

A Call For Discernment

A closer look at the teachings of

Bill Gothard

by The Elders of Calvary Bible Church
Fort Worth, TX.

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Forward

In Acts 20:28 we read: “*Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*”

As elders who are charged to pastor and shepherd the church, God has called us to guard ourselves and the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made us overseers. The two-fold means by which we are to accomplish God’s call includes both feeding and protecting. Elders are to feed the church the Word of God and protect it from straying from the Word of God. In order to achieve this we are “...*to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. . .*” (Titus 1:9).

As in the days of Paul and Timothy, the contemporary church seems to be caught up in a mind-set which promotes exhortation while shunning refutation (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Those who refute unsound doctrine are often labeled “negative,” “divisive,” or even “unloving.” Ironically, such an attitude usually results in further division in the body, and even worse, faulty belief and spiritual insecurity. Such an attitude also discourages accountability among teachers and the need for the church to examine what it is being taught (Acts 17:11). As elders it is our desire to be found faithful in both exhorting in sound doctrine and refuting those who contradict (2 Timothy 4:1).

Thus, we have asked Pastor Dan to lead an examination of the teachings of Bill Gothard and then write a paper disclosing our findings. Over the past two to three years we have become increasingly familiar with Mr. Gothard’s teachings on a variety of subjects. And though portions of his interpretations and applications are sound, we have found many to be incorrect and fallacious resulting in a misappropriation of their usage which, in turn, results in an unnecessary tension among the brethren.

This examination is not intended to defame Bill Gothard or question his personal belief and commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ. We have gone to great lengths to be sure it offers a fair representation of his teachings - even so far as to correspond directly with Mr. Gothard himself. In the end, however, while this report has much to do with Mr. Gothard (in that it deals with his teachings), it has most everything to do with Jesus Christ. *His* name and reputation are our primary concern. We are but men - frail, fallible and in need of accountability. Thus, we encourage you to examine *the Scriptures* to see whether what we or any other man teaches you is true to *the Scriptures*.

Finally, it is our prayer that this paper would reflect the love we have for our Savior and for you - His flock (John 21:15-17). Remember, we are not asking you to do with Bill Gothard what we have not already (time and time again) asked you to do with us - examine the Scriptures yourselves to see whether or not what we teach is biblical.

This is our passion and our call. May we be found faithful.

Pastor James Pittman
for the elders of Calvary Bible Church:

Frank Shannon
James Pittman
Doug Helms
Daniel Kirk

Preface

In the summer of 1995 the Lord saw fit to bless Calvary Bible Church with a significant influx of new people who named Jesus as their Lord and expressed a desire to make Calvary their new church home. The growth of a church is a marvelous thing, but it often presents some unique challenges to those who have been charged with the responsibility to oversee its affairs. In this case, one of the challenges was to discern how to handle some unusual interpretations and applications of the Scriptures that emerged from the body during this surge of new growth.

At first the elders paid little attention to these unique doctrines as they came up in casual conversation. It was our opinion that for the most part they dealt with “gray area” kinds of issues and did not warrant any special attention by us. As things progressed, however, our concern became heightened as we discerned that some of these teachings were antithetical to what we propound to be sound doctrine and that, for the most part, their origin was from a single source - the teachings of Mr. Bill Gothard. Nevertheless, we believed the issue did not warrant a public statement, but in all likelihood could be dealt with quietly by continuing in prayer, by preaching sound doctrine, and by challenging unsound teachings as they surfaced in private conversation. The elders maintained this posture for more than a year.

By the spring of 1997, it had become apparent that some were holding up Bill Gothard’s teaching as a test of orthodoxy. Several families even broke fellowship to start their own home church. What had started out to be a minor concern had now become a disruption to the body at large. It was the opinion of the elders that for the spiritual well-being of the body, the issue now warranted a well informed and clearly articulated statement regarding our reservations about Bill Gothard’s teaching.

We do not relish the idea of publicly calling a fellow minister’s teaching into question. Nor do we take lightly the possibility that our intentions in writing this paper will be misunderstood. Nevertheless, for the sake of the unity of the body, we believe it is necessary to disclose our concerns about the teachings of Bill Gothard. It is *not* our intent to communicate that everything from the *Institute of Basic Life Principles* is false or that there is nothing to be gleaned from the seminars and printed material. To the contrary, much of it is edifying and profitable. Nor do we wish to communicate that those who have gleaned from Bill Gothard’s teachings are unwelcome here at Calvary. All who love the Lord Jesus and His Word are welcome. Rather, our intent is to clearly communicate why we believe Bill Gothard’s teachings are often contrary to sound interpretation of the scriptures, and upon that basis, exhort our people to exercise discernment regarding what they glean from his ministry.

This is the second edition of this paper. The first edition was taken by some to be of a harsher tone than we had intended. It is not our desire to give insult to either Mr. Gothard or those who ascribe to his teachings. Therefore, we offer this revised edition in hopes that our concerns will be communicated with as much grace as clarity, and that those who read it will be stimulated to a greater love for the Person of Jesus Christ and a stronger commitment to the sound interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.

Introduction

Bill Gothard is the founder and director of a ministry known as the *Institute of Basic Life Principles*. He is a 63 year old bachelor, graduate of Wheaton College, and a minister ordained under the authority of the LaGrange Bible Church in suburban Chicago.

When Mr. Gothard entered the ministry in 1961 his focus was on reaching young people with the life-changing message of the gospel. His uncommon commitment to being faithful to this calling led him to the inner city of Chicago where he began approaching street kids who were involved in gang activity and who desperately needed to hear about the Savior.

With little more than a chalk-art board, Bible, and a love for young people, Mr. Gothard was able to win a hearing, and eventually the respect, of many sin-hardened juveniles. It was a world of ministry viewed as impenetrable by most ministers of the gospel, but Mr. Gothard tackled it head on, and as a result, many made professions of faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior.

As the ministry progressed, however, it became apparent that some of these professions of faith didn't "stick". In some cases there was a relatively short lapse of time between embracing Christ and re-embracing the gang lifestyle. So Mr. Gothard concluded that if the ministry was going to be effective in the long term, he would have to shift the lion's share of his efforts from reaching teenagers to reaching their parents.

This transition of ministry strategy was the seed which eventually sprang up into what became called the *Seminar in Basic Youth Conflicts* (now known internationally as the *Institute of Basic Life Principles*).¹

Throughout the 1970's this new ministry grew explosively as literally millions of people flocked to hear Mr. Gothard teach the "universal and non-optional" principles of life.² It seemed to many that the Christian life was full of questions and Mr. Gothard had discovered the answers.

Today the *Institute* is a national ministry which offers several kinds of large seminars (including the *Basic*, *Advanced*, *Men's*, *Minister's*, and *Home-schoolers*), as well as a plethora of instructional books, work-books, audio and video tapes and children's materials, covering every subject from self esteem, to issues of church and state.

Furthermore, for those who home-school their children, the *Institute* has developed a complete educational curriculum called the "*Advanced Training*

Institute." And for graduates there is specialized training in business, counseling, law, medicine, education, midwifery, and cosmetology.

In a mere twenty to thirty years, Mr. Gothard's work has evolved from the simplicity of street corner, chalk-art evangelism into an extremely sophisticated ministry which offers instruction on nearly every area of personal and spiritual life.

As their printed literature says, Mr. Gothard is "Giving the World a 'New' Approach to Life!"³

An Appeal For Discernment

As believers, it is imperative that we build our lives around nothing but the Person of Jesus Christ, and that through the written Word of God. Any teaching that is lifted up as a credible option for believers to embrace must be carefully inspected under the scrutinizing light of the Word of God and plain reason before it is accepted.

Mr. Gothard affirms this principle by rightly encouraging those attending the *Basic Seminar* to practice the discipline of biblical discernment. He exhorts them to "check everything you hear against the scriptures."⁴

Unfortunately, however, what one discovers by examining Mr. Gothard's own teaching is somewhat disheartening. Having done an in-depth study ourselves, the elders of Calvary Bible Church believe there is some cause for concern regarding his handling of the Word of God and the questionable teachings that have resulted.

While in his seminars Mr. Gothard gives verbal instruction regarding a sound hermeneutic, in practice he doesn't seem to have any consistent criterion for determining the difference between right and wrong interpretation. Hence, the line between sound doctrine and false doctrine is blurred.

One of the chief causes of Mr. Gothard's hermeneutical troubles is the fact that in his teaching *application* reigns supreme. Careful *interpretation*, on the other hand, seems to hold a position of relative insignificance and is often either ignored or misappropriated to bolster preconceived conclusions about "practical living."

Godly living of necessity, however, must be grounded in and birthed from a sound hermeneutic. The Bible is God's written message to mankind regarding everything we need for life and godliness. Therefore, it behooves us to determine what the text

1. Adapted from the 1984 video taped version of the Basic Seminar.

2. Advanced Seminar Textbook, 1986, p. 269

3. Basic Seminar Workbook, front cover.

4. 1984 video taped seminar, Session #1, Monday evening.

means before considering what it calls us to do.

Application without sound interpretation is imagination - a mirage of "truth" contrived in the shifting sands of subjective thought and wholly inadequate as a foundation for life. It provides a form of biblical authenticity but lacks solid substance. What results is often the unnecessary binding of a believer's consciences leading to division among the brethren.

Careful interpretation, however, produces sound doctrine - the strong foundation that grounds our faith against the winds of subjectivism and provides a platform upon which to build a godly life. Mr. Gothard's teaching often lacks such a foundation because he often disregards careful interpretation as the necessary prerequisite to practical application. Misinterpretation often leads to misappropriation.

Authorial Intent

The foundational principle upon which all sound interpretation is based is the principle of *Authorial Intent*. Authorial intent simply asks the question, What did the author *intend* to communicate? Much distortion of the Bible's meaning results from interpreting Scripture in a way never intended by the original authors. Hence people are led astray into false doctrines and inflexible applications based on misrepresentations of the text.

The golden rule of interpretation is, "It is the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say."⁵ (See also Appendix C)

Mr. Gothard affirms this principle early in his basic seminar by explaining:

It is essential that all Scripture be diligently studied and applied. Each application must be in harmony with the total meaning and message of Scripture - not from an isolated verse taken out of context.⁶

But no sooner is this principle affirmed than we find Mr. Gothard disregarding its essentiality in practice by frequently forcing the Scriptures to say what they were never intended to say and manufacturing meaning that is inconsistent with the context. The following examples serve to illustrate.

Pre-Birth Training

Three sections of the *Advanced Seminar Textbook*

provide instruction on a doctrine called "pre-birth Training."⁷ In this unusual teaching Mr. Gothard proposes that training children to be "mighty in spirit" begins not after the child is born, but before - while still in the womb.

In a section called *Freedom: Conquering Moral Impurity*, Mr. Gothard makes this astounding claim:

"Unborn children are capable of comprehending Scripture because Scripture is spiritually discerned. Therefore, parents who read Scripture to their children before birth are giving them greater alertness to spiritual truth."⁸

In support of this claim II Timothy 3:15 is referenced which says, ". . . and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

The basis for his interpretation of this text is explained much earlier in the textbook as Mr. Gothard comments,

"The Greek word which Paul used for child was *brephos*. Its precise definition in *Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* is "an infant (properly, an unborn infant)." (emphasis in the original).⁹

Mr. Gothard's interpretation of this Scripture, however, is problematic because it is built on a common, but misleading, semantic fallacy. The fallacy here is the presupposition that says, "since every word has a root meaning, that meaning must be carried over into what ever context it is used." Hence, if *brephos* means *unborn child* in Luke 1:44 (and it does), it must retain the same meaning where ever else it is used.

To approach the interpretation of words in this way requires that one disregard their normal semantic range of meaning determined by context and impose on them an unnaturally rigid uniformity unknown to most words in either Greek or English.

In this case, while it is true that Strong's does provide "unborn infant" as *the* literal definition of the

5. Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, Assurance Publishers; Rockville, M.D. p. 54

6. Basic Seminar Textbook, p. 3

7. Advanced Seminar Textbook, p. 28; 261; 309-310

8. *ibid.*, p. 261

9. *ibid.*, p. 28

Greek word *brephos*, the literal meaning of this term is clearly broader than what Strong suggests. For example, in Luke 2:12 we read:

And this will be a sign for you: you will find a [*brephos*] wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger.”

Clearly the literal meaning of *brephos* in this instance is not “unborn infant”. Its normal semantic range allows for a slightly different, albeit significant, meaning. Nor is there any reason to suggest that Paul was referring to Timothy as an unborn child in 2 Timothy 3:15. The natural meaning of the term in this context points to a young child of unspecified age.

It is likely, however, that Paul was referring to Timothy as a child of around five years of age. For as the Linguistic Key To The New Testament points out regarding the meaning of *brephos*, “The Jewish parent’s duty was to teach their children the law in their fifth year.”¹⁰

The second basis for Mr. Gothard’s teaching on pre-birth training is the idea that “scripture is spiritually discerned.” While no text is given in support of this assertion, one might safely assume reference is being made to I Corinthians 2:14 which says:

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

What did the author intend to communicate in this passage? Clearly Paul was explaining that without the indwelling and illuminating presence of the *Holy Spirit*, no one can fully understand the revealed truth of scripture. In fact, spiritual truth is “foolishness” to such people.

Mr. Gothard, however, uses this passage to teach;

“The Scriptures are understood by spiritual perception. Therefore, even though the intellectual ability of an unborn child is not developed, the spiritual perception of that child is developed.”¹¹

In other words, it is not necessary for a child to comprehend words in order to understand the truth of Scripture. Rather, one can communicate spiritual truth “spirit to spirit,” (as is demonstrated by testimonials presented in the textbook).¹² As such, communication with a pre-born child does not require the normal faculties of the five senses. It can be accomplished by

means that are *Extra Sensory*.

We do not believe for a moment that Mr. Gothard is deliberately teaching the superstitious doctrine of Extra Sensory Perception (ESP). But by overlooking the author’s original intent and implementing an unusual hermeneutic, he steps over the threshold of sound doctrine into aberrant teaching.

Upon closer inspection it turns out that the seed thoughts behind Mr. Gothard’s instruction concerning Pre-birth Training do not find their origin in the Scriptures primarily, but with the writings of *Prenatal Psychologist*, Dr. Thomas Verny. Mr. Gothard quotes extensively from Dr. Verny’s book *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child* which promotes such concepts as adult memory retrieval of prenatal experiences.¹³

While Mr. Gothard does allude to the biblical example of John the Baptist “leaping in the womb” upon the approach of Mary (Luke 1:44), this text is a tribute to the unique nature of Christ, and says nothing concerning a child’s ability to understand the scriptures from within the womb.

Far from teaching the plain meaning of these texts, Mr. Gothard forces them to say something the original authors never intended them to mean by making them conform to a subjective combination of mystical thought and psychoanalysis rather than careful exegesis. By so doing he encourages believers to practice a religious discipline that the Scriptures do not condone.

Home-Schooling

Another example of forcing a text to mean what it was never intended to say involves Galatians 4:1-2.

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.

In one instance Mr. Gothard uses this verse to evaluate whether or not parents have believed “Satan’s lie” regarding how to educate their children.¹⁴

In another place, he uses this text to teach that home-schooling is a God-ordained assignment for *all* parents.¹⁵

Later on in a section entitled *God’s Presuppositions For Successful Education*, this same verse is used to teach that “God charges parents and grandparents, not

10. Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament by Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers. p. 646

11. *ibid.*; p. 310

12. *ibid.*

13. Dr. Thomas Verny, M.D. *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*; Summit Books, New York, 1981 p. 194. It must be noted that not even Dr. Verny’s proposals go as far as Gothard’s. Some of Verny’s teachings are certainly unbiblical, but their focus is exclusively on the sensory experiences of the pre-born. Gothard takes Verny’s conclusions a step further by adding his own convoluted interpretation of 1 Cor. 2:14.

14. Advanced Seminar Textbook, p. 145; This section entitled *How To Recognize “The Lie” In Our Culture*.

teachers, with the responsibility to train their son's and daughters." 16

The problem here is not that Mr. Gothard encourages Christian parents to take the primary responsibility for educating their children. Rather the problem arises from the fact that these verses do not speak to the issue of education at all.

An important principle of interpretation to keep in mind is that *not* everything reported in the Bible is didactic in nature. That is, just because an author alludes to a cultural pattern does not of necessity mean he is promoting it as a way of life for his readers.

In this case it is clear from the surrounding context that Paul was not intending to communicate anything about educating children. Rather he was using a cultural norm as an illustration to clarify a spiritual reality. Namely, that in Christ we have been set free from bondage to the law and are now legally adopted sons who possess full rights as heirs of God.

Furthermore, the cultural allusion in this passage does not indicate that children were home-schooled at all. It only indicates that the fathers were in charge of how long a child would be tutored before he would be considered of age to take on the privileges and responsibilities of managing his inheritance as a mature adult. The implication is that tutors and guardians *other than the parents* were given the authority to teach Jewish children.

The interpreter of the Scriptures must first ask himself *not*, "what does the text mean to *me*?", but "What did it mean to the original author?" As one commentator points out, "until we can answer the latter question with some degree of certainty, we have no basis for claiming validity for our interpretation." 17

Mr. Gothard's misinterpretation of this text leads him to suggest that it is God's will for all Christian parents to home-school their children. But the Scriptures, in fact, make no such claim.

Inappropriate Applications

On occasion Mr. Gothard's interpretation of the Scripture leads to inappropriate applications. For example, Hebrews 9:22 is used as a text supporting the claim that God intended the wife's menstrual cycle to be a reminder to her husband of the blood Christ spilled to pay the price of redemption. 18

And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no

forgiveness. (Heb. 9:22)

Mr. Gothard asks:

How should a husband view his wife's cycle?

A Monthly Reminder That:

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions..." (Isaiah 53:4-5; Emphasis in the original).

This kind of misapplication of the Word of God is inappropriate. Obviously it is important for husbands (and all Christians for that matter) to reflect regularly on the blood Jesus spilled to redeem us. But was it not for that very purpose Jesus Himself instituted the ordinance of the Lords Supper?

Another example of misapplying Scripture is Mr. Gothard's treatment of Proverbs 23:7. Mr. Gothard writes;

Medical researchers have recently discovered that the heart contains chemical substances similar to those in the brain which carry out thinking. This discovery is consistent with the words of our creator, "*As [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he. . .*" (emphasis in original). 19

Even in the English it is quite clear the author was not making reference to the physical heart but to the spiritual "inner man" (i.e. the soul).

Another example of Mr. Gothard's unorthodox approach to applying Scripture occurs in his application of John 1:9. Mr. Gothard writes:

The conscience is the inward sensitivity to right and wrong. It is referred to in John 1:9 as "*the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*" This "light of the conscience" is sensitive to the qualities of God's nature as well as to the lack of them (emphasis in the original). 20

But is John 1:9 speaking of the conscience or of the Person of Christ? In context it reads:

There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. **He** was in the world, and the world was made through **Him**, and the world did not know **Him**. **He** came to **His** own, and those who were **His** own did not

15. *ibid.*, p. 28

16. *ibid.* p. 344

17. Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics*; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, p. 78

18. Advanced Textbook, p. 170 "What specific purpose does God have for the wife's cycle?" Purpose # 4.

19. How to Develop Truthfulness *Character Book 4*, p. 4.

receive **Him**. But as many as received **Him**, to them **He** gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in **His** name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, (John 1:9-13 emphasis added).

If this text is referring to a person's conscience, one must logically conclude the conscience should be the object of man's faith, that it made the world, and that it has the authority to make people "children of God."

"Biblical" interpretation of this caliber not only leads believers into unnecessary and non-biblical, religious practices, it strikes a blow against the sufficiency of the sacred Scriptures by handling them in a *laissez faire* manner. Furthermore, it teaches young students that the normal faculties of intelligent reasoning do not always apply to biblical interpretation and application. Therefore the Bible's true meaning may only be accessible to the spiritually elite who have the exclusive ability to unlock the hidden message *behind* the normal meaning of the text.

It must be said at this point that we have no reason to believe Bill Gothard is anything less than a man of moral integrity who genuinely loves the Lord Jesus Christ and has no *intention* to mislead those who follow his spiritual leadership. Nevertheless, by mishandling the Word of God in this way, Mr. Gothard implies (albeit unintentionally) that he is privy to a higher level of spiritual knowledge than the average believer has access to and that his "principles of life" are the key to spiritual health and maturity.

As a result, students are in danger of coming away from an Institute seminar not better equipped for personal study of the Word of God, but more deeply dependent on Mr. Gothard himself to teach them how they should live.

Extra-biblical Authorities

Among the reasons Mr. Gothard's teaching sometimes steps out of bounds is his tendency to suggest extra-biblical sources as binding authorities on issues related to the believer's walk with God.

The danger here is that whenever the perceived value of man's wisdom is lifted up as binding on issues related to life in the Spirit, the perceived value of God's Word is dragged down. When we elevate man's knowledge we devalue God's revelation by implying that, by itself, it is insufficient to meet the complex spiritual needs of believers in the 20th century.

We have already seen how Mr. Gothard's integration of psychology into his interpretation of 2

Timothy 3:15 has skewed the author's intended meaning of that text. But his teaching on *Pre-birth Training* is not the only example of how Mr. Gothard imposes extra-biblical authority over the believer's conscience regarding spiritual issues.

In his discussion on music he makes it clear that the Word of God is not sufficient as the basis upon which to form judgments about the kind of music Christians may listen to. Under the heading *Basic Principles of Music Evaluation* he writes:

Accurate evaluation of music is *only possible* as we *integrate* it with the related disciplines of mathematics, science, history, and medicine. *The laws of these disciplines act as an authoritative reference* to confirm that the musical expression is either following or violating established principles:" (emphasis added).²¹

Several pages later, he then declares that if these principles are violated, the music in question "is the antithesis of what God desires in the life of a Christian."²² In other words, if we violate one of these principles we have sinned! Regardless of the fact that the "authoritative reference" for these principles is extra-biblical.

If this is the case, then the Word of God is not sufficient to keep a believer from all sin. He also needs to know Mr. Gothard's understanding of the principles of mathematics, science, history, medicine and psychology if he is to escape the world's evils and become spiritually mature.

This kind of reasoning surfaces in other teachings as well. It would seem that whenever Mr. Gothard wants to make a point that cannot be supported by the normal interpretation of Scripture, he simply turns to another "authoritative reference." Such is the case in his teaching on Satan's exercise of power over the lives of believers through "evil objects" in the home.²³

In this particular teaching, Mr. Gothard has no scripture to support his claim that "evil objects" in the home cause rebellion and other domestic vices. So in order to make this teaching authoritative he tells *seven* stories of people who claim to have been negatively influenced by items such as a voodoo mask, rock & roll cassettes, a modern art canvas, Cabbage Patch Dolls, Trolls *et al.*²⁴

Additionally, in his booklet entitled *Contemporary Christian Music: Ten Scriptural Reasons Why The "Rock Beat" Is Evil in Any Form*, Mr. Gothard's authoritative references include 15 testimonials (the booklet is only 17 pages long), a misappropriation of conclusions from a study by the American Medical

21. Advanced Textbook; p. 123

22. *ibid.*; p. 133

23. Basic Seminar Workbook, 1996; p. 46

Association, the unreferenced finding of a neurobiologist and a physicist, the “law of sympathetic vibrations”, one of his own charts from the Basic Seminar, and unreferenced “further research”.²⁵

This is not to say that there are no Scriptures in this booklet. In fact they are numerous. But not one of them speaks to the issue of “beat” - rock or otherwise. In fact, the only direct references to the “rock beat” throughout the booklet are found in Mr. Gothard’s own statements and the quoted testimonials of like-minded people. Should they be considered a legitimate, binding authority over the believer’s conscience?

Obviously there is a legitimate cause for grave concern regarding the worldly and often godless bent of much of the music and musicians in our day who claim to be Christian. As Mr. Gothard rightly points out, believers should never “give place [ground] to the devil” (Eph. 4:27) with their choice of music, or “love the things of the world” (I John 2:15-16), or “offend other Christians” (I Cor. 8:9-13), or “rebel against our parents” (Ex. 20:12). Certainly we should “avoid the appearance of evil” (I Thess. 5:22), and be careful not to “mix light with darkness” (II Cor. 6:14-15).²⁶ These are all legitimate biblical principles for evaluating the kind of music a believer listens to. Taking a stand against a kind of “beat,” however, is unnecessary and only serves to bind people’s consciences in an area the Scriptures do not and contribute to making the Christian life more like a burden to be carried than a reason for rejoicing in God’s grace.

To make the claim that God says a “beat” is evil is to put words in God’s mouth and make Him say what in fact He never said. Furthermore, it communicates that God’s Word is insufficient to answer the difficult questions a believer must wrestle with in this increasingly complex society. The only support for the claims Mr. Gothard makes concerning the “rock beat,” however well intended, is extrabiblical and therefore lack the authority to bind a believer’s conscience.

Once again, let us be clear that we are not questioning Mr. Gothard’s motive or sincerity. His desire to promote purity in the believer’s life is certainly admirable and biblical. Rather our concern is with his interpretations and applications of Scripture and what they often communicate regarding the duties of the Christian life and the sufficiency of the Word of God.

As Dr. John MacArthur, Jr. writes:

Contemporary evangelicalism has been

beguiled and sabotaged by a ruinous lack of confidence in God’s Word. . . Many who would never doubt the Bible’s authenticity as God’s word or distrust its essential authority as a guide for righteous living have nevertheless accepted the notion that Scripture simply does not contain all we need to minister well in these complex and sophisticated modern times. So they turn to human expertise in the fields of psychology, business, government, politics, entertainment, or whatever else they think might supply some recipe for success that’s lacking in scripture. . . . [But] we don’t need to pick through this world’s tainted wisdom to sort out new insights or answers for spiritual issues. The only reliable answers are there for us in the Bible. . .²⁷

Should we conclude then, that there is nothing to be learned outside the Bible that can be useful in the church?

Useful, perhaps. Necessary, no. If they are necessary [for our walk with God], they are in Scripture. Otherwise God has left us short of what we need, and that would be unthinkable.²⁸

In the final analysis, the principle we need to set our minds and hearts to is not the principle of mathematics, science, history, medicine, or psychology, but the principle of *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone), which teaches that the only truth that has the authority to bind our consciences absolutely, is the Bible.

It is becoming increasingly popular in our day to affirm the inerrancy of the scriptures while at the same time inadvertently denying their sufficiency. Whenever extra-biblical “wisdom” is held up as authoritative for life and godliness, the supremacy and sufficiency of the scriptures is devalued and the consciences of men are unnecessarily bound, regardless of the teacher’s noble intent.

Misuse of the Old Testament Law

We know, as Paul told Timothy, that “the law is good if one uses it lawfully” (I Tim. 2:5-8). But to misuse the law is to lead the church into legalism and shackle believers in spiritual bondage unnecessarily.

Mr. Gothard freely applies the mosaic law as the basis for a generous portion of his teaching. He does so on this premise:

24. See appendix A for testimonial examples.

25. Ten Scriptural Reasons Why The “Rock Beat” is Evil in Any Form; Special publication of Institute in Basic Live Principles, 1990. It should be noted that the quote from the American Medical Association says nothing about the effects or evils of “beat”. Neither does the testimony offered by the neurobiologist and physicist. These references appear impressive but add no support to Gothard’s claim that the “rock beat” is evil.

26. *ibid.*

27. Dr. John MacArthur, Jr., *Our Sufficiency in Christ*; Word Publishing, 1991. pp. 117 & 120

The laws and commandments throughout scripture are a *single unity*. . . The claim that the Old Testament Law has no application for us today not only violates the unity of scripture, but also the clear instruction of II Timothy 3:16: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. ” ²⁹ (Emphasis added)

The implication of “single unity” here is that since all Scripture is inspired by God, every Scripture must be taken as applicable to the lives of believers *in the same sense* regardless of its larger context in the Bible as a whole. Thus a command from the *ceremonial* portions of the mosaic law should be interpreted and applied the same as a command from one of Paul’s epistles to the church.

In his Basic Seminar, Mr. Gothard illustrates this by teaching that even such laws as “*You are not to boil a kid [baby goat] in the milk of its mother*” (Ex. 23:19), and “*You shall not wear a material mixed of wool and linen together*” (Deut. 22:11), are applicable to us today.

Similarly, in the Advanced Textbook Mr. Gothard points his students back to the law as the standard by which love is defined and demonstrated. He writes; “A person may think he is a loving [spouse] by the things he says or does, but God’s law is much more precise and accurate in defining what is loving”. ³⁰

With that as the foundation he is then free to teach couples the “biblical principle” of *Marital Abstinence* whereby a married couple can demonstrate they *really* love one another by not engaging in sexual relations

1. During the wife’s menstrual cycle;
2. Seven days after the cycle;
3. Forty days after the birth of a son;
4. Eighty days after the birth of a daughter; ³¹ and
5. The evening prior to worship. ³²

While Mr. Gothard stops short of treating *marital abstinence* as a divine imperative, the very fact it is included in the context of “biblical principles” communicates that this is God’s will for married couples. But are these conclusions based on sound interpretation?

In Paul’s teaching, the old *ceremonial* code of law had been stripped of its authority over our consciences because it only served as a shadow of the reality that is now ours in the Person of Christ. Mr. Gothard’s

understanding of this, however, is different.

From his perspective;

We don’t keep the law in order to gain or maintain salvation, but we should apply the principles of the law to avoid sowing to the flesh and reaping corruption”. ³³

But do the ceremonial laws concerning what we eat, how we dress, when married couples may engage in physical intimacy, *et al.*, empower us to overcome the flesh? Paul rebuked the church at Galatia for giving in to such teaching:

. . . now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain. (4:9-11)

Similarly, to the Colossians he wrote:

If you have died with Christ to the *elementary principles* of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)— in accordance with the *commandments and teachings of men*? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but ***are of no value against fleshly indulgence*** (Col. 2:20-23 emphasis added).

While the problems being addressed in the churches of Galatia and Colossae were not identical to Mr. Gothard’s teaching in every respect, these Scriptures stand in stark contrast to Mr. Gothard’s perspective on how we should apply the law.

Contrary to what Mr. Gothard suggests, the flesh is not only powerless to fulfill the law, the law is powerless to conquer the flesh. In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote:

. . . sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produces in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the law sin is dead. And I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died; and this commandment, which was to

29. Advanced Textbook; p. 173

30. *ibid.*; p. 173

31. *ibid.*; p. 175-176

32. Robert Sheridan, “Bill Gothard And Dispensationalism”, Graduate paper, Calvary Bible College, pp. 18-19. Copy on file.

33. Advanced Textbook; p. 173

result in life, proved to result in death to me; for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. (Rom. 7:8-11)

Teaching believers that “apply[ing] the principles of the law” will empower them to “avoid sowing to the flesh and reaping corruption” may sound religious, but it is not biblical. On the contrary, throughout the book of Galatians, Paul draws a sharp contrast between living by the law and living by the Spirit. To Paul, living by the law is like being a descendant of Hagar. Living by faith in the Spirit is like being a descendant of Sarah (4:21-31). Living by the law is bondage. Living by the Spirit is freedom in Christ. (5:1-25)

This is why Paul warned the brethren in Colossae:

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the *elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ*. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, (2:8-10 emphasis added. See also Colossians 3:1-5).

The New Testament model for demonstrating love is not the *ceremonial* law, but the Person of Christ (Eph. 5:22-32). Additionally, power over the flesh is not found in obedience to the law, but living by faith in the Spirit of Christ (Gal. 5). Regardless of our need, the Scriptures always point us to Christ who alone can supply.

Mr. Gothard points out “The Old Testament Law is described by Paul as a ‘schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.’”³³ And that is certainly true. But he neglects to explain the very next verse which completes Paul’s thought; “But now that faith [in Christ] has come *we are no longer under a tutor*” (3:25 emphasis added). “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but *faith working through love* (5:6 emphasis added).

Mr. Gothard does say:

Those who don’t understand the good news of salvation often try to keep the law with their own human efforts in order to be saved. This goal could be described as legalism.

A further expression of legalism takes place when a Christian thinks he has to keep the law in order to maintain his salvation or that he has to fulfill the righteousness of the law by his own human efforts.³⁴

And yet Mr. Gothard frequently calls believers back to obedience to ceremonial laws regarding foods,

clothing, etc., in order to “avoid sowing to the flesh and reaping corruption.” This is a confusing inconsistency.

Perhaps the reason this inconsistency exists is that Mr. Gothard does not make any distinction between the *moral* law and the *civil and ceremonial* laws. This distinction is important to make in order to interpret and apply the law the way God intends us to (See Appendix B for a further treatment of this subject).

Our point here is that rather than focusing on obedience to the old code of *cerimonial* law, our emphasis should be on learning how to love Christ faithfully. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision [i.e. ceremonial law] nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love” (Eph. 5:6). It is out of our relationship with Jesus that the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of righteousness which manifests itself in a holy life. Our eternal life is defined simply in terms of “knowing Him” (Jn. 17:3). Why? Because in Christ, God has supplied everything we need to be both satisfied and sanctified.

In Christ we have wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (I Cor. 1:30). His grace is sufficient for every situation (II Cor. 12:9). We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Him (Eph. 1:3). By one offering He has perfected us forever (Heb. 10:14). We are complete in Christ (Col. 2:10). We find satisfaction in the living water and bread of life which is Christ (John 4:13-14; 6:35)

Paul, who understood best what the law of God had to offer, said he considered all of his accomplishments under the law as;

... loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. (Phil. 3:7-8)

The student of the Scriptures will search in vain to find Paul (or any other New Testament writer) pointing to the Old Testament *levitical/ceremonial* code of law as the standard and motivation for godliness. The student of Mr. Gothard’s principles, however, will search in vain to find concentrated teaching on the sufficiency of Christ for the believer’s every need.

Mr. Gothard’s preponderance for placing practical living (application) over sound doctrine (careful interpretation) leaves his students without the strong moorings that keep one secure against the winds of subjectivism. In our estimation, Mr. Gothard’s teaching gives far more emphasis to the details of “practical living” than the Scriptures do. By contrast, the Scriptures give far greater emphasis to the glorious Person and work of Jesus Christ than all the volumes of

33. Advanced Textbook, p. 173

34. *ibid.*

the *Institute's* "biblical principles" combined.

While we do not question Mr. Gothard's personal love for the Lord Jesus, we have failed to find in his writings a proper emphasis on the essential doctrine of the sufficiency of Christ as it relates to the sanctification and satisfaction of the believer. By emphasizing practical application over this essential doctrine, Mr. Gothard has put the cart before the horse and has led many of his followers into a pursuit of a "life that works" rather than a glorious Savior who sanctifies and satisfies.

Sins of the Fathers

One of Mr. Gothard's more prominent teachings from the Old Testament law is that people inherit spiritual weaknesses from their forefathers. As believers, therefore, it is our responsibility to discover what these inherited tendencies are, warn our children of them, confess the sins of our forefathers and then implement specific spiritual disciplines to counteract their effects.³⁶

This teaching emerges throughout Mr. Gothard's printed material but is no where more striking than in his counsel for couples who may be contemplating adoption. In this teaching he makes it clear that the "sins of the forefathers" are not simply *learned* sinful behaviors and attitudes, but are sinful tendencies that are transmitted genetically through DNA.³⁷ Hence, "many parents are shocked and disillusioned when their adopted children fail to respond to the genuine love and spiritual training which they have been given"³⁸ because they are genetically bound by the sins of their forefathers.

According to Mr. Gothard, the only means by which one can "break the chain of the sins of the forefathers and establish a new line of God's blessing" is "by following these steps." Seven steps are then detailed including acknowledging the sins of parents and ancestors.³⁹ Are these sound, "biblical principles"?

Mr. Gothard's teaching on this subject is based on the second commandment, Exodus 20:5 which reads, (in context with verse 4 which Mr. Gothard does not include):

4. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.
5. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God,

visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me. . .

Once again, the question we must ask is did the original author of this Scripture intend to teach what Mr. Gothard teaches regarding genetic transmission of sinful habits?

A closer look at this text reveals God's intent.

First, notice the objects of God's "visiting" are "those who hate me". Notice too, that they are idol worshipers. In other words, this command was a warning directed to people who reject God for idols.

Second, there are two important words in this text that shed light on what God is communicating. They are *visiting* and *iniquity*. The Hebrew word *visiting* in this context should be understood as *punishing*. And the word *iniquity* means *guilt*.⁴⁰

Therefore, what the text is saying is that since God is a jealous God, He will not tolerate the sin of idolatry (an egregious form of unbelief), but will punish idolaters (those who hate Him) with an unprecedented severity which may include not only the idolater himself but his whole family with him.

Clearly this text is not saying God will pass down certain *sins* (e.g. moral impurity, drunkenness, lying, occult involvement, or pride) as Mr. Gothard proposes, but rather that He reserves the right to pass down *punishment*, the effects of which would reverberate through multiple generations.

An example of God punishing in this way is found in Numbers 14:31-33;

. . . you [king Jeroboam] also have done more evil than all who were before you, and have gone and made for yourself other gods and molten images to provoke Me to anger, and have cast Me behind your back— therefore behold, I am bringing calamity on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male person, both bond and free in Israel, and I will make a clean sweep of the house of Jeroboam, as one sweeps away dung until it is all gone. "Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city the dogs will eat. And he who dies in the field the birds of the heavens will eat; for the LORD has spoken it".

Another example is found in Jeremiah 7:18-20;

"The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they

36. Men's Manual Volume II, p. 250

37. Basic Care Bulletin 5, Medical Training Institute of America; How to Make Wise Decisions on Adoption, p. 28

38. *ibid.*, p. 27

39. *ibid.* p. 36

40. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament Volume II, by Harris, Archer & Waltke; Moody Press, Chicago, 1980.

pour out libations to other gods in order to spite Me. . . Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, My anger and My wrath will be poured out on this place, on man and on beast and on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground; and it will burn and not be quenched.”

In this case, it wasn’t just the people who were going to receive God’s punishment but the trees and ground as well.

Other examples could be cited throughout the Old Testament of how God’s people continually forsook Him by turning to idols for which God responded with severe punishment affecting multiple generations of people.

It must be acknowledged at this point that some sinful tendencies are indeed passed down from one generation to the next. If a father is a habitual liar, it is likely that his sons will learn to lie also. If a mother is an alcoholic, the chances of her children growing up to abuse alcohol are significantly increased. There are even examples of this in the Scriptures. But it is questionable whether or not these sinful tendencies have any genetic relationship, and it is *certain* that the second commandment is not speaking to this issue at all.

Mr. Gothard’s teaching on the second commandment is based more on superstition than sound interpretation. And that results in an unnecessary and unbiblical burden on would-be adoptive parents, and, for that matter, any Christian parent who might become fearful that God has imposed certain sins onto their children as a result of this teaching.

Regarding the practice of acknowledging (i.e. confessing) the sins of our forefathers, once again Mr. Gothard teaches what the Word of God does not.

Confessing the sins of the forefathers was not a discipline instituted by God for the individual, as Mr. Gothard suggests, but was, rather, a command given to the *nation* of Israel as a part of the Old Covenant.

In Leviticus 26, God warns the *nation* of the penalties they should expect should they choose to “break my covenant” (vs. 15). As they reject God, He would judge them with increasing severity until they are reduced to eating their own children to survive and then ultimately taken captive from their promised land and scattered among the nations.

In this context God graciously tells Moses:

If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me . . . then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will

remember the land (Lev. 26:40-42).

This is exactly what we find the leaders of the nation of Israel doing, both during and after the Babylonian captivity. (Nehemiah 9:2-3; Daniel 9:4-6). They were not asking God to free them as individuals from the “controlling influence which [the sins of their forefathers had] over their lives”⁴¹ Rather, they were acknowledging their national rebellion against God, their King, and asking Him to restore to them both the covenant and the land according to the law.

Interestingly, the book of Jeremiah records an account of the prophet attempting to intercede for the people by confessing the sins of the fathers. But God responds to this prayer by telling Jeremiah, “Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence” (14:20-51:1) Why? Because they “have as many gods as [they] have towns (11:11-14).

Clearly, confessing the sins of past generations had nothing to do with individual believers “breaking the chain” of genetically transmitted sins. Rather it was an act of obedience to the *judicial* law of God (which was completely fulfilled in Christ) by which the leaders of the nation of Israel would express national repentance from idolatry and re-establish their nation’s covenant relationship with God.

Mr. Gothard’s teaching on the “sins of the fathers” is yet another example of a teaching that imposes a religious discipline on the church that God has neither required nor condoned.

Grace and Faith

One of the doctrines the elders of Calvary are especially concerned about in Mr. Gothard’s teaching is his view of God’s grace. Mr. Gothard defines *grace* as follows:

- ◆ **Grace** = An active force within us giving us the desire and power to do things God’s way. (Phil. 2:13; Heb. 12:15)
- ◆ **Grace of God** = The desire and power to reproduce ourselves spiritually. (Rom. 12:5-6)
- ◆ **Grace of Life** = The desire and power to reproduce ourselves physically. (1 Pet. 3:7)⁴²

What is the problem with these definitions?

Aside from the interpretive difficulties regarding the use of the scriptures suggested for each definition, there is one significant flaw - God’s glory is misplaced!

Whenever the Scriptures speak of God’s grace in the

41. Basic Care Bulletin 5, Medical Training Institute of America; How to Make Wise Decisions on Adoption, p. 36

life of a believer (or unbeliever for that matter), its purpose is to evoke trust in the Person who is gracious, not the power of grace itself. In other words, God's purpose in being gracious is to cause us to give Him glory.

We believe Mr. Gothard, albeit unintentionally, minimizes the doctrine of grace by defining it in terms of an impersonal "force" or "power" which enables us to accomplish certain objectives (e.g. general obedience, evangelism, and child bearing).

But the purpose of grace is not to give us a firmer handle on life by which we can make it work for us. Grace is given that God might be gloriously exalted for doing in us, for us, and through us what we are absolutely helpless to do ourselves; namely to believe, to repent, to love Him and others, to obey His commands, *et al.*

Grace should *not* be viewed as a tool God puts into man's hand in order to give him the capacity to fix life or make it better, or perform great spiritual exploits. Rather grace should be understood as a glorious attribute of God whereby He demonstrates His unmerited love for us by doing for us what we could never possibly do, and giving to us what we never would have expected Him to give... "to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

On the last day when all will stand before God to give an account, we will not rejoice that our families turned out well because *we* wielded God's grace skillfully. Nor will we exult in the fact that many were saved as a result of *our* prowess for delivering God's grace. Rather, we will offer up humble worship to God for what He miraculously accomplished through the likes of depraved sinners such as us in order to demonstrate the greatness of His glory by His grace.

In an attempt to define grace in terms that are practical and relevant, Mr. Gothard inadvertently de-emphasizes the most important aspect of grace - the glory of God.

This can be more clearly seen by inserting Mr. Gothard's definitions in place of the word *grace* in a couple of Scriptures.

For example, what if Paul had written: "*For by [the active force within] you have been saved through faith...*" (Eph. 2:8)?"

Does that communicate Paul's intention to reveal that God chooses to save a man by His own good pleasure and for His own glory as the context suggests?

While it is certainly true that our salvation was accomplished by a great power, that "power" is not Paul's point. Rather Paul is trying to elicit within his readers a deep sense of humble contrition before the Person of God based upon the revelation that we were saved, not by works, but by "God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love for us... (2:4). That's grace!

And what about 1 Corinthians 15:10? Could Paul have written; "*But by the [desire and power to do things God's way] I am what I am*"?

Paul did not intend to exult in his own "desires" or "powers" even if they had been graciously given by God. Rather, his intent was to exalt the Person of God who had been unbelievably gracious in miraculously transforming a blasphemer like himself into a useful servant of God.

While God's gracious care over his children may include giving them such gifts as the "desire and power" to do certain things, those gifts are not the definition of grace. Rather, they are two of the *benefits* of God's grace. God gives them when He pleases because He is gracious.

Properly understood, grace is an attribute of God by which He accomplishes every good thing for those whom He has called to Himself. It is a glorious attribute of His Person by which He looks on our sinful state with pity, redeems us by His blood, sanctifies us by His word and Spirit, and will glorify us with His Son - all for His own glory.

A second concern in this regard is Mr. Gothard's teaching that God will allow us to tap into the grace "force" if we meet certain qualifications. For example, in his basic seminar Mr. Gothard teaches, "grace requires humility (James 4:6)." ⁴³

While the Bible does teach a grace that is conditional, Mr. Gothard leaves out the most important part of the doctrine of "conditional grace". Namely, that conditional grace is still *unmerited* grace because everything God requires *for* grace, he also supplies *by* grace.

For example, God requires repentance as a condition for the grace of salvation (Luke 13:5). But, by the same token, the repentance God requires, He also supplies.

And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps *God may grant them repentance* leading to the knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 2:24-25, emphasis added).

Similarly, *faith* is a condition both for salvation and sanctification, and yet we know from Paul's teaching that *faith* is a "gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).

John Piper, in his book *Future Grace*, quotes Augustine as saying:

"Man's good will precedes many of God's gifts, but not all. The very will that precedes is itself among these gifts." God's freedom is not reduced when he makes some of his graces

42. Advanced Textbook, p. 356-357

depend on conditions that He himself freely supplies. Grace responding to grace is still grace.⁴⁴

Our point here is that Mr. Gothard's treatment of the doctrine of grace is inadequate because it reduces grace down to a list of benefits, thus de-emphasizing the Giver of grace. It leaves the student with the distinct impression that he must do something to earn sanctifying grace. It makes man the initiator and God the reciprocator rather than the other way around.

By its very definition, however, grace must be absolutely free - given solely on the basis of God's good pleasure. Paul wrote, "But if [salvation] is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace" (Romans 11:6). Why? Because as Piper correctly explains:

Grace would not be grace if it were a response to resources in us. Grace is grace because it highlights God's own rescues of kindness... Grace is free because God would not be the infinite, self-sufficient God He is if He were constrained by anything outside Himself.⁴⁵

If the grace that saves and sanctifies is at all dependent on man's will or works then God is constrained by us rather than we by Him. But the truth is, God is absolutely unrestrained. He is the one Being in the universe who is truly autonomous. Hence when He revealed Himself to Moses He said "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show compassion on whom I will show compassion". (Exodus 33:19)

Mr. Gothard, on the other hand, in a personal letter to the author explained his view of sanctifying grace as follows:

Scripture does not present the believer as a passive recipient of overpowering grace, but a responder to initial grace so that more grace can be given. Thus we are not to resist the grace of God (Heb. 12:15), and we are to humble our selves to receive more grace, (James 4:6).⁴⁶

We have already discussed James 4:6, but it must also be noted that "resist the grace of God" in Hebrews does not support Mr. Gothard's point. The NASB renders this verse, "*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God.*" The NIV renders it, "*See to it that no one misses the grace of God.*" The author did not

intend to communicate grace's *resistibility*, but the believers *responsibility* to communicate God's grace to one whose life is demonstrating a lack of saving faith by means of persistent sin (i.e. bitterness or immorality).⁴⁷

Our concern regarding Mr. Gothard's teaching about grace is *not* that he teaches "conditional grace", but that he teaches it almost exclusively.⁴⁸ Once again the source of the problem here is Mr. Gothard's seemingly incessant focus on application apart from the careful interpretation that leads to sound doctrine. Rather than grounding his students in the meaning of biblical grace as a whole, his treatment only includes the elements of grace that seem to apply most to practical living.

A proper treatment of God's grace as it relates to the sanctification of a believer must *first of all* be anchored in the glory of God's sovereign, unmerited favor toward us *before* it speaks to the issue of conditional grace. Apart from the doctrine of God's sovereign grace our relationship with Him is reduced to a contractual agreement between the cosmic supplier and the mortal consumer.

Obedience, then, is viewed by the believer not as an offering of worship, but as payment for services rendered. And when life takes a "bad" turn, one is then tempted to conclude that either he didn't pay enough obedience (e.g. wasn't humble enough, loving enough, committed enough), to meet the *conditions* of God's gracious blessings, or that God did not come through on His end of the bargain.

But the hope of our sanctification should not be anchored in our ability to obey or by our level of personal commitment to God. Rather it should be grounded in God's precious and magnificent promise that the work He began in us, He will certainly complete in us "to the praise of His glorious grace" (Eph. 1:3-6).⁴⁹

When we come to God, we must bring nothing but Christ with us. Any ingredients or any previous qualifications of our own, will poison and corrupt faith. He that builds upon duties, graces, etc. knows not the merit of Christ. . . . [You] must everyday denounce as dung and dross your privileges, your obedience, your graces, your tears, your meltings, you humblings . . . your workings, your self-sufficiency must be destroyed. You must take all

43. Basic Seminar Workbook, 1996; p.8

44. John Piper, *Future Grace*; Multnomah Books, 1995; p 79

45. *ibid.*; p 83

46. Personal letter from Bill Gothard to the author dated November 24th, 1998. Letter on file.

47. Scripture regarding irresistible grace include: John 6:44; John 15:16; Acts 13:48; Romans 8:30; 2 Corinthians 4:6

48. Gothard does have a small section in his Men's Manuel where he refers to grace as an attribute of God that is free for the salvation of unbelievers (volume 1, p. 113). But nowhere does he give concentrated instruction on God's sovereign work of sanctification in the lives of believers by grace through faith (Gal. 3:1-5; Col. 2:6). His view of sanctification is grounded in man's ability to respond to initial grace as the grounds upon which more grace is given. This is contrary to the reformed view of grace which the elders of Calvary teach and preach.

from God's hand. Christ is the gift of God. . .
Ah, how nature storms frets, rages at this, that
all is a gift, and it can purchase nothing with its
actings and tears and duties, that all workings
are excluded, and of no value in heaven.

Thomas Wilcox (1621 - 1687)

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Along with grace, Mr. Gothard has also
manufactured a new definition for faith. In Mr.
Gothard's own terms, the definition of faith is
"Visualizing what God intends to do" (Heb. 11:1).⁵¹

Once again, let's look at how this definition fits
when overlaid on the scriptures.

- ◆ So [visualizing what God intends to do] comes
from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ
(Romans 10:17).
- ◆ For through the grace given to me I say to every
man among you not to think more highly of
himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to
have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a
measure of [an ability to visualize what God
intends to do] (Romans 12:3).
- ◆ And without [visualizing what God intends to do]
it is impossible to please Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Now let's put Mr. Gothard's definitions of grace and
faith together and see what they communicate in Paul's
letter to the Ephesians:

- ◆ For by [an active force within you], you have been
saved through [visualizing what God intends to do]
(Ephesians 2:8).

Is this what the apostle Paul intended to
communicate? And what about the text Mr. Gothard
attaches to his definition of faith?

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1)

The author of this text defines faith in terms of two
operative words; *assurance* and *conviction*. That is,
faith is a confidence that God will make good on His
Word. He is trustworthy. He will do everything he has
promised. The idea here is not that we *visualize*, but
that we *trust* God even with "things not seen."

Conclusion

In short, we believe Bill Gothard misinterprets the
Word of God to such an extent that his teachings
present a concern for the local church significant
enough to warrant a caution to those who are inclined to
follow his teaching indiscriminately.

We are not suggesting that Mr. Gothard *intends* to
be misleading in how he handles the Scriptures. To be
sure, much of what he teaches is sound. His focus on
memorizing and meditating on the Scriptures, for
example, is exemplary. His exhortations concerning
pre-marital purity and the need to live lives that are
distinctively different from the world around us is
outstanding. His call to submit to governing authorities
is excellent. Nevertheless, it is difficult for us to
overlook what are often egregious errors in his biblical
interpretation and the resulting applications which
follow.

It has been our observation that some have had their
consciences unnecessarily bound (leading to either
legalism or depression), while others, making Mr.
Gothard's teaching a test of orthodoxy, have caused
disunity in the body and some have broken fellowship
with the church all together.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Mr. Gothard's
misinterpretations of the Scriptures are not more plainly
obvious to those who attend his seminars is that the
pace of the seminars does not allow for the student to
actually look at the scriptures in context. In his Basic
Seminar, for example, Mr. Gothard provides 32 hours
of concentrated instruction on "biblical principles" but
not once does he ask his students to open their Bibles.⁵²
As a result, we fear many of his followers (though
certainly not all) have, for all practical purposes, been
lulled into supplanting Mr. Gothard's voluminous
writings for the Word of God as the final court of
arbitration over issues of life and godliness.

To the extent this is true, Gothard's teaching has
become a law unto itself - a kind of Gentile Talmud⁵³
imposing extra-biblical authority over the consciences
of God's people under the guise of "Biblical
Principles".

In so doing, Mr. Gothard gives the distinct
impression that the abundant, spiritually mature life can
be acquired by following a complex (but achievable)
recipe of behavioral disciplines that he alone has
discovered and teaches. But this is a false hope which
finds no support in the Scriptures.

49. It should be noted here that we are not advocating spiritual Passivism or Antinomianism. Certainly as believers we need to be diligent and disciplined in the process of "working out our own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:2). At the same time, however, our works for God must be offered as acts of worship knowing that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in.

50. Quoted from *The Berean Call* News Letter, P. O. Box 7019 Bend Oregon 97708, June 1997

51. Advanced Textbook, p. 356. Gothard uses this definition throughout his materials.

As shepherds of a local church, we offer this evaluation not out of contempt for Mr. Gothard, but out of love for God's flock - over whom He has made us overseers, and for whom we will one day give an account. We long for the people of Calvary to be "filled with the knowledge of [God's] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:9-10).

There are, however, no newly discovered secret steps or disciplines that lead to this end. There is only the simplicity of growing in the knowledge of our all-sufficient Savior and finding our greatest joy in our relationship with Him. All we need, God graciously grants by His grace through the basics of fervent prayer, worshipful obedience, and the *careful* study of God's Word.

The first question we must each learn to ask concerning every teaching we hear is not "Does it work?" but "Is it true?". And of every teacher our first question must not be, "Is he sincere?", but "Is he correct?" (I Timothy 1:6-7) Satan doesn't care what we believe - or how sincerely we believe it - as long as what we believe is error - as long as it leads us astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ (2 Cor. 11:3).

It is dangerously easy to sit comfortably under the teaching of a trusted spiritual leader without giving serious consideration to his handling of the Word of God. But, too much is at stake to allow our minds to slip into neutral when our bodies slip into the pew. Whatever the cost, we must develop the discipline of biblical discernment. Otherwise, we will go through life constantly tossed about by "every wind of doctrine". (Eph. 4:14).

As elders, we are not exhorting God's people to do anything more with Bill Gothard's teaching than we have repeatedly exhorted you to do with our own. Be "Bereans!" Regardless of who the teacher is, or how respected he may be, receive the Word with great eagerness, but examine the Scriptures daily, to see whether what he says is so (Acts 17:11).

52. On November 18, 1997 we asked Mr. Gothard by letter to please explain this practice. He responded that having students examine portions of scripture as the seminar goes along would be "impractical due to the large amount of material covered, however, in the final details that we have sent out to first timers, we have included sections of Scripture to study before they come."

53. The *Talmud* is the collection of Jewish laws, traditions, and commentaries providing detained instruction on every area of Jewish life from

Appendix A Cabbage Patch Dolls and Trolls

Testimonial #1

We are hearing wonderful reports of more and more couples who have chosen to have their children born at home, using the services of a midwife. Midwifery can be a beautiful opportunity to minister and share the blessing of God with others.

Much of midwifery today is strongly associated with New Age practices. However, God is establishing a "core" of Godly midwives who are committed to following His principles in their practices.

Satan's program from genesis to revelation is to destroy the Godly seed. A midwife in Iowa gave us a brief report of two opportunities she had, through the ministry of midwifery, to share the importance of cleansing the home from evil influences.

"At one birth, the mom had been in labor for two or three days with no signs of problems for the mother or baby, but no progress. This was baby number five. The Lord prompted me to ask them about any items in their home through which Satan could gain entrance to interfere. There was a Cabbage Patch doll in their home. They threw it outside and agreed to burn it when they could get a fire going. Within two hours, this mom had a beautiful son."

"In the home of another born-again Christian couple, there was a similar situation, only with a rebellious daughter and lots of trolls in addition. This mom was not dilating well. Again the Lord burdened me to approach this couple about what they had in their home that might allow demonic influence. I had seen one troll doll in their bathroom. They agreed to get rid of any they had - the dad collected a grocery sack full! Out went the trolls. This family had their first successful home birth that morning after having attempted one years before."

Medical Training Institute of America
Basic Are Newsletter, January 1996

Testimonial #2

Five years ago the parents of a three-year-old girl became alarmed when their daughter began to retain water. They took their bloated daughter to the hospital, and after a week of many tests, the problem was identified as nephrosis of the kidneys.

The daughter was then treated with prednisone

steroids, which did not work. The fluids were drained from her with needles, and twice she almost died. Chemotherapy seemed to bring some improvement, but the side effects were damaging, and the bloating condition continued.

Last week the parents attended a Basic Seminar. On Friday the father noted a comment that was made about Cabbage Patch dolls. Testimonials were shared of children who developed unusual illnesses when they were given a doll. The parents remembered that their daughter's condition began at the very time she was given a Cabbage Patch doll five years earlier.

That evening the parents burned the doll, and immediately the bloated condition subsided. Both parents and doctors were amazed. All test now show perfect kidneys.

Mr. Mark Sternbauer, Ontario

The complete name of these dolls is "The Enchanted Cabbage Patch Dolls". They are part of the occult world, and as such, are subject to the Instructions of Deuteronomy 7:25-26.

Medical Training Institute of America,
Basic Care Newsletter, June 1992

Appendix B Understanding the Old Testament Moral, ceremonial, and Judicial Laws

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

There are two main difficulties which are raised regarding [Jesus' relationship to the law]. There is one school which believes that all our Lord Himself did was to continue teaching the law. . . The second main difficulty is the exact opposite to it... that Christ abolished the law completely, and that He introduced grace in place of it. . .

Our Lord answers both at one and the same time in this vital statement in [Matthew 5:] verses 17-18 which deals with this specific matter of His relationship to the law and to the prophets. What has he to say about it?

Perhaps the best thing to do at this point is to define our terms... What is meant by 'the law' and 'the prophets'? The answer is, the whole of the Old Testament... Wherever this expression is used it includes the entire Old Testament Canon.

What, then, is meant by 'the law' in particular, at this point? It seems to me we must agree that the word, as used here, means the entire law. This, as given to the children of Israel, consisted of three parts, the **moral**, the **judicial** and the **ceremonial**. If you read again the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, you will find that this was how God gave it.

The *moral* law consisted of the Ten Commandments and the great moral principles that were laid down once and forever. Then there was the *judicial* law, which means the legislative law given for the nation of Israel in its peculiar circumstances at that time, which indicate how men were to order their behaviour in relationship to others and the various things they were not to do. Finally, there was the *ceremonial* law concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices and all the ritual and ceremonial in connection with their worship in the temple and elsewhere...

Having defined our terms, let us now consider what our Lord is really saying to us. What is He actually teaching? ... Our Lord Jesus Christ in these two verses confirms the whole of the Old Testament. He puts his seal of authority, His *imprimatur*, upon the whole of the Old Testament canon, the whole of the law and the prophets. (pp. 183-187)

Well, I suggest again that if we are not clear in our understanding of the law, we shall never understand the meaning of the cross... The purpose of the cross is not to arouse pity in us, neither is it merely some general display of the love of God. Not at all! It is finally understood in terms of law. What was happening upon the cross was that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was enduring in His own holy body the

penalty prescribed by the holy law of God for the sin of man.

Christ says, 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.' One of the ways in which the law has to be fulfilled is that its punishment of sin must be carried out. The punishment is death, and that was why He died. . .

Let me summaries... We can say with regard to the *ceremonial* law... that it has been already completely fulfilled. Our Lord observed it in His life while here on earth, and He exhorted the disciples to do the same. In His death, resurrection and ascension the whole of the *ceremonial* law has been entirely fulfilled. In confirmation of that, as it were, the temple was later destroyed. The veil of the temple had already been rent in twain at His death, and finally the temple and all that belonged to it were destroyed. So that, unless I see that the Lord Jesus Christ is the altar and the sacrifice and the laver of washing and the incense and everything else, I am still bound by that levitical order

But seeing it all fulfilled and carried out in Him, I say I am fulfilling it all by believing in Him and by subjecting myself to Him.

What of the *judicial* law? This was primarily and especially for the nation of Israel, as God's theocracy, in its then special circumstances. But Israel is no longer the theocratic nation. You remember that at the end of His ministry our Lord turned to the Jews and said, 'Therefore say I unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.' That is Matthew xxi.43, one of the most crucial and important statements in the whole of Scripture with regard to prophecy. And the apostle Peter, in 1 Peter ii. 9,10, makes it abundantly clear that the new nation is the church. There is then no longer a theocratic nation, so the *judicial* law has likewise been fulfilled.

That leaves us with the *moral* law. The position with regard to this is different, because here God is laying down something which is permanent and perpetual, the relationship which must always subsist between Himself and man. It is all to be found, of course, in what our Lord calls the first and greatest commandment. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.' That is permanent. That is not for a theocratic nation only; it is for the whole of mankind. The second commandment He says, 'is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' That again was not only for the theocratic nation of Israel; that was not merely the old ceremonial law. It is a permanent condition and part of our perpetual relationship with God.

Thus the *moral* law, as interpreted by the new

testament, stands now as much as it has ever done, and will do so until the end of time and until we are perfected. In 1 John iii the apostle is very careful to remind his readers that sin in Christian people is still 'a transgression of the law.' The law is still there, and when I sin I am breaking that law, though I am a Christian and though I have never been a Jew , and am a Gentile. So the *moral* law still applies to us.

Studies in the Sermon on the Mount
by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
Eerdmans 1959-60; p 197-198

For a further treatment of this subject, see the
MacArthur Commentary Series - Matthew 1-7;
pp. 255 & surrounding.

Appendix C

J. Gresham Machen

As these excerpts from the introduction of J. Gresham Machen's book *What is Faith* shows, the problems of imprecise exegesis and the exaltation of application over sound doctrine are not at all new. Machen's book was published in 1925, confirming what Solomon said nearly 3,000 years previous; "that which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun". (Eccl. 1:9)

The ignorance of the church is explained by the failure of the Christian family as an educational institution; but what in turn explains that failure? Why is it that Christian parents have neglected the instruction of their children? Why is it that preaching has ceased to be educational and doctrinal? Why is it that even Sunday Schools and Bible classes have come to consider solely *applications* of Christianity without studying the Christianity that is to be applied?

These questions take us into the very heart of the situation; the growth of ignorance in the Church, the growth of indifference with regard to the simple facts recorded in the bible, all goes back to a great spiritual movement, really skeptical in its tendency, which has been going forward during the last one hundred years - a movement which appears not only in philosophers and theologians such as Kant and Schleiermacher and Ritschl, but also in a widespread attitude of plain men and women throughout the world. The depreciation of the intellect, with the exaltation in the place of it of the feelings or of the will, is, we think, a basic fact in modern life, which is rapidly leading to a condition in which men neither know anything nor care anything about doctrinal content of the Christian religion, and in which there is in general a lamentable intellectual decline. . . . A striking feature of recent religious books is the abandonment of scientific historical method even among men who regard themselves as in the vain of scientific progress.

Scientific historical method in the interpretation of the Bible requires that the Bible writers should be allowed to speak for themselves. A generation or so ago that feature of scientific method was exalted to the dignity of a principle, and was honored by a long name. It

was called "grammatico-historical exegesis". The fundamental notion of it was that the modern student should distinguish sharply between what he would have said or what he would have liked to have the Biblical writer say, and what the writer actually did say. The latter question *only* was regarded as forming the subject-matter of exegesis.

This principle, in America at least, is rapidly being abandoned. It is not, indeed, being abandoned in theory; lip-service is still being paid to it. But it is being abandoned in fact. It is being abandoned by the most eminent scholars. . . . My point is that . . . critical grounding is now thought to be quite unnecessary. Many modern writers simply attribute their own predilections to [the scriptures] without, apparently, the slightest scrutiny of the facts.

As over against this anti-intellectual tendency in the modern work, it will be one chief purpose of the present little book to defend the primacy of the intellect, and in particular to try to break down the false and disastrous opposition which has been set up between knowledge and faith.

. . . Time was when reason sat in regal state upon her throne, and crowds of obsequious courtiers did her reverence. But now the queen has been deposed, and pragmatism the usurper occupies the throne. Some humble retainers still follow the exile of the fallen queen; some men still hope for the day of restoration when the *useful* will be relegated to its proper place and truth will again rule the world. But such retainers are few. . .

. . . As over against this pragmatist attitude, we believers in historic Christianity maintain the objectivity of truth; and in doing so we and not the Modernists become advocates of progress. Theology, we hold, is not an attempt to express in merely symbolic terms an inner experience which must be expressed in different terms in subsequent generations; but it is a setting forth of those facts upon which experience is based.

What is Faith? by J. Gresham Machen.
The Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle, Pa.
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