

GNOSTICISM, CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER & OTHER CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

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Christians are being exhorted to put their minds on hold through meditation and take a step into the supernatural realm. Is it biblical to connect with the supernatural realm? In an interview with Emergent leader Rob Bell, founding pastor of Mars Hill in Grand Rapids, MI, he made the following comment: "Central to the Christian tradition, for thousands of years, have been disciplines of meditation, reflection, silence, and breathing. It was understood that to be a healthy person, to be fully connected with God, and fully centered you would spend significant parts of your day in silence—breathing, meditating—praying allowing the Spirit of God to transform you and touch you." So ordinary people spent significant parts of their day in silence, meditating?

Even if it were true, nowhere in the Bible are God's people encouraged to stop using their minds and to connect with the supernatural world. Believers are to worship God with their heart, strength, mind and soul. In an altered state of consciousness the mind is not engaged, it's blank!

For over two thousand years (not "thousands of years") Christians have followed a whole host of unbiblical practices that God regards evil. But that hasn't stopped untold numbers from participating. Example: Even though God forbids fortune telling (divination) countless people, including Christians, have visited mediums to "look into the future."

For more than five thousand years meditation has been practiced by Eastern religions and has become mainstream in Western culture. It is true, as Bell says, that Christians have been practicing meditation for centuries. Christian meditation came about when monks began reading the Bible slowly. As they read, they would ponder the deeper meaning of each verse. This is called "divine reading" or *lectio divina*. As a result of their Scripture meditation the monks found themselves spontaneously praying. Their prayer would move them to a wordless focus on God. They called this "wordless love for God" contemplation. More on contemplative prayer in a moment.

Lacking a biblical worldview and an understanding of Scripture is the main reason Christians are dipping into the forbidden waters of Eastern meditation to "know the unknowable."

Contemporary Christianity is following "every wind of doctrine." Believers are listening to what their "itching ears want to hear." Regrettably, their itching ears are tuned to neo-gnostic heresy. One of the obstacles the Apostles faced were false teachers, the Gnostics being the most prevalent of the bunch. Gnosticism was condemned as a heresy in the first century church. Here's the crux of Gnosticism:

"Christian Gnosticism is the belief that one must have a "gnosis" (from Greek "Gnosko," to know) or inner knowledge which is mystical knowledge obtained only after one has been properly initiated. Only a few can possess this mystical knowledge, limiting the number of those "in the know". ... Gnosticism today seems to provide a lot of the form and color for the New Age portrait of Jesus where Jesus is seen as the illumined Illuminator: one who serves as a cosmic catalyst for others' awakening. As such it is as false and heretical as the Gnosticism of the first century and needs to be roundly condemned for the heresy that it is."[\[1\]](#)

Most of us think it's cool to have inside information. Makes one feel important. Even special. Who wouldn't want to cultivate a special experience with God that no one else has?

Sadly, Christians involve themselves in New Age practices like yoga meditation so they'll "be in the know."

You say, "My church isn't into any of that New Age stuff." No, but you'll read about the New Age stuff in books purchased in your local or online Christian bookstores. You'll also see an abundance of false teaching on Christian blogs all over the Internet.

Or you'll hear name it and claim it prosperity preachers on TV acting as if the Almighty is actually whispering into their ear as they impart their false teaching to millions of viewers.

You can't even escape Gnostic heresy in modern Christian music. You could be singing it in church! Listen to the lyrics of so-called worship songs and be amazed! And be sickened.

Last, but not least, the Oprah Winfrey Show is rife with Gnosticism. Those who tune into Oprah's program (a number of gullible Christians do) will hear her guests share their esoteric mystical experiences.

It's all about experience. "The Gnostics thought that one must directly experience the spirit to learn the truth, this being apart from the word. Stepping over into the supernatural, experience becomes the teacher and gives them real knowledge. What was and is now being taught is spirit to spirit communication that is completely outside the Biblical revelation given by the apostles."[\[2\]](#)

This fits liberal "Christianity" to a tee. The Word of God is out of date so experience becomes the teacher. In his essay "What are we talking about?" DA Carson points out that some leaders in the Emergent Church movement claim "changing times demand that fresh questions be asked of Scripture, and then fresh answers will be heard. What was an appropriate use of Scripture under modernism is no longer an appropriate use of Scripture under postmodernism." This is a classic case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater! But I digress.

The "knower" believes that the masses are not in possession of spiritual knowledge, and only the truly "enlightened" can experience God. Thus the reintroduction of contemplative, aka centering, prayer into the Church.

How is centering prayer different from biblical prayer? Centering prayer is a meditative practice where the focus is on having a mystical experience with God. Individuals choose a sacred word or symbol (such as God, Jesus, Father) and repeat it over and over during the twenty-minute exercise. Sitting comfortably in a meditative posture, with back straight and eyes closed, the sacred word is introduced as the symbol of consent to God's presence within. Should outside thoughts emerge in your mind, you must return "ever-so-gently" to your sacred word. At the end of your prayer time you're to remain in silence with eyes closed for a few minutes.

Sounds like a good way to relax, doesn't it? Trouble is, contemplative prayer has no Scriptural support whatsoever. Moreover, it's the exact opposite of how the Bible instructs believers to pray. Read the prayer of Jesus in Luke 11:1-4 below.[\[3\]](#)

"In that day you will no longer ask me anything," said Jesus to the apostles. "I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete" (John 16:23-24).

Paul says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6, NLT).; "Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured" (Col. 4:12).

Biblical prayer advocates engaging your mind, even wrestling in your mind, as did Epaphras, not emptying your mind! Yet Pastor Rob Bell encourages Zachary Lind to do just that. Following is a snip of an interview Lind did with Bell. (For clarity I edited out phrases like "like," "you know" and "I mean."):

Interviewer Lind: ... the book you recommended to me a few weeks ago [by] Richard Rohrr...talked about contemplative prayer ... [I read] half of the book and still don't really know what his definition of that is. But he starts getting into it. And he says ... you have to at least sit ... past 20 minutes.

Bell: Yeah, yes.

Lind: It takes a certain amount of time before your sort of selfish things get aired out. Like you might be all about you for 20 minutes, but then after that it's like, you're kind of a blank slate. You know...

Bell: Uh-huh.

Lind: You're kind of ready to intake anything. He talks a lot in that book about a beginners mind and ... being kind of like a child and coming up to Jesus, and really just ready to be written on. And ... maybe I'm wrong but I kind of feel like from what I hear ... there's a lot of that going on ...

Bell: Yeah, well you have to essentially discipline your life around forming the depths, and that takes just phenomenal discipline that I don't even pretend to have.^[4]

At this point the conversation drifts away from contemplative prayer. Bell gave no warning with regard to the dangers of meditation even though Lind admits that he's ready to take anything, "Ready to be written on." Written on by whom? The Bible warns of deceiving spirits! "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved" (2 Thess. 2:9-10).

After listening to the interview what you will come away with is that Rob Bell is leading Christians into dangerous Eastern religious beliefs and rituals. Convinced they're having an esoteric experience with "God," many Christians are actually embracing Hinduism.

Biblical prayer is comprehensible communication with God. Prayer is not an esoteric, yoga meditation. Granted, many contemplatives are ignorant of the true nature of meditation—but such ignorance is inexcusable and indefensible! The truth about the dangers of meditation is readily available in books and on the Internet. Contemplative spirituality, like Gnosticism, promotes pursuing a magical mystical experience with "God."

Overlooked are passages such as Joshua 1:8: "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." This command is from God! He wants His people to meditate on Scripture; He doesn't want them emptying their minds. Leaders in the Emergent movement have succeeded in persuading those who practice centering prayer to put aside God's Word and focus on a blank wall!

Will practicing Eastern mysticism really help to open you up to a greater spiritual experience with God, or just the opposite? Since God opposes mysticism in any form, perhaps contemplatives are really experiencing visits from demonic spirits. Meditate on that!

In 1 Cor. 2:15-18 Paul informs us that we have "the mind of Christ." In Romans 12:2 he reminds us that God's people are not to kowtow to this world, "but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

In the words of William Hendrickson, "Even if we or a holy angel must be the object of God's righteous curse, were any of us to preach a gospel contrary to the one we humans previously preached to you, then all the more divine wrath must be poured out on those self-appointed nobodies who are now making themselves guilty of this crime."

Footnotes:

- 1, What is Christian Gnosticism? - [Got Questions website](#)
- 2, The Gnostic Jesus, a Gnostic Christianity - [Let Us Reason website](#)
- 3, [Luke 11:1-4 - Bible Gateway website](#)
- 4, [Interview With Rob Bell - Finding Rhythm website](#)