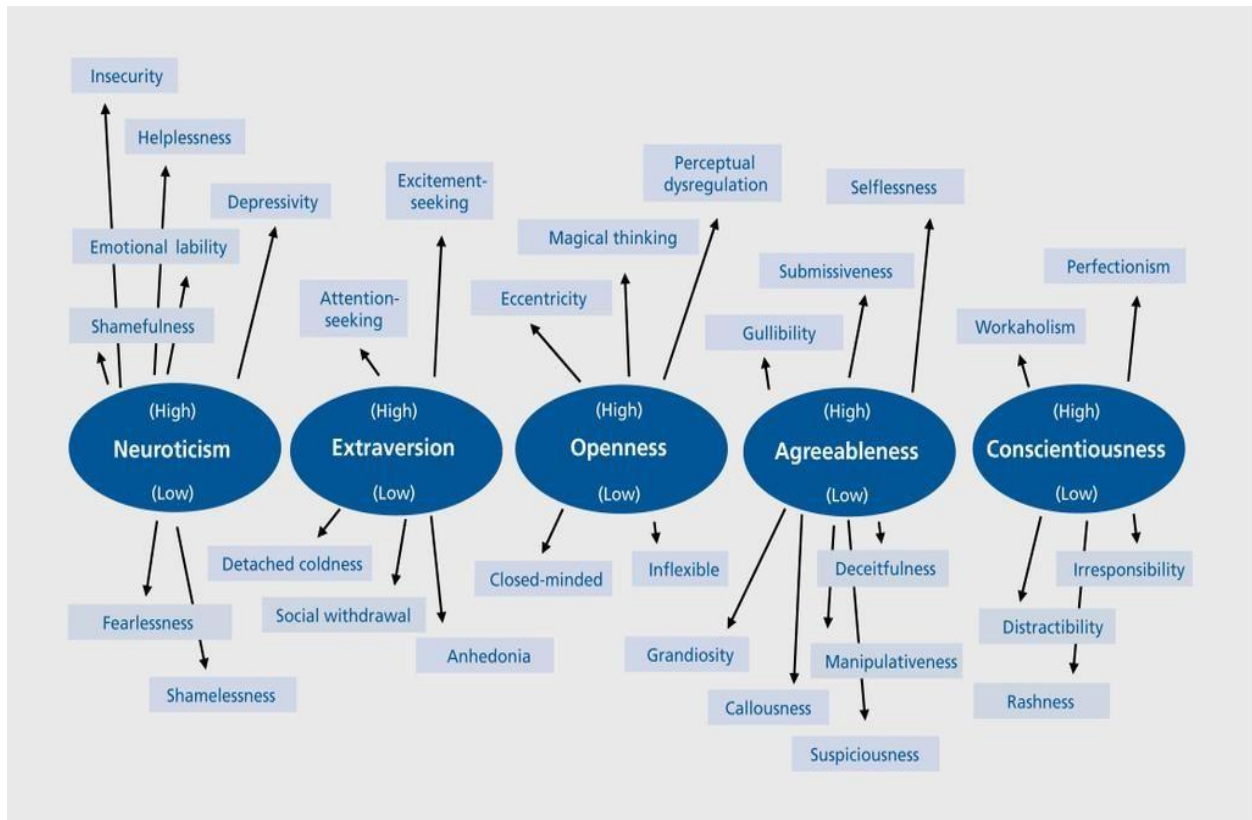
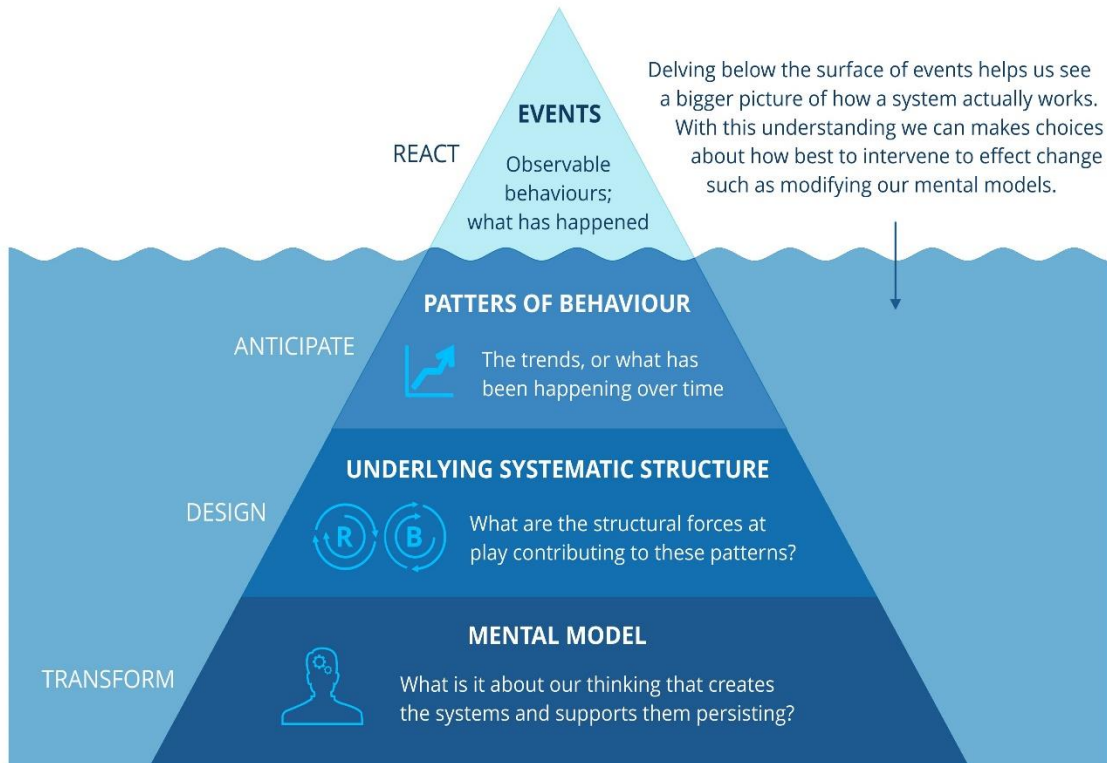


GETTING REAL & TELLING IT THE WAY IT IS!



Getting Real With The Way We Think:





Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development: From Magical Thinking to Logical Thinking

- Jean Piaget (1896–1980), often recognized as the foremost child psychologist of the twentieth century, made the growth of the child's ability to think his particular domain of investigation.
- Piaget, working primarily at Geneva University in Switzerland, began his investigations into the workings of the child's mind because of an interest in epistemology.
- **Epistemology**, a branch of philosophy, is the study of knowing.

39. MAGICAL THINKING



- Magical thinking is the idea of believing that the laws of the universe, physics, economics, or cause and effect, don't apply to us.
- Magical thinking is also described as the belief that thoughts and reality are connected and that thinking can influence the actual world.
- For example, believing in miracles, being superstitious (example, "I'm feeling better this morning, but if I tell anyone the pain might get worse") or trusting that wishful thinking will cause the outcome we are hoping for.
- Magical thinking especially comes out when a high degree of chance, accident, hope, fear, and danger are perceived.

MAGICAL THINKING: THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

“Many of us manufacture our own unhappiness. Of course, not all unhappiness is self-created, for social conditions are responsible for not a few of our woes. Yet it is a fact that to a large extent by our thoughts and attitudes we distill out of the ingredients of life either happiness or unhappiness for ourselves. Suffice it to say that we manufacture our unhappiness by thinking unhappy thoughts, by the attitudes which we habitually take, such as the negative feeling that everything is going to turn out badly, or that other people are getting what they do not deserve & we are failing to get what we do deserve. Our unhappiness is further distilled by saturating the consciousness with feelings of resentment, ill will, and hate.

The unhappiness-producing process always makes important use of the ingredients of fear and worry. How, then, may we proceed to produce not unhappiness but happiness? The happiness habit is developed by simply practicing **happy thinking**. Make a mental list of happy thoughts & pass them thru your mind several times every day. If an unhappiness thought should enter your mind, immediately stop, consciously eject it & substitute a happiness thought. Such thoughts will help cause events to turn out that way. Do not affirm that things will not go well that day. By merely saying that, you can actually help to make it so. You will draw to yourself every factor, large and small, that will contribute to unhappy conditions - for if you visualize and affirm an unhappy outcome, you tend thereby to create just that type of condition. So, affirm happy outcomes at the start of every day, and you will be surprised at how often things will turn out so.

But it is not sufficient to apply to the mind even such an important affirmation therapy as I have just suggested unless throughout the day you also base your actions and attitudes upon fundamental principles of happy living. One of the most simple and basic of such principles is that of human love and good will.

Mr. Mattern carries a unique business card on the reverse side of which is stated the philosophy which has brought happiness to him and his wife and to hundreds of others who have been so fortunate as to feel the impact of their personalities. The card reads as follows: "The way to happiness: keep your heart free from hate, your mind from worry. Live simply, expect little, give much. Fill your life with love. Scatter sunshine. Forget self, think of others. Do as you would be done by. Try this for a week and you will be surprised." Of course, in order to give power to these principles of happiness and make them work it is necessary to support them with a dynamic quality of mind.

It is astonishing how people can become **inoculated with happiness** through an inner experience of spiritual change. Then, having been changed inwardly, you will begin to create out of yourself not unhappiness, but a happiness of such quality and character that you will wonder if you are living in the same world. As a matter of fact, it won't be the same world because you are not the same, and what you are determines the world in which you live, so as you change, your world changes also. If happiness is determined by our thoughts it is necessary to drive off the thoughts which make for depression and discouragement."

MAGICAL THINKING: THE DALE CARNEGIE COROLLARY

Principle #2 — Show respect for other opinions. Never say, “You Are wrong.”

“You can tell people they are wrong by a look or an intonation or a gesture just as eloquently as you can in words—and if you tell them they are wrong, do you make them want to agree with you? Never! For you have struck a direct blow at their intelligence, judgment, pride and self-respect. That will make them want to strike back. But it will never make them want to change their minds. You may then hurl at them all the logic of a Plato or an Immanuel Kant, but you will not alter their opinions, for you have hurt their feelings.

Never begin by announcing ‘I am going to prove so-and-so to you.’ That’s bad. That’s tantamount to saying: ‘I’m smarter than you are, I’m going to tell you a thing or two and make you change your mind.’ That is a challenge. It arouses opposition and makes the listener want to battle with you before you even start. It is difficult, under even the most benign conditions, to change people’s minds. So why make it harder? Why handicap yourself? If you are going to prove anything, DON’T let anybody know it. Do it so subtly, so adroitly, that no one will feel that you are doing it.

Over 300 years ago Galileo said: ‘You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him to find it within himself.’ Socrates said repeatedly to his followers in Athens: One thing only I know, and that is that I know nothing. Well, I can’t hope to be any smarter than Socrates, so I have quit telling people they are wrong. And I find that it pays.

If a person makes a statement that you think is wrong—yes, even that you know is wrong—isn’t it better to begin by saying: ‘Well, now, look, I thought otherwise, but I may be wrong. I frequently am. And if I am wrong, I want to be put right. Let’s examine the facts.’ There’s magic, **positive magic**, in such phrases as: ‘I may be wrong. I frequently am. Let’s examine the facts.’ Nobody in the heavens above or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth will ever object to your saying: ‘I may be wrong. Let’s examine the facts.’ “

The Positive Thinking Philosophy

Mike Willis
Bowling Green, Kentucky

The apostle Paul warned, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8). The Christian is constantly in a struggle to keep from being conformed to this world (Rom. 12:1-2), whether it be this world's morals, dress, speech, or philosophies.

The world is in a state of constant flux. "For the fashion of this world passeth away" (1 Cor. 7:31). What is in vogue today will be old hat tomorrow and another new thing will take its place. The observation that "the world passeth away" (1 Jn. 2:15) is not solely aimed at the passing which will occur when Jesus returns. The world is constantly passing away even now.

This observation is obvious when thinking of women's fashions. It is not so obvious to some when thinking about the philosophies and doctrines which attract the attention of this world. Yet, those familiar with religious history are aware of many doctrines which came on the scene and have vanished over the course of the centuries, such as Gnosticism, Arianism, Sabellianism, and many others.

The people of God sometimes become enamored with the various philosophies of the world. On many occasions, religious do-gooders have sought to pick out the good things of some heathen philosophy and bring them into Christianity. Rather than Christianizing heathenism, they succeed in heathenizing Christianity. When Norman L. Geisler commented on C.S. Lewis' "Christian humanism," he sounded a warning "that the Christian humanist must maintain a constant vigil to make sure he has a Christian view of what is human and not a humanist view of what is Christian" (*Is Man The Measure?*, p. 107). What Geisler observed about "Christian humanism" is true of every other attempt to pick out the good points of any system of human philosophy.

There have been many different philosophies which have appeared in recent decades. Modernism appeared denying the miracles of the Bible, the Bible's inspiration, the deity of Jesus, the virgin birth, the atonement, and any other thing that was supernatural. As the movement gained

control over churches and these churches rejected the hope of eternal life in heaven as man's goal and spreading the gospel to convert a lost world as the church's mission, the churches were led into the social gospel, a redirecting of the mission of the church away from the salvation of lost souls to correcting social ills in the world. The further development of this infidelity has led some into secular humanism, a denial of God and everything supernatural. Others reacted by trying to recapture some of the lost beliefs of Christianity in neo-orthodoxy, while still rejecting the verbal inspiration of the Bible. Those familiar with our own history are aware that each of these philosophies eventually affected the Lord's church. Consequently, each of these philosophies had to be studied, exposed, and repudiated by gospel preachers in previous generations.

Another philosophy which has sprung up and gained in popularity in recent years is the positive thinking philosophy. It too is beginning to have its impact on brethren. Consequently, we need to become aware of its roots in history, its primary doctrines, and wherein it assaults the gospel of Christ. In an effort to make us aware of the danger of the positive thinking philosophy, I present these articles. I trust that brethren will be benefitted by this material and better equipped to recognize the dangers of being carried away by this philosophy.

Historical Development of the Positive Thinking Movement

In detailing the history of the positive thinking movement, one soon discovers that its present thrust is the result of the converging of many different movements. As these diverse movements all move toward one common philosophy, the philosophy's impact on society is increased. In detailing the history of the positive thinking movement, I will only be able to call attention to some of its more prominent leaders. Those interested in a more detailed study should consult *The Positive Thinkers* by Donald Meyer.

1. Mary Baker Eddy. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Mrs. Eddy began teaching a philosophy she learned from Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, a practitioner of mental healing. Attention began to focus on the relationship of the mind to healing as the study of psychology as a science began. The work of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who is described as the founder of psychoanalysis, falls into this period. Mrs. Eddy taught that all sickness was a result of wrong thinking. If one

could redirect man's thinking, his illnesses would be cured. She said, "A sick body is evolved from sick thoughts"; "They think sickly thoughts, and so become sick"; "Tell him that he suffers only as the insane suffer, from false beliefs" (Science and Health 260:19, 24-25; 420:33-421:1). As one corrected wrong thinking, he released a power to heal the body of diseases. Positive thinking created a healthy, prosperous life.

2. The Business Community. The next major advance for the positive thinking philosophy came from several very successful business leaders. A new group of business men began to teach that men could be successful if they would learn to think success. Insofar as every man could control his own thoughts, every man could succeed by thinking rightly. Among those business leaders who preached a gospel of success was Napoleon Hill (author of *The Law of Success* and *Think and Grow Rich*). He began teaching that in order to control the conscious, one must learn to control his subconscious. By affirmation and visualization, one can input positive thoughts which result in positive thinking - the key to success.

In 1936 Dale Carnegie published his success classic *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Carnegie encouraged salesmen to smile, extend lavish praise, offer hearty approbation, talk about what people are interested in, let them think new ideas are their ideas, and be interested in them. When one is genuinely committed to these ideas, good things come back to him - success.

W. Clement Stone circulated the positive thinking philosophy through *Success* magazine and *Success Unlimited, Inc.*, a company which distributes his tapes - He taught sales people, "What the mind can conceive and believe, the mind can achieve." A very popular speaker at various sales rallies, Stone spread the positive thinking philosophy in the business community.

A number of success motivation seminars have been developed by business which have been used by many businesses. Through selling tapes to direct sales personnel (Amway, Home Interiors, Shaklee vitamins, Mary Kay Cosmetics, and other direct sales companies), the positive thinking philosophy has spread to affect the thinking of many citizens. (These businesses should not be judged wrongly because they used the current, popular business promotions to move their products. These statements should not be understood as a criticism of their

products.) Success Motivation Institute, Inc. distributed *The Dynamics of Goal Setting* by Paul Meyer. The positive thinking philosophy affirms: "Anything you can imagine, visualize, and develop a sincere desire for can be yours if you plan for it and work for it through a program of goal setting" (Lesson 2, p. 1). The power of thinking positively generates ideas, unleashes power, which enables you to accomplish the goal which you set, the affirmation which you made and the visualization which you imagined. If you can believe that you can be successful, if you will affirm that you are going to be successful, and if you visualize yourself as being successful, this will unleash a power which enables you to be successful.

3. Norman Vincent Peale. In 1952, Norman Vincent Peale published his book *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Religion was changing from theology to psychology. More and more books were being published as self-help manuals (how to overcome depression, hate, guilt, bitterness, etc.). Peale applied many of the principles of the positive thinking philosophy to the Bible, teaching that these principles were always in the Bible but only recently discovered. What others attributed to sub-conscious thinking, visualization, and affirmation, Peale called "faith." This "faith" released an inner power which enabled one to accomplish his goals and be successful. He instructed:

. . . change your mental habits to belief instead of disbelief. Learn to expect, not to doubt. In so doing you bring everything into the realm of possibility. . . . When you expect the best, you release a magnetic force in your mind which by a law of attraction tends to bring the best to you (p. 94).

To change your circumstances, first start thinking differently. Do not passively accept unsatisfactory circumstances, but form a picture in your mind of circumstances as they should be. Hold that picture, develop it firmly in all details, believe in it, pray about it, work at it, and you can actualize it according to that mental image emphasized in your positive thinking.

This is one of the greatest laws in the universe. Fervently do I wish I had discovered it as a very young man. It dawned upon me much later in life and I have found it to be one of the greatest if not my greatest discovery, outside of my relationship to God. And in a deep sense this law is a

factor in one's relationship with God because it channels God's power into personality (p. 170).

By eliminating all negative thoughts and thinking positively, faith releases a power which enables one to obtain his successes. If one will expect the best, he will get it. Peale made positive thinking a matter of faith and made the one responsible for success, not some mystical power of the mind, but God. The positive thinking philosophy was now sanctified into religion - Christianity. So long as the positive thinking philosophy was tied to Christian Science, it was viewed as a cult, neither Christian nor science. With Peale, the positive thinking philosophy moved into the mainstream of denominationalism.

4. Television evangelists. A number of very popular television evangelists have preached a health and wealth gospel of success that is conditioned upon faith in God. Men such as Robert Schuller, Pat Robertson, Jim and Tammy Bakker, Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart, and many others have presented programs which have featured testimonials (similar to those in Peale's books) of those whose lives have been changed from sickness to health, from poverty to wealth, from sadness to gladness through faith in Jesus Christ.

In Oral Roberts' book, *Miracles of Seed Faith*, the influence of the positive thinking movement is obvious. Roberts wrote, "Whatever you can conceive, and believe, you can do!" (p. 7) Roberts counseled his readers to show their faith in God by planting seed-faith. In order for a farmer to harvest a crop, he must first plant the seed; the more he plants, the greater harvest he can expect. In a similar way, one plants seed-faith in God and God blesses the seed faith with an abundant harvest. One first gives to God and then God gives him an abundant harvest. Hence, faith in God releases a power from God. One should plant his seed faith and expect a miracle from God. His book contains many stories relating people's success in planting seed-faith and receiving a large harvest.

Similar examination of the writings of Kenneth Copeland and the publications of other television evangelists will also demonstrate the influence of the positive thinking movement which teaches that faith in God releases a power which makes success attainable.

Robert Schuller combines the positive thinking philosophy and piety to assure audiences of their own self-worth and success. His individual-centered "gospel" glosses over sin and preaches a success-oriented message with a shallow, happy optimism.

5. The human potential movement. Another source of positive thinking has arisen from secular humanism's teaching of human potential. Humanists reject the supernatural and look to no power higher than man. Viewing the process of evolution as continuing, humanists believe there is undeveloped and almost unlimited potential for development in man. The development and achievement of "human potential" is man's only hope for survival. As humanists develop their concept of man, they look within man for the answer to life's problems. Developing this human potential releases powers heretofore unused. Some humanists see parapsychology, ESP, and mental telepathy as potential development of the human mind. Though the ties between humanism and the positive thinking movement are not direct, both groups see a release of power from inside of man which enables him to achieve success. One group might attribute it to achieving human potential, another might call it re-programming the sub-conscious, and another group might call it faith, but all see a power released by man which enables him to achieve.

6. Eastern religion. The subjectivism of the Eastern religions with yoga exercises, visualization, and meditation have made perceivable contributions to the positive thinking movement as well. The eastern religions see the answers to life's problems locked inside of man and claim that these answers can be experienced in meditation, yoga, or other mental and subjective exercises. Eastern religions teach that God is within each of us and, as we get in touch with our inner self, we have contact with God, releasing a power to help us succeed in life.

Conclusion

As we bring this article to a close, we should begin to see the merging of a variety of influences which have created a distinct positive thinking philosophy influencing our society. In our next article, I will try to call attention to some of the distinct doctrines which have been spawned in this movement.

Guardian of Truth XXXI: 7, pp. 194, 212-213
April 2, 1987

The Positive Thinking Philosophy Its Doctrinal Assertions

Posted by [Mark Mayberry](#) June 29, 2012

By Mike Willis

Having given in my last article a brief overview of the historical development of the positive thinking philosophy, I want to call attention to some of the main doctrinal affirmations which have become popular as a result of the movement.

In case some might misunderstand me, I hasten to add that opposition to the positive thinking philosophy is not an affirmation of pessimistic thinking. Each of us needs to have as positive an outlook on life as reality will allow. However, there are certain doctrines of the positive thinking philosophy which need to be assessed. Let us consider some of them:

1. The deification of man. None of the movements that paved the way for the positive thinking philosophy directly affirm the deity of man. Nevertheless, affirmations are made which lead to that necessary conclusion.

Anything you can imagine, visualize, and develop a sincere desire for can be yours if you plan for it and work for it through a program of goal setting (Paul Meyer, Dynamics of Goal Setting, Lesson 2, p. 1).

You can make just about anything of your life – anything you will believe or will visualize, anything you will pray for and work for. Look deeply into your mind. Amazing wonders are there (Norman Vincent Peale, The Power of Positive Thinking, p. 176).

. . . God is willing to give you everything you ask for, if you but believe (Peale, *You Can If You Think You Can*, p. 12).

As I meditated on this, a thought came crystal clear, Whatever you can conceive, and believe, you can do! (Oral Roberts, *Miracle of Seed Faith*, p. 7)

In order for these statements to be true, man would have to be deity, for only deity can accomplish everything he imagines. That these are overstatements at best and outright deceptions at worst should be obvious. There are definite limitations on man. He is finite, not infinite; he is not omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent. Consequently, there are things which no human being can achieve, though he believes that he can achieve them. The account of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11 is conclusive on that point!

Teaching this dogma deceives men and leads him into despair. A man who believes he can accomplish something but is unable to achieve it will conclude that the problem is his lack of faith. The Scriptures teach that “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all” (Eccl. 9:11). Circumstances beyond human control contribute to whether or not men achieve their goals. A young couple who gives birth to a deformed baby should not attribute the deformity to lack of faith. Though they believed they would have a healthy baby, prayed about it, and visualized a healthy baby, sometimes a baby is born without an arm or leg. Experience, as well as the Scriptures, demonstrates the limitations of man.

2. Faith in mind power or “faith,” instead of faith in God. The positive thinking movement teaches faith in “faith” rather than faith in God. Some refer to mind power being released; others speak of the miracle of

seed-faith. In either case, the power to accomplish begins in the human mind with unlimited potential.

When people begin to think that they can control what God does for them by prayer or faith, they have slipped into pagan concepts of God. In magic, men manipulate a higher power to obtain things for themselves. Those who promise success to those who believe teach that by believing one can bring God (or some other kind of power) under obligation to provide health, wealth and success. Do you want a raise in pay at the factory, desire a higher paying job, or wish your restaurant sold more food? Believe you can have it, pray, visualize, and receive it. "God answers prayer" ends up meaning "God is at man's beck and call!"

Anthony Campolo, Jr., author of *The Success Fantasy*, wrote,

Will Herberg, a contemporary Jewish social philosopher, claims that Americans have "faith in faith." They think believing in God assures them of economic prosperity and personal achievement. He may be right. But this kind of "faith" makes God a means to our own personal ends and declares that He is there to help us achieve things which society tells us are important.

The eternal God does not exist to serve our ends. He is not an instrument for the fulfillment of our wishes. We exist to serve Him. We are called to be instruments of His will.

Many sociologists differentiate religion from magic by pointing out that in religion people submit themselves to the will of a higher power; in magic, people try to manipulate a higher power to get things for themselves. Many people who think they have true religion transform the Christian faith into a primitive form of magic, treating God as though He were the genie of the magic lamp. Prayer becomes a litany for manipulating God into delivering what the petitioners want. Jesus' name

becomes a magical incantation that must be blasphemously uttered at the end of the prayer if God is to deliver the desired results (The Success Fantasy, pp. 137-138).

3. Eliminate the negative. Even as positive thoughts have power to create, negative thoughts have power to destroy. Hence, according to positive thinking, success depends upon eliminating the destructive power of negative thinking and replacing it with the power of positive thinking.

It is important to eliminate from conversations all negative ideas Never use a negative thought in prayer. Only positive thoughts get results Suffice it to say that we manufacture our unhappiness by thinking unhappy thoughts, by the attitudes which we habitually take, such as the negative feeling that everything is going to turn out badly, or that other people are getting what they do not deserve and we are failing to get what we do deserve (Peale, The Power of Positive Thinking, pp. 33, 65, 69).

It was at this moment that I might be able to show him he had sowed seeds of doubt that brought him a harvest of needs, and more needs With faith you do something first and thereby make your faith an act and release it toward God On the other hand, doubt is just as real, in a negative way, as faith. Doubt (or unbelief) is the REVERSED FORM of faith. . . . In this negative spirit, you block the flow of God's intervention in your behalf to turn the tide (Oral Roberts, Miracle of Seed-Faith, pp. 145-148).

As positive thinking has been applied to preaching, the result has been that preachers only preach what is positive. Preaching that condemns others creates a negative impression toward the church and should be eliminated. A "I'm O.K. – You're O.K. " disposition arose toward every religion and sin virtually passed from the vocabulary of the preacher.

Instead of the preacher being a prophet who called man's attention to his sins with a message of repentance, the preacher began delivering messages which made a person feel warm inside. Robert Schuller defined sin as "lack of self-esteem" (Self-Esteem: The New Reformation, p. 98); consequently, his preaching was designed to build man's self-esteem, feeling of self-worth. Anything which attacked the man as a sinner condemned in the sight of God damaged his self-esteem and should be eliminated. Preaching had to address the "human needs" of the non-Christian – to meet his deepest emotional needs.

One needs only to listen to radio and television evangelists or visit any religious bookstore to perceive the influence of positive thinking on preaching. Preaching has turned from theology to psychology. Many seminaries now have a larger staff for pastoral counseling than for biblical studies. Man is more interested in "practical" preaching than "doctrinal" preaching. Preachers rarely preach a "hell-fire-and-brimstone" sermon (indeed, some have renounced belief in hell and others who believe in it do not want to alienate those who might be listening). In the mainline Protestant denominations, any doctrinal belief is accepted, welcomed, or tolerated; only those who are so "narrow-minded" and "bigoted" as to assume "their little group is the only one going to be saved" are openly condemned. Intolerance of other religions and lifestyles is the ultimate – if not the only – heresy in the minds of most social commentators and even some preachers! Positive thinking has eaten the doctrinal heart out of the mainline Protestant denominations and all that is left is a denomination with no specific doctrinal beliefs. Many remain historically tied to their denomination but have no doctrinal ties to it.

4. A gospel of wealth. Men have been taught by the positive thinking philosophy that faith in God and adherence to His word will deliver wealth, power, and status – social success. Gordon D. Fee, author of *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospel*, described this affirmation like this:

God wills the (financial) prosperity of every one of his children, and therefore for a Christian to be in poverty is to be outside of God's intended will; it is to be living a Satan-defeated life. And usually tucked away in this affirmation is a second: Because we are God's children, the King's kids, as some like to put it, we should always go first class – we should have the biggest and best, a Cadillac instead of a Volkswagen, because this alone brings glory to God (The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels, p. 3).

While not explicitly saying what Fee has summarized, the television evangelists teach the same message when they bring celebrities to testify how the gospel changed their lives from abject failure to glowing success. They begin by describing the dismal level to which they had sunk – they lost their job, they were poor, they lived in a shack and drove a wreck. Then, they gave their lives to Jesus and since then things have changed. They now have a job paying twice what their former job paid, they have money in the bank, live in a mansion, and drive a Cadillac – because they had faith in Christ.

Another might “testify” that he sent in his donation as seed-faith and God blessed him materially. In *Miracle of Seed Faith*, Oral Roberts described how God sent his brother-in-law a job, arranged a loan for Oral, enabled two men to become Tulsa's third-largest builders, etc. as they practiced the principle of seed-faith. Peale publishes many similar testimonials of success in *Guideposts*. The message of positive thinking is that if you have the proper faith in God, you will be living successfully. In *The Success Fantasy*, Anthony Campolo, Jr. wrote,

As a boy I remember attending testimony meetings at our church where Christians told how they were poor and beaten people until they accepted Christ as personal Savior and Lord. Then they would relate how, as a consequence of their new lives in Christ, they suddenly experienced prosperity. . . . Sermons from the pulpit, articles in magazines, and testimonies of successful Christian businessmen at

luncheon meetings, all reinforce the creed that Jesus will prosper us if we just walk in His ways (The Success Fantasy, p. 11).

Many popular evangelists today seem to promise the world if one will accept Christ. . . . We hear mostly the positive, what one will get: health, success, self-fulfillment, and even wealth, especially if one supports that particular evangelist (George Marsden, "Secular Humanism Within the Church," Christianity Today Institute [17 January 1986], p. 14).

a. one result of this teaching is that it has sanctified man's spending upon himself. One is not viewed as a greedy, covetous sinner when he makes a display of his Cadillac, mansion, and diamonds; instead, these displays of wealth become a badge proving that one has faith in God. The Scriptures warn of the danger of wealth (1 Tim. 6:6-10; Deut. 6:10-12). The positive thinking philosophy has made wealth a proof of faith and poverty an evidence of an absence of faith.

b. This gospel makes life's physical blessings dependent upon faith in Christ whereas Jesus said that life's physical blessings come upon the just and unjust alike (Matt. 5:45). One of the most distressing things to God's saint is the prosperity of the wicked (cf. Psa. 73), itself a proof that prosperity is not conditioned on faith in God. Some of God's most faithful servants were destitute (cf. Heb. 11:32-39).

c. This gospel makes the theology of giving selfish. One gives (plants seed-faith) in order to receive. By giving to the Lord and the poor, one is assuring his own prosperity, producing profit-motivated giving. Jesus taught that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

5. The gospel of good health. Another tenet of positive thinking is the belief that God blesses those who have faith in Him with good health. "God wills our perfect health" is a presupposition of many television evangelists. If one has enough faith in God, he will be healed by God

through a miracle. Any failure to be healed is not the fault of God but of the one who lacks faith.

The Scriptures nowhere affirm that physical healing of the body is part of the atonement of Jesus Christ. Indeed, faithful saints of God suffered physically (cf. Job, Jesus). The Scriptures do not attribute suffering from heart attack or cancer to a lack of faith in God, nor should anyone teach a gospel which drives a man to this conclusion.

Conclusion

This brief summary of some of the prominent concepts promoted by those associated with positive thinking should alarm us of its dangers as a philosophy which will destroy us spiritually. Although every positive thinker does not teach or believe every specific item mentioned, those generally associated with the positive thinking philosophy teach many of the same doctrines. Becoming aware of the danger of these influences may help us avoid being taken captive by the positive thinking philosophy.

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April 16, 1987

The Positive Thinking Philosophy: Its Impact On The Church

Mike Willis
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What can be historically documented as a movement in American church history is not yet so easily documented among Christians. The influence of denominational movements on the church has generally lagged several decades. The social gospel movement was fully developed among denominations before the churches of Christ ever began supporting colleges, orphan homes, hospitals, recreational camps, retreats, and other human institutions. The denominations had their missionary societies sponsoring television programs on the networks long before Herald of Truth was supported by thousands of congregations sending money to the Highland church in Abilene. We should not, therefore, think it strange that the influence of the positive thinking philosophy on Christians is lagging behind its influence on the denominations.

In this article, I want to call attention to incipient forms of the influence of the positive thinking philosophy among faithful brethren. These are trends developing among us and, as such, are less easily documented in their formative stage than when fully mature. Nevertheless, I am confident that others have also noted some of these trends and their observations as a result of this article would be appreciated. If some believe we have erred in identifying or analyzing this trend, we would appreciate hearing from them, will prayerfully consider their arguments, and will be glad to publish a reasonable response to our material. If some who share the spirit of this distorted philosophy could be cautioned to have second thoughts about the dangerous direction of this trend, our efforts will be richly rewarded. We are not seeking to discourage or destroy anyone who labors and walks "uprightly according to the truth of the gospel," but neither do we desire to ignore any trend which may subtly lead us away from the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:14; 2 Cor. 11:3).

Positive Contributions Of Positive Thinking

One would be unfair to call attention to only the negative influences from the positive thinking philosophy among brethren. Hence, I want to mention some positive influences the movement has had:

1. It has helped some brethren develop a "can-do" attitude toward the Lord's work. Too many brethren have a negative approach toward everything anyone suggests doing. We have all heard the trio of negative attitudes toward any program of work: "It'll never work!" "We've tried that before." "No one is interested." The positive thinking movement has called our attention to the fact that we often cause our own failure by our defeatist attitudes. For this contribution, we are thankful.
2. It helps create zeal and enthusiasm toward the Lord's work. Those who have been influenced by positive thinking are generally excited about their work and convinced that much good will be accomplished by hard work.
3. It has helped develop certain character traits, such as friendliness toward one another and non-Christians, joy, perseverance, etc. Those influenced by positive thinking have been encouraged to take a good look at their own character weaknesses to correct them.
4. It has helped some people reach their own potential. Some introverted people have learned to participate in the public services of worship through the influence of positive thinking.

I do not mean to imply by these observations that one cannot accomplish these goals without the positive thinking philosophy. The word of God does not need to be supplemented by any human philosophy to develop any of these attributes. What is true is that most philosophies contain an element of truth, which is what makes them believable. These elements of truth do not need to be rejected with the false theories to which they are tied.

Dangerous Influence of the Positive Thinking Philosophy on the Church

There are several very definite changes which are occurring among us tied to the positive thinking philosophy. I want to enumerate what I have observed:

1. Elimination of doctrine from preaching. The positive thinking philosophy has influenced preaching away from theology toward psychology. It encourages that preaching answers the so-called "felt human needs" of those listening. Consequently, many self-help manuals

have been written to overcome depression, guilt, anxiety, and many other emotional needs. The positive thinking movement does not treat sin and forgiveness as a top priority (some positive thinking philosophers no longer believe in sin or redefine it [such as Robert Schuller]).

I see this same trend developing among us. In the preaching which I have heard and in the many bulletins and periodicals which I read, I see a trend away from teaching doctrinal lessons which distinguish the Lord's church from denominationalism (the organization, work, worship, and names of the church; the plan of salvation; the action, purpose and subject of baptism, etc.). I have noticed that bulletins and sermons rarely expose denominational error and many of the respectable sins of our day (such as "once in grace, always in grace," infant baptism, sabbath observance, observance of holy days, gambling, dancing, immodesty, social drinking, etc.). Under the guise of "balance" in preaching, some pulpits and bulletins have completely eliminated any distinctive preaching - preaching which would lead a man out of denominational error or worldly habits and into the Lord's church.

There appears to be a fear that preaching these doctrines will run off our contacts. One brother wrote, "By our obnoxious name-calling, negative fault-finding spirits and 'McCarthyisms,' we have run off everyone who might be interested in filling their spiritual needs. " Consequently, we will preach only positive sermons until they are converted. Then we will teach them in Bible class (if they ever attend) these particular doctrines to be believed and the morality required of a Christian. Brethren, we cannot sneak up on the alien sinner and convert him without him knowing it! To convert the sinner, he must be taught the error of his ways, repent of his sins, and obey the gospel. This cannot happen so long as his sins and denominational beliefs are never confronted and exposed. This must be done if we speak "the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). Anything less is lacking not only in truth but also in genuine love!

At the present, I do not so much fear what is being taught as what is not being taught. A generation of Christians is being reared without the benefit of hearing sermons which distinguish the Lord's church from Protestant denominationalism. Because they see no difference between denominations and the Lord's church, they will soon want to recognize that there are Christians in all denominations and then join hands to work with them in those areas in which we are agreed. Some of the

more liberal churches which have been fed a constant all-positive diet for years are already at that stage now. Attitudes have consequences; we reap as we sow. Unless there is a consistent program of instruction which teaches the uniqueness of the church and the necessity for following the word of God, apostasy will occur.

2. Elimination of all forms of controversy. The positive thinking philosophy seeks to win friends and influence people with a wide smile, a warm handshake, glowing affirmations, and other words of encouragement. It does not encourage the frank and open discussion of areas of disagreement which characterized the New Testament era (Acts 17:11; 15; Gal. 2).

As this filters into the church, a generation is raised with the philosophy that "you win more flies with honey than with vinegar," a concept repudiated by inspired men (Jer. 6:14-17). Recently an article was published among us which held up the positive thinking philosophy saying, "You gotta accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative; latch on to the affirmative; and don't mess with Mister In-Between. " I am confident that the man who made this statement would agree that, if this concept becomes the accepted norm in preaching, a generation will arise which has no backbone to oppose false doctrine. Even today some want to eliminate references to denominations from the pulpit, as though Paul erred in specifying a false religion (Acts 17:23). Preachers are encouraged not to run off denominational friends who might attend worship by sermons which expose the denomination of which they are members.

Some older Christians feel that they should shelter younger Christians from controversies in the church or in journals circulated among brethren. Preachers who participate in discussions of a point of truth are denigrated as participating in some kind of "preacher-fuss." Nearly all discussions of doctrinal differences are maligned as "issues" drawn up by brethren who do not like other brethren and are spending "their time trying to ruin the reputations of other good Gospel preachers because of jealousies and envies." They decry, "We have become too busy 'standing firm' instead of teaching the lost. We are too busy talking about our negative, back-biting view of Christianity to ever present it in a way that would demonstrate the love of God for the lost world. " (Of course, these criticisms of the "negative view" should not be judged as one preacher trying to destroy the reputations of other good gospel

preachers, back-biting or jealousy; this good brother offering these criticisms is only standing firm for the truth. Physician, heal thyself!)

A new breed of preacher has arisen who is "too spiritual" to participate in discussion of doctrinal differences of any sort. Those who worked to keep congregations from supporting colleges and orphan homes from their budget are criticized for using the wrong tactics. Pulpits salvaged from liberalism by militant preaching are filled by men who condemn militant preaching!

A polarizing of brethren appears to be occurring. Those who are committed to the positive thinking movement seem to be forming a group. They only invite one another for meetings. The rest of us brethren are looked down upon as less enlightened, less spiritual brethren who are constantly embroiled in carnal controversy. We are told, "We are just beginning to wade out of the negative attitudes and stunting dispositions of the last generation and get going again." The "last generation" was fighting denominationalism and institutionalism among brethren. This new generation has "waded out" of such negativism.

This attitude toward controversy creates an atmosphere for false doctrine to breed. Where false teachers are not exposed and driven away from a flock, they will stay, infiltrate and infest the entire congregation. Soon they will be in control and they will drive off those who teach the truth. I am concerned for the church where this attitude toward controversy predominates. It is destined for trouble because this new so-called positive spirit positively contradicts the spirit of Christians in the New Testament age.

If this view predominates, an essential element of the gospel will have been lost. Through the years, we have emphasized Acts 17:11 - for brethren to search the Scriptures daily to see whether or not the things which are taught are so. Early saints engaged in discussion and dispute in order to arrive at the truth (Acts 15:2). Through these discussions and disputes, the truth became obvious to truth-loving Christians. If we succeed in eliminating all controversy or create an atmosphere where all controversy is "of the devil," we will have destroyed the spirit of searching the Scriptures to see if what is taught is so. Brethren need to recognize that discussion of differences in a brotherly spirit is healthy, not sinful. We should not feel threatened by discussion or feel that every

difference aired in a paper is going to become an issue over which brethren will divide. Newly converted Christians do not need to be protected from a discussion of issues; they need to be taught to examine the Scriptures to see if the things taught are so. Where this spirit is predominant false doctrine cannot thrive.

3. Preaching with little reference to the Bible. Those who read the journals of the positive thinking philosophy know that they are filled with "testimonials" and illustrations of men who have achieved success. The anecdotes, illustrations, and testimonials inspire a person to greater achievement.

Every preacher knows the value of a good illustration, anecdote, or example to emphasize a point of truth revealed in Scripture. None of us is opposed to using anecdotes, illustrations, and examples. However, some have begun to preach like those under the influence of the positive thinking philosophy. Their sermons contain few, if any, references to Scripture. What is taught is generally true but is grounded on anecdote, illustration, and testimonial instead of the word of truth. A gospel preacher recently visited me and told about hearing a sermon in a meeting; he said it was a "fireside chat" instead of a sermon. I heard this same preacher in a meeting preach for 30-35 minutes without referring to the first Bible verse. The oratory was excellent but it does not build faith in God. Men come away talking about what a great preacher he is instead of what a great God and wonderful Savior we have.

Gospel preachers have been commissioned to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). Jesus said, ". . . preach the gospel" (Mk. 16:15). Paul said, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.... And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:1-5). Sermons so full of anecdotes, illustrations, and testimonials that the word of God is omitted or used only occasionally cannot build the strong faith which sustains Christians. I fear for the congregation whose preacher uses more anecdotes, illustrations, and oratory than he uses the word of God!

4. The power of preaching resides in the method or technique of presentation rather than in the gospel. In the positive thinking philosophy great attention is given to expressing "how to close the sale" in the right manner. For example, a salesman might say, "Do you want me to send these to you by mail or leave them with you now?" This question presupposes that you want the item he is selling. Any objections which are made are to be ignored and a presentation of the positive points of the item is reiterated.

Similar concern for technique is demonstrated in preaching the gospel. One is schooled in closing the home Bible study, "Do you want to be baptized tonight or Sunday morning?" "Would you like to have your wife present when you are baptized or someone else?" If an objection is raised, it is to be pushed aside (not answered) and a restatement of the need for Christ given.

In one study recently written about evangelism, the author encouraged us "not to challenge every false statement" which is made and not to "challenge" the sinner's immoral life. Rather, we were to make the sinner feel comfortable in our presence. He expressed concern about being perceived as "the bunch that 'thinks they are the only ones,'" describing Christians as having a holier-than-thou-attitude, leaving people with an impression that we are dogmatic, close-minded and hard-hearted. We agree that such abuses as smart-aleck, mean, and malicious remarks hide the gospel, and we do not take second place to anyone in protesting such a hurtful spirit. But it is characteristic of the positive thinking philosophy devotee to constantly harp on these abuses and to make broad charges as though the abuses have generally been the rule rather than the exception in the teaching efforts of preachers, debaters, writers, and other brethren. Paradoxically, these positive thinking philosophy devotees often use such excessive language in condemning their "negative" brethren as to convict themselves of the very abuse charged against others - the use of smart-aleck ways and tongue-lashing remarks. Meanwhile, there is an almost total absence of teaching on their part to expose the "damnable heresies" of denominationalism, liberalism, and worldliness in order that people might be convicted of sin and saved from its disastrous influence (2 Pet. 2:1, Jn. 16.8).

Although I see a need to learn "how" to answer every man (Col. 4:6), when the emphasis shifts from the message to the messenger or some technique he uses, less (not more) evangelism will occur. Brethren will

perceive that they are not skilled in how to present the gospel and will not teach others. Sooner or later those we teach are going to learn that we believe that only those who have obeyed the gospel are saved (if that is what they are teaching) and that those in the denominations have not obeyed the gospel. Then those who obey the gospel may feel they were manipulated, just as some feel that way about a high-pressured salesman who has convinced them to buy his product.

The appeal of the gospel is the cross of Christ, not some technique used for presenting it. Some have become more wedded to a method of evangelism (such as Crossroads techniques) than to the gospel.

5. Faithfulness is measured by success. The positive thinking philosophy measures success in accomplishments, usually tied to financial prosperity, power, and popularity. The definition for success among preachers affected by the positive thinking philosophy becomes a growing church with a large membership, good contribution, and many responses to the invitation.

A successful preacher is one who has the ability to make a church grow, have a lot of responses to the invitation, build large buildings, and accomplish great things. (This does not mean that we discourage church growth, having a lot of responses to the invitation or building new buildings.) By these standards, many of the Lord's servants were not successful. Noah saved only eight souls. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos were not very successful; they did not persuade a large number of people to repent.

In trying to achieve the positive thinking philosophy's measure of success changes must be made in our preaching to accomplish growth. We quit preaching against social drinking, dancing, mixed swimming, and other moral issues which might "run off" members. We quit referring to denominations by name in the pulpit lest we "run off" our visitors. We preach sermons addressing only the "felt human need" instead of how to obtain salvation from sin. Many liberal churches use celebrities to preach or lead singing to attract a larger crowd. Our measure of success is reached - the church starts growing numerically and in contribution, necessitating the erection of a larger building. However, the church is doctrinally weak and morally permissive.

How do we measure a preacher's success? It is only natural that we often notice the work of well-known preachers who hold a lot of meetings and work with large congregations. There is nothing inherently evil in doing either of these things; the well-known preachers with whom I have had association are conscientious men with extraordinary ability, humbly seeking to serve God. Yet, some of the most dedicated men I have known have labored quietly with small congregations in hard circumstances. By the measurement of the positive thinking philosophy, they were not "successful." However, they were faithful to God and that makes any man successful. We would do well to read 1-2 Timothy as the measure of success or failure in an evangelist's ministry - it has nothing to do with the numbers game!

Conclusion

From my point of view, there is no doubt that faithful brethren have been and are being influenced by the positive thinking philosophy. Paul's warning, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit" (Col. 2:9), was never more appropriate. Too many faithful brethren have already been spoiled by this philosophy. It has taken the cutting edge off their use of the sword of the Spirit. Their bulletins are full of the motivational pablum available in any denomination. I long for the day when one of their bulletins, papers, or sermons exposes the false denominational doctrines and worldly practices so predominate in our time. I long for the time when there is enough doctrinal content in their sermons and bulletins to persuade a denominational person to leave his denomination and become a Christian. I long for some article deploring the worldliness which is encroaching the church, specifying what it is and calling on Christians to abstain from the form of evil.

The prolonged absence of this kind of teaching is evidence that some have accepted the positive thinking philosophy and represents threatening clouds on the horizon. A generation is growing up without hearing distinctive preaching; a generation is growing up seeing no difference in the Lord's church and denominations; a generation is growing up opposed to all forms of controversy; a generation is growing up not used to biblically oriented preaching. A Bible student knows what kind of harvest this seed will bring.

Brethren, let us use this opportunity to conduct a self-evaluation to learn how we have been influenced by the positive thinking philosophy. Let

us correct our course where needed and strive to present a balanced diet of teaching - both positive and negative. As we seek to improve our work, rather than doting on this world's wisdom, we need to reflect again and again upon the charge which Paul gave Timothy by divine inspiration:

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his Kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim 4:1-5).

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MAGICAL THINKING: SCHULLER'S POSSIBILITY THINKING

**SCHULLER'S CULT OF POSSIBILITY
THINKING!**

Written by: Trott, Jon Posted on: 05/01/2003

Category: Cults / Sects / Non-Christian Religions and Topics

Source: CCN

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"SCHULLER'S CULT OF POSSIBILITY THINKING!"

Taken from an article in the magazine: "CORNERSTONE"

Vol. 12 Issue 68

Written by: JON TROTT

Close-up: Robert Schuller of Garden Grove, California's Crystal Cathedral, reaches toward the camera and encourages the watcher to become a possibility thinker, "a somebody in a world of too many nobodies, a success in a crowd of failures." For evangelical & charismatic believers Robert Schuller is a well-known personality. Thousands attend his Crystal Cathedral, while millions view Hour of Power, which according to the Nielson ratings, reaches more people than any comparable program. Since 1970 more than twenty thousand pastors have attended Schuller's Institute for Successful Church Leadership. As has been said, success is its own best argument. On a deeper level, however, Robert Schuller's emphasis on personal success and self-esteem has caused consternation and controversy among Christian theologians and philosophers.

SUCCESS AND POSSIBILITY THINKING

Robert Schuller's possibility thinking message makes him the most likeable success evangelist in America: "Here's how it works. When a person begins to believe it just might be possible, somehow, someday, somewhere, someday - then in that magic moment of Possibility Thinking three miracles occur: (1) Opportunity-spotting brain cells activate! (2) Problem-solving brain cells come to life (3) Determination-energizing chemicals are released into the blood stream!"

Heady stuff, and "Reverend" Robert Schuller goes on to claim that God has fantastic dreams for each one of us, but that impossibility thinking blocks our ability to make them realities. So, "Stop running away from opportunities and possibilities! Run toward fulfillment, actualization, and success!" Success is inevitably big and visible. "You are suddenly catapulted into the spotlight. The attention is never on the comfortable spectator, but on the energetic chance-taker in the center ring. And the bigger the gamble, the bigger the crowd of onlookers. It is the risk-running racer on the track, not the hot-dog-eating grandstand sitter that gets the attention, the applause, the encouragement, and finally, the prize."

Robert Schuller's own successes via possibility thinking range from the gift of a new Lincoln luxury car to his various building projects (the newest of which is a scripture-studded sidewalk around the Crystal Cathedral dubbed the "Walk of Faith.") Adding to possibility thinking Schuller in 1969 wrote, "Every negative thinker I have ever met distrusts himself, belittles himself, and downgrades himself. This lack of self-worth lies at the root of almost every one of our personal problems.

The subject of self-love, or self-esteem became "something greater than possibility thinking." Setting a prelude for what was some thirteen years later to be a theological showdown, Schuller claimed, "if your job is to save souls, you can do this when you liberate them from the sin of self-degradation and lift them to salvation and self-esteem. Come to the understanding that self-will is sin, self-love is salvation!" Bob Schuller continues, noting that self-love or self-esteem is in fact "the deeper ultimate will" of mankind, worded in 1982 as "the deepest of all human needs." In that year, "after 32 years of thinking, praying, testing, retesting," Schuller published his definitive theological statement, *SELF ESTEEM: THE NEW REFORMATION*. Chapter one sets the tone: "What the Church needs, more than anything else, is a new reformation – nothing less will do! Without a new theological reformation, the Christian church as the authentic body of Christ may not survive..."

Sin and salvation are redefined by Robert Schuller to fit the self-esteem model. The classical definition of sin as "rebellion against God" is, we are told, "not so much incorrect as it is shallow and insulting to the human being."

Schuller utilizes what might be called golf ball theology. The outer coating of white, hard plastic he likens to the rebellious, disobedient acts man performs, "the externality of sin." The real core, the small hard rubber ball, is man's "negative self-image." Stretched rubber bands wrapped tightly around the golf ball's core represent "negative reactions" or "anxieties, fears, and negative emotions" which finally appear as outward acts of rebellion, though in reality go back to non-trust. What we need in light of this, then, according to Schuller, "is a theology of salvation that begins and ends with a recognition of every person's hunger for glory." "What does it mean to be saved?" Schuller asks, then answers his own question. "It means to be permanently lifted from sin (psychological self-abuse with all of its consequences as seen above) and shame to self-esteem and its God-glorifying human need-meeting, constructive, and creative consequences." Or, for another definition, "To be born again means that we must be changed from a negative to a positive self-image - from inferiority to self-esteem, from fear to love, from doubt to trust."

WHAT ARE WORDS FOR?

Perhaps the great truth illustrated by the problems in Schuller's theology is this: When words are stripped of their historical meaning, they lose all meaning. So, it goes with Schuller's redefinition of sin & his muddying of the historical meaning of salvation. Christianity threatens to become nothing more than what Francis Schaeffer called "God-words," terms that sound Christian but mean whatever the hearer wants them to. It is important for us as believers to respect biblical authority, and in its historical context. At bottom this is the reason we must not accept a gospel taking words filled with power and vital meaning and squeezing them into whatever cultural mold lies closest at hand. The Bible reveals the only reality there is, and though the two-edged sword sometimes cuts its wearer, it's only because we need the stinging healing God's Word brings. If the Word is only words, it has no edge. The Gospel becomes a self-serving gospel of shallow emotionalism.

TV Evangelists And The Positive Thinking Movement

By Ron Halbrook

By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John teaches three vital lessons in 1 John 4:4-6.

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

They are of the world: therefore, speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

Lesson One. Truth triumphs over error. God works in His people through the power of truth, just as Satan works in his people through sin and error. Satan's power cannot withstand God's. Lesson Two: False teachers appear to have great power because of worldly success. They are more popular than those who uphold the simple truths of the gospel, but this popularity is based on carnality. The taproot of all false doctrine is carnality in some form: "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (2:16). We must not be deceived by the trappings of success associated with error – persuasive and entertaining speakers, large audiences, big bucks, expanding power, and related success symbols. Lesson Three. The only way to know the difference between truth and error is by the standard of God's Word.

PMA In American Society and Religion

To further the ends of his kingdom, Satan has given media ministers a powerful tool – the positive mental attitude or PMA approach to religion. Religious historian Sydney Ahlstrom traces the steps in the development of a religion of health and harmony during the last 100 years. It is “a vast and highly diffuse religious impulse that cuts across all the normal lines of religious division” (*A Religious History of the American People*, p. 1020). Man is taught to look inward to find the solution to life’s problems, to find God, to find peace or health or wealth or whatever he seeks. Mind control is the key to all.

This rising impulse included the techniques of mind-cure in “The Science of Health” as represented by Christian Scientists, and parallel but broader concepts called “New Thought” emphasizing man’s infinite possibilities to attain all his needs by the power of constructive thought. Such notions found new variety in both secular and religious forms as “Positive Thinking” until they were unified and promoted in “The Phenomenon of Peale.” Norman Vincent Peale perfectly blended the secular interpretation of PMA by Dale Carnegie with a religious accent to highlight peace of mind for middle-class Americans who had health and money but suffered from materialism’s emptiness of spirit. Positive thinking had become a form of psychological therapy.

The PMA movement had so saturated American religion by 1960 that its prescriptions were “as common as aspirin” (Ahlstrom, p. 1031). A major study of the American pulpit entitled *Ministry in America* (Harper & Row, 1980) confirms what any alert observer can see: strong Bible preaching and otherworldly concerns have taken a backseat to pop psychology, salesmanship jargon, “interpersonal relationships and group dynamics” (*Time Mag.*, 29 Sept. 1980, p. 85).

Among modern-day variations of positive thinking promoted on TV, none is so well known as Robert Schuller's "Possibility Thinking" – the good things of this life are available on an unlimited basis to all who truly believe they can have them. Both material prosperity and psychological fulfillment can be found by faith in faith, faith in one's own possibilities, faith in oneself! The answer lies within.

The positive thinking and the charismatic or neo-pentecostal movements share much in common. Each has focused on healing and health, then expanded to include other this-worldly concerns such as wealth. Each causes man to look within himself to find God or a divine potential at work. Neopentecostal religion as represented by Oral Roberts attracts middle-class people seeking peace with God or some assurance of His presence in the midst of prosperity and plenty. In short, the PMA philosophy was an idea whose time had come. It is closely associated with a culture of plenty and prosperity – it is an effort to sustain a sense of optimism and inner peace in a society aching with the emptiness and dissatisfaction of materialism. The PMA message comes in many versions and packages, but none meet man's true needs. Its positive platitudes about prosperity and peace are false to the core and will leave man emptier still.

Robert Schuller and PMA

Robert Schuller's "Hour of Power" and Oral Roberts' "Expect a Miracle" are two of the most popular TV ministries which reflect the positive thinking movement. Schuller grabbed onto Peale's coattails (both are members of the Dutch Reformed Church) and held on until the prophet's mantle fell on him. His Garden Grove, California ministry began in 1955 and the \$18 million Crystal Cathedral which opened in 1980 near Disneyland now claims some 10,000 members.

Dennis Voskuil, a professor at Schuller's alma mater (Hope College in Holland, Michigan), surveys and analyzes the Schuller phenomenon in *Mountains Into Goldmines*. Central to Schuller's "possibility thinking" or positive philosophy is the concept that man's problems of sin, guilt, and failure are all rooted in poor self-esteem, too little love or self. We inherit this sinful nature and it is not willful rebellion. Therefore, all true gospel preaching affirms a positive self-image to prop up man's insecure ego. Schuller's theology of self-esteem is "the North Star of his entire system" (p. 139).

Schuller's "Hour of Power" TV ministry began in 1970. Its format explained below is built around positive thinking (pp. 49-69). (1) Offer trinkets as incentives for people to write in and make a donation. "The minute we stop offering gifts, our revenues go down dramatically," an advisor noted. (2) Always speak of health, happiness, and success. (3) Be as broad as possible, never narrow, in message and appeal. (4) Entertain to overcome the idea that church is boring and negative. Sermons must be short and make people "feel good" rather than guilty. Songs and sermons avoid reference to such "negative" things as penitence, confession, or the church. Positive preaching stresses the heart rather than the head, makes generous use of "personal experiences," and abounds in "success stories." Above all, it avoids controversial subjects such as adultery, the second coming of Christ, or even Christ himself (who can be mentioned "at the end of the message" as a matter of "distraction").

In short, Schuller's PMA approach "tells people exactly what they want to hear in the manner which pleases them most. He doesn't insult people by telling them they are sinners" (p. 68). Schuller believes Jesus was the greatest possibility thinker of the ages – "positive and nonjudgmental." "Jesus never called any person a sinner!" Never would he preach, "You are sinners. Repent and be baptized" (p. 104).

Schuller spreads his concept of church growth through seminars, films, and books such as *Your Church Has Real Possibilities*. Voskuil summarizes the plan for growth (pp. 37-47). (1) There must be no “negativism” – we must dream of such great successes that nothing is impossible. (2) The leader is the preacher-pastor and he cannot leave leadership “in the hands of the lay people.” (3) The whole ministry of the church must be geared to attract people. The end justifies the means. Affluent people do not want the emphasis on “biblical preaching” but prefer stress on immediate “human needs.” Voskuil further explains Schuller’s view that though unbelievers need “salvation from sin,” they are not interested in “biblical pronouncements” and a “God-talk” but are more attuned to the language of social scientists, psychologists, and psychiatrists (pp. 94-97). Says Schuller,

I don’t deliver Biblical expositions. I don’t jam the Bible down people’s throats. I believe in the Bible, but if people want Bible preaching, they can get it elsewhere (pp. 128-129).

(4) If the church is to grow, we must be non-controversial. Grant that sincere people may disagree on a wide range of issues. “The possibility preacher must therefore be a positive preacher – inoffensive, uplifting, and affirming,” Voskuil notes (p. 43). (5) The church needs a staff that can administer a wide array of social and community service programs in keeping with the above objectives. Programs for counseling, literacy, day-care, relief, senior citizens, single and divorced persons should be included.

Oral Roberts and PMA

As old-line holiness and pentecostal people began to taste the sweets of prosperity, in the middle 1950s and the 1960s, Oral Roberts “expanded his evangelism . . . to include ‘God’s Formula for Success and Prosperity . . . (Donald Meyer, *The Positive Thinkers*, p. 256).

In fact, as Roberts “increasingly associated health with a positive mental attitude and the belief that ‘God is a good God,’” he was perfectly in tune with the multiplied thousands of successful middle-class Americans all across the religious spectrum who suffered from a growing sense of anxiety and emptiness (David E. Harrell, Jr., *All Things Are Possible*, pp. 156, 148). Oral was ordained in the Pentecostal Holiness Church in 1935 and joined the Methodists in 1968, reflecting the broadening of his appeal from the dispossessed to the affluent. His healing campaigns began in 1947 and he has effectively used the media to build his empire. Tents, journals, books, radio, and TV have been utilized. He has been on TV since 1954, with a brief absence during part of 1967-69.

Aspects of the PMA approach are apparent in his constant claims of healing, divine revelations, and other miracles. His message has increasingly proclaimed immediate happiness, wealth, and success to his followers especially his contributors! The old-time message of salvation and healing are still intact, but he has expanded the idea of healing to embrace “the whole man” – body, soul, mind, finances, and every other aspect of life. God wants us to prosper in every way avers Oral, though he concedes some cases of sickness and failure to the mystery of God’s sovereignty (Harrell, Oral Roberts, pp. 461,455).

Since at least 1954 Roberts has promised that God will financially reward those who give to his ministry. This is called a “blessing-pact” or “seed-faith.” The seed-faith gospel blossomed as Oral’s main fund-raising appeal in the 1970s, financing the huge expansion of his ministry later in the decade. Oral says his September 1980 report of a 900-foot-tall Jesus and his January 1987 report that God would take his life by late March unless \$8 million were collected offer projects for people’s seed-faith and so do not constitute crass fund raising (Harrell, Roberts, pp. 418, 460-63). Was Simon the sorcerer or Satan himself ever shrewder than that?!

Speaking as a TV writer and producer for Roberts during 1975-78, Jerry Shoals notes that Oral's sermons play upon "the desires we all have to succeed, get ahead financially, and live healthy lives," rather than stressing traditional Bible themes such as sin and guilt (Shoals, *Give Me That Prime-Time Religion*, p. 47). Oral himself says, "I don't believe in the judgmental gospel that Billy [Graham] preaches," "I can't go around preaching against alcohol all the time. I preach Christ," and, "I'm determined that I'm going to preach a positive gospel" without fighting the errors of Mormons, Baptists, Catholics, or the World Council of Churches. The ecumenical "inclusiveness" of Methodism was his main reason for joining it (Harrell, Roberts, pp. 442-46). He endlessly dispenses the elixir of a "positive and joyous mental attitude" as God's power for man's wholeness (p. 452). His sermons are light on Scripture but heavy on personal experiences, anecdotes, illustrations, and stories holding out the promise of healing and happiness to the whole man.

Roberts' brand of PMA religion is reinforced in other ways. Typical prayers at the end of his programs say,

. . . and I pray that as I stretch forth these hands which I've given to God, that a miracle in your finances, in your health, in your marriage, and in your relationship with people will begin to happen now, this very day, at this very moment. Amen and amen (Shoals, p. 57).

He accents blessings here and now rather than suffering, service, and sacrifice followed by blessings in eternity. His slogans exude "Possibility" and "positive thinking" by "appealing to people's universal desires to improve their station in life" (Shoals, pp. 58-59). "Miracles from Heaven in '77," "God won't be late in '78," "Miracles will be mine in '79," "Our God is a Good God," and best of all, "Something Good is Going to Happen to You." That last one, a Roberts' trademark, is a public relations man's dream, no matter what the product, message, or medium. It perfectly captures the yearning of people in our culture to "feel good about yourself."

Objections to the PMA Gospel

PMA error is rooted in carnality and the elements of this world (1 Jn. 4:5).

1. Carnality as religion. The PMA gospel sanctifies covetousness, glorifies selfishness, and makes religion a way of gain (1 Tim. 6:5). It is an idea whose time has come in an age when men are “lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Tim. 3:1-5). Success is wrongly defined as wealth, health, power, prestige, status, and happiness in the sense of prosperity and pleasure. True success means serving God without regard to such symbols and not one of them is included in Jesus’ description of the man truly blessed (Eccl. 12:13; Matt. 5:1-12).

2. Carnality as worship. Worship services are remade to appeal to the carnal mind. Rather than deep devotion arising from the inner man and finding expression in ways ordained by God, the carnal appetite for entertainment is gratified in the name of worship (Eccl. 5:1-7). Testimonials of “success,” celebrity appearances, musical extravaganzas, theatrics, dancing, and every possible enticement to the eye and ear are offered. “The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play” (Ex. 32:6). The mood is not one of humble devotion, penitence, and thanksgiving. A circus, carnival, or party atmosphere is created. The scene is punctuated with clapping and laughing. People go to church to “have a good time.” Such “worship” pleases and satisfies man, but does not please and glorify God (Gal. 1:10). The god of navel gazers is their own belly (Phil. 3:19; Rom. 16:18).

3. Carnality as preaching. PMA preaching is more concerned with what man wants to hear than with what God wants him to hear. So-called “felt needs” are not always true needs as defined by God. “After their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Tim. 4:3). The vague generalities and inspirational vaporings of pop psychology may meet man’s “felt need” to “feel good about himself,” but such teaching does nothing to address his real need to be convicted of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come (Jn. 16:7-11). True gospel preaching exposes sin, pricks the heart, and causes people to tremble, while pointing to Christ as our only hope for eternal salvation (Jn. 4:16-18; Acts 2:36-38; 24:25). When sinners are made to feel “accepted” and “comfortable” in their sins, they may fill church houses and media ministers’ coffers, but they will not be converted to Christ.

Voskaills Views. Though Voskuil is sympathetic to Schuller, he admits that “positive thinking” has many weaknesses (Mountains Into Goldmines, pp. 139-60). With slight modification, the same criticisms apply to Oral Roberts’ promises of endless miracles, healing for the whole man, and seed-faith. (1) The gospel of success centers man upon self rather than upon God. True success is not measured by this-worldly terms such as fame, wealth, or physical comfort but by doing God’s will. (2) The gospel becomes a vehicle for self-love rather than for giving of oneself to serve God and our fellow man. (3) Possibility thinking says sin is rooted in man having too little self-love and self-esteem, when actually the root is too much! Man’s problem is not a lack of ego but the constant tendency to glorify or deify himself (Rom. 1:23).

(4) Presenting psychology as religion distorts the gospel because psychology views man as absolute and autonomous, not in his relation to God. Psychological tradition and its terminology obscure and deny many biblical principles. It replaces Bible concepts such as duty, sin, and judgment with more fashionable “felt need” notions such as “fear, frustration, and anxiety.”

(5) PMA is made a panacea for all life's problems, but it is fatally flawed. It is not grounded in teaching on man's limitations and finiteness before an infinite God. One symptom of this error is its evasion of the enigmas and negative realities of life. (7) Fascination with the PMA, possibility thinking, and felt needs approach is cultural captivity – subjection to a worldly mind set. It lets the world rather than the Word set the agenda for the church and for gospel preaching.

“Peace, Peace” vs. “The Old Paths”

Prophets sent from God were not PMA men. They were persecuted and castigated, not prosperous and comfortable. They were, both positive and negative, preaching a message which would both pull down and destroy, build and plant (Jer. 1:10). When the culture was saturated with materialism and covetousness, and people cried for someone to meet their “felt needs” with a positive message of “peace, peace, Jeremiah instead addressed their real needs:

Thus, saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein (6:16).

Such preaching was out of season and such prophets out of date. How boring, what a “burden” to listen to them. More popular men arose to proclaim, “Ye shall have peace,” but God said they spoke from their own imagination, stole the truth from people's hearts, and “perverted the words of the living God.” “Is not my word as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces” (23:16-40). Those who “seduced my people, saying, Peace,” built an attractive wall with a positive image, but God promised to expose its defective workmanship and materials by tearing it down (Ezek. 13:10-16).

The beautiful walls built by Schuller, Roberts, and other PMA preachers serve the Devil's purpose by soothing the troubled conscience of sinners, but God will raze these gleaming walls to the ground (Matt. 15:13).

Jesus Christ did not promise endless miracles of pleasure, profit, power, and prestige for the whole man. As to the seed-faith theory, Jesus invested his life by serving others, suffering at the hands of others, and sacrificing himself for others (Matt. 20:20-28). Our Lord was born into a carpenter's family, laid in a manger, conducted his work in borrowed houses because he had none of his own, and died on a cross, leaving no earthly inheritance for his loved ones. Jesus was not oriented toward rewards in this life nor did he teach such crass materialism. This world rewarded him with hate and he promised his disciples no better fare (Jn. 15:18-21). The blessings of the Beatitudes are spiritual, not carnal, and are promised to those who empty themselves of self to please God, not to those who abound in self-love (Matt. 5:1-12).

Jesus warned that torment in the next world awaits people whose hearts are set on the material things and comforts of this world (Lk. 12:13-21; 16:19-31). In fact, Jesus redefined success, showing that the rich ruler forfeited heaven for earthly treasures while followers of Christ forfeit earthly gain in serving God to "inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Matt. 19:16-30). The Master Teacher cared nothing for the methods of positive thinkers but balanced the beautiful promises of heaven with severe and repeated warnings of hell (Matt. 5:10-12,22,28-29; 6:20; 25:34,41,46). No one ever confronted sin or debated the merits of truth and demerits of error more directly than the Son of God (Jn. 8). Rather than flocking to sit on a platform of unity-in-diversity with Jesus, false teachers were offended by his condemnation of error. Even the disciples of Christ advised him to break out of such growth-restricting negativism and to project a more positive image, to no avail (Matt. 15:1-20). He never expected to draw great masses and majorities, but said, "Few there be that find it" (7:13-14).

The Holy Spirit came to reveal the truth in fulness in order to perpetuate the message and the method of the Master (Jn. 1:7-13). We cannot improve upon it today! Is “positive preaching” more powerful or motivational than negative? God’s Word to Adam was both positive and negative, as was his Law to Israel (Gen. 2:16-17; Ex. 20). The Psalms of worship reflect the same rich balance, as can be seen in Psalms I and 2. The spirit of praise for God and of hatred for error are one and the same. “Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand” (Psa. 149:6; cf. 119:103-104, 127-128). The device of antithesis or opposites which characterizes Proverbs makes the difference between right and wrong crystal clear (cf. v. 1 of chapters 10-15). Do we need any less teaching on the dangers of “the works of the flesh” than on the benefits of “the fruit of the Spirit”? Are the “put off” passages any less imperative or powerful than the “put on” passages (Gal. 5:19-23; Eph. 4:17-32)? “Positive preachers” cannot declare “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). They mutilate and emasculate the gospel.

True gospel preachers take their cue not from positive thinkers but from truth lovers, not from crowd pleasers but from soul savers, not from the Schullers’ and Roberts’ in the world but from the inspired Apostles in the Word. The charge of 2 Timothy 4 was never more needed than it is today:

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.”

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MAGICAL THINKING: “NAME IT & CLAIM IT” WORD POWER

Is “name it claim it” teaching biblical?

Question: "Is 'name it claim it' teaching biblical?"

Answer: The “name it and claim it” or “[prosperity gospel](#)” is not biblical and is in many ways antithetical to the true gospel message and the clear teaching of Scripture. While there are many different versions of the name it and claim it philosophy preached today, they all have similar characteristics. At its best, this teaching comes from the misinterpretation and misunderstanding of some Scriptures, and, at its worst, it is a completely heretical teaching that has the characteristics of [cultic](#) doctrine.

The roots of the [Word of Faith](#) movement and the name it and claim it message have more in common with new age metaphysics than with biblical Christianity. However, instead of us creating our reality with our thoughts, as new age proponents advise, name it and claim it teachers tell us that we can use the “power of faith” to create our own reality or get what we want. In essence, *faith* is redefined from “a trust in a holy and sovereign God despite our circumstances” to “a way of controlling God to give us what we want.” Faith becomes a force whereby we can get what we want rather than an abiding trust in God even during times of trials and suffering.

There are many areas where name it and claim it departs from biblical Christianity. The teaching really exalts man and his “faith” above God. In fact, many of the more extreme Word of Faith teachers teach that man was created on terms of equality with God and that man is the same class of being that He is Himself. This dangerous and heretical teaching denies the very basic tenets of biblical Christianity, which is why the extreme proponents of the name it and claim it teaching must be considered to be cultic and not truly Christian.

Both the metaphysical cults and the name it and claim it teaching distort the truth and embrace the false teaching that our thoughts control reality. Whether it is the power of positive thinking or the prosperity gospel, the premise is the same—what you think or believe will happen is ultimately what controls what *will* happen. If you think negative thoughts or are lacking in faith, you will suffer or not get what you want. But on the other hand, if you think positive thoughts or just have “enough faith,” then you can have health, wealth, and happiness now. This false teaching appeals to one of man’s most basic instincts, which is one reason why it is hugely popular.

While the prosperity gospel and the idea of controlling one's future with his thoughts or faith is appealing to sinful man, it is insulting to a sovereign God who has revealed Himself in Scripture. Instead of recognizing the absolute sovereign power of God as revealed in the Bible, the name it and claim it adherents embrace a false god who cannot operate apart from their faith. **They present a false view of God by teaching that He wants to bless you with health, wealth, and happiness but cannot do so unless YOU have enough faith.** Thereby God is no longer in control but man is. Of course, this is completely antithetical to what Scripture teaches. **God does not depend upon man's "faith" to act.**

Another problem with the name it and claim it teaching is that it fails to recognize that Jesus Himself is the ultimate treasure worth sacrificing everything for ([Matthew 13:44](#)) and instead sees Jesus as little more than a way of getting what we want right now. Jesus' message is that a Christian is called to "deny himself & take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?" ([Matthew 16:24-26](#)). Contrast that to the message of the prosperity gospel. Rather than being a message of self-denial, the prosperity gospel is one of self-satisfaction. Its goal is not becoming more Christlike through sacrifice but having what we want here and now, clearly contradicting the words of our Savior.

The Bible teaches that "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" ([2 Timothy 3:12](#)), but the name and claim it message is that any suffering we undergo is simply the result of a lack of faith. The prosperity gospel is completely focused on us getting the things the world has to offer, but [1 John 2:15](#) tells us we should not "love the world or the things in the world" and, in fact, those with a fondness for the things of the world become enemies of God ([James 4:4](#)). The message of the prosperity gospel simply cannot be any more opposite of what the Bible really teaches.

In his book *Your Best Life Now*, prosperity teacher [Joel Osteen](#) says that the key to a more rewarding life, a better home, a stronger marriage, and a better job is found in a "simple yet profound process to change the way you think about your life and help you accomplish what is truly important." How different that is from the biblical truth that this life now is nothing compared to the life to come. The message of prosperity gospel is focused around the "treasures" or good things we want and can have now, while Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" ([Matthew 6:19-21](#)). - *GOT QUESTIONS*

Is the 'Name It Claim It' Teaching Biblical?

Posted on 20 Sep 2012 by Truth in Reality

The 'name it and claim it' or 'prosperity gospel' is not biblical and is in many ways antithetical to the true gospel message and the clear teaching of Scripture. While there are many different versions of the name it and claim it philosophy preached today, they all have similar characteristics. At its best, this teaching comes from the misinterpretation and misunderstanding of some Scriptures and, at its worst, it is a completely heretical teaching that has the characteristics of a cult.

Both the metaphysical cults and the name it and claim it teaching distort the truth and embrace the false teaching that **our thoughts control reality**. Whether it's the power of positive thinking or the prosperity gospel, the premise is the same—what you think or believe will happen is ultimately what controls what will happen. If you think negative thoughts or are lacking in faith, you will suffer or not get what you want. But on the other hand, if you **think positive thoughts** or just have 'enough faith,' then you can have health, wealth and happiness now. This false teaching appeals to one of man's most base instincts, which is one reason why it is hugely popular.

The message of the prosperity gospel simply could not be any more opposite of what the Bible really teaches...

Jesus did not come to give us health, wealth and happiness now. He came to save us from our sins so that we can have an eternity of bliss with Him. Following Christ is not a ticket to all the material things men desire in this life but a ticket to eternal life. Our desire should not be to have our best life now but should be that of the Apostle Paul who had learned to be content "in whatever state I am" (Philippians 4:11). The prosperity gospel (or health and wealth gospel) started as a movement in the 1940s. It teaches that God wants Christians to be prosperous financially, physically, spiritually, and in every other aspect of life. The supporters of this gospel have influenced millions of eager listeners desperate to hear the promising message of the prosperity gospel.

If you've ever listened a prosperity preacher, you've probably heard some of the outrageous lines, often broadcasted to millions via televangelist and Christian radio shows. I won't be quoting any names, but here are some lines that I've heard while listening to the prosperity message:

“Money Cometh to the Body of Christ”

“If you don't give, you're not giving the blessing anything to multiply”

“Allow the blessings to multiply your material investments.”

“We are totally free. Free from habits, addictions, fear and worry, discouragement, poverty and lack.”

And the tagline for the prosperity gospel... **“Name it, Claim it!”**

Could anything be more opposite to the teachings of the Bible than this! There aren't too many things that bother me more than watching the Word of God get twisted as prosperity preachers lead thousands to literally run to the alters at churches, leaving money on the stairs with the hope and anticipation that God will multiply and lead them to a prosperous life. The reasons for giving shouldn't be based on what you can get back in return; rather, we're challenged in the Bible to give with a cheerful heart, not out of reluctance and under compulsion (2 Cor. 9:7)

Prosperity in the Bible

There's no denying that the Bible is full of scriptures that tell us of God's blessings. Unfortunately, when we solely focus on the good endings of these stories, we can miss out on the not so glamorous parts of scripture that put things into perspective.

I think it's worth referencing a few commonly used scriptures that take God's Word out of context in order to promote the prosperity message:

Genesis 39:2-4 The Lord was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master. Potiphar noticed this and realized that the Lord was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did. This pleased Potiphar, so he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned.

Let's not forget that Joseph was disowned by his own brothers, sold into slavery and thrown into prison. Even after this encouraging verse showing God's favor on Joseph's life, we read how Joseph was falsely accused of sleeping with Potiphar's wife. He was put back into prison and then released again later to become ruler of Egypt. Here's a perfect example of someone who had the blessings of God on his life, yet still faced unimaginable troubles.

Psalm 1:3 They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither and they prosper in all they do.

The Bible uses hundreds of agricultural references and the example of bearing fruit is a reflection of righteous living. It's just as we would read in Matthew 7:17 as Jesus teaches us that good fruit cannot come from bad trees, and that good trees cannot produce bad fruit. It's an encouragement to study God's Word so that our actions (our fruit) will be good so the message of God's love can be shared to everyone.

Deuteronomy 28:11 The Lord will give you prosperity in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you, blessing you with many children, numerous livestock, and abundant crops.

When put in the context of the Old Testament covenant between God and Israel, prosperity was used as a sign of God's approval and blessing. Today, we do not live under the requirements of the law – but we live under the freedom of God's grace according to Romans 6:14. We have an even greater covenant with God and an even more prosperous promise thru His son Jesus Christ. To say that material possessions, riches, health, and worldly wealth are promises from God is to completely discount the ultimate sacrifice that Christ made. Christ is our promise, not wealth, health, or success here on earth.

Here are a few more scriptures that are often taken out of context by prosperity gospel preachers –

Malachi 3:10: “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do, I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessings so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!”

Matthew 25:14-30: The Parable of the Ten Talents

John 10:10: “The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.”

Philippians 4:19: “And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.”

3 John 1:2: “Dear friend, I hope all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit.”

Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

Why The Prosperity Gospel Is Wrong

The prosperity gospel says that it is fine to pursue riches and that worldly wealth is a sign of God’s blessing. Here’s the thing – the Bible is clear in telling us that riches are a dangerous thing to pursue. It’s not that money is evil in itself. Money can be used for great things. But as soon as we make riches and prosperity our pursuit, our priorities get all screwed up. That’s exactly the point behind the story of the rich young ruler and Jesus found in Matthew 19: 16-30.

It wasn’t enough for the rich ruler to keep all the commandments. Jesus specifically brought up his wealth because the young ruler made it a priority in his life. It was so much of a priority that he valued it more than following Christ.

When we turn our focus away from sharing the Gospel message and promote the promise of prosperity in health and worldly wealth, we are forgetting the purpose of the Gospel.

Jesus said if we want to be his disciples, we must to take up our cross daily and follow him. The phrase take up your cross means that you will face suffering in this life. Being a follower of Christ isn’t well taken in a world that is full of sin. There will be difficult times for everyone – that’s a reality.

Mark Driscoll's talk about the prosperity Gospel made four excellent rebuttals to common prosperity gospel promises that often get twisted. The prosperity gospel quote is bolded and his rebuttal (paraphrased) follows.

1. God wants you to always have great relationships

Jesus' family disowned him, his friends abandoned him, Judas betrayed him and the crowds screamed Crucify him. Jesus appears to have had occasional relational strains.

2. God doesn't want you to have pain

Did Jesus ever suffer pain? He was beaten, whipped, and crucified – one of the most excruciating ways to die.

3. God doesn't want you to be a victim, but a victor

Jesus was a victim: false accusations, false witnesses, trials, condemnation, an execution. Sounds like Jesus was victimized, doesn't it?

4. If you really trust God, you won't have anything to worry about and you won't have any anxiety

Remember the Garden of Gethsemane? Jesus was stressed to the point of sweating blood.

I'll finish with one of the most powerful verses that help us to understand the role of wealth and contentment in our lives is found in 1st Timothy 6:6-9

“Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. So, if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.”

by Tim, Faith and Finance Blog

WORSE-CASE POSSIBLE: POWER IN NEGATIVE THINKING

Accentuating the Negative

A STRATEGY, NOT A SYMPTOM: “Pessimists have only pleasant surprises . . .” —NERO WOLFE THE DEFENSIVE PESSIMIST

Strategic optimism, however, does not work for all situations any more than a hammer works for all tasks in carpentry. It makes just about as much sense to recommend strategic optimism to someone who is anxious as it does to offer a hammer to someone who needs to screw in a bolt. It does make sense to evaluate the efficacy of different tools designed for the same job and, based on the results, to recommend the best tool for a particular task.

VARIETIES OF PESSIMISM AND OPTIMISM:

“Psychologists also use different tools in their attempts to describe and understand how people function. The terms optimism and pessimism, in addition to their meanings in everyday use, describe several distinct concepts in psychology. It is important that we distinguish defensive pessimism and strategic optimism from some of the other kinds of optimism and pessimism out there, starting with a look at the most basic and general kind.

Dispositions and Strategies. Some people, ‘Pollyanna’ types, always expect the best in every situation. Others—‘nattering nabobs of negativism,’ in Spiro Agnew’s memorable phrase—are grimly convinced that disaster lurks around every corner. *The terms dispositional optimism and dispositional pessimism describe those stable tendencies toward either positive or negative expectations.* The term disposition conveys that a characteristic is likely to influence behavior across a variety of situations and is relatively unlikely to change much over time.

Dispositionally, optimistic children usually grow up to be optimistic adults, and thruout their lives they tend to have positive expectations about relationships, work, recreation—most all of their endeavors. Often there is some genetic influence on our dispositions, and indeed, there is evidence to suggest that genes play a role in the development of dispositional optimism and pessimism (though exactly how big a role is not yet clear).

However, whatever genetic influence exists is played out through interactions with the environment; there is no direct relationship between a particular gene and an optimistic or pessimistic disposition. Dispositional optimism & pessimism are the psychological constructs that most resemble how we use optimism and pessimism in everyday language. When we casually describe people as optimists ('she sees the glass as half full') or pessimists ('his glass is always half empty'), we don't necessarily mean that they are as extreme as Pollyanna or the Grinch, but we usually do mean that their characteristic expectations are either positive or negative. Most people assume that optimism and pessimism are the opposite ends of the same dimension, implying that the more optimistic you are, the less pessimistic you are, and vice versa. But people turn out to be complex in ways we don't notice through casual observation. Sometimes the same person will have both positive and negative characteristics. And some people may be hard to describe as either optimistic or pessimistic—they don't seem to have a single, definable outlook or expectation about the future.

Thus, it turns out that optimism and pessimism, rather than being opposite ends of the same scale, constitute their own distinct dimensions. In other words, people may be high in optimism (or medium or low), but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are low (or medium or high) in pessimism. The two dimensions are correlated, but they are not flip sides of the same thing. Some people are both strongly optimistic and strongly pessimistic ('I'll be brilliant; they'll think I'm an idiot'); others are neither particularly one nor particularly the other. And then there are all the permutations in between.

Regular old optimism has received a lot of credit for its relationship with better physical health, which might lead us to call for clinical interventions that increase optimism in patients. Yet, in keeping with the principle of separate dimensions, it may not be the presence of optimism so much as the absence of dispositional pessimism that is important to those reported health benefits—and at least one study has found that to be the case. In that study, despite predictions, optimism itself wasn't related to blood pressure overall, and when optimists were in a bad mood, their blood pressure was just as high as anyone else's. It was the level of pessimism that was specifically related to chronic blood pressure levels (more pessimism was related to higher ambulatory blood pressure). If that's the case, then increasing optimism would be less effective than reducing pessimism.

There's a chasm between dispositional and strategic optimism and between dispositional and defensive pessimism, however. Although, defensive pessimists are more pessimistic and less optimistic overall than strategic optimists, they are by no means pessimistic all the time or in every situation. Our dispositions are very general, and they influence our overall outlook; our characteristic strategies may surface only in reaction to particular situations or goals.

Attributional Styles and Strategies. Researchers have also used optimism and pessimism almost as nicknames for much more complex constructs. Several popular books and scores of journal articles address the ways people ordinarily explain the positive and negative things that happen to them. Our explanations are called attributions, and our typical patterns of attributions may be optimistic or pessimistic because of the way they reflect our interpretations of the past and influence our expectations about the future. Strategic optimists do have an optimistic attributional style, but defensive pessimists do not have the typical pessimistic style. Defensive pessimists make attributions, but they don't fit into the stylistic categories of optimistic and pessimistic— their attributions are different from both of those styles. Strategies in general are also different from attributional styles, because they refer to how we prepare for situations, rather than how we explain them after the fact.

Positive Illusions. The terms positive thinking and positive illusions refer to a collection of processes that are also sometimes lumped together under the heading of optimism. These illusions—mild distortions of reality—sometimes help people maintain a positive sense of self and a feeling of control over their lives. We may selectively remember the good things people say, for example, and 'forget' the negative ones, or convince ourselves that our successes are much more indicative of our ability than our failures. Those conclusions reflect a positive bias toward ourselves that can be motivating as well as self-protective. Strategic optimists tend to indulge in these positive illusions, and defensive pessimists don't—with important consequences for their self-concepts and relationships with others. But again, both defensive pessimism and strategic optimism involve more than just the presence or absence of these illusions."



Getting Real With The Way We Talk:

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Colossians 4:5-6



KEEPING IT REAL AND TELLING IT RIGHT!

The Tongue: One of Man's Most Dangerous Weapons

By [Wayne Jackson](#)



It is not without significance that two of the Ten Commandments deal with speech—taking the name of God in vain and bearing false witness against another person (Ex. 20:7, 16).

Similarly, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warned against the abuse of the tongue in “swearing falsely” (Mt. 5:33-37). Elsewhere, Jesus Christ gave a stern warning regarding the unseemly language that sometimes proceeds from a person’s mouth (Mt. 12:36-37).

The way one talks is a very revealing index to his character. The Scriptures describe different kinds of “tongues” (speech). Let us consider some of these.

The Hateful Tongue

Jeremiah spoke of those “treacherous” people who “bend their tongue like a bow.” He cautioned that no one should place trust in the person who “deceives” and “slanders,” nor with those who “have taught their tongue to speak lies” (Jer. 9:2-5). Jehovah hates the lying tongue (Prov. 6:17; cf. Acts 5:3-4). Some use their tongues to rip and gut others—even their brethren in Christ.

The Licentious Tongue

Solomon said that the mouth of the forbidden woman is a “deep pit” (Prov. 22:14). Note the perfume-drenched words (“fair speech”) of the dissolute woman who lures the unwary lad to his destruction (Prov. 7:14ff). Men have similarly taken advantage of vulnerable, lonely women by their deceitful language.

The Boasting Tongue

The vain Pharisee, in a dramatic presentation before the Lord, paraded his feigned accomplishments, but he was not accounted as just with God, in spite of his boasting (Lk. 18:9ff). It was Francis Bacon who said something to the effect that “a bragging man is scorned by the wise, and admired by fools.”

There are those with whom one can scarcely engage a conversation without being bored to tears with an incessant stream of self-adulating and dubious accomplishments.

The Impetuous Tongue

An inspired writer declared: “[L]et every man be swift to hear, slow to speak” (Jas. 1:19).

The poet Robert Frost once said that “half the world is composed of people who have something to say and can’t, and the other half who have nothing to say and keep on saying it.”

A wise man wrote: “Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise” (Prov. 17:28).

Unfortunately, he frequently opens his mouth and removes all doubt! There are far too many people who talk in an attempt to discover the content of their thoughts.

The Obscure Tongue

Have you ever had a religious conversation with a person, and when the exchange was concluded, you had no earthly idea where he stood on any significant issue? Such folks slip and slide, flip and flop.

“What is your position, brother?”

“Well, I think there is much to be said on **both sides** of that argument.”

Some people simply cannot be pinned down on any point of truth.

The Critical Tongue

A wise man values constructive criticism; it's just that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between constructive criticism and plain old **meanness**. But, as Solomon observed, “A rebuke enters deeper into one who has understanding, than [do] a hundred stripes into a fool” (Prov. 17:10).

A wise person can learn valuable lessons from his critics if he but will. On the other hand, there are those who have turned criticism into a recreational sport. Whenever they gather, like vicious piranha, they devour all flesh in sight.

The Double-Tongued

In setting forth qualifications for deacons, Paul admonished that they must not be “double-tongued” (1 Tim. 3:8). The double-tongued person is one who has refined the art of duplicity. He will say anything to get you off his back, then say quite another to someone else. His word is not his bond. His tongue flaps like an irritating awning in a winter storm (see Prov. 8:8).

The Explosive Tongue

James observed that the tongue is an instrument that no man can control completely (cf. Jas. 3:8). But some make almost no attempt at the effort. At the least irritant they explode with expletives. One might be surprised to listen to the language of the man on Monday who has spoken so piously over the Lord's table on Sunday! To those who operate in such fashion, the Lord's says: “What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant upon your lips?” (Psa. 50:16).

Conclusion

“Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth” (Eph. 4:29), rather, put away shameful speaking from your mouth (Col. 3:8). Listen to the warning of the Judge of the universe:

I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned (Mt. 12:36-37).

The Power of Speech for Good or Evil

By **Wayne Jackson**



On the first day of Earth's initial week, at some point following a primary creation, the inspired Genesis record declares: "And God said. . . " (Gen. 1:3). This expression is found no fewer than ten times in Genesis 1.

The reader is thus introduced to **the power of speech**.

Later the psalmist would write:

"He spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Psa. 33:9).

A New Testament writer adds his comment:

"By faith, we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God" (Heb. 11:3).

On the sixth day of that glorious primal week, the first human beings were brought forth. Initially, there was Adam, formed directly from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7). Presently, the Lord spoke to the man: "And Jehovah God commanded the man saying" (Gen. 2:16). The obvious implication is that Adam could understand the communication without any previous formal education in language.

On the same day, Eve was fashioned out of man's side (Gen. 2:21-22). Then, Moses records these words: "And the man said. . ." (Gen. 2:23). Following, are the first recorded words of a human being.

God has spoken. Mankind, made in his very image, likewise has the ability to speak. Of the millions of biological creatures that adorn this planet, only humans have the ability to communicate through verbalized speech. Clearly, speech is a very special gift from the Creator.

The Fountain of Sweet and Bitter

In that small document that bears his name, James, the Lord's half-brother, has a brief dissertation on the power of human speech (Jas. 3:1-12). Under the figure of the tongue, he discusses what a powerful force speech is.

No man has the ability to control his words entirely. The tongue is a force either for blessing or cursing. It is a life-long challenge to magnify the former, and attempt to eliminate the latter. In this study, we will briefly address some of the ways the gift of speech can either bless or curse.

A Proper Use of the Gift of Speech

As one considers the gift of speech, he might initially contemplate the proper use of this endowment.

First, the foremost use of one's speaking ability ought to be the praise of his Creator. The Hebrew title of the book of Psalms is **rehillim** ("praises"). In the earliest times of biblical revelation, inspired writers praised God for his magnificent acts of creation, his benevolent operations of Providence, and for the gracious provisions of redemption.

He is "worthy to be praised" (Psa. 18:3), and the words of our mouths, coupled with the mediations of our hearts, ought to be aimed at being acceptable unto him (Psa. 19:14).

Jesus, in the model prayer, framed the address to God in this fashion: “Our Father in the heavens, Hallowed be your name” (Mt. 6:9). The expression “hallowed” suggests the idea of holding in reverence, treating as holy (cf. Isa. 8:13; 29:23; Ezek. 36:23; 1 Pet. 3:15). The phrase reflects a form of praise.

Each new day should begin with an anthem of adoration to our wonderful Maker.

Second, the ancient Greeks prided themselves on their wisdom. But Paul, in a letter to the saints at Corinth (in Greece), argued that true wisdom is that which derives from God.

Furthermore, the apostle declared that sacred wisdom was made known by means of the **spoken word**, as conveyed through the apostles and others who possessed the means of divine revelation. This matter is discussed quite comprehensively in 1 Corinthians 2. Note the repeated emphasis on “words” and “speech” in this segment of the letter.

Out of this background, the Christian does not have to be convinced that one of his prime duties is to employ his gift of speech to **speak the words of truth** so that his contemporaries may know of Heaven’s saving plan. The Great Commission is about preaching and teaching (Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16).

Third, there is also power in words to bless our friends and neighbors in a great variety of ways. By words we have the power to edify (build up), to exhort, and to console our brothers in Christ (1 Cor. 14:3). Through speech, we may lovingly reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with longsuffering and teaching (2 Tim. 4:2). We may offer words of comfort in troubling times (1 Thes. 4:18).

Indeed, a word fitly spoken [at the appropriate time] is like apples of gold in a network of silver (Prov. 25:11).

What a challenge it is to use our power of speech in a fashion that is helpful to others and glorifying to God.

The Perversion of the Power of Speech

There is a dark side — very dark — to the power of speech. Not infrequently this marvelous gift is so wantonly abused. We would be remiss in our responsibility if we did not, in some measure, throw the floodlight of Scripture upon some of our weaknesses in this area.

First, perhaps the greatest violation of speech imaginable is when man employs his tongue to **deny the very One who made him**. The fool says: “There is no God” (Psa. 14:1; 53:1). In a vivid passage that spotlights skepticism, a prophet of God chastised a cold-hearted people.

“You turn things upside down: Shall the potter be esteemed as clay; that the thing made should say of him that made it, ‘He made me not’; or the thing formed say of him that formed it, ‘He has no understanding?’” (Isa. 29:16).

What a vile tongue!

Second, as indicated earlier, God, by means of an inspired revelation (compiled ultimately in that volume of literature called the Bible), has spoken to man with a message designed to lead him to heaven. Men must know that truth in order to be set free from the consequences of sin (Jn. 8:32).

It is a wickedness of indescribable proportion to alter the character of that divine message so as to **lead men falsely**, thus depriving them of the hope of life eternal.

Jesus warned: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves” (Mt. 7:15). Paul spoke of those who “pervert” the gospel by attempting to change the character thereof, mingling it with other systems (e.g., Judaism – Gal. 1:6-8).

Again, there are those who handle the word of God **deceitfully** (**do1oo** — to falsify, adulterate; 2 Cor. 4:2), rather than handling it aright in an orthodox fashion (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15). To wrest the Scriptures is to twist or torture them, and such can only bring destruction to the perpetrator (2 Pet. 3:16).

Who has not been exposed to a torturous treatment of Scripture?

Third, a terribly serious violation of the gift of speech is the **distortion of truth**. Truth is intrinsic to the very nature of God. He is a God of truth (Dt. 32:4; Isa. 65:16), who cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18). **Lying** is an assault upon the very fabric of God's being. It is classified as a sin (Psa. 59:12) that Jehovah hates (Prov. 6:19; 12:22).

The first recorded lie in the Bible was perpetrated by Satan, who, as a result of that foul deed, has become known as the "father" of lies" (Jn. 8:44). Man, by virtue of long-standing habit (cf. Eph. 2:3), has a weak propensity toward lying (Rom. 3:13), and believing lies (Rom. 1:25; 2 Thes. 2:10-12).

History is replete with examples of such. Cain lied about the murder of his brother (Gen. 4:9). Abram lied about the identity of Sarai (Gen. 12:13; cf. 20:5), and Jacob and Rebecca lied to Isaac (Gen. 27). Peter lied about knowing Christ (Mt. 26:58, 69-75), and the first case of "church discipline" involved Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to God, misrepresenting the matter of a contribution to the Jerusalem church (Acts 5:1-11).

Lying is strongly condemned in the New Testament (Eph. 4:25; Col. 3:9-10), and the final book of the New Testament warns that **all liars** will have their portion in the hell of fire (Rev. 21:8).

It is a matter of some amazement, therefore, that some folks, who profess a friendship with the Christian system, and who have defended it admirably in some ways, nonetheless argue in favor of defensive lying in certain circumstances. Norman Geisler contends:

"the Bible indicates that there are occasions when intentionally falsifying (lying) is justifiable. Rahab intentionally deceived to save the lives of Israel's spies and was immortalized in the spiritual 'hall of fame' (Heb. 11)" (122).

Rahab was commended for her faith, not her lying. She is honored for her courage and her acknowledgment of the workings of the true God (Josh. 2:9), not the **manner** in which she pursued the protection of the Hebrew spies. Her lying is no more excused than was her harlotry.

Fourth, these days might be characterized most appropriately as the age of vulgarity. Social media has enabled and encouraged unfiltered and unedited publication from any person regardless of merit or credibility.

We've come a long ways from those days when men refrained from the use of vile language in the presence of a lady. And so has the "lady." Rhett Butler's single-word profanity shocked a nation in *Gone With The Wind*. But today, filth and coarse language flow like raw sewage down the main streets of insensitive America—from the White house right on down to even many who occupy the church house on Sunday.

Even some skeptics have had enough of it. In *Vulgarians at the Gate*, noted infidel Steve Allen rails against the speech depravity that inundates our culture. He decried the plague of profanity as a breach of common morality and manners, though he had no clue as to the basis of morality or how to defend it.

The Scriptures speak of filthy talking (Eph. 5:4). According to Greek authorities (Danker, 29), the term "filthy" (**aischrotes**) entails "behavior that flouts social and moral standards, shamefulness, obscenity" while "shameful speech" (**aischrologia** — Col. 3:8) denotes "speech of a kind that is generally considered in poor taste, obscene speech, dirty talk."

Lascivious speech (cf. 2 Pet. 2:18) is that designed to conjure up illicit sexual images and ideas. Corrupt communication is morally unwholesome, harmful (Eph. 4:29) that is likewise condemned. Foolish (literally, moronic) talking is speech that reveals a stupid mentality, while jesting suggests off-color humor (cf. Eph. 5:4).

But Jesus taught that men will give account for their words in the Day of Judgment (Mt. 12:36-37). For a further consideration of this topic, see [Are Some Sins Excused?](#) .

Fifth, another abuse of speech is **abusive speech!**

The inspired psalmist dramatically foretold the verbal abuse that would be heaped upon Christ in connection with the Savior's death. The Lord's adversaries would "laugh [him] to scorn" and "shoot out the lip." They would mock him, saying, in essence: "Commit yourself unto Jehovah; let him deliver you. Let him rescue you, since he is supposed to delight in you so much!" (Psa. 22:7-8).

And, just as predicted, when he hung upon the cross, “they that passed by railed on him” (Mt. 27:39) and “scoffed at him” (Lk. 23:35).

The Greek term for “railed” is one familiar to the English reader. It is **blasphemeo**, anglicized into the form “blaspheme.” Though the derivation of the word is a bit uncertain, it likely comes from the roots **blapto** (to injure) and **pheme** (speech), hence, speech that injures (cf. Vine, 87).

One thing is certain. Men have mastered the science of injuring one another with their words. It is not difficult to find ample examples to illustrate the abuse of speech.

Some men, who have never laid an abusive hand upon their wives, have unmercifully flayed them with **razor-sharp tongues**. Where does a man think he obtained the right to get in his wife’s face and talk to her like a Marine drill instructor? It is little wonder that some women have no self-esteem. Their brutish husbands have cursed them, screamed in their faces, and belittled them in all sorts of humiliating ways.

But ... some women are equally adept at the art of tongue-lashing. They criticize their husbands to the children and before their lady friends. They disrespect them in public. It is no surprise that there is a plague of unhappy homes — as husbands and wives engage in the war of words.

Similarly, many parents are **verbally abusive to their children**. They yell at them, profane them, inform them of how stupid and clumsy they are. Abusive husbands and wives were educated by abusive parents, in all probability. Unrestrained language is the root of many evils.

Conclusion

To return to James’ admonition for a moment, the inspired servant of the Lord reminds us of how rigorous a task it is to control the human tongue. It is like a raging fire that requires maximum effort to subdue. Indeed, the tongue is like a consuming fire ignited, as it were, by hell itself (Jas. 3:6).

It is a fresh challenge each day to channel speech for good, and not for evil — to use it wisely and benevolently, rather than stupidly and malevolently.

NARROW-MINDED OR NARROW DEMOGRAPHIC?
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JUDGEMENT PREPARED
FIVE STATES FIVE STEPS

Five States of the Soul:

- **EXEMPTION:**
- Ezekiel 18: 20; Matthew 18: 1 – 3
- **CONDEMNATION:**
- Galatians 3: 22
- **JUSTIFICATION:**
- Romans 5: 1, 2; 8: 1, 2
- **DAMNATION:**
- Matthew 23: 3; Mark 16: 16
- **GLORIFICATION:**
- Romans 8: 17, 30; 2nd Thess. 1: 7 - 12

JUDGEMENT PREPARED
FIVE STATES FIVE STEPS

Five Steps For Saving:

- **HEARING:**
- Romans 10: 17; Matthew 7: 24-27
- **BELIEVING:**
- Hebrews 11: 6; Mark 16: 15, 16
- **REPENTING:**
- Acts 2: 38; 17: 30; Luke 13: 3
- **CONFESSING:**
- Matthew 10: 32,33; Acts 8: 36,37
- **BAPTISM:**
- Romans 6: 3 – 5; Acts 8: 36 - 38