Oprah: America's Beloved False Teacher

After her star turn at the Golden Globes Sunday night, Oprah is the media darling once again—and the hope of America? Sue Bohlin blogged about Oprah's spirituality when her daily TV show ended.

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Tomorrow is the last episode of the Oprah Winfrey show on network TV. Oprah will be throwing her considerable energies and resources into her own cable network (OWN: The Oprah Winfrey Network). But she has left a huge footprint on the culture and on the hearts of minds of millions of loyal fans.

People have said for years that they wished Oprah were their next door neighbor or their best friend. And for good reason: she is winsome. She is open and transparent. She is incredibly generous. She not only asks the questions you would ask of her guests, she has the power to draw some of the most powerful and influential people to her stage, ranging from U.S. presidents to Billy Graham.

But she is so much more than a talk-show host. She sees herself as a teacher, and she certainly has used her pulpit to teach and preach—worldwide, as evidenced by the outpouring of love and attendance at her recent tour of Australia.

The problem is that what she's teaching, both personally and through the spiritual gurus she has brought into the limelight, is poisonous. It not only keeps unbelievers in the dark, but she has the power to draw undiscerning, untaught Christians into her spiritual gravity field of heresy.

Oprah is a false teacher of postmodern religion, an a la carte spirituality where people pick and choose their beliefs from a

cafeteria line of offerings. She started out with a strong foundation in the Baptist church, but over time she drifted into unbiblical New Age beliefs. She mentions God a lot, but she defines Him in her own way. She has become a Christianflavored pantheist, one who believes that an impersonal god, ("however you choose to describe him") is a universal force or energy. She embraces karmic destiny from Zen Buddhism. She helped launch "The Secret," the best-selling book promising that wishing will make it so through "The Law of Attraction"-the belief that you attract whatever you think about, whether good or bad.

And she enthusiastically proclaims religious pluralism: "One of the biggest mistakes humans make is to believe that there is only one way. Actually, there are many diverse paths leading to what you call God."

One of Oprah's buddies is Marianne Williamson, a teacher of <u>A</u> <u>Course in Miracles</u>. In 2008, on her XM Satellite Radio show "Oprah and Friends," listeners were offered a year-long course of study on this book which was channeled from a demon. At the same time, she and author Eckhard Tolle offered a webinar featuring his book <u>A New Earth: Awakening to Your</u> <u>Life's Purpose</u> (the link takes you to a Probe article providing analysis of the book). This book is Eastern mysticism, which is incompatible with biblical Christianity, but many Christians can't tell the difference.

Oprah's response to a question about reconciling A New Earth with her Christian background was not only eye-opening, but it also shows her point of departure from biblical truth:

I've reconciled it because I was able to open my mind about the absolute indescribable hugeness of that which we call 'God.' I took God out of the box because I grew up in the Baptist church and there were, you know, rules and, you know, belief systems indoctrined. And I happened to be sitting in church in my late twenties . . . And this great minister was preaching about how great God was and how omniscient and omnipresent, and God is everything. And then he said, 'And the Lord thy God is a jealous God.' And I was, you know, caught up in the rapture of that moment until he said 'jealous.' And something struck me. I was thinking God is all, God is omnipresent, God is—and God's also jealous? God is jealous of me? And something about that didn't feel right in my spirit because I believe that God is love and that God is in all things. And so that's when the search for something more than doctrine started to stir within me.

"And I love this quote that Eckhart has, this is one of my favorite quotes in chapter one where he says, 'Man made god in his own image, the eternal, the infinite, and unnamable was reduced to a mental idol that you had to believe in and worship as my god or our god.'

"And you know, it's been a journey to get to the place where I understand, that what I believe is that Jesus came to show us Christ consciousness. That Jesus came to show us the way of the heart and that what Jesus was saying that to show us the higher consciousness that we're all talking about here. Jesus came to say, 'Look I'm going to live in the body, in the human body and I'm going to show you how it's done.' These are some principles and some laws that you can use to live by to know that way. And when I started to recognize that, that Jesus didn't come in my belief, even as a Christian, I don't believe that Jesus came to start Christianity. So that was also very helpful to me.

Well, I am a Christian who believes that there are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). That's either true, or it's false.

And not even "the divine Miss O" can get around that. Please

join me in praying that she will return to the Lord of truth—and please stay discerning about anything and everything Oprah says. If God doesn't agree with it, it's false. And it's dangerous.

Addendum, post-Finale show:

In the hour-long sermon of her farewell show, Oprah was consistent with her values and her perception of herself as teacher. It was filled with her inspirational "you can do it" rhetoric that has endeared her to us for 25 years.

She did address the spirituality issue. She said that when people ask how she lasted, how she did it for 25 years, she answers, "My team—and Jesus." She added, "Nothing but the hand of God has made it possible." Her life is permeated by awareness of God's presence and grace in her life, but she has been deceived by the lies of the enemy. She said, "People want to know, which God are you talkin' about? The same one you're talkin' about: the alpha and omega, the omniscient, the omnipresent, the ultimate consciousness, the source, the force, the all of everything there is, the one and only Gee Oh Dee. That's the one I'm talkin' about."

This description of her God is a combination of the biblical God (alpha and omega, omniscient, omnipresent) and the impersonal divinity of pantheism (the source, the force, the all of everything there is). Note that "the one and only Gee Oh Dee" is not the way God reveals Himself to us in His word—as Father, Son and Spirit.

Oprah invokes her memory of Jesus as a warm and fuzzy throwback to her childhood, like a beloved teddy bear that you love but keep on the shelf as a reminder of younger days. She's not dealing with the Jesus who insisted He is the only way to the Father!

John Piper makes a great point about how people (in this case, the 5000 whom Jesus had miraculously fed) choose their own

Jesus, as I suggest Oprah does:

Because the enthusiasm these people have is not for who he really is. This is so important for our day and for your life. People can have a great enthusiasm for Jesus, but the Jesus they're excited about is not the real biblical Jesus. It may be a morally exemplary Jesus, or a socialist Jesus, or a capitalist Jesus, or an anti-Semitic Jesus, or a white-racist Jesus, or a revolutionary-liberationist Jesus, or a counter-cultural cool Jesus. But not the whole Jesus who, in the end, gives his life a ransom for sinners. And if your enthusiasm for Jesus is for a Jesus that doesn't exist, your enthusiasm is no honor to the real Jesus, and he will leave you and go into the mountain.{1}

As I mentioned in my blog post, Oprah's point of departure from orthodoxy was hearing in church, "The Lord thy God is a jealous God." Instead of checking her reaction to this statement with a pastor or someone more theologically taught then she, Oprah slammed the door on the fundamentals of Christianity and gave herself permission to pursue a god more to her taste. What a difference it would have made if she had allowed someone to assure her, "No, Oprah, God is not jealous of you. He is jealous for you! He loves you so much, He wants your full and undivided heart. Let go of your misunderstanding and embrace the Father who loves you more than you can imagine."

Instead, she has embraced a vague and impersonal divinity who is indistinguishable from the universe. In fact, one of the prayers of her life has been, "What would You-God-the universe-have me do?" The problem with this is that God and the universe are not the same thing. God is the creator of the universe. He is before, above, and outside the universe. The universe is part of His creation. There is no point in asking a part of creation what it would have her do, because the universe is a fellow creature of the Most High God along with Oprah. Much has been made of her farewell words, "Until we meet again." But those were not her last words.

The final words of her finale were, "To God be the glory." And I truly do think she means it.

I think that Oprah is not evil, she's deceived. And I will continue to pray for her.

Note

1. John Piper, "The All-Providing King Who Would Not Be King," www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-all-providing -king-who-would-not-be-king.

Oprah's Spirituality: Exploring 'A New Earth' – A Christian Critique

Steve Cable looks at the teaching of Eckhart Tolle and Oprah Winfrey and finds it far removed from a Christian worldview. From a biblical perspective, their teaching is in line with that addressed by Paul in Colossians where he points to false teachers who are "taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind."

Over 2,000,000 people from 139 countries have participated with Oprah Winfrey and Eckhart Tolle in a live Web-based seminar covering each chapter of Tolle's book entitled, *A New* Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose [1]. Why is this book so popular? Will it lead you deeper in your walk with Christ? Or is it counterfeit spirituality promoting a false view of God? In this article, we will address these questions as we embark on an exploration of Tolle's "new earth."

The underlying premise is that all material things (from planets to pebbles to flowers to animals) result from a universal, immaterial life force expressing itself in material form. Humans are a part of that expression. However, we have evolved to the point where we have the potential to become Aware of our oneness with the universal life force. The purpose of all mankind is to become aware that their Being is an expression of the One Life Force.

However, the vast majority of people are unconscious and unaware of the source of their being. Every human being has an illusory self image or ego which is completely conditioned by the past, always wanting and never satisfied. We also have an individual and collective accumulation of old emotional pain Tolle calls the "pain-body." Our ego and our pain-body are actively trying to keep us away from true awareness. When we identify ourselves with our ego, our thoughts about the past and future, our wants and our hurts, we cannot experience our true Beingness.

In Tolle's view, this lack of awareness of our true essence and false identification with our egos has the world and the human race on the brink of extinction. Fortunately, the universal life force is manipulating this crisis to create an opportunity for many people to move from an unconscious state to consciousness. In order to become conscious, we must recognize that we are not our thoughts and/or egos. We must learn to accept and be present in the Now, because the past and the future exist only as thoughts. When most people are operating from their true essence rather than their egos, we will have drastic social and physical upheavals on this earth resulting in a whole new world order—that is, "a new earth." If you are thinking this sounds a lot more like Eastern mysticism than a deeper walk with Christ, you are on the right track. So why is this message so popular even among many regular church attendees?

Why Is A New Earth a Significant Issue?

Since A New Earth is clearly incompatible with Biblical Christianity, why is it being read and recommended by many people who profess to be Christian?

First, the pervasive influence of post-modern tolerance continues to undermine commitment to the truth of the gospel even in evangelical circles. We are constantly assailed with the message that it is hateful and intolerant to believe that Christianity is true and other religions fall short. According to this viewpoint, the loving Christian will accept the validity of all religious traditions encouraging us to partake from the smorgasbord of spiritual guidance available from other religions. Thus many people forsake Paul's warning in Colossians to not be taken captive by the traditions of men rather than the truth of Christ and thereby open themselves up to false teaching $\{2\}$. An immature Christian may say to themselves, "A New Earth offers a way to greater personal peace and an escape from unhappiness so why not find a way to glue it onto my Christian tradition." Tolle and Oprah cleverly encourage them by saying, "How 'spiritual' you are has nothing to do with what you believe, but everything to do with your state of consciousness."

Second, A New Earth contains nuggets of truth about the nature of the body, soul and spirit and some practical ideas which may often prove helpful in dealing with anxiety, anger and other issues people face. Tolle is correct in pointing out that our individual and collective selfish egos introduce a lot of pain and suffering into this world. In addition, we may be filled with anxiety and discontent with our circumstances because our thoughts are preoccupied with past hurts and

future hopes/fears. He encourages us to realize that we are not our thoughts or past pains. If we will affirm our intrinsic spiritual value and observe our ego at work, we can anxiety and be able to accept our present reduce circumstances. In some ways this is analogous to the instruction in Colossians to set our minds on the things of Christ not on the things of this earth because our real life is in Christ not in this earth. [4] It also reminds us of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians where he tells us that through the Holy Spirit we can "take every thought captive in obedience to Christ." [5] So you can see how thinking this way could be helpful. Unfortunately, this is taught as a part of a broader teaching that will leave non-Christians separated from God and misguided Christians not fulfilling their God-given purpose on this earth.

The third reason for its unwitting acceptance among some Christians is that quotes from Jesus and others in the Bible are sprinkled throughout the book in an attempt to show this philosophy is consistent with "true Christianity." Like so many false teachers, he attempts to make Jesus support his worldview by removing the teaching of Jesus from the clear message of the gospel.

Fourth, and probably most importantly, Tolle found a powerful proponent in Oprah Winfrey whose endorsement catapulted his first book, *The Power of Now*, onto the *NY Times* Best Seller list. Now, Oprah is enthusiastically promoting *A New Earth* through her web seminar, calling it the most exciting thing she has ever done. Oprah is an evangelist for smorgasbord spirituality. During the first web seminar for *A New Earth*, she was asked how she could reconcile it with her Christian upbringing. Oprah explained that she began to get out of the box of Biblical doctrine in her late twenties when her pastor was preaching on the characteristics of God. When he said that "The Lord thy God is a jealous God," she decided that she wanted to believe in a God of love not a jealous God.

Apparently, rather than doing a study to understand what that Bible passage meant, she decided to make up her own Jesus. As she stated (see <u>Appendix A</u>),

"And you know, it's been a journey to get to the place where I understand, that what I believe is that Jesus came to show us Christ consciousness. That Jesus came to show us the way of the heart and that what Jesus was saying that to show us the higher consciousness that we're all talking about here. Jesus came to say, 'Look I'm going to live in the body, in the human body and I'm going to show you how it's done.' These are some principles and some laws that you can use to live by to know that way. And when I started to recognize that, that Jesus didn't come in my belief, even as a Christian, I don't believe that Jesus came to start Christianity.... Well, I am a Christian who believes that there are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity."<u>{6}</u>

Worldview Comparison

Let's continue our exploration of Tolle's new earth by considering some of the fundamental worldview questions. How does the worldview of *A New Earth* line up with a Biblical worldview? (see <u>Appendix B</u>)

God and the Universe

Let's first look at the origin of the universe and the nature of God.

According to Tolle, the material universe is a temporary manifestation of the universal spiritual consciousness. This One Life is impersonal and pervasive, investing itself in all matter not just living things. He states it thus, "Each thing has Beingness, is a temporary form that has its origin within the formless one Life, the source of all things, all bodies, all forms." {7} And "Like all life-forms, they are, of course,

temporary manifestations of the underlying one Life, one Consciousness" [8] Consequently, the being the Bible calls God is really an expression of this impersonal life force. Since everything is of God and is God, all material things must ultimately return to formless, unidentifiable union with the spiritual life force.

This view of God as an impersonal life force living in all things is directly counter to the Biblical revelation of God. According to the Bible, God is the creator of the universe not a part of the universe. God is an identifiable, personal being characterized by holiness, love, grace and compassion. The creator of this universe is a thinking being as God shares through Isaiah, "for as the heavens are higher than the earth…so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts."{9} Paul reminds us, "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God."{10} God is a communicator, choosing to reveal Himself to us through the attributes of creation, through the Scriptures and through Jesus Christ.

Nature of Man

What about the nature and purpose of mankind? According to Tolle, humans are an evolved material manifestation of the spiritual life force. Humans have evolved to the point where we are capable of being overtly conscious of our Beingness; of our oneness with the One Life force. However, our material manifestation includes the eqo (a false sense of identification with our thoughts) and our individual and collective pain bodies which fight our attempts to be conscious of our real identity in the life force. We need to realize that we are not really a unique individual, but rather a material expression on the One Life force. Our purpose for existence is to bring a consciousness of the underlying one Life into this world. He states, "The ultimate purpose of human existence, which is to say, your purpose, is to bring that power into this world."<u>{11}</u> However, the ultimate end for each human is to return our life energy back into the impersonal life force.

In contrast, the Bible teaches humans were intentionally created by God in His image. We are created with a body, soul and spirit. Our earthly bodies are temporary, but our soul and spirit are immortal. We are, in fact, individuals responsible for our actions with different eternal destinies determined by our relationship with God.

Sin and Evil

In *A New Earth*, the concepts of sin and evil are severely distorted. According to Tolle, original sin is the collective dysfunction which prevents people from recognizing the point of human existence. He suggests that this barrier to true Awareness is built into our DNA. He states, "The collective pain-body is probably encoded within every human's DNA, although we haven't discovered it there yet." {12} In other words, the collective hurts and perceived inadequacies of our parents and previous generations are not only passed on through our interactions with a fallen world, but are actually encoded into our DNA. This, of course, would require our thoughts to be able to modify our DNA so that these experiences are passed on to future generations.

However, since we are not our bodies or our thoughts, we are not responsible for our sins. As he states, "There is only one perpetrator of evil on the planet: human unconsciousness.... People are not responsible for what they do when possessed by the pain-body."{13} In fact, we cannot really distinguish good from evil since they all arise from the same life force. As Tolle puts it, "The deeper interconnectedness of all things and events implies that the mental labels of 'good' and 'bad' are ultimately illusory. They always imply a limited perspective and so are true only relatively and temporarily."{14} In contrast, the Bible teaches that we are all sinners and apart from faith in Christ the result will be eternal separation from God. $\{15\}$

Salvation

In Tolle's worldview, humans are not born spiritually dead, but rather spiritually unconscious. Our real self cannot be separated from God because our real self is a part of God. He states, "You do not become good by trying to be good, but by finding the goodness that is already within you, and allowing the goodness to emerge. But it can only emerge if something fundamental changes in your state of consciousness." {16} We become a new alive person, not through faith in the atoning death and empowering resurrection of Jesus, but rather through a process of becoming aware of our real self which has been masked by our ego. However, when our body dies, we cease to exist as an individual merging back into the universal life force. Tolle states, "the recognition of the impermanence of all forms awakens you to the dimension of the formless within yourself, that which is beyond death. Jesus called it 'eternal life.'" {17} So, regardless of what we do or believe during our earthly existence we all have the same ultimate destiny.

This view devalues the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Tolle's view is true, Jesus' death was unnecessary and His resurrection was an illusion. The Bible clearly states that "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."<u>{18}</u>

Jesus Christ and Christianity

For Tolle, Jesus was an enlightened human. He joined Buddha and a few others in trying to communicate this concept to people and societies who were not ready to receive it. Jesus was no more God than any other human, but he was aware that he was a part of the One Life Force which He identified as God.

With this view of Jesus, Tolle clearly rejects the central

gospel message: faith in Jesus' atoning death on the cross and victorious resurrection is the only way to move from death into spiritual life.

Truth and Religion

According to Tolle, truth cannot be found in thought, doctrines or narratives which are perceived through our egos. He states, "Every ego confuses opinions and viewpoints with facts. It cannot tell the difference between an event and its reaction to that event. Only through awareness—not through thinking—can you differentiate between fact and opinion…. Only through awareness can you see the totality of the situation or person instead of adopting one limited perspective."{19} Thus, the only real Truth with a capital T is in my being. "The Truth is inseparable from who you are. Yes, you are the Truth. If you look for it elsewhere, you will be deceived every time. The very Being that you are is Truth."{20} He even claims that this is what Jesus was really trying to tell us when He said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through me."

Tolle writes:

"All religions are equally false and equally true, depending on how you use them. If you believe only your religion is the Truth, you are using it in the service of the ego." {21} And, "Many religious people claim to be in sole possession of the truth in an unconscious attempt to protect their identity. Unless you believe exactly as they do, you are wrong in their eyes, and they may feel justified in killing you for that." {22}

Like many people, Tolle confuses our inability to fully understand the truth with the lack of truth. As R.C. Sproul said, "Real truth is reality as seen from God's perspective." Real truth can only be revealed by God and is not about our need for identity or a need to create enemies. Truth is central to the Christian faith. Jesus told Pilate, "For this I was born and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the *truth*." {23} As Christians, we are motivated to share the truth God has revealed because of His love for us and His "desire for all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the *truth*." {24}

The Bible

In addressing the Bible, Tolle attempts to play both sides of the street. Although he does not directly state it, he clearly does not believe that the Bible is an accurate revelation of the character of God and the nature of the universe. His worldview is totally contrary to the Bible in most areas, so he clearly does not consider it an authoritative source. But, knowing that much of his audience has a Christian background, he quotes the Bible over 25 times in this book. In most instances, he takes the verse out of context and misinterprets it to align with his viewpoint. One example is when he claims that Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" in order to teach us that we are the Truth. Ignoring the fact that Jesus went on to say, "no one comes to the Father but through me."<u>{25}</u> Jesus said that if we lived according to His words we would "know the truth"<u>{26}</u>, not "be the truth."

Conclusion

A New Earth is not so new after all. It is another presentation of Eastern mysticism with a focus on separating your identity from your ego. Although the mind exercises promoted in the book may provide some temporary help with issues such as anxiety and anger, the overall worldview is directly counter to the gospel of Jesus Christ. By denying the existence of a personal transcendent God, by denying individual responsibility for my sin, by denying an eternal soul, and the need for the redeeming death and resurrection of Jesus, Tolle's spiritual teaching will result in eternal separation from God for non-Christians and fruitlessness for Christians taken captive by this unbiblical worldview.

Appendix A: Oprah Winfrey on reconciling A New Earth with her Christian background:

"I've reconciled it because I was able to open my mind about the absolute indescribable hugeness of that which we call "God." I took God out of the box because I grew up in the Baptist church and there were, you know, rules and, you know, belief systems indoctrined. And I happened to be sitting in church in my late 20's...And this great minister was preaching about how great God was and how omniscient and omnipresent, and God is everything. And then he said, and the lord thy god is a jealous god. And I was, you know, caught up in the rapture of that moment until he said "jealous." And something struck me. I was thinking God is all, God is omnipresent, God is—and God's also jealous? God is jealous of me? And something about that didn't feel right in my spirit because I believe that god is love and that god is in all things. And so that's when the search for something more than doctrine started to stir within me.

"And I love this quote that Eckhart has, this is one of my favorite quotes in chapter one where he says, "Man made god in his own image, the eternal, the infinite, and unnamable was reduced to a mental idol that you had to believe in and worship as my god or our god."

"And you know, it's been a journey to get to the place where I understand, that what I believe is that Jesus came to show us Christ consciousness. That Jesus came to show us the way of the heart and that what Jesus was saying that to show us the higher consciousness that we're all talking about here. Jesus came to say, "Look I'm going to live in the body, in the human body and I'm going to show you how it's done." These are some principles and some laws that you can use to live by to know that way. And when I started to recognize that, that Jesus didn't come in my belief, even as a Christian, I don't believe that Jesus came to start Christianity. So that was also very helpful to me.

"Well, I am a Christian who believes that there are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity."

Appendix B: Comparing A New Earth with Other Worldviews

	Christian Theism	A New Earth	Naturalism (Postmodernism)	Pantheism
God	Personal	Universal life force	Non-existent	Impersonal
World	Creation	Spiritual	Physical	Spiritual
Human Nature	Like God	Is God; corrupted by ego	Like Animals	Is God
Body/Soul	Unity	Spirit is only reality	Body Only	Soul Only
Immortality	Resurrection	Reunite with life force	Annihilation	Reincarnation
Destiny	Glorification	Absorption into grand plan of one life force	Extinction	Absorption
Source of Authority	Divine Revelation	Presence; "I Am Truth"	Culture	Spiritual
Truth	Absolute	Relative and personal	Culturally based	Personal
Jesus Christ	Son of God	Early enlightened being	A product of his/her culture	Enlightened being
Salvation	Redemption	Awareness, consciousness, presence	Whatever is effective	Meditation
Evil	Rebellion	Illusion results from pain-body	Culturally defined	Illusion
Ethics	God-centered	Counter ego	Culturally centered	World-centered

History	Linear	Predestined by the one life force	Culturally defined	Cyclical
Culture	God-ordained / man steward	Unconscious vs. conscious	Language-centered	World-centered

Notes

Eckhart Tolle, A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's 1. Purpose, Penguin Group, New York, 2006 2. Colossians 2:8 3. Ibid., 18 4. Colossians 3:1-3 5. 2 Corinthians 10:5 6. Oprah Winfrey, transcript of the first A New Earth web seminar dated March 3, 2008 7. Tolle., 37 8. Ibid., 4 9. Isaiah 55:9 10. 1 Cor 2:11-12 NASV 11. Tolle., 78 12. Ibid., 143 13. Ibid., 163 14. Ibid., 196 15. Romans 3:23, 6:23 16. Tolle., 13 17. Ibid., 81 18. Romans 6:23 19. Tolle., 69 20. Ibid., 71 21. Ibid., 70 22. Ibid., 17 23. John 18:37 24. I Tim 2:3 25. John 14:6 26. John 8:31-32

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