Christian Science: Mary Baker Eddy and the Bible

Introduction

The First Church of Christ, Scientist is a towering presence in the city of Boston. It owes its centrally located architecture and nationwide Christian Science "reading rooms" to the ingenuity of Mary Baker Eddy. She's credited with being an entrepreneur in religion, journalism, education, and women's rights. Her innovation as a religious leader remains impressive to this day, being that she began such a large movement before women were even allowed to vote. But what of this faith she's so known for?

Mary Baker Eddy grew up in 19th century New England, a time and place that saw tremendous religious dissatisfaction. Out of this same time and locale Joseph Smith started Mormonism and Charles Russell founded the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Eddy was a sickly woman from early on. She was well versed in general Bible knowledge. At the age of seventeen she joined the Congregational Church. She had somewhat of a rocky social life. She had three husbands by the time she was in her fifties. In her early forties, after her second marriage, Eddy met a man named Phineas P. Quimby.{1} She seems to have learned at least some of her healing concepts from Mr. Quimby.

Her adult life appears to have been characterized by great paranoia and outrageous allegations. She even blamed her third husband's death from heart disease on poisoning from enemies of the Eddy's.{2} She also related to one of her associates just before her death that she wished to be remembered as being "mentally murdered."{3}

The followers of Mary Baker Eddy say she loved God and His

word so vastly that she was given revelation about the truths of scientific healing hidden beneath the surface of the Bible. She recorded these truths in her *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. With this newfound ability to heal came the birth of Christian Science. Christian Scientists claim to possess basic spiritual methods for healing and comfort for participants of any and all religions.

Eddy founded the Church of Christ, Scientist in 1879. She established such periodicals as *The Christian Science Journal*, *The Christian Science Sentinel*, and the Pulitzer Prize winning *Christian Science Monitor*. By the time of her death in 1910, she had even founded the Massachusetts Metaphysical College. Her amazing initiative in the face of poor health for most of her life is not to be questioned. However, what ought to be challenged are the conclusions she arrived at due to such extreme initiative Eddy claimed that "the Bible was her sole teacher" for developing the methodical treatments for sickness as well as sin.{4} If this is so, then it's appropriate to use that same source as a measure of her claims. Here we will examine the claims of Christian Science and weigh them with the established standard of God's word. We will see that Christian Science is neither Christian nor science. Let's see how Christian Science measures up to biblical Christianity.

Prayer

Mary Baker Eddy founded the First Church of Christ, Scientist upon the notion that everything she taught came from her examination of the Scriptures. Today we'll begin evaluating her assertions according to the standard of those same Scriptures. Let's first look at the subject of her first chapter in *Science and Health*: prayer.

She deduces from Scripture that audible prayer is a meaningless attempt to draw attention to one's pretentiousness. Prayer changes nothing. True change comes from putting Truth into practice. Eddy robs prayer of its true

effectiveness in communicating with God. For instance, Eddy says that prayer for the sick is not what will lead to one's healing, only enlightened understanding heals.{5} Otherwise, why would some people remain sick after prayer and others get well? Surely if God is consistent and willing to heal He wouldn't withhold healing from one and grant it to another.

But God's wisdom is infinitely beyond our attempts to understand why He heals some and doesn't heal others. Paul pleaded for God to take the thorn in his flesh from him and Christ responded, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). God allows us to experience difficulty in order to fulfill His grander purposes, of which we often know very little (1 Peter 4:19).

Mary Eddy accentuated Jesus' call to "go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret."{6} To her, this was not a simple command to be humble in prayer. She believed this statement communicated that true prayer is not to be spoken or have anything to do with the physical senses. She said,

> *In order to pray aright, we must enter into the closet and shut the door. We must close the lips and silence the material senses. . . . Practice not profession, understanding not belief, gain the ear and right hand of omnipotence and they assuredly call down infinite blessings.{7}*

Not only does prayer become suspect in Christian Science, but so do the orthodox concepts of belief and confession, which are necessary components of prayer and the Christian faith. Eddy misses the point of prayer altogether. Christians don't pray to manipulate fate. We pray in order to verbally express our hearts to God and communicate our concerns. Jesus said that our Father already knows our needs before we ask of Him, but we are to pray nonetheless (Matthew 7:8-9). Eddy's

Christian Science has its roots in Gnosticism, saying that salvation is obtained through some sort of secret knowledge. That flies in the face of the historic Christian truth that simple belief in Christ as Lord and confession of faith in Him leads to justification (Romans 10:9). This issue, of faith versus understanding, is what we will address in the next section of this article.

Belief and Disbelief

Basic to Christian Science is belief and disbelief in error. Once again, like the Gnostics the Christian Scientists see all things in the physical world as an evil opposition to the virtue of the spiritual world. So error comes from an infiltration in the mind by the material. Eddy wrote, "We treat error through the understanding of Truth, because Truth is error's antidote."{8} If one denies the reality of pain, due to its material nature, one may be delivered from such pain. We read in Science and Health, "The dream that matter and error are something must yield to reason and revelation. Then mortals will behold the nothingness of sickness and sin, and sin and sickness will disappear from consciousness."{9} Basically, Christian Scientists believe that pain is an illusion. If you deny the existence of this deception, it will go away.

As a matter of fact, material things are evil, because they don't really exist. Remember, to a Christian Scientist error is the embodiment of evil. To think something exists that doesn't is error. So anything resulting from the physical is also evil. This is the context for understanding sickness and death from a Christian Science perspective. It's inaccurate to Christian Scientists to say only that sin, death, and sickness are results of a fallen world. They believe sickness and death are intrinsically evil themselves. This explains why Christian Scientists reject drugs and human medicine. Drugs are a material attempt at curing what only the spiritual can

heal.{10}

Christian Scientists oversimplify sickness and death. Regardless of whether we like to admit it, death, brought on by sickness or suffering of some sort, is inevitable (Hebrews 9:27). Wouldn't belief in spirituality or "disbelief in error" have rescued at least some from such human suffering? From what I can gather, even Christian Scientists still suffer and die. What about Eddy herself? If she was right, then why did she die?

Sickness and death result from the sin that we all answer for in Adam (Romans 5:12). Therefore, God has opted to rescue us from this fallen world through the means of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Knowledge does not relieve one's sinful predicament. Faith in Christ is the sole deliverer from this condemnation (Ephesians 2:8-9). Even deliverance does not always come in this life, but we have a hope that in the life to come there will be no sickness, no pain, and no death (Revelation 21:4). We have this hope because of that one event in history to which all Christians ought to find unity, the death of Christ. Next, let's look at the Christian Scientist's perspective of the atonement.

The Atonement

As we look at Christian Science we are measuring it according to the standard of God's Word, which it claims to use as the source for its beliefs. In this section, we will discuss Christian Science's perspective on the atonement of Jesus Christ.

Mary Baker Eddy's unique view of the atonement of Christ has supreme bearing on the supposedly biblical nature of Christian Science. To Eddy, the cross of Christ was not meant to save sinful people from death by Christ's death in their place. She stated "The material blood of Jesus was no more efficacious to cleanse from sin when it was shed upon 'the accursed tree,'

than when it was flowing in his veins as he went daily about his Father's business."{11} Instead, Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection was a sign to His followers that the type of life He lived was effective in overcoming death.

To Eddy death is an enemy to Truth, another deception. Jesus was not subject to death, nor are we. She writes, "To him, therefore, death was not the threshold over which he must pass into living glory."{12} Jesus is alleged to have survived the cross through the mastery of mind over matter.{13} This was the ultimate example of Christian Science in practice. Jesus healed Himself with no medicine, bandages, or surgery. Only the disciples thought that Jesus was dead.{14} But Jesus overcame all laws of matter in healing Himself from a near-death experience and He shed His material existence to reveal only the "Soul."

Eddy contends that the disciples originally misunderstood Jesus' appearance after the crucifixion by calling Him a ghost. But soon after they realized that He never died at all. If this is so then why is the tradition passed on to Paul by those same apostles in a sequence of events detailed here in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4?

> *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day. . . .*

In that same chapter Paul defends the idea that Christ was raised *from the dead*, and that if this were not so then we're all still in our sins and of all people most to be pitied (15:17,19). Hebrews 8:12 says of Jesus "he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption." To imagine that Jesus did not die, but simply healed Himself, is biblically and historically

preposterous.

To Mary Baker Eddy, Jesus' death is no longer the redemptive sacrifice that gives life to all who believe. Instead, she establishes Jesus as the first Christian Scientist, a sort of "way-shower," leaving a prime example of how we *all* can conquer sin, suffering, and death.{15}

Human Suffering

As we've been discussing the biblical nature of Christian Science, we conclude with some final thoughts. The central issue in Christian Science seems to be human suffering. Sin, sickness, and death are real threats to the human condition. Mary Baker Eddy was truly bothered by this. Instead of leaning on the God of the Bible for His comfort in times of crisis (2 Corinthians 1:3-4), Eddy devised her own plan to serve as an immediate solution to the burdens she carried.

Contrary to Eddy's charges, Christianity does *not* deny the reality of Jesus' healing ministry. In fact, healing is *still* a valid way for God to show Himself to a generation of hurting people. Nevertheless, healing, even in Jesus' ministry was never intended to be the end all. It was a means for all who witnessed the event to credit Jesus with the Father's seal of approval. The kingdom of God had come. Jesus affirmed this in Matthew 11:4 when He sent John's messengers back to him to respond to the question of whether He was the Messiah with the message, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."

Healing of suffering, as well as sin must be recognized for what it truly is: God bringing glory to God. When we put humans and their suffering at the center of Jesus' ministry or even our own ministries we are doomed to misunderstand God's mercy and compassion in relation to human suffering. "For my

thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). The Master Architect who is also orchestrating all of history to end the way He planned it has to have latitude in bringing this about. That means many of the problems that may not make sense to us will go unanswered until He has the final word.

Compassion is an essential requirement of the Christian message. But too many, like Mary Baker Eddy, have confused godly compassion for humanistic ideology. We ought to pray that none of us are found guilty of imposing our own circumstances upon the Word of God, in order for it to better address our perceived problems. God is faithful. He won't do anything without purpose. But His purpose in our suffering cannot always be obvious. Remember, He loves His creation and will do all that's necessary to bring about "good, for those who are called to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Often pain, suffering, and death are a means of God's character development in His children. "[H]e disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). It takes eyes of faith to see His good in our difficulties. He who has eyes to see, let him see.

Notes

1. She credited Quimby with healing her. She became a huge proponent of Quimby's abilities. Quimby claimed to have rediscovered Jesus' very own methods for healing. Later this relationship went sour. There is a great deal of controversy over whether Eddy taught the same things as Quimby or not. Both Quimby and Eddy claimed originality and that the other was borrowing his or her ideas. Hoekema, Anthony A., *Christian Science*.(Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1963), 10-11.
2. Hoekema, 16.
3. Hoekema, 17.
4. *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures,* viii.
5. Ibid., 12.
6. Matthew 6:6.

7. *Science and Health,* 15.
8. Ibid., 346.
9. Ibid., 347.
10. Ibid., 345.
11. Ibid., 25.
12. Ibid., 39.
13. Ibid., 44.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 26.

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