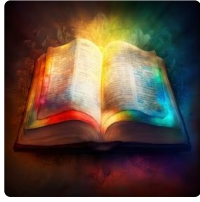


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The Word of God and its Rivals (Part 2)



Authority of Scriptures - Steve Gregg

In "The Word of God and its Rivals" by Steve Gregg, five authorities are discussed as potential rivals to the Bible's authority for believers: human authority, human reasoning, personal experience, tradition, and spiritual experiences. The lecture emphasizes that personal experience, though not necessarily evil, cannot be relied upon as the ultimate determinant of truth or morality. Additionally, the article cautions against cultic leaders or practices that elevate personal experiences or emotions above the objective reality found in Scripture. Overall, the Bible should always be the final authority for believers.

Transcript

In this session, we need to finish up what we began in our last session. We were working on this handout I've given you, which has the title The Word of God and its Rivals. The basic premise of that lecture yesterday, and we'll simply be picking up where we left off today and continuing, was that since all behavior and all thought, all belief that we hold and all actions that we do are done in submission to some authority, whether we have identified consciously what that authority is or not, there is something that is dictating action to us.

It follows that if the Word of God were followed in every way, and if its authority was honored in all points of thought and practice, we would never do anything wrong. But when we do things that are wrong and think things that are wrong, and all of us do, it is at that point that we are not actually submitting to the authority of Scripture. Now, I don't make this observation in order to browbeat anybody.

I'm not perfect in my beliefs or in my thoughts any more than anyone else is. I have errors as well. I'm not trying to make us feel bad, but I'm trying to awaken us or make us aware of the reality that there are areas in our lives where although we would say the Word of God is our final authority, there are times and categories and things in which we may not be aware that we're not allowing the Word of God to be an authority.

And what's more, we may not be aware that we are submitting to some authority, contrary to the Word of God in many cases. And so I began to delineate five rival

authorities in the life of the believer that rival the authority of the Scripture. I said at that time, and I want to again make it clear that you understand, I do not think that these five rival authorities are evil in themselves.

I do believe that all of them have a realm in which they are valid, a degree to which they are valid, and I think that they all are means by which we learn things legitimately, and we gain information and we grow and so forth through these things. The problem is that idolatry is often not the introduction of some evil thing out of nowhere. It is the elevation of some good thing to a wrong status.

If we love our wives, that's a good thing. If we love our wives more than we love God, that's an idol. Likewise, our children or whatever, our homes or our country or whatever, anything that is legitimate to love is a good thing.

But anything that is loved more than God becomes an evil thing, which is why Jesus said, Whosoever loves wife or children or father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Certainly we are to love our relatives as well as our non-relatives, but we're not to love anything more than him. That's when it becomes idolatry.

The gifts of God are good things because the Bible says every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from the Father of light, and it also says that God freely gives us all things to enjoy. We should not be ashamed that we enjoy the gifts of God, but if the gifts of God are elevated in our thinking above God himself, then we have an idol. Likewise, authorities such as those that we're talking about in this lecture are not evil in themselves.

They are genuine sources of information, legitimate sources of information, but when they are elevated above the authority of Scripture, they are given a position that only God should hold, and that is the position of absolute lordship or authority or governance over our life and thinking. I want to make that clear, that if I mention these things, I'm not trying to put these in the category of evil things. It simply is that there is a danger, and it is often succumbed to by Christians, of submitting to these authorities at times when the Word of God would direct us otherwise, and at the times that we do so, then these authorities have been elevated to a dangerous role in our lives, one that we need to reduce them from.

We need to bring them down. Scripture says we need to, by the weapons of our warfare, which are not carnal but mighty through God, we need to pull down strongholds and cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God in order that we can bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And so that's the direction we're seeking to move in our lives.

These lectures are there to sort of open our eyes to some of the areas that we might not have thought about, where we are in violation of that principle. We talked about human

authorities as an authority that many people will kowtow to, will submit to, will defer to, even when the Word of God would guide otherwise, whether it's people who have a political authority and therefore clout, or who have the power to enforce their wishes and therefore can intimidate. Many times people will compromise on their biblical principles, on their Christian principles, in order to avoid running afoul of the authorities, if the authorities are taken to be the political or law enforcement authorities.

If the laws of the land are contrary to Scripture, there's a certain number of people who regard themselves to be Christians who would nonetheless obey the laws of the land in order not to run afoul and not to bring consequences on themselves. On the other hand, there have always been Christians who have been willing to obey the Scriptures in spite of the fact that the authorities disapprove. During the First World War, there were many Anabaptists who believed that it was wrong for them to fight or even to put on a uniform.

And many of them were treated just the way you read of Richard Wurmbrandt and other prisoners of conscience in the communist world were treated. They were made to take cold showers in the winter, to stand outside in freezing weather, in thin summer uniforms. They were hung by their wrists in prisons by shackles.

They were given gruel to eat and made to be in intolerable conditions. This was actually documented of many Anabaptists who simply were what we would today call conscientious objectors. The only problem is in World War I, there were no laws that permitted conscientious objectors.

And so these people were treated like criminals. Now, they could have been on the good side of the authorities and not been treated so badly had they only been willing to compromise the principles that they believed to be biblical. But they were of the type of person as the apostles who would say, well, we must obey God rather than men.

It doesn't matter what the men are going to do to us. That's not the issue. Our concern is not what happens to us.

Our concern is that we do what God said. We'll leave the matter of what happens to us in his hand. And so we, I think, are called to be like them in this respect, that we are not intimidated by human authorities, whether political or whether their authority is more of an abstract sort.

You know, they're intellectual authorities. They're celebrities. They are people who are imputed some degree of authority for some reason or another.

But they are not to be kowtowed to by the Christian. Now, a second authority we talked about was the authority of human reasoning. And this is, of course, not so much of a personal authority like a man who's an authority is an authority.

Your own reasoning. And the refusal to believe what the Bible says when I can't reason it

out is what we're talking about here. There are people who will believe the Bible insofar as it seems reasonable to them, whether it is philosophically reasonable in the sense that, well, you know, I can understand how, if I can't understand how God could be one and three, and the Bible seems to say it, but I can't understand it, so I guess I'll reject that doctrine.

Well, if I reject that doctrine, then I'm leaning on my own understanding, the very thing the Bible says not to do. We're told to trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. There are things that we can't understand.

There are things too profound for me, said the psalmist in Psalm 131, verse 1. And to be humble and to acknowledge that although God has given us what he has not given anything else in the creative world, as far as we know, an incredible brain, an incredible computer, the most highly organized matter in the universe is the human brain, as far as we know. And that is a good thing. God wants us to be reasonable.

He wants us to think. But there are times when he says, well, listen, this is true. I'm not asking you to understand it.

There may be factors I haven't, there may be data that's not in your processing that you don't know how to work this out, and you can't figure out why it's true, but trust me, it's true. And if God's word says something is true and we can't reason it out, we simply are called upon to accept what he says. Now, I will say this.

I have very seldom found anything in the Bible that isn't reasonable to a person who's willing to really try to understand it and reason it out. In almost all cases, I mean, there are a few things that still, like the Trinity, I don't understand that. But a lot of things that people would think are not capable of being seen reasonably in the Bible, really, clearer thinking often shows that they are reasonable.

And in fact, if we think that the Bible is teaching something that in fact seems unreasonable, that may be a very good reason to question whether we're understanding it correctly. It's perhaps that we don't. There are, well, Calvinists, for example, believe that man is responsible for his own actions, but they also believe that God ordained everything we ever do so that Adam's sin was ordained by God, ordained in such a way that it would inevitably happen.

And it was ordained before Adam was ever made. Yet when Adam did it and did what God ordained infallibly, that must inevitably happen. Adam is responsible.

Now, if you say, well, how can that be? How can God be the one who actually ordained that this would happen before the guys are born and infallibly nothing else could have God ordained? And then this guy comes along and does what God ordained him to do. And now he's held guilty for that. They say, it's a mystery.

We just have to believe what the scripture says. It may not seem reasonable. We may not be able to figure it out, but it's, it's like the Trinity.

It's a mystery. Well, I, I frankly think that, well, I'm willing to accept mysteries. Let me put it this way.

I mean, I accept the Trinity, but I don't accept the Trinity as something that's crazy. I accept the Trinity as something that I don't fully understand. For example, I can think of ways in which it would be impossible for three to be one, but I can also think of ways in which it is not impossible for three to be one.

You put water and sugar and lemon juice in a cup, stir it all up. You've got one drink, but there's three things. And I can understand that.

You've got a human being who is a body and a soul and spirit. He's one person. I can see how in some, I mean, those may not be analogies for the Trinity, but I can think of ways in which a thing could be said to be one thing and yet be three things, a family.

You know, you've got a father and a mother and a child. That's one family, but, but three persons. I mean, there's, it's not inconceivable.

It's not impossible to imagine how something can be said to be three in one sense and be one in another sense. And if the Bible indicates there's one God, and yet there's three persons who are called God, then I may not know in what sense that is true, but I can't say there's no sense in which that could be true because I can think of analogies in nature where some things are three and one. I don't know if any of those analogies are really analogous to the Trinity, but I'm saying there's nothing intrinsically nonsensical about saying something can be three in one sense and one in another sense.

But when you say, well, the person who determined that this action would happen was God, but the responsibility for the action falls on this other person who didn't determine that it would happen and, and therefore was not the actual cause of it happening. That's a little harder to understand because from what we understand of what responsibility means. Responsibility suggests that a person had some choice, you know, a person that becomes responsible when they, when they could have done better, but they didn't.

They made a choice. I mean, if I pull out a gun and shoot you right now, unjustifiably, I'm responsible for my action because I didn't have to do that. But if somebody comes up here and puts chloroform on my nose, if I pass out and they put a gun in my hand, they hold my arm up and they pull the trigger and I'm, I'm just a passive individual.

Someone else is doing all the, all the shooting. My hand is on the trigger, but someone else is making it all happen. It's a different story.

I'm not, there's, there's no sense in which the word responsible for that action could be

attached to me in that scenario. You know what I mean? I didn't do it. I didn't know I was there.

I didn't have any power to do anything else. That's not responsibility. And so there are some problems here with some of the ways people say, well, you just don't have to understand it.

Just believe what the Bible says. In some cases, people make a mystery where we don't need one because we can look at a case like this. Does God ordain everything and man's responsible? And we can go to the Bible and say, well, no, not necessarily.

God doesn't necessarily ordain everything according to scripture. Man is responsible, but we can make something bizarre simply by misunderstanding what the Bible says. And if we have, if we look at it, well, what does the Bible actually say on this? We say, well, there's no place in the Bible that says that God ordains everything.

And there's the problem. You see, if I say God does ordain everything and I'm responsible for things I do that God ordained that I would do, there's a serious problem. I can't reason out to how that could be.

Now, if the Bible did say both things, I'd have to do the same thing I do with the Trinity, I guess. So whatever, I don't know. But fortunately, because it is hard to reason how God could ordain everything and man could be responsible for everything he does.

It makes us go back and say, well, maybe we're not understanding the Bible correctly. We'll go and say, oh, there's the solution. The Bible doesn't say God ordained anything.

That's simple. Once you see that the Bible doesn't say that in any place, the problem is removed. And the very fact that certain biblical teachings don't seem to be reasonable and you can't figure them out, may be the first clue you need to know that you need to relook at the doctrines and see if you really are seeing what's there or whether you're imposing something.

So what I'm saying is that human reasoning is a servant that God has given you to serve you to, it certainly should be that something seems ridiculous or impossible or absurd, that it should raise suspicions in your mind. Maybe I should look at this more closely. Absurdities generally aren't true.

And for that reason, I can, my reasoning informs me that I need to think about this more carefully. But if after I've thought about it as carefully as one can and consider all the data, it's still, you know, baffles me. Then I can say, well, I'm a human being.

I've got finiteness to my understanding. God is infinite. I'm finite.

There's probably a lot of things about God that I could not understand. Man, I'll just trust

him when he tells me it's true. No doubt he knows a lot of things I don't know.

And that is not unreasonable. That is not sacrificing your intellect. That is being quite reasonable to assume that God, who is infinite, knows more than you who are finite.

That's a very reasonable assumption. And to be humble and say, I don't know, I'll just believe what scripture says, is a reasonable choice. Not only in these philosophical areas of theology, but also in the area of ethics and morals and justice.

You know, I mean, a lot of things God says in the Bible and does in the Bible, some people say, I just don't see how that's just. I don't see how that's fair. But the problem there is the part that says, I just don't see.

I mean, to say, I just don't see how that's just doesn't mean it isn't. It just means I don't see how it is. I can't understand that.

Maybe if I knew everything about it, then God knows I'd see differently. Or maybe if I had a more pure understanding of what justice is, maybe I'd see it differently. But to say, I don't see how that is fair, what God said there or what God did there, is not to really find a flaw in God.

It's to find a flaw in what I can understand and can't understand. And at times like that, it's wise, it's humble, it's reasonable to say, I will not put my human reasoning above the authority of what God has said. I'll trust God, even if I don't understand some of these things.

The third authority that we looked at last time was human traditions. And that's what we ended with because we ran out of time yesterday. Human traditions are those things that we do simply because someone else did them before, because they've been done for a long time, because everyone seems to it.

It's become a commonplace of our, of our culture, of our religious culture, our family's culture, our national culture. There are certain traditions. You say the Pledge of Allegiance, it's a tradition.

And you'll never think about what you're saying when you say that and how that is in juxtaposition with your commitment to Jesus Christ. And can a man serve two masters? Can you pledge allegiance to two different entities, some of which may not be agreeable with each other? I mean, it's just traditional. When you get out of high school, you go to college.

Why? It's traditional. That's what everyone does. It's just understood.

Well, but Christians ought to start thinking, say, well, is this really what the Bible says? Is this a following of values that the Bible encourages me to adopt? What does the Bible tell

me to do? And it's true of religious traditions. There's theological traditions. There's ethical traditions.

And there's a lot of other stuff that's traditional. We talked about last time. We're not going to bother talking about it further now because we want to go on to our final two.

But the point is that human authorities, human reasoning, human traditions, all of these are fairly regularly, fairly regularly deferred to instead of the Bible by persons who ought to know better, by persons who say they believe the Bible is the final authority. And by the way, the examples I give, some of them may be a little shocking. I don't make an effort to be shocking.

I try to think of the things that are so obvious to me. I mean, as I look at the church, as I look at Christians who live their lives, I think, well, here's some obvious areas where it seems like they're not really using the Bible as the authority. They're using something else.

And so I'm not looking for shocking examples. But if they are shocking, some of them, if some of them seem to really tweak you a little bit, don't just accept them because I say so. That would be violating rule number one, human authorities.

I'm a human. And if I say, well, it's wrong to do this or that in one of these examples, don't believe me. Do what I'm telling you to do.

Go to the Bible and see what the Bible says. Think it through biblically. But don't submit to human authorities, even if it's me or anyone else that you might be accustomed to letting think for you.

Let's go on to the fourth one. The fourth usurper, the fourth rival authority to the word of God is the authority of personal experience. It's amazing how many people assume that their experience is self-validating.

It happened to me. Therefore, I know it's true. I saw it.

I heard it. I felt it. I smelled it.

I tasted it. I experienced it. I was there.

It happened. I saw it. Experience obviously is that which comes to us through the senses.

If you neither saw, heard, smelled, tasted, felt, if you didn't, if none of those things were involved, how could you be said to have experienced something? An experience technically is what you are aware of happening in your life, in your circumstances. If something happens, and you know it happened because your senses tell you so. And therefore, experiences are perceived by the senses.

However, all of your senses can be deceived. Can they not? There are counterfeits. I have experienced the deception of my senses on many occasions.

I remember in grammar school, there was some science experiment we had to do back in the days when science wasn't very complex. And they had you do an experiment where you blindfold one of your fellow students, and you cut up an apple, and you cut up a pear. And you give them a slice of pear to eat, but put a piece of apple under their nose.

And they're blindfolded. They don't know what they're eating. And they think they're eating an apple, because they're smelling an apple and eating a pear, and they think they're eating an apple.

Well, you can deceive senses that way. Anyone who's watched a stage magician knows that the eye can be deceived. The hand is quicker than the eye.

Most of us have believed that we heard something at one time or another, and we looked around, and there was nothing there. We didn't hear anything. I mean, our ears, our eyes, our nose, our mouth, our feelings, they can all be deceived.

Can they not? Now, I'm not saying that we shouldn't trust them. We have to. We have to live every moment of every day putting some measure of confidence in our eyesight.

If we couldn't trust them, we wouldn't dare move. You know, we do basically judge the reality around us to a large extent by what our senses are. And the sum total of what our senses are telling us about what's happening right now is our experience right now.

And so, experiences are not bad. I mean, you can't live without them. Experience is just what happens, and your awareness of it happening.

However, it is dangerous to say that because I have had a certain experience, that that proves something to be true, even if the Bible says that such a thing is not true or maybe not good. You see, experiences can sometimes tell you what is happening around me, but experience does not tell me that what is happening is good or bad. In other words, my experience can't make moral assessments.

My hands and my eyes tell me there's a podium right in front of me, whether that's good, bad, or otherwise. My experiences don't make any judgments about those, can't make any judgments. Moral judgments are made some other way than by my senses.

My senses just tell me what is. Something else has to tell me what should be, right? I can experience the fact that you are in the room with me and that I am in this room. We know this.

I can see you. I can hear some of you, and I know you're here. That's part of my

experience.

Whether you should be here or not is another question. I can't tell by my eyes whether you should be here. Maybe you have an obligation to be somewhere else.

Maybe you should never come to school in the first place. I don't know. What ought to be is not something that your senses can tell you, only what is.

Now experience can tell you what is. Unfortunately, too many people use their experiences to tell what ought to be, and this is what we call pragmatism. Experience proves that something desirable has occurred, and therefore we judge that the thing is a good thing.

Let me give you some examples in case you're confused about where I'm going with this. I've written some examples in your notes, and many others could come to mind. When you talk to a Mormon about the faith, when you have a discussion about your respective religious beliefs, you will probably talk, first of all, for the first hour or so, about what the Bible says about things.

At least if you're well-schooled in the Bible, you'll present biblical things and challenges to what they're saying to you and so forth, and they're expecting that, and they come up with their biblical arguments, and at a certain level, it seems like the argument is biblical. One could almost get the impression from watching that whoever has the best biblical argument is going to win this thing, because both people are quoting the Bible and so forth. It looks like an exchange between people who care about what the Bible says.

But when the end of the discussion comes, and the Mormon almost always decides when that's going to be, as soon as they can tell they're not winning, it will not matter to them whether you made the better biblical arguments. It will not matter to them whether the Bible actually stands on your side in the discussion, because there's a different authority more important to them than the Bible. They have two authorities more important to them.

One of them is Joseph Smith and his teachings in Pearl of Great Price and Doctrines and Covenants and the other doctrines of the Church, but there's even something more convincing to them. And I've had many discussions with Mormons, which started out as biblical discussions, back and forth about what the Bible says and so forth, but when they found they couldn't win, and they found that the Bible was not on their side, and that I knew more than they did about the Bible, and they just couldn't win on that basis, they called an end to the discussion, but not without making this final remark, and they always do this, it's their policy, they stand up to leave and they say, well, we have other calls to make and it's been, you know, it's been good talking to you and so forth, but they say, before I leave I'd like to give my testimony. They always want to give their

testimony, because this is more important to them than anything.

And you might think, well, why not? Testimony is good, right? And they say, listen, quoting a Mormon, they say, there was a time when I was considering whether Mormonism was true or not, and somebody challenged me to pray and ask God, if Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and if the Book of Mormon was the word of God, and I prayed, and I asked God to show me if the Book of Mormon was the word of God, and I received a witness. Now, what they're calling a witness was an inward, subjective impression. They often will refer to it as a burning bosom, that is, your chest burns inside.

It's sort of like when the men on the road to Emmaus said, did not our hearts burn within us when Jesus spoke to us on the road there? And that's what the Mormons testify to, and that testimony is more important to them than anything. You can show them that nothing they're saying has any agreement with Scripture whatsoever, but that will get nowhere with them, absolutely nowhere, they couldn't care less. All that matters to them is that they have a witness.

They have a burning in their bosom, and that is self-validating. The fact that they got this burning in their bosom proves to them that their religious view is correct. Well, what is that but a feeling? That's just a subjective experience.

But it's clear in these discussions, the way they always turn out, that that subjective experience matters more to them in determining what is true than the Bible matters to them. They can be left without one shred of biblical defense for their view, and they don't care, it doesn't matter, as long as they've got the witness, the witness inside. Now, the sad thing is that they seem so naive is not to realize that a lot of different religions have a witness like that.

I could confess that I have a witness too. I mean, the Bible says the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we're the children of God. I've had that witness often, many times.

I take it for granted that God bears witness to me. There is an inward experience, there is a subjective awareness and consciousness of salvation, that's no problem. I mean, if they've got a burning in their bosom, I'm sure I've had the same thing, at least something similar enough that it convinces me, but that alone doesn't convince me that I'm right.

Just because I say, I feel very strongly inside and there's a very subjective burning in me that says, yes, yes, yes, to the truths of Christianity, that's not why I believe in Christianity, because I know Hindus have that feeling about their religious ideas. I know Mormons feel that way about theirs. If everyone's feeling the same thing about their conflicting viewpoints, there must be some other more objective way to determine

what's true than just what I feel about it.

The problem is the Mormons are naive enough not to know that there is an equal experience of conviction in the minds of people of lots of different religions, and that their burning bosom doesn't tell a thing. It may be something that's whipped up psychologically within them, or it might even be a satanic counterfeit. That's the problem, see.

You can have an experience that tells you, I feel, I see, I hear, I experience this, but your experience cannot evaluate itself and say, this is of God, this is of the devil, or this is just of the flesh. That evaluation has to be made on some more objective basis. But the people who are most prone to violate this principle of personal experience over the word of God are those who just assume that their experiences are self-validating.

That is, the fact that the experience happens means that it's right and good. But some people feel good about their extramarital affairs, and their experience tells them, this can't be wrong. Why not? Well, because it's happening.

Whatever I do can't be wrong. Whatever I'm experiencing must be right. That's obviously, no real Christian could ever believe such a thing, but Christians do fall into the same kind of problem in a lesser degree, but one that's serious enough to be concerned about.

There are many Christians, as well as cultists, who are more impressed than they ought to be by sensational experiences. I mean, things that happen out of the ordinary must be from God, right? Well, not necessarily. A lot of things out of the ordinary are not from God.

There is a cult called Spiritism. Actually, it's called Spiritualism. Christians usually refer to it as Spiritism, because they're fascinated with spirits.

And one of the sacraments, as it were, of that cult is going to seances and contacting the spirits of people who are now dead. Now, you may be aware that the Bible forbids God's people from seeing mediums and going to seances and contacting the dead. This is forbidden in Scripture.

It's a sin. In fact, Saul died in battle, the Bible says, because he saw a medium, because he violated this command of God. God killed him the next day.

It's not a small matter. In the Bible, a medium was put to death if caught in the law. So, this is not a small matter.

God is greatly offended by persons going to mediums and seances and contacting the dead. This is something forbidden in Scripture. Now, I've talked to Spiritists before and pointed this out to them, since they do this very thing that the Bible forbids.

And they say, well, you wouldn't talk that way if you'd been in one of these seances with me. You know, this thing is so real. I contacted my grandfather, who died 20 years ago, and it really was him.

It had to be him, because in the seance, he communicated things to me that were secrets between ourselves that no one else knew. The medium couldn't be faking this. I mean, this had to be the spirit of my grandfather talking to me.

Well, I'm not here to tell you whether it was or wasn't the spirit of your grandfather. Most evangelicals would say it wasn't. Most evangelicals believe that what was contacted in a case like that was what we call a familiar spirit, a demon that was acquainted with your grandfather and knew enough about your grandfather's private and secret life to impersonate him convincingly.

Now, evangelicals believe that is the case, but the Bible doesn't say so directly. The Bible nowhere directly says that when you go to a seance, what really contacts you is a demon. Of course, you do read in the Bible of familiar spirits.

I'm not denying that. But as near as I can tell, the familiar spirit is so-called because he's familiar with the medium, not because he's familiar with whoever it is that's being contacted. But evangelicals have their standard ways of talking about this, and they may be right or they may be wrong.

I don't know. But let me just say this. What if it really was grandpa? Who cares? The Bible says don't do it.

I don't know whether it's possible to contact your deceased grandfather through a medium. I don't know if that's possible. That's not the issue.

It's forbidden by God. What if you did have a genuine experience? Saul had a genuine experience of contacting Samuel through a medium. That was really Samuel, as near as I can tell reading the passage.

But that didn't make it okay. Just because an experience happens doesn't mean it should happen. It doesn't mean it's all right.

And if the Bible specifically says this is wrong, but I'm impressed because some sensational supernatural thing happened that dazzled me with its obvious miraculousness, its obvious supernaturalness, somehow people assume that it must be of God if it's supernatural. We know that in Deuteronomy 13, verses 1 through 4, Moses warns the Israelites about anyone who would be a prophet or dreamer of dreams who comes and gives them a sign of the wonder and the wonder happens. They predict something happens and it does.

But he says that they lead you after other gods. He says don't listen to them. The Lord

your God is testing you.

There are times when a supernatural thing will happen, but the person who's doing it is promoting an error, a false god, a false religious idea. And therefore the experience of a supernatural sensational thing does not mean that God is favoring it or that he approves of it. There are psychic healers in Manila in the Philippines who can apparently, unless it's all fakery, but I mean I've heard I know people who've gone over there and had healings before they were saved.

It seems like it's genuine, but it's definitely if it is it's supernatural where these psychic healers are able to reach inside to a body and pull out a cancerous tissue and leave no mark on the skin. It's just it seems magical. Well, that's probably exactly what it is.

Magical in the worst sense of that word is no doubt demonic. People have actually been healed in this way from what I understand. I mean this happens all the time.

People from America fly over to the Philippines all the time to have this done to them because there are testimonies. There's a witness. There's a testimony.

There's an experience someone had that says listen I had cancer and now I'm well. That can't be bad. It sure can if it's what God told you not to do.

The Bible forbids you to see psychics and to involve yourself in the occult. It is sensational. It is if it's not fakery it is supernatural and I'm not here to say that none of it's fakery.

I'm sure there's a fair bit of fakery, but I'm also I also believe in the supernatural, but just because it's supernatural if it is it needn't be thought to be of God. Unfortunately too many people think that something unusual happens. It's of God.

Something unexplainable. It must be of God. It must be okay.

I'm asked many many times a month on my radio program. The callers call up and say what do you think about the renewal? You know what the renewal is. The renewal is really usually a reference to some of the goings-on that a few years ago were in Kansas City and then more recently a few years after that were associated with Toronto and later still more more currently associated with goings-on down in an Assembly of God Church down in Florida.

What do I think about it? Well I must confess I don't know. I don't know what to think in some cases because first of all I haven't been there, but if I were to judge from reports which might not be a fair thing to do and therefore I'm cautious about making absolute statements about it since I don't want to judge from reports merely, but it seems to me like there may have been some people touched by God. There may be some things happening there that are of the Holy Spirit and that we should rejoice in.

There may be some people saved. There may be some people healed. There may be some people getting closer to God, finding God.

If that is happening and like I say not having been there I'm not really able to judge that very well, but if that's happening how can I not approve? Unless there's evil things happening too, of which I'm not aware of. I will say this though. Some people are much quicker than I am to jump to the conclusion that whatever is going on is good because unusual things are going on.

If people fall down on a regular basis and stay down on the carpet for 20 minutes each service, certainly is an untraditional church service and therefore we could call that sensational. It ceases to be sensational after it's happened a hundred times, but when it's new, when it's a new phenomenon, people, you know, it's kind of sensational, kind of amazing. Wow, look at this.

Everyone was here singing and now they're all laying on the floor. I went to one of these meetings in Kelowna, British Columbia, and everyone was on the floor. That's certainly an unusual church service.

Now I've seen people slain in the Spirit for 30 years. I mean that's not a new thing, but to have a church service where the high point of the church service is everyone's doing carpet time, that's a new phenomenon. In association with some of those other, with that, there are some other things like, and you don't hear as much about this anymore, but it was sort of the showcase experience for a while there in the publicity that Reno was getting.

People were laughing uncontrollably. So much so that it was at one time called the laughing revival because people, in addition to falling over, were laughing a great deal and nothing was funny. I mean I've been in church service where everyone was laughing because the preacher was funny, but this is where nothing funny is happening and people just start laughing uncontrollably and people begin to stagger and act like drunkards and they say they're drunk in the Spirit.

And there's been occasions, and not a few, and it was another showcased feature of the Reno at one point in time, these things come and go, but there was a great deal of barking and growling, growling like lions and barking like dogs. These were considered to be the normative aspects of some of the meetings for a period of time there. Now some of these more unusual features don't appear to be getting much publicity now.

Either they're not happening as often as they used to or else they're just so ordinary no one's talking about it anymore. But my concern is not to condemn, you know, Christians who are having experiences different than mine. I haven't barked, growled, fallen over, or laughed inappropriately as far as I know in my spiritual life.

I have, by the way, when I was younger had occasions where I laughed and I believe it was in the Spirit, you know, believe it or not. I believe there's such a thing as laughing in the Spirit. It hasn't happened recently to me and I would never say it was a very normal occurrence in my life.

There were a few times when it just seemed I and the people I was with were so happy in the Lord we just laughed for sheer joy, you know, and maybe that's what's happening to these people. I don't know. I'm not here to debunk experiences that are different than my own experience.

I realize that a lot of things happen to people through the Holy Spirit that don't necessarily happen to me and I don't think that we have to judge the normativeness of our relationship with the Holy Spirit by whether the same experiences are happening to everybody. My concern is this, that some people just assume that since these experiences are occurring within the framework of what people are calling a renewal at a church meeting or in a religious meeting that they must be therefore of God. Now I'm of the opinion that a thing like that could be of God.

I'm not closed down to that maybe like some people are, but I'm just not very comfortable with people who say it is of God on no evidence other than the fact that it is being experienced. It's happening. It's happening.

People are experiencing it. Therefore, it's of God. People ask me, what do you think about holy laughter? I say, anything is holy.

I have to agree with. But what laughter are you referring to? Laughter at this meeting? On what grounds am I going to call that holy laughter as opposed to ordinary laughter? Or for that matter, unholy laughter? If a preacher is preaching a solid sermon and some of the service starts disrupting by inappropriate laughter, why should I call that holy laughter? I mean, what's the evidence that it's holy? It seems to be extremely unholy if it's distracting from the Word of God. I'm not one of these people who's one-dimensional that either has to say it's all of God or it's all not of God.

I'm willing to believe that God does unusual things and does some today, maybe many. But I'm saying that it is certainly wrong-headed for a person to assume that just because it is happening and the setting in which it is happening is a church setting or a religious worship service setting, that whatever unusual happens must be God. Remember, in every revival, the first person to wake up is the devil himself.

And anyone who's done a study of revivals has learned that while every revival includes unusual things that God does, it also includes a great number of spiritual counterfeits where the devil gets in to try to corrupt you. And it is simply not safe to say, because this is a renewal, because some people are truly being touched by God and good things are happening in their spiritual lives, therefore we will uncritically accept, as from God, every

unusual sensational thing that happens. Now, I'm not speaking against the renewal, I'm speaking against a mentality that may not exist in the minds of everybody in the renewal, but certainly does in some, from my observation of people who've flown out there and it was very important for them to be in on this thing, to be under the spout when the glory comes out.

And my concern is this. I've observed, especially in the charismatic movement, which, as I've made clear, is the movement I have been a part of for 30 years. I'm in the charismatic movement.

I've observed many things that concern me in the charismatic movement, not the least of which is gullibility at a very high level and total lack of discernment at an equally high level. Now, it's not universal. There are charismatics, I would call myself one, who are trying to discern, trying to be careful, trying not to be gullible.

But there's an awful lot who have no interest in not being gullible. They just want to ride the wave. Whatever is the cutting edge, whatever someone says is what the Holy Spirit is going to say, that's what they want.

And it doesn't occur to them to judge it scripturally, to see if it agrees with the character of God and what the Bible says. They just want to make sure they don't miss the wave. They're surfers, spiritual surfers.

They don't want to be caught behind. They want to miss the opportunity. I have discovered among charismatics two general types of people.

Those who want more than anything else truth, whether or not they have sensational experiences with it. Now, I mean, among charismatics, those who want the truth want it with experiences if the experiences are good, genuine, or without experience if the only kind of experience you can have is phony. There are truths that you can embrace and there's no particular experience that goes along with it.

And some people are quite happy to have the truth, whether or not there's any sensations that accompany it. I'm going to have to include myself in that number. But then there's those who want more than anything else an experience, whether or not the truth agrees with it.

That seems to be the two categories I see. There are those who want the truth, whether or not there's an experience. They'll accept an experience.

I will. If God wants me to fall over right now, he's welcome. I'd be pleased as could be if he wants to do that to me, although I'm not desiring it.

I just want whatever God wants in my life. But all I really want is the truth. And I'm going to look to the Bible for the truth because that's where it is.

And the experience can come or go or not exist as God prefers. It's up to God to decide when the experiences will come and what kind they will be. But there are people who care mostly about an experience.

They live from one buzz to the next buzz in their lives and don't confuse them with the facts that this is not particularly a biblical experience necessarily, or that it might even be contrary to biblical principle in some cases. It doesn't matter to them. It's an experience.

It feels good. It's right. It's self-validating.

No, experience cannot be self-validating. Remember, experience can only tell you what is. It cannot tell you what ought to be.

It can't tell you whether what is is good or bad. You need the Bible to judge those things. The Mormons had an experience in their history, if their telling of it is accurate.

And frankly, I'll just take it at face value that it is a true story. But when they first migrated to Utah, they were the first settlers in the region of the Great Salt Lake. It was a barren land.

And they'd traveled through much desert, and they had very few supplies left and so forth. And they immediately started farming so that they could get their harvest up and eat because they were close to starvation. And about the time their harvest was due to be brought in, a plague of locusts hit the area.

The skies were darkened by these billions of locusts that came in. They settled down in the crops and they threatened to eat everything that the Mormons were desperately needing for their survival. And they got down on their knees and they prayed to God.

And you know what happened? An enormous number of seagulls appeared out of nowhere, came in and ate the locusts and scurried the crops. Did that really happen? I don't know. I assume it may have.

I'm not going to call them liars. I think they can be greatly mistaken, but I'm not going to call them liars. Let me accept the idea that this really happened.

They prayed and they were saved by a great, unusual, maybe miraculous appearance of seagulls that came and ate all the locusts and spared these people's lives after they prayed. Now, how do you suppose they interpret that event, that experience? That was an experience that some of them had. How do you suppose they interpret that? Well, no doubt they say, well, this proves that God is our side.

This proves that our religion is the true religion because God miraculously delivered us when we called on him. What more proof do we need that Mormonism is the true

religion? Well, more than that, we need it to agree with the scriptures because if they don't speak according to this word, there's no light in them. But many people would say, well, because my prayer was answered, I know God's not displeased with me.

I know that I'm on the right track. What they forget is that Jesus said, God loves his friends and he loves his enemies. And Jesus said, God causes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good.

And he sends rain on the crops of the just and on the unjust. In other words, the goodness of God in preserving or delivering or taking care of somebody is not his way of putting a stamp of approval on everything they do or believe. He does good things even for the evil.

He's just seamlessly gracious. And if I were God, I would have saved him, too, even though I disagree with their religion. Wouldn't you? I mean, it's a bunch of people out there and they're starving to death.

The crops come up, the locusts, they cry out to God. If you were God, wouldn't you help them? I hope you would. I think he did.

And it seems very much like him to do that. The problem is when they interpret the experience as validating their religious beliefs, when in fact God's own word says that their religious beliefs are off the wall and not correct. That is placing an experience above scripture as a determiner of what's true and right.

By the way, it's not impossible that the devil sent the seagulls. I don't know. I mean, the devil, he's got some powers.

We don't know what the extent or limits of them are, but we can say this, that an unusual, rare, unique or even miraculous event could be from God or it could be from the devil. But even if it's from God, it doesn't necessarily place his endorsement on the people who he assists in this way. I've never had any problem believing that story about the Mormons and the seagulls.

It may not be true, but I have no problem believing that it's true. It sounds just like something God might do. On the other hand, it might also be something the devil would do simply to make them feel more comfortable about their errors.

I don't know. I don't know whether it was God or the devil. I hate to be so undecided about that, but I'm not even sure the event happened.

But they believe it happened. And that is an experience that confirms to them that something is true because why? A sensational thing happened, apparently miraculous, an answer to prayer. Well, that's good.

When people ask me how I know my beliefs are not entirely a deception, I've got a lot of ways that I remind myself that I know that my beliefs are true. Many of them are some things I've shared with you throughout this lecture. There's a lot of evidence that the Bible is true.

But I mean, among the things that I call to mind is all the times God has answered my prayers. There have been many remarkable times when God answered prayers in ways that no one in their right mind would say was a coincidence. Striking.

I remember I was in a Christian band in Santa Cruz, and we were scheduled to play down at like a youth prison down in Watsonville, about 15, 20 miles away. And we were scheduled weeks in advance, but the week that we were supposed to do it, it was just incessantly downpour of rain. It was just unbroken rain for days and days and days.

And we carried our band equipment in the back of a pickup truck. We were able to put a tarp over it to keep it dry, but we got to the location where we were going to play. And to our chagrin, we couldn't bring the truck anywhere near the building to load the equipment in.

Now, the rain was pouring down in sheets. It had been doing so at least for three or four days at this time. And we had to cross over a lawn, which we were not allowed to drive on anyway.

It was all muddy. We'd get stuck in it if we tried. And we had to carry the equipment maybe, I'd say, 20, 30 yards maybe in rain to get it into the building to play.

Now, we were there for ministry's sake. We believed the Lord wanted us there. And we were sitting in the parking lot with the equipment covered with a tarp and looking at the distance we had to cover.

And there was a smirking guard who was employed there at the prison. He had been a menace to the chaplain there. He was very anti-Christian.

And he was so pleased to see that we were stuck out in the parking lot with our equipment, we couldn't come in and play. And I went up and talked to him. And I said, is there any other way to get closer to the building than this? And he smiled and said, no, this is the only way in.

And he knew that if we carried the equipment through there, it probably wouldn't work. All the electronic stuff would get wet and soaked and destroyed. And he says, well, what are you going to do? And I said, well, I guess we'll just have to pray that God will stop the rain.

And he laughed. So we went over to the truck and I and the other members of the band said, you know, never done this particular thing before, but Elijah did it. He prayed that

the rain would not come and it didn't.

So I said, well, James tells us that story and indicates, you know, Elijah is a man who liked passions like we are. He prayed fervently that it might not rain. And we're kind of out on a limb here.

I never told any mountains to move or anything before, because I was always afraid I wouldn't have the faith to it. But I just thought, well, we don't have many choices. Let's just pray that God will stop the rain.

And so we prayed that the rain would stop. It hadn't stopped for four days, three or four days, constant and not just drizzling. And when we said, amen and looked up, the rain stopped.

It literally stopped. And we carried all that equipment into the building. We did what we were there to do.

We took the equipment back into the truck, put the tarp over it, started driving home, and the rain came again. It continued for days and broken. The rain just stopped for a little bit.

Now, I have experiences like that. Not a few. Now, that's sort of like the Mormon story.

Now, if what happened to them proves that their Mormon religion is correct, then what happened to me proves that my religion is correct. Problem is, both can't be correct. Therefore, my experiences or theirs, you know, they can't both be endorsing the respective beliefs of the persons who have these experiences.

I have many experiences of answer prayer. And believe me, they do. If I am ever tempted to doubt God, one of the first things I do is call to mind the times that God has done miraculous things in answer to prayer.

It's not the only thing I think of, but I remember that because I think how ingrateful it would be for me after he's shown himself powerful in my life so many ways and so many times. I was healed of a, well, I was diagnosed as having cystic fibrosis when I was two years old. I'm not supposed to be able to recover from that.

Nothing ever happened to change it except that my family prayed and don't have it anymore. So, I mean, I guess I got healed. But after God has done so many things like that, I would feel very, you know, like a jerk to doubt him.

I mean, what more could he do to convince me of him? And yet, what I'm saying is those very things aren't proof that Christianity is true. If it can be shown to be true on other bases, they provide a tremendous confirmation. But Mormons and Hindus, I mean, there's some Hindu guru over in India right now who allegedly is raising the dead,

healing sick people all the time, and people from all over the world flying, Europeans, Americans flying who have cancers and stuff, and they go talk to this guy because he comes out.

He's in hiding most of the time and the crowds are waiting outside his house and he comes out maybe once a day for a little bit and lays his hands on a few people. They recover and he goes back in. He's a Hindu.

Does this prove Hinduism's truth? No. God can heal any way he wants to. He prophesied through Balaam who was some kind of a fortune teller.

He even spoke through Balaam's ass. You know, that doesn't endorse being an ass as the right thing to do. You see, God can work through any means he wishes to and he does not necessarily intend for us to say, ah, therefore all the false things that are contrary to scripture are good because God's doing things.

And we need to remember too that it may not even be God in some of these cases. It may be the devil. Some say, well, why would the devil want to heal people? That's not the kind of thing the devil wants to do.

Oh, I don't know about that. We sometimes think that the devil, that his main business is just to make people miserable. Frankly, I think the devil spends a lot of time trying to make people comfortable.

The devil's main interest is having people not uncomfortable. I mean, it's not his job to make sure everybody's uncomfortable and sick and poor. Here's somebody's word of faith people.

You think that that's all the devil wants is keep you poor and keep you sick. I'm sure he couldn't care less whether you're poor or sick. Other people think all the devil wants to do is just make you sin all the time.

I don't know that the devil's even as interested in that as people think. One thing that the Bible says the devil's interested in is keeping you wrong, keeping you deceived. And the devil may very well heal you if that will confirm you in your deception, in your beliefs.

It is not unlike the devil to heal. There's always been psychic healers and occult healers and things like that. I mean, it's not unlike the devil to do that kind of a thing.

I don't know if it's the devil or God in some of these cases. I don't need to worry about that. I can say that God has acted in mercy to somebody that he is an enemy of.

Or I can say the devil is acting on, you know, to confirm one of his own in their error. Either theory is possible. It's not up to me to decide.

All I can say is I don't decide whether this belief system is right or wrong based upon the

presence of supernatural occurrences. I decide it on the basis of whether it agrees with what the word of God says. That's the only thing I can go by.

The experiences are not self-validating. That's the point. Now, I've known a lot of Christians.

I've mainly given you examples of cults here, of psychic healing and spiritism and Mormons and things like that. But I know a lot of Christians who are so taken with their own imagined revelations that they get that they actually eclipse the Bible as an authority in their own lives. Dreams and visions, personal impressions.

Now, I want to make something clear. I always have to give this disclaimer because I come out pretty strongly on some things. I don't want you to think that I'm throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

I can think of at least four times in my life that I had dreams where God revealed something to me about someone I needed to know about. I had no way of knowing. I had a dream, contacted them and sure enough, the dream was true and they needed to be talked to about the thing, usually confronted.

But I believe God speaks through dreams. I've had prophets speak to me, genuine prophecies. I've also had a whole bunch of prophets speak bogus prophecies to me.

I don't think every prophet is a prophet. Test the spirits. Many false prophets have gone out in the world, the Bible says.

But I've had true prophecies uttered to me by people with prophetic gifting. I've had dreams. I've had visions.

I've never had an angel appear to me. That's one of the few things in the Bible that I've never had happen. I've even heard, well, I think I've heard something that was so close to an audible voice from God before that I'm not sure if it was audible or not.

It certainly seemed like it in retrospect and at the time. But what I'm saying is I believe in these things. I don't believe there's anything in the Bible that should discourage us from allowing God to speak to us through dreams, visions, prophecies, angelic visitors, whatever he may choose to do.

I don't think these things are as common as some people want them to be. I think some charismatics think that this should get several prophecies a day just to make sure you're not getting far from God or something. But I don't know that even in the Bible, I don't think Isaiah got several prophecies.

I don't think Elijah did. And therefore, I don't think I will either. But at the same time, let's put this in biblical balance.

I believe that God speaks to us in supernatural ways and can do so anytime he wants to do so. And I have personally experienced most of the various things that you read in the Bible in terms of ways God speaks. But now what I really want to say about this, don't trust those things more than the Bible.

I met a man who I thought of as a Christian, and maybe he even was, but he was certainly off base. He had a community that he headed up. Everyone in his community had hair down to their belts, the men, women's hair was longer.

The men also had beards down to about as far as a beard can grow. They looked like very shaggy hippies, and they all wore Amish style clothing. The men wore black pants and white shirts with black suspenders.

And the women wore long gray or blue dresses with head coverings and so forth. And they were very quiet people. In fact, if you saw them, you'd wonder if they were Amish, except the men had long hair, which the Amish don't.

And frankly, when I met these people back in the seventies, I was kind of a long-haired hippie Christian myself. I didn't cut my hair for three years. My hair was pretty long and shaggy too.

And I dressed like a hippie. So these people kind of, they looked like they were up my alley. I was staying in a Christian community, and their car broke down as they were passing through Santa Cruz.

And they stayed there for a few days while they fixed their cars. And they were impressive. I liked them.

They were quiet people. Their children were quiet and cute. And little girls running around with head coverings and long dresses, and just looked sort of like being visited by an Amish community or something.

And I don't know how you feel about that, but that was, I found that attractive. And the men, quiet men. Oh man, they were very solemn men, very solemn and quiet.

And one of the men, Brother George in the group, this is funny really now, but I mean, I took it at face value at the time. He said, God had told him to take a vow of silence and to never speak unless he was spoken to. You know how Phariseeism works.

You will find ways to get around what God says. Brother George felt that God had told him to never speak unless he was first spoken to. So whenever he wanted to speak, he'd whistle.

And they'd say, yes, Brother George, and then he'd speak. So whenever, that's how he got around it. It was a very unusual group, but the leader of the group was a brother

named Brother George.

By the way, his son went through the school a few years ago and he himself died of cancer prematurely last year. What I'm about to say to him was about him are not good things, but he later repented and was a very good Christian friend of mine later. But I'm talking about back in the 70s.

He always talked about the dreams he had. He had dreams apparently every night, prophetic dreams. And he was very impressive because he had this long beard, long hair, suspenders, and he always walked around sort of like this and very solemn.

And if you'd ask him a question, he wouldn't speak immediately. He'd think very much about it and look very serious. And he'd speak very quietly in a quiet voice so everyone would lean forward and hear what he had to say, add to the effect of his authority.

And anyway, if you asked him any question, he knew his Bible inside and out. He carried this little tiny Bible with him that was all color marked up by him. Every verse in it, it was some color or another.

And if you asked him anything about the Bible, he could turn immediately to the Bible verse that was relevant. But more often than not, he'd allude to a dream that he'd had. You ask him something and he'd say, well, I had this dream.

And in this dream, such and such happened. Well, when I met him, I was a little cautious about this. He quoted dreams so much, as much as he quoted scripture, but he knew his Bible real well.

And just the whole dynamics of their community was very attractive and impressive to me. And I decided once when I was hitchhiking across country from California, I decided I'd hitchhike up into Oregon where he had his community. This is after he'd left where I was, where I met him maybe six months later.

And visit his community on my way before I headed east. I and another brother were hitchhiking and doing some ministry that way. And so we hitchhiked up and visited him and his community in Philomath.

And it was a little farm with goats and a garden and stuff like that, all these quiet people walking around. And I kind of, it was kind of a nice environment, very peaceful. You know, I thought, well, God is definitely here.

But as we stayed there a month, my friend and I, and they had meetings every day, morning and night. In their meetings, they sang hymns, which I love hymns, but they sang them about a third of the speed that you'd normally sing them. Very slowly.

And it was so funny because they'd sing for maybe an hour or so before he would

preach. And he'd sing this song that I was on him. I was accustomed to singing it, you know, at least three times as fast.

It'd be almost, you know, it really tests your patience, you know, to get through the hymn. I remember once we got through the whole hymn, all five verses or something. Finally, it took about 15 minutes to get through it, I think.

And then he said, now let's do that one again. Only this time, more slowly. I thought, he's got to be kidding.

And then anyway, they sang these hymns for a long time. And then he would give a sermon. In his sermon, he'd walk, he'd pace side to side, sort of bobbing like this with a very solemn look, stroking his beard and so forth, and talking very quietly.

So everyone would sit forward and listen. And some of his dreams, his sermons were full of dreams and full of scriptures. But it was clear that the dreams were at least as authoritative as the scriptures.

He was sure that he was a prophet and his dreams were prophetic. And some of the dreams got kind of weird. He started talking about how he dreamed one day that he was in his place and all the women were running around topless.

And the Lord showed him that that was because they were losing their inhibitions and that was a good thing or something. I thought, bizarre. I began to think that this guy is starting to interpret every sexual dream that he has as being a revelation from God.

And then he began to talk about how he had this dream that this woman was in bed and she was calling for him and that he was supposed to sleep with her. I thought, wait a minute, there's something really weird going on here. And I left the place.

And he came after me and said, no, God wants you to stay. He wants you to become a prophet like me and so forth. I said, no, thanks.

And I didn't know of any misconduct in the group, but he got quite angry at me at one point. I had a way of making prophets mad. Keith Green got mad at me too, but always because I wouldn't join their groups.

That's why. They were always the prophet telling me I'm supposed to join their group. I said, I don't think so.

And I've made more prophets mad at me that way. But anyway, Bruce told me that God was telling me through him to stay in the community and become part of the community and become a prophet. And I said, no, I don't think so.

And I began to confront him about some of my concerns. I said, you know, your dreams, they bother me a little bit, you know, and they've got some things about them that I

don't think they're all that pure. And he says, well, God speaks through dreams.

The Bible says in Numbers that if I, the Lord, if I raise up a prophet among you, I will speak to him in dreams or in visions or in dark sayings. And I said, okay, well, I believe that, but I don't believe every dream from God. I said, for example, Bruce, what if you felt that God spoke to you in a dream that you should sleep with brother George's wife? And he stroked his beard for a long time.

He says, well, he said, I'd really struggle with that. I said, well, I wouldn't. I wouldn't struggle with it for one second.

The Bible says it's unlawful for you to have your brother's wife. You don't need to struggle with whether this dream is of God or not. It's contrary to scripture, but he didn't see it that way.

Little did I know he was sleeping with brother George's wife and with all the wives in the community that later came out. Every woman in the committee was his harem. And there were only a few other men.

Some of them were married to some of the women and they knew he was sleeping with their wives. That was just, they, they revered him as a prophet. It was very cultic, very cultic.

He eventually came out. By the way, he, his cult was blown apart. The people left and he, he was deeply humbled.

He was greatly repentant. And he later became a sincere Christian man, a leader in the assemblies of God in the town he lived in. Humble.

I knew him for years after this, and I'm convinced he was a true Christian afterwards, but he was definitely in deep, deep deception running this cult in Philomath because his dreams, he just assumed they're all of God. And he was willing to keep his, let, follow his dreams more than his, more than his, what the Bible said. Now, let me talk a little bit about Christian pragmatism, which is also related to this business, putting experience above the scriptures.

If something you do gets results that are desirable, you're likely to believe that the thing you did was a good thing because the results that came from it were desirable results. This is called pragmatism. Pragmatism is the idea that the end justifies the means.

That if the result or the goal or the end that is reached is a good result or desirable, then the means that were followed to get there were good. And there's a lot of this in Christianity, believe it or not. There are Christians who will approve of abortion if they believe that it would be better for the girl not to be bothered with a child at this time.

It'd be too traumatic. And for her to go through with the birth, that'd just be very bad for her. The results of that decision would be horrible.

Therefore, you know, she gets an abortion. She feels much better now. Her life is going to be able to be normal again.

And because some good result comes or some desirable result, it may be good or not, but it's desirable to the party who's considering it. Therefore, the abortion must have been okay in their case. Now, a lot of people who are against abortion say, well, they'd be against abortion except in cases of rape and incest.

Why? Well, because it's, I don't know, it'd be so disgusting to the girl to carry a baby from someone who raped her. Well, it might be, but it's still a baby. I don't see how murdering a baby becomes the right thing to do when the baby is a result of somebody's crimes.

It just doesn't make sense to me. But they feel like the result is you free the woman from humiliation and pain and trauma and so forth by doing this. That's not necessarily true, of course.

Abortion often brings traumas of its own, of the worst kind. But people often will decide on ethical behaviors based on the desired result. If the result is commendable, if the result is desirable, then whatever has to be done must be what God would want me to do, even if the Bible would teach otherwise.

The issue of war is another one. I know I've brought this up several times, and I'm not trying to say that Christians should never go to war. That's for you to sort out.

It's a complex ethical question in Scripture. And yet there are people who believe that the Bible teaches you shouldn't go to war. And sometimes the only answer that people can give to argue against these pacifists is to say, well, if we didn't fight in the war, we would lose our freedoms.

Right? Ever heard anyone say that? You know, if we didn't fight the communists, if we didn't fight the Nazis, if we didn't fight whoever, if we didn't fight the revolution, we wouldn't be a free people today. Well, that may be true. I guess we'll never know, since that's not what happened.

We did fight, and we won, and we are a free people. Maybe we wouldn't be free if we hadn't fought. But that shouldn't be the issue in deciding what's moral and what's not moral.

Being a free people is a desirable thing. Who wouldn't want to be free? I do. But who's to say that being a free people is God's ultimate value? That cancels out all other moral issues.

That whatever you do to be free, it's okay with God just so you get free. Well, let's put it this way. People think that way.

Freedom? Man, whatever I have to do to stay free, even if I have to do things the Bible says are wrong, dropping the bomb, you know, on Hiroshima, people say, well, that's morally right. I've heard many discussions about that, because I think the 50-year anniversary of the dropping of the bomb was a few months ago, and talk shows were talking about it, and conservative talk shows were all saying, well, that's the right thing for us to do. Look, it ended the war.

Saved a lot of lives. How many more people would have died if the war had continued? Then died in, you know, it was a good economy of human life. You know, you kill off a few thousand here, you save more thousands, maybe more millions by ending the war early by dropping the bomb.

Well, that's very good pragmatism talking. It still doesn't answer whether it's right to drop bombs on civilians, to wipe out women and children who would just as soon not be in the war at all, to kill innocent people, in other words. That's a moral issue, is it not? To firebomb Dresden in Germany so that every inhabitant is burned to a crisp, even the people who are trying to run out of the city, the flames are sucking in the air so fast because they're so hot, it pulls people back in like a vacuum cleaner, and women and children, everyone's going to get wiped out.

Now, you might say, well, Steve, you just said earlier that, you know, God commanded the Canaanites, women and children, to be wiped out too. That's right. God commanded that.

When God commands something, that's just, because God never makes any unjust commands. How do I know it was just to kill all those Japanese people or those German people? Now, I know there's some wicked German people who probably deserve to die, but did we restrain our efforts to only making sure that people who deserve to die died, or did we kind of be a little indiscriminate there like they did? Are we really morally superior? We have better ideals. We're a free people.

We're not into dictatorship. That's good. We saved the world for democracy, right? But how? By what means? The end does not justify the means.

There are times when we can do something to procure an end, but it's not the right thing to do. But many people don't think that way. They think, well, if the result was good, then the thing was good.

A lot of people feel that way about religious issues. There was a They've changed their name several times to escape prosecution. They flee around the country because they do all kinds of criminal things and mostly sex crimes, but they considered themselves to

be the most radical Christians in their day.

One thing they practiced was called flirty fishing. The pretty young girls in the cult would go out and seduce men to have sex with them on the grounds that those men would come to the meetings and eventually they'd reel them in, as it were, into the cult. Now, these women were doing things that were morally wrong, but they were doing it for a good purpose, they thought, to bring them to God.

You sleep with a man and bring him to God. Well, that's a pretty crazy example of saying the end justifies the means. But it's not really much different than what some Christians do.

When I graduated from high school and I was single, I lived and shared an apartment with a man who was an evangelist. He was single also. I sometimes would go and hear him preach.

I had ministry of my own, so we were out different places ministering, sometimes it was the same night. But on occasions I was in the same place he was and I got to hear him preach frequently. Something concerned me.

In giving his messages, he would really embellish a story that he was using for an illustration that was said to be a true story. This happened and I met this person, we had this conversation, this kind of stuff that evangelists do. But there were cases where I knew the story that he was telling, I knew the facts, and he wasn't telling it truly.

He was stretching the truth. He was embellishing the story in order to make it a good sermon illustration for what he wanted, to make it a little more sensational than it really was. I talked to him about this more than once.

I said, Gary, when you're evangelizing people, how can you tell the story in a way that isn't true? And you're representing it as a true story. Don't you think of that as lying? And I confronted him about that more than once and his answer always was this, well, how do you argue with souls getting saved? People are getting saved, aren't they? Well, I said, yeah, they're getting saved. Maybe more are getting saved if you told the truth, never know, God might honor it.

I don't know if they're getting saved, maybe they are, but all I know is that even if people get saved, that doesn't mean it was right for me to sin in order to get them saved. To lie is not to tell the truth. And Christians are duty bound to be committed to truth.

And yes, maybe some people get saved, but that doesn't, that's pragmatism. I can do what the Bible says is wrong in order to get a result that God no doubt will like. One way that this is seen a lot, and this was more so a few years ago, I've lived through many fads in the charismatic movement in the last 30 years.

One of the fads in the 80s was called inner healing. And there were certain therapies that were practiced. Some churches made them as common as getting someone saved, get them baptized in the Holy Spirit, get them water baptized, and take them through inner healing.

Sometimes there was other things on the list, deliverance and other things like that. But inner healing was a practice of regressing a person in their imagination to their childhood traumas. Usually this was done by a practitioner who was said to have the word of knowledge.

And they say, when you were a child, your father beat you. And it's because of that, that you closed up and you haven't forgiven your father. And this lack of forgiveness is tweaking your Christian life in all respects.

And you need to go back and regress. And they actually, in some cases, encouraged visualizing yourself back then, and your father's coming with the baseball bat to hit you, and then picture Jesus coming in, and he's protecting you now. And he stops your father from doing that.

And that's supposed to be very reassuring. It's supposed to be very helpful. And maybe it is.

I don't know. The problem is that I'm not going into detail about this technique. I know it much more in detail than that.

I've read the books, and I've seen the people do it. They don't know necessarily that what they're doing is occultic. The techniques of inner healing and guided visualization come out of shamanism.

Native shamans have done this for centuries. It was introduced into the Western world by Carl Jung, an occultist, who, without any shame, said that he got his ideas from a spirit guide named Philemon, that he met with regularly. We call those demons, spirit guides.

He got his information from a demon, same as the shamans and witch doctors got the same practices. No one pretends that Carl Jung was a Christian, but Carl Jung influenced people who are Christians. One of those was a woman named Agnes Sanford, and she brought these practices into the charismatic movement.

She trained other people like John and Paula Sanford, Francis McNutt, other people who are around. Agnes Sanford's dead now, but her disciples are around. They write books, they practice, they teach seminars, and they practice this shamanistic practice.

Jesus never practiced it. Paul never did. It's not taught in the Bible anywhere.

In fact, it's contrary to Scripture. The Bible says not to practice occult things, and this is an occult practice. But if you tell some people who practice it that this is occult, and you shouldn't be... The Bible says you're not supposed to have any truck with the occult.

The answer I've always gotten every time is, but I've seen so many people helped this way. So many people are set free by this method. So what? People get cured of cancer, they go to psychic healers too in the Philippines.

That doesn't make it right. That's pragmatism. If I get the result I want, then the way I got it must be okay with God.

Or better yet, if I get the result that I think God wants, then God must approve of it. Who knows what God might have done in freeing people if they followed the biblical procedures instead of occult procedures. The end does not justify the means, and yet people say, my experience proves that this is the right thing.

No, experience can tell you only what happened, not what should have happened. The Bible tells you what should be done. I've occasionally met people who, when you're witnessing to them, they say, well, I tried Christianity once, but it just didn't work for me.

I'm glad it works for you. It didn't work for me. What is that? Well, that's the error of thinking that what my experience was determines whether Christianity is true or not.

Christianity is objectively true or false based on facts. My experience with it tells me nothing about whether it's true or not, really. I mean, I will say that Christianity has been confirmed to me by experience, but I don't base my belief in it on experience.

Some people haven't had the same experience I've had. Maybe it doesn't work for them in their opinion, but its truthfulness rests on something more solid than their experience of it. One other thing I need to get into, and I only have a very short time to bring this up.

I wish I had given myself more time. The fifth rival authority to Scripture in the lives of many, many believers is sentiment. Sentiment is an opinion based upon what one feels to be right.

It's not necessarily on the basis of reason. Certain things just unexplainably seem right. If something goes against your grain, it goes against your sentiments.

What you feel in your heart to be true is likely to be in the category of what we call your sentiments. Now, the Bible says your heart is deceitful above all things, and who can know it in Jeremiah 17, 9. And twice in the Proverbs we're told there's a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Just because your sentiments tell you that such and such a thing is right, your heart tells you so or whatever, your emotions tell you they're so, doesn't mean it's so.

You can be misled by this just like you can by any other of these things we're considering. There was a song, a hit song back in the late 70s called, or was it 80s? No, it was late 70s, Debbie Boone's song, You Light Up My Life. She actually sang it to the Lord, she said, but it was a secular song and she doesn't mention the Lord in it.

But there was a line in it that bothered many Christians. She said, it can't be wrong when it feels so right. Now, of course, if she's talking about the Lord and her experience with Jesus, I guess maybe there's nothing wrong with that.

However, the song was cast in the structure of a love song as if she was singing to a man. And it can't be wrong when it feels so right has somewhat moral connotations to it. Why would anyone say it can't be wrong unless someone thinks it's wrong? No one's going to say it can't be wrong unless someone's arguing that that is wrong.

And a relationship of man or woman, someone says that's wrong, usually is an immoral relationship. They said, but it feels right. Now, she's not talking about that.

She's talking about a relationship to Jesus, but most of the people who bought that record didn't know that. And that message is, if it feels so right, it just seems like it must be right, then it, of course, can't be wrong. What a wrong message that is.

If people have a spontaneous morality that they decide what's right and wrong based on whatever is currently feels right, and there's no objective source for morality, as in the scripture, then we're in a morass. But we're in trouble. We've got no anchor.

We're just adrift on our feelings. And we're going to feel one thing one day and another thing another day. It's a scary way to live.

There are people who say that, you know, how can you say that all these people who are in other religions are going to go to hell? They're sincere. It doesn't seem right that God would send them to hell. Well, I don't know if it seems right or not.

It depends on, I guess, what you're considering, but maybe it doesn't seem right. But if it doesn't seem right, it doesn't mean it isn't true. How many people have rejected the doctrine of hell altogether because it just doesn't feel right to them? It doesn't seem like it should be so.

How many people have rejected God's word because he commanded the Israelites to kill off the Canaanites? That doesn't seem right to me. It just doesn't seem right. Well, it may not seem right, but that doesn't mean it isn't right.

A lot of examples. There's people who argue for their particular doctrine of healing by saying, you know, God wouldn't want his children to be sick. God wouldn't want his people to be poor.

God wouldn't want his children to be stuck in an unhappy marriage. Well, I don't know. What does the Bible say about that? I don't feel like God should want people to be sick.

I don't feel like God should want people to stay in an unhappy marriage. But what does he actually say? It's not what seems right to me or what feels right to me that matters. It's what God has revealed.

And if someone goes by what they feel or what seems more than the Bible, they're in trouble. There's a lot of people who are just starting to feel like we shouldn't really condemn the homosexual lifestyle. These people are born that way.

I mean, gosh, put yourself in their shoes. But if you're born that way, would you like people condemning you? It doesn't seem right to put down the homosexuals. Well, frankly, I don't put down people who are struggling with homosexual feelings.

That's one thing. The Bible does condemn homosexual behavior, however, and that's condemned in scripture. I don't know that anyone is really born that way.

I have my doubts. But even if they were, that wouldn't excuse their behavior. I was born heterosexual.

There's a lot of things I can't do as a heterosexual, even though I was born that way. When I was single, I couldn't just go out and sleep with women just because I was born that way. And if I was born with homosexual things, I couldn't just go out and do homosexual things just because I was born that way.

Our sentiments, we're soft-hearted, and maybe that's a good thing to be sometimes, but we shouldn't be so soft-hearted that we can't accept the hard realities of what the Bible says about right and wrong. We had a girl come to our school once who had a child. She wouldn't discipline the child.

She was a terror. We confronted her and said, the Bible says discipline your child. She says, well, Jesus would never discipline a child.

I said, wait a minute, Jesus himself said in the book of Revelation, whom I love, I discipline. He would, but she had a sentimental idea of Jesus, gentle Jesus, meek and mild. He wouldn't ever hurt a fly, but the Bible says he would.

The Bible says he does discipline. And this woman was allowing her sentiments about Jesus to prevent her from doing what the Bible said. My father-in-law is a pilot and he was once flying in zero visibility in a cloud cover.

And he looked at his instruments and they said he was flying upside down. He didn't feel like he was flying upside down, but his instruments on his panel said he was flying upside down. I've heard more than one pilot tell a story similar to this, and he didn't

know what to do.

I didn't feel like it was upside down, but I had to correct if I was. And he went by the instruments because he was told to fly by the instruments because they're objective, not his feelings. So he did.

He corrected the plane according to what the instruments said, and it came out of the clouds. They were right. If he had gone by his feelings instead of what was objective, the instruments don't have any feelings, he probably would be dead.

And when we live our lives for God, we need to fly not by our feelings, but by the objective reality that God has given us. It can be trusted even when our feelings are against it. And to put any authority above the authority of the Word of God, whether it's human authority, human reasoning, human tradition, personal experience, or sentiment, is dangerous.

And you'll wreck your Christian life doing that. It's only when the Word of God is given the top priority and top authority in all matters of belief and practice, that we can live the way God has instructed us to live, and that he's designed us to live, and which is safe spiritually to live. Even though some other things may seem right, we need to go by the Word of God.

In the end, it will be shown why he was right and all other rival authorities were wrong. Well, I could go longer on each of these points.