reward I give is with me….I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Ask the Witnesses, "Who do you say the Alpha and Omega is?" They will say, "Jehovah." Now take a careful look. The Alpha and Omega in verse twelve is coming quickly. Let's see who is speaking in verse twelve.

Look at verse sixteen, "I Jesus, sent my angel to bear witness to you people of these things for the congregations. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star." It is Jesus speaking in verse twelve. If there is any doubt go to verse 20 which says, "He that bears witness of these things says, 'Yes; I am coming quickly' Amen come Lord Jesus." So it

is clear that the Alpha and the Omega in verse twelve is Jesus. Here is a strong proof text that Jesus is God because both Jehovah and Jesus are called the Alpha and the Omega.

Another pair of verses that are effective when used together are Isaiah 44:6 and Revelation 1:17-18. Isaiah 44:6 says, "This is what Jehovah has said, 'The king of Israel and the Repurchaser of him, Jehovah of armies, I am the first and I am the last.'" Ask the Witnesses how many firsts and lasts can you have? It's obvious to anyone you can only have one first and one last. Ask them, "Who is the first and the last?" They will say, "Jehovah." Now turn to Revelation 1:17-18 which says, "Do not be fearful; I am the First and the Last, and the living one; and I became dead but look! I am living forever." Who is speaking here? Obviously, it is Jesus for He died but is now alive, and guess what? He is called the First and the Last. Here again we see Jesus is God.

These are my favorite verses, and I have never had Witnesses refute these arguments. Remember, the Witnesses at your door won't convert right then and there. The key is to get them to start thinking and questioning the organization, and down the road, maybe in several years, they will seek answers and that will lead them out of the organization. Don't give up or be discouraged when sharing with Witnesses. Though they may be rude and show no signs that they are thinking, the Word of God is powerful and is working in their hearts even if we can't see it.

Remember Dr. Walter Martin (author of *Kingdom of the Cults*) went fifteen years without a convert, but he never gave up. Today we know of hundreds he pulled out of the organization. Continue to study the Word, and God bless you as you defend the faith.

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Sociobiology: Evolution, Genes and Morality – A Christian Perspective

Dr. Bohlin looks at the basic tenets of sociobiology from a biblical worldview perspective. Looking at them as a scientist and a Christian, he finds a lack of consistency and obvious paradoxes in this way of looking at our world.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

In 1981 I wrote an article for *Christianity Today*, which they titled "Sociobiology: Cloned from the Gene Cult."(1) At the time I was fresh from a graduate program in population genetics and had participated in two graduate seminars on the subject of sociobiology. You might be thinking, "What in the world is sociobiology, and why should I care?"

That's a good question. Sociobiology explores the biological basis of all social behavior, including morality. You should care because sociobiologists are claiming that all moral and religious systems, including Christianity, exist simply because they help promote the survival and reproduction of the group. These sociobiologists, otherwise known as *evolutionary ethicists*, claim to be able to explain the existence of every major world religion or belief system, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and even Marxism and secular humanism, in terms of natural selection and evolution. E. O. Wilson, a Harvard biologist and major advocate of sociobiology, claims that scientific materialism (a fully evolutionary worldview) will eventually overcome both traditional religion and any other secular ideology. While Wilson does admit that religion

in some form will always exist, he suggests that theology as an explanatory discipline will cease to exist.

The First Paradox

While the arrogance of sociobiology is readily apparent, it contains a number of paradoxes. The first paradox is simply that the worldview of sociobiology offers nothing but despair when taken to its logical conclusion, yet it continues to gain acceptance in the academic community.

Four Foundational Principles of Sociobiology

The despair of the sociobiological worldview and the ultimate lack of meaning it presents are derived from what I consider the four foundational principles of sociobiology. The first principle is the assertion that human social systems have been shaped by evolutionary processes. Human societies exist in their present form because they work, or at least have worked in the past, not because they are based on any kind of revelation.

Second, there is what sociobiologist Robert Wallace called the **reproductive imperative**.(2) The ultimate goal of any organism is to survive and reproduce. Species survival is the ultimate goal. Moral systems exist because they ultimately promote human survival and reproduction.

Third, the individual—at least in respect to evolutionary time—is meaningless. Species, not individuals, evolve and persist through time. E.O. Wilson stated that the organism, your body, is simply DNA's way of making more DNA.(3)

Fourth, all behavior is therefore selfish, or at least pragmatic, at its most basic level. We love our children because love is an effective means of raising effective reproducers. Wilson spells out the combined result of these principles quite clearly in his book *On Human Nature* when he says that

> *…no species, ours included, possesses a purpose beyond the imperatives created by its own genetic history (i.e., evolution)….we have no particular place to go. The species lacks any goal external to its own biological nature.(4)*

Wilson is saying that since humans have been shaped by evolution alone, they have no purpose beyond survival and reproduction. Even Wilson admits that this is an unappealing proposition.

Hope and Meaning

Since sociobiologists claim that all behavior is ultimately selfish, that an organism's only goal or purpose is to survive and reproduce, and that it is species survival, not individual survival, that is ultimately required, personal worth and dignity quickly disappear. The responses of sociobiologists when they are confronted with this conclusion have always been curious to me. I distinctly remember posing a question about hope and purpose to a graduate seminar composed of biology students and faculty. I asked, "Let's suppose that I am dead and in the ground, and the decomposers are doing their thing. What difference does it make to me now whether I have reproduced or not?" My point was that if death is the end with a capital "E", who cares whether or not I have reproduced? After an awkward silence, one of the faculty answered, "Well, I guess that it doesn't matter at all." In response, I asked, "Don't you see, we were just discussing how the only purpose in life is to survive and reproduce, but now you admit that this purpose is really an illusion. How do you go on with your life when you realize that it really doesn't matter what you do? That there is no point to any of it?" After an even longer silence, the same faculty member said, "Well, I suppose that those who will be selected for in the future will be those who know there is no purpose in life, but will live as if there is."

To say the least, I was stunned by the frankness of his response. He was basically saying that the human race will be forced to live with a lie—the illusion of hope and meaning. What was even more unsettling, however, was the fact that no one disagreed or offered even the most remote protest. Apart from myself, everyone there accepted evolution as a fact, so they were forced to accept this conclusion. (I would find out later that at least a couple of them didn't like it.)

A professor of philosophy at a university in Minnesota recently answered my challenge by saying that maybe there are two different kinds of hope and meaning: hope and meaning in small letters (meaning survival and reproduction) and Hope and Meaning in capital letters (meaning ultimate worth and significance). We all have hope and meaning in small letters, and maybe there just isn't any in capital letters. So what? But that was precisely my point. Hope and meaning in small letters is without significance unless Hope and Meaning in capital letters really exists.

Three Responses

Over the years I have noted three responses of evolutionists to the stark realization that their worldview offers no hope or meaning in their lives. The first is strong disagreement with the conclusions of sociobiology without strong reasons for disagreeing. They don't like the result, but they find it difficult to argue with the basic principles. As evolutionists, they agree with evolution, but they don't want to believe that a meaningless existence is the end result.

The second response is simple acceptance. These evolutionists agree that there is no purpose or meaning in life. They just have to accept it, as the professor in the story did. Their commitment to an evolutionary worldview is total. I find this attitude most prevalent among faculty and graduate students at secular institutions. There is an almost eerie fatalism that stoutly embraces the notion that one's dislike of a theory is

not sufficient cause to raise questions about it, especially when it is based on “sound” evolutionary principles.

The third response is an existential leap for meaning and significance when both have been stripped away. This leap is aptly illustrated by evolutionist Robert Wallace at the end of his book, *The Genesis Factor*. He writes:

> *I do not believe that man is simply a clever egotist, genetically driven to look after his own reproduction. He is that. But he is at least that. He is obviously much more. The evidence for this is simple and abundant. One need only hear the Canon in D Major by Johann Pachelbel to know that there are immeasurable depths to the human spirit….I am sorry for the person who has never broken into a silly dance of sheer exuberance under a starry sky: perhaps such a person will be more likely to interpret the message of this book more narrowly. The ones who will find it difficult to accept the narrow view are those who know more about the joy of being us. My biological training is at odds with something that I know and something that science will not be able to probe, perhaps because the time is now too short, perhaps because it is not measurable. I think our demise, if it occurs, will be a loss, a great loss, a great shame in some unknown equation.(5)*

What Wallace is saying in this passage is that something is missing, and it can’t be found within the confines of the evolutionary worldview. So look wherever you can!

Some may argue that those who have trouble with the loss of hope and meaning are taking all this too seriously. I don’t agree. On the contrary, I believe that they are being very consistent within their worldview. If everything has evolved, and there is nothing outside of mere biology to give meaning and significance to life, then we must live in despair, denial, or irrational hope.

Sociobiology is gaining in popularity because of the scientific community's strong commitment to evolution. If something follows logically from evolutionary theory, which I believe sociobiology does, then eventually all who consider themselves evolutionists will embrace it, whether it makes them comfortable or not. They will have no other rational choice.

The Second Paradox

In reflecting on the notion that all human societies and moral systems should have characteristics that seem to have evolved, I am led to a second paradox for sociobiology. The first paradox was that, despite the loss of hope and meaning in the context of a completely naturalistic worldview, sociobiology has continued to grow in influence. The second paradox involves Christianity. Since Christianity is based on revelation, it should be antithetical to or unexplainable by sociobiology, at least in some crucial areas.

It is not unreasonable to expect that some aspects of Christian morality would be consistent with a sociobiological perspective, since Christians in small and large groups do work for the betterment of the group as a whole, and the argument could be made that the survival of individuals is thus increased. However, if Christianity's claim to be based on revelation from a transcendent God is true, I would be surprised, indeed extremely disappointed and confused, if everything in Christianity's moral standards also made sense from a sociobiological perspective. What little I have seen in the way of an evaluation of Christianity from E.O. Wilson and other sociobiologists is a poor caricature of true Christianity.

I would like to offer a few suggestions for consideration. William Irons, in a discussion of theories of the evolution of moral systems, comments that nepotism is a very basic prediction of evolutionary theory.(6) Humans should be

expected to be less competitive and more helpful towards relatives than towards non- relatives. He cites numerous studies to back up his claim that this prediction, more than any other sociobiological prediction, has been extensively confirmed.

To be sure, the New Testament holds to very high standards concerning the importance of the family. Church leaders are to be judged first by how they conduct and relate themselves to their families (1 Tim. 3:12; Tit 1:6). Yet Jesus makes it quite clear that if there is any conflict between devotion to Him and devotion to our family, the family comes second. He said,

> *Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it. (Matt. 10:34-39).*

In other passages Jesus gives promises that if we give up our families and possessions for His sake, then we will receive abundantly more in this life and the next, along with persecutions (Mark 10:29,30). Jesus Himself preferred the company of those who do the will of God to His own mother and brothers (Matt. 12:46-50). The clear message is that, while our families are important, our relationship with the living God comes first, even if members of our family foce us to choose between God and them. Sociobiology may respond by saying that perhaps the benefit to be gained by inclusion in the group will compensate for the family loss, but how can the loss of an individual's entire genetic contribution to the

next generation be explained away by any evolutionary mechanism?

Common Ground

So far I have concentrated my remarks in areas where a Christian worldview is in sharp contrast with the evolutionary worldview of the sociobiologists. Now I would like to explore an area of curious similarity.

While Christianity should not be completely explainable by sociobiology, there are certain aspects of Christian truth that are quite compatible with it. I have always been amazed by the curious similarity between the biblical description of the natural man or the desires of the flesh, and the nature of man according to evolutionary principles. Both perceive man as a selfish creature at heart, looking out for his own interests. It is not "natural" for a man to be concerned for the welfare of others unless there is something in it for him.

Sociobiology seems to be quite capable of predicting many of the characteristics of human behavior. Scripture, on the other hand, informs us that the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit, that they are foolishness to him (1 Cor. 2:14). I have wondered if our sin nature is somehow enveloped by biology, or, to be more specific, genetics. Could it be that some genetic connection to our sin nature at least partially explains why "there is none righteous, there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God" (Rom. 3:10,11)? Does a genetic transmission of a sin nature help explain why "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23)? Is this why salvation can only be through faith, that it is not of ourselves but is a gift of God, not a result of works (Eph. 2:8, 9)? Is this why the flesh continues to war in our bodies so that we do the thing which we do not want to do, why nothing good dwells in me, and why the members of my body wage war against the law of my mind (Rom. 7:14-25)?

If there is a genetic component to our sin nature, it seems reasonable to assume that only the Spirit of God can overcome the desires of the flesh and that this struggle will continue in the believer until he or she is changed, until we see God face to face (1 Cor. 13:12; 15:50-58).

I ask these questions not thinking that I have come upon some great truth or the answer to a long-standing mystery, but simply looking for some common ground between the truth of Scripture and the truth about human nature we may be discovering from the perspective of sociobiology. All truth is ultimately God's truth. While I certainly do not embrace the worldview of the sociobiologist, I realize that there may be some truth that can be discovered by sociobiologists that can be truly captured to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

When I wrote that article for *Christianity Today* in 1981, I closed with this paragraph:

> *To know what to support and what to oppose, Christians involved in the social and biological sciences must be effective students of sociobiology. The popularity of sociobiology has gone unnoticed for too long already. We need precise and careful study as well as a watchful eye if we are to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."(7)*

Notes

1. Raymond G. Bohlin, "Sociobiology: Cloned from the Gene Cult," *Christianity Today,* 23 January (1981): 16-19.

2. Robert Wallace, *The Genesis Factor* (New York: Morrow and Co.,1979).

3. E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge,Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 3.

4. E.O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978) 2-3.

5. Ibid., 217-218. Emphasis mine.

6. William Irons, “How Did Morality Evolve?” *Zygon* 26 (1991): 49-89.

7. Bohlin, “Sociobiology,” 19.

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The Occult Connection – A Christian View

Occult philosophy has permeated nearly every area of our society. I believe that Christians need to think clearly about these issues and apply a biblical worldview to them.

Consider the pervasive influence of the occult. Students are involved with role-playing fantasy games that introduce them to occult concepts. Universities offer courses in paranormal and occult science. Occultic themes provide popular material for television shows and movies. Police departments are beginning to realize that many of the crimes they investigate have occult origins. Everywhere we go, it seems that the occult is present.

The word *occult* comes from the Latin *occultus*, which means “concealed.” In its ordinary usage, it means “beyond the bounds of ordinary knowledge—the mysterious, the concealed, or that which is hidden from view.” The occult involved such practices as magic, divination, incantations, paranormal experiences, and the New Age concept of the expansion of consciousness.

Students of the occult frequently divide occult phenomena into

three areas: (1) forms of divination, (2) types of mystical experience, and (3) magical manipulation.

The most common form of divination is astrology. Other examples of divination would include palmistry, ouija boards, tarot cards, biorhythm, crystal balls, and interpretation of dreams. Divination is evil and is strictly forbidden in Deuteronomy 18.

Types of mystical experience would include any paranormal attempt to transcend the bounds of our physical world. The out-of-body experiences reported by psychics fit into this category. Other examples would be telekinesis, clairvoyance, and psychic trances. This would also include seances, necromancy, and psychic healing.

The final category would be magical manipulation. This is not to be confused with the art of illusions used by professional magicians. By contrast, occultists say they can use hidden forces in the spiritual realm to manipulate people and circumstances.

Practitioners would include sorcerers, witches, and witch doctors. Many of these practitioners are mentioned in the Bible. In the Old Testament we find Jezebel as well as the magicians in Egypt. In the New Testament are Simon (Acts 8) and Bar-Jesus (Acts 13).

Finally, let me address how Christians should respond to the occult. We should be equipped to counteract its influence in society. First, Christians should know God’s word. The best way to discover a counterfeit is to know the real thing. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Know God’s word and put on the whole armor of God.

Second, resist Satan and all of his influence in your life. If we resist the devil, the Bible teaches that he will flee from us. Third, destroy occult books and paraphernalia in your possession. Confess and repent any involvement you have had

with the occult.

Fourth, submit your life totally to Jesus Christ. As we yield to Him and allow the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, we are fortified for spiritual warfare. The Bible teaches that greater is He who is in you, then he who is in the world. Lean not on your own strength but on the strength of the Lord. You can have victory over the forces of darkness if you know the enemy and marshall God's spiritual resources for the battle.

Halloween

Next I would like to focus on Halloween. Most people see Halloween as nothing more than a harmless festival that allows kids to collect candy. Yet Halloween is much more than a harvest festival. Its origins are deeply rooted in the occult, and the various practitioners of the black arts identify Halloween as a significant event in the pagan calendar. The following questions and answers should help you be more aware of the occultic nature of Halloween.

The date, October 31st, has long been known as "The Festival of the Dead." The Celtic tribes and their priests, the Druids, celebrated this day as a marker for the change from life to death. Today, the modern celebration of Halloween is usually performed by adherents of witchcraft who use the day (and especially the night) for their rituals.

Witches celebrate Halloween as the "Feast of Samhain"—the first feast of the witchcraft year. Being a festival of the dead, Halloween is a time when witches attempt to communicate with the dead through various forms of divination.

Witches believe that this day marks the time when the Mother Goddess (also known as Mother Nature, Goddess of the Earth) returns to the underworld to sleep under a blanket of snow. In her place comes another god—the Horned God—who emerges to begin his reign of death. Witches believe this is a time when

the life of summer is replaced by the death of winter. Halloween is a high feast day to celebrate the end of summer and the coming of winter.

In later centuries, the Catholic Church attempted to redeem this pagan holiday by designating it as “All Saints Day.” Protestant churches during the Reformation chose not to celebrate this day, seeing it as an attempt to Christianize a pagan holiday.

For example, let’s look at the practice of dressing up on Halloween. During most of the 20th century, children in America have been dressing up on Halloween so they can go out and “trick- or-treat.” This tradition has been self-perpetuating for decades, but if we go back to the origins of Halloween, we can again see the occult connection.

Occultists who revered Halloween as a pagan holy day saw this day as a time of transition between life and death. They believed that during this transition from life to death, the two worlds were momentarily in contact with one another. The veil between these two worlds (the land of the living and the land of the dead) was very thin, and so many believed they would come in contact with the spirit world.

Some occult practitioners practiced divination and believed one could learn the secrets of life and wisdom by lying on a grave and listening to the messages from the long-departed. Others taught that spirits and ghosts left the grave during this night and would seek out warmth in their previous homes. Villagers, fearful of the possibility of being visited by the ghosts of past occupants, would dress up in costumes to scare the spirits on their way. They would also leave food and other treats at their doors to appease the spirits so they would not destroy their homes or crops but instead move on down the road.

Another technique used to scare away the spirits was to carve

a scary face into a pumpkin. People hoped this horrible visage would move the spirit on to another home or village and spare their home from destruction. Sometimes the villagers would light a candle and place it within the pumpkin and use it as a lantern (hence the name “Jack-o-Lantern”). Then they would walk from the local grave yard to their homes in an effort to scare off evil spirits that might be walking down the road after leaving the grave.

Within witchcraft there are four pagan festivals celebrated throughout the year. The first festival in the witchcraft calendar is Halloween (October 31). This is the celebration of life and death. It is also known as Hallowmas. Second is Candlemas (February 2) which honors the “God of Death.” This festival gives thanks to him for keeping them from sickness and wishes him well as he journeys back to the underworld. The third festival is Beltane on May eve (April 30). This celebration welcomes new life and involves fertility rituals. A final festival is Lammas (August 1), which is a festival of the harvest. Witches give thanks to the Goddess of the Earth for making the crops grow.

The pagan origins of Halloween should be sufficient to cause Christian parents to question the wisdom of allowing their children to participate in a witchcraft festival. Given this information, parents really have only two choices: fight the celebration of Halloween and provide alternatives.

At a time when schools are removing any religious significance from Christmas (now often merely called winter break) and Easter (spring break), it is ironic that most public schools still celebrate Halloween. Responsible parents should ask school administrators to restrict Halloween celebrations. Pictures of witches, haunted houses, and other occultic practices in the public schools are a promotion of pagan, religious practices.

Many churches have begun to develop creative alternatives.

Church youth groups hold bowling or skating parties. Some groups spend the night going out and witnessing to those in the streets. Other churches hold a Fall Fun Festival and have children come to the church facilities in biblical costumes. Such programs keep children safe and focus their attention on the Bible rather than on a pagan, occultic ritual.

Astrology

Less conspicuous and more insidious than Halloween is the practice of astrology. Even occupants of the White House have failed to see its occultic connection.

Former White House chief of staff Don Regan said in his book that "virtually every major move and decision the Reagans made during my time as White House chief of staff was cleared in advanced with a woman in San Francisco who drew up horoscopes." The friend was later identified as Joan Quigley, a San Francisco astrology author.

When Ronald Reagan scheduled the signing of the INF treaty for the afternoon of December 8th instead of during prime-time television hours, many were puzzled. Former chief of staff Don Regan said it was performed in the afternoon because Nancy Reagan said that was when "the stars were right."

The Reagans were hardly the first national leaders to be interested in astrology. Teddy Roosevelt mounted his natal horoscope on a chessboard so he could study it each day. During World War II, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Adolf Hitler shared at least one thing in common: they were all interested in horoscopes. And even Charles DeGaulle quoted a pre-war horoscope predicting he would rule France.

Even though astrology is unscientific and illogical, it is still very popular. Over 1200 daily newspapers carry horoscopes, and there are 12,000 full-time and about 175,000 part-time astrologers. Many people make it a daily ritual to

consult their horoscopes, and some hire professional astrologers to help them make business and personal decisions.

Astrology had its beginnings in the fertile crescent in Mesopotamia. During the period from the Sumarians through the Chaldeans, astrology gained prominence and developed into the formalized occultic structure found today.

Astrology is based upon the questionable assumption that the fixed stars, sun, moon, and planets have an influence upon people and historical events. This influence can be determined once one knows the exact hour of one's birth. In fact, the word *horoscope* means "a consideration of the hour." Once the time and place of birth are known, the stars can be consulted and a forecast can be made.

There are good scientific reasons to question the basis of astrology. First, it is based upon a geocentric solar system rather than a heliocentric one. The basic premise of astrology is that the sun and planets rotate around the earth. Yet science tells us that the earth and planets rotate around the sun. Thus, the science of astronomy undermines the quackery of astrology.

Second, astrology is based upon the assumption that there are seven planets. Moreover it identifies the sun and moon as planets. Lacking telescopes and other astronomical instruments, the founders of astrology incorrectly identified some heavenly bodies as planets and were unaware of other planets. Thus, a second assumption of astrology fails to square with scientific data.

Third, astrology mixes and matches stars that should not be grouped together. The 12 signs of the zodiac are quite arbitrary. They mix together stars in one constellation that are actually quite far from each other—often in entirely different parts of our Milky Way galaxy. Moreover, since the stars are in motion, some of the constellations change shape

over time. In essence, the zodiac of astrology is arbitrary and subject to change and hardly reliable as a guide for one's future.

But in addition to the scientific problems with astrology, there are also logical problems. First is the well-documented fact that different astrologers sometimes cast different horoscopes for the same person. If astrology were an objective science, we would expect different astrologers to cast the same horoscope for the same person. Instead, they make vastly different predictions about the same person. If we can determine our destiny from the stars, we should not find such vastly different predictions. Since we do, we must conclude that astrology does not lead to logical conclusions.

A second logical problem related to the previous one is that if astrology were true, then twins would have the same destiny. Being born in the same place and at approximately the same time should ensure that twins would have the same destiny. Yet the history of twins shows that although there are similarities, there are also significant differences not readily predicted by astrology.

A third problem is the inability to predict accurately the future of people with known destinies. In order to test this idea, one researcher put together what he called a "test of destinies." He gave astrologers 40 birthdates. Twenty belonged to known criminals and 20 belonged to peace-loving citizens. He asked them to separate the birthdates into the two categories.

None of the astrologers separated them correctly. The researcher said, "The result is always great confusion: the astrologers invariably select a mixed bag of criminals and peaceful citizens in about the same proportion that a machine would pick randomly."

Finally, in addition to scientific and logical problems with

astrology, there are also scriptural problems with astrology. In Deuteronomy 18:9-12, God lists five categories of detestable practices. These range from witchcraft to child sacrifice. They also include divination, which is the attempt to predict the future through such methods as reading the stars. All of these are listed as detestable practices.

Unfortunately we live in a society that sets up a dichotomy between hard-core occult activity like witchcraft and satanism and so- called soft-core occult such as reading horoscopes and playing with ouija boards. All are considered detestable practices and should be avoided. Don’t be tempted to dabble in these activities. Instead, resist Satan and he will flee from you.

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