

Contending For The Faith

April 16, 2020 Lesson #13 Desiring A Spiritual Experience: Spiritual Formation Part II

Many Christians chase feelings and experiences, a mystical experience, rather than an intimate relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ. The emphasis on experience actually keeps them from knowing God who is a being and not a feeling or experience.

Common beliefs between Contemplative Spirituality and Biblical Christianity:

1. Both affirm there is more to the human being than just material and physical.
2. The human being has a spirit.
3. There are other spirit beings that can interact with the world and with people.
4. Human beings need to develop spiritually or they will miss out on the most important things in life.

Similarities end abruptly when discussing how and in what direction one should develop spiritually.

Contemplative Spirituality/Mysticism [CSM] form of meditation in an altered state of consciousness known as Contemplative/Centering Prayer (CCP); i.e. transcendental meditation lightly sprayed with Christian terminology.

A. Centering Prayer - a silent initial step to receive a contemplative prayer

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. [Jesus, Mother, Father or Peace, etc.]
2. Sit comfortably; close eyes; silently introduce the sacred word. Repeat it silently in your mind for a set amount of time > 20 minutes until your heart seems to repeat the word itself.
3. If you become aware of thoughts, gently and silently return to your sacred word.

Deception Alert: Although this might sound like an innocent exercise, it has no Scriptural support. Prayer in Scripture: Phil. 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;...

➤ Biblical prayer is portrayed as comprehensible communication with God.

It is not an esoteric, mystical meditation meant to clear the mind of thought.

A centering prayer is more like mystical chanting than true communication with God.

4. This prayer is followed by a period of opening your mind, heart and soul to the influence of God > the contemplative prayer.

B. Contemplative prayer = The inner voice: God is calling you.

Mysticism: the belief that knowledge of God, spiritual truth and ultimate reality can be gained through subjective experience.

Contemplative Prayer = The sacred art of learning to comprehend YOUR OWN THOUGHTS as the voice of God.

A mystical prayer practice that leads one into the "silence," but it actually leads away from God.

1. Begins with centering prayer. Completely empty your mind > to just "be"

Quote: A clear, uncluttered mind is always the one that will take you to your highest heights."

2. Sit still; listen for direct guidance from God; feel His presence

Deepak Chopra: "To make the right choices in life, you must get in touch with your soul. To do this, you must experience solitude, which most people are afraid of, because in the silence, you hear the truth and know the solutions."

Brennan Manning: author of *The Signature of Jesus*: "The first step in faith is to stop thinking about God in prayer...Contemplative spirituality tends to emphasize the need for a change in consciousness...we must come to see reality differently...Choose a single, sacred word...repeat the sacred word inwardly, slowly and often...Enter into the great silence of God. Alone in that silence, the noise within will subside and the Voice of Love will be heard.

John Mains: *Word Into Silence* > "The silence is there within us. What we have to do is to enter into it...to become the silence...Silence is the language of the spirit."

John Main, in his book *Moment of Christ*, mentions that life is a journey to know and accept ourselves. In order to be successful in our pilgrimage, we need to contact God within us and so discover that we are essentially spiritual beings rooted in God. In this inward journey, stillness of body and mind is necessary because contemplative prayer is not thinking about God, but *being* in the presence of the divine. John Main states that with time, we realize that the presence of the divine within us is one of love that is wooing us to love in return. When we learn to be still and let God touch us, we will grow in this loving relationship.

Ray Yungen: (*A Time Of Departing*, p. 150) The mantra is the key to entering the non-thinking mode. "When a word or phrase is repeated over and over, after just a few repetitions, those words lose their meaning and become just sounds. ... if this repeating of words were continued, normal thought processes could be blocked, making it possible to enter an altered state of consciousness because of hypnotic effect that begins to take place. It really makes no difference whether the words are 'You are my God' or 'I am calm,' the results are the same." Yungen: "*Unknown to most people, a blank mind in a meditative state is all that is necessary for contact with a spirit guide.*" "Those who lack discernment are at great risk."

3. It focuses on a mystical experience with God; a greater spiritual experience

❖ Emptying your mind is contrary to active, conscious transformation.

1. Encourages the pursuit of a mystical experience with God.

Marianne Williamson "It is our own thoughts that hold the key to miraculous transformation."

Bible: Transformed by the renewing of my mind [Rom. 12:2]

Experiential Faith: Warren Smith: "People are turned off by the idea of reading the Word of God and finding out what God would say to them. They desire having a touchy-feely experience. This teaching is being advocated in the Church, that it's kind of hip to skirt around the Bible a little bit and instead have some spiritual experiences.

Throughout these churches, people are having spiritual experiences that will bring in hopefully from the Devil's standpoint "new revelation" which will end up providing a new worldview.

The way they are seeking new revelation is mainly through contemplative prayer.

It's a code really for MEDITATION."

This voice from the Enemy is doing a fairly good job. The bottom line teaching says we are all connected. We are all one. We are all God.

Matthieu Ricard: "The ultimate reason for meditating is to transform ourselves in order to be better able to transform the world."

"This embraces the mysticism of Roman Catholicism; Ecumenical philosophy; Unite people from all faiths. We are to work together to bring in a new world of peace and harmony. It complements New Age thinking; a utopian idea of many world religions awaiting a religious leader who brings world domination."

If we don't subscribe to this belief, we could hinder world peace, and would have to be dealt with in the future.

UNBIBLICAL ORIGINS of Contemplative Prayer

- Despite assertions the spiritual disciplines are "God-ordained," they are in fact derived from the practices of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox mystics.
- This practice is based in occult and eastern metaphysical practices. Avoid It!
- It is no different than meditative exercises used in Eastern religions & New Age cults.
- It exalts "transcendental" experiences that raises the person from the earthly experiences into a supposedly higher "spiritual" stand.
- Practitioners believe that one must clear the mind of outside concerns so God's voice may more easily be heard and that one may be united with the "divine spark" within.
- Most vocal supporters embrace an open spirituality among adherents from all religions. This promotes the idea > Salvation is gained by many paths.

Deception Alert: John 14:6 Jesus said He is the Way, the Truth & the Life.

Key Point: It is "the opening of mind and heart to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words and emotions. It is the non-thinking emptying of the mind that seeks to find God in a way that is "closer than consciousness itself."

Deception Alert: Mysticism does not rely upon truth or fact. It is purely subjective.

Danger: If I am doing nothing with my mind but emptying it in an attempt to reach God, I am on dangerous unbiblical ground.

Truth: The Bible instructs us to pray with our minds.

I Cor. 14:15 I will pray with the spirit, I will pray with the mind also;

I Tim. 4:13 Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

- ❖ Trusting in experiential knowledge over God's Word leads to deception!
- ❖ Emphasis on experiential knowledge erodes the authority of the Scripture.

Key Point: Contemplative prayer is NOT Biblical prayer because mystical "spirituality" downplays the role of FAITH in the Scriptures.

- Faith that is based on mysticism is subjective and does not rely upon the absolute truths of God.
- Trusting in feelings and experiences is not Biblical.
We are commanded to "walk by faith, not by sight." [II Cor. 5:7]

➤ Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. [Rom. 10:17]

II Tim. 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Truth: God does not add additional teaching or truth to His Word through mystical experiences. Our faith and what we know about God is based on FACT.

Commonly Misused Verses To Support Centering & Contemplative Prayer

I. Psalm 46:10 "Be Still (Cease striving) and know that I am God."

Notes from Pastor Larry DeBruyn: This verse is not about mental emptiness or physical stillness

1. That would contradict what the Psalms already teach us about prayer and meditation.
2. We are to meditate actively and use our minds; not empty nothingness and waiting.
3. "The verb 'Be still' (Hebrew, *raph*) is used 46 times in the Old Testament with meanings describing laziness to ordering relaxation.
4. In no Biblical usage or context does the Hebrew verb enjoin God's people to meditate or contemplate. Rather, believers are to "rest and trust in God."
5. The context of this verse is one of war and conflict.
 - a. Verses 1-3 describe how God is our refuge or shelter when everything around seems to be falling apart.
 - b. Verses 4-7 God is described as our river of joy.
 - c. Verses 7 & 11 describe God as a stronghold, high tower & fortress.
 - d. Verses 8-11 - The scene is on the fields surrounding Jerusalem where the 185,000 Assyrian soldiers lay dead after The Angel of The Lord had defeated them.
 - e. "Be still" in this context literally means > "Take your hands off! Relax!"

Many times we need to take our hands off and allow God to work in His own time and way.

Warren Wiersbe: If we seize His promises by faith with both hands, we won't be able to meddle!

II. Ps. 62:1 Truly my soul silently waits for God; From Him comes my salvation.

Understood in context, this verse offers a picture of submitting oneself to the Lord, trusting in and waiting patiently for Him to act according to His will.

[4 "L's" while waiting > Listen to Him, Look To & For Him, Live For and Long For: Adrian Rogers]

"Only to God did [David] look with complete calmness." [Bible Knowledge Commentary]

Pastor DeBruyn: "Psalm 62 is not a call to unexpressed contemplation, but rather a song of expressed confidence.... The psalmist is not providing an example for retreating into silence. Rather he is telling fellow believers to go to God."

Warren Wiersbe: "To wait in silence before the Lord is not idleness or inactivity.

It is calm worship and faith, resting in His greatness and submitted to His will.

It is preparation for the time when God gives the orders to act."

III. Psalm 63:6 "When I remember Thee on my bed, I meditate on Thee in the night watches."

Recall what God has done in the past and apply it to the present circumstance.

Remember: Our God is I AM, not I was.

III. Psalm 119:15,23,27,48,97 "I will meditate on Thy precepts, and regard Thy ways...
²³Thy servant meditates on Thy statutes... ²⁷So I will meditate on Thy wonders. ⁴⁸And I will meditate on Thy statutes... ⁹⁷O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day."

Note: Meditating means loving the Lord by pondering His Word and allowing its truths to penetrate our hearts.

Biblical prayer is our communication with God. As the Lord speaks to us through His Word, we speak to Him in prayer. Such prayers are rational, intelligent and flow from our minds.

Paul said in I Cor. 14:15 that he would pray with his spirit **and** with his mind also > not either/or.

John 4:24 We make use of our God-given intellect as we worship Him in spirit and truth. I

Thess. 5:17 We are to pray without ceasing.

Phil. 4:6 We are to make our requests known to God.

In prayer we praise God for His known attributes.

I John 1:9 In prayer we confess specific sins to restore fellowship.

Biblical prayer is not what spiritual formation advocates mean by contemplative prayer.

Invented Practices Made Binding Upon Christians

Spiritual disciplines are not commanded in Scripture. To impose practices not commanded in Scripture as necessary for spiritual maturity is to undermine and deny the sufficiency of Scripture. [II Tim. 3:16-17].

Phil. 1:6 He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Phil. 2:13 For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

In spite of the absence of an explicit command in Scripture to practice these disciplines, leaders continue to assert their necessity:

DANGERS of Contemplative Prayer

Richard Foster states: God will always speak in a positive manner.

- That is a gross over-generalization.

Consider: To characterize the Lord's voice as only one of drawing and encouragement would mean we would need to ignore huge portions of the Word of God.

- The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and judgment. [John 16:8]
- God pronounces warnings and judgments throughout Scripture.
- Jesus pronounced woes of judgment on the Pharisees who saw themselves as the spiritual leaders of Israel. [Matt. 23:13-16]
- Jesus called Peter "Satan" at one point and told him to get behind Him, for Peter was a stumbling block to Him. [Matt. 16:23]

Richard Foster: "You can always tell the voice of Satan because it is foreboding and dark."

Pastor Larry DeBruyn's comments about Foster's comments in his DVD, *Be Still*:

Assuming God speaks Soul to soul today, what if Foster's paradigm for determining "the voice" were reversed; that the negative voice is God's, and the positive is Satan's? Garden of Eden?

God warned Adam and Eve that for disobedience to God, "you shall surely die" [Gen. 2:17]. Satan reassuringly told Eve, "You surely shall not die!" [Gen. 3:4].

The point is: When engaging in meditative spirituality, the contemplator can never be certain who will speak, and as a consequence, the experience can become the spawning ground for myriads of flashy ideas based solely upon, "he heard this," or "she heard that."

At that juncture, Christians and the church will have turned aside "to myths" [II Tim. 4:4].

Truth: Deception is rampant! Unbiblical, mystical practices may offer people an actual spiritual experience, BUT not one that originates from the true and living God.

To ignore the boundaries of Scripture is to open oneself up to danger.

These writers have presented and promoted the contemplative view to the extent that many now see it as the only way to "go deeper" in the Christian life. They prompt people to plunge into contemplative practice. Their message leads people to experience the "lights" and the "inner adviser!"

Bob DeWaay contends: The Bible nowhere describes an inward journey to explore the realm of the spirit. God chose to reveal the truth about spiritual reality through His ordained, Spirit-inspired, Biblical writers. We do not see any of the apostles, prophets or disciples ever using contemplative prayer to connect with God.

On the contrary all sorcery and divination were fully condemned [I Samuel 15:10].

The Jews were led into captivity and destroyed for practicing these evils.

[II Kings 17:17; Jeremiah 14:14; Malachi 3:5].

Deception Alert: Joshua 1:8 exhorts you to meditate. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Note: Focus of meditation > Word of God

Christians Under The Influence of Another Spirit: Warren Smith [*Reinventing Jesus Christ*]

II Cor. 11:4 Paul went to great lengths to warn the Corinthians not to be deceived by:

- a "Jesus" that wasn't Jesus Christ the Son of God,
- a spirit that wasn't the Holy Spirit
- a gospel that was not the true Biblical Gospel

The New Age Gospel spirit says: It is a time for "breakthroughs" and for the fulfillment of our "destiny"; that there is something "new" and exciting in the wind. This teaching claims that we are in the midst of a great "transition" that will result in a "paradigm shift," and that through "new revelation" and "personal experience," God is in the process of taking the church to a "new dimension" and to a whole "new level." Many Christian leaders are so sure that what they are hearing and experiencing is from God, they are rarely testing the spirits, or even considering the possibility that they are being deceived.

The first century Bereans tested their leaders and tested their teachings as they "searched the Scriptures daily" to see "whether those things were so" [Acts 17:11]. Apostles, prophets, pastors, and teachers were always subject to God's holy Word.

Remember: "New revelation" never nullified nor superseded Scripture.

The Bereans were not impressed by supernatural power and spiritual experiences that had not been tested by the Word of God.

They did not depend on signs and wonders and miracles.

They depended on the authority and reliability and trustworthiness of Scripture:

Paul taught that if he or anyone else preached any other gospel--"new revelation" or otherwise--that person should be completely disregarded and accursed. [Galatians 1:8].

The Bible repeatedly warns that we should not allow ourselves to be influenced or intimidated by teachings that originate not from God but from the spirit world and from the hearts of men.

Mark 7:7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

MacArthur: Contemplative prayer is invading churches like a virus in which submicroscopic pathogens *contaminate the body many hours or days before the victim is aware of its presence.* People are being encouraged to reach a state of no-thinking - a blank mind which leads one to enter an altered state of consciousness that opens a person up to demonic influence.

MacArthur: "Mysticism is encroaching upon the church. This new wave says we'll never reach the world without signs and wonders. They offer courses in seminary on miracles, signs and wonders. They teach people how to get into the other dimension, how to get into the other paradigm - think mystically. It's nothing but sheer imagination at best; and at worst, you are courting demons, you're courting demons."

Question: Why do some pursue the paranormal, supernatural, mystical, and intuitive?

They make things happen in the mind that aren't happening, and they open themselves to things that do happen from demonic sources. It's a frightening thing to think about!

MacArthur: "Somewhere in their theology they have bought into the fact that it's not enough to have Christ. So they're into all these experience with angels and so forth.

It's not great faith, it's great distrust in the sufficiency of Christ and the sufficiency of His Word. The environment of human imagination is dangerous enough; but when it gets tangled up with the demonic forces of the other world, it's even more frightening.

No, there's no higher plane. There is no surpassing experience. Christ is all and all. These people do this, it says, because they delight in humility, and all it does is puff up their fleshly mind. Isn't that a tragic diagnosis? But that's a fact. Christ is not enough."

John MacArthur: Contemplative prayer is mysticism. = a deeper, higher religious experience based on personal intuition. The assumption is that spiritual truth is somewhere inside of you and that is not true. Spiritual truth is outside of you, it is external to you. It is in a book, outside of you. It is not in you. You can contemplate yourself all you want, you can go sit on a rock in the middle of nowhere and think and you will find in you no source of divine revelation

whatsoever because divine revelation is external to you, it's external to every human being; it's in a book that God wrote. When you put the book down and start looking into your own brain, all you're going to do is be led down a black hole.

Question: Is Jesus Christ sufficient for every need, spiritually speaking, in time and eternity?

I Cor. 1:30-31 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

II Cor. 12:9 "My grace" - that is the grace of God in Christ - "is sufficient for you."

Eph. 1:3 "We have in Christ been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus."

Heb. 10:14 "By one offering He has perfected forever them that are His, or sanctified forever them that are His."

"Is anybody debating that?" YES! We live in a time, in a day when there is great doubt cast upon the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, when Jesus Christ appears to be something you add to what you already have, or something you get in order to add to.

The Colossians were being intimidated by people who were telling them that Christ was not sufficient, Christ was not adequate, Christ was not enough. There's a higher, there is an ascending, a surpassing, a paranormal; a supernatural, a higher, deeper, spiritual knowledge. There is a mystical piety. There is a plane of humility connected with aeons and angels and demigods and emanations, and we need to ascend to that level."

- Needed to have rationalism: depend on your own reason and thoughts
 - Eph. 4:17-18 = in blindness, darkness, ignorance, no truth
- Christ + intellectualism; Christ + philosophy; Christ + ceremonies, laws, ritual, rules
- Christ + mystical experiences and encounters with angels

Col. 2:10 "You are complete in Him."

All joy, peace, meaning, value, purpose, hope, fulfillment in life now and forever is bound up in Christ.

Col. 2:18 [NASB] NASB = "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize" - take away your reward - "by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom all the body by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered and knit together increases with the increase of God."

Don't let anyone intimidate you with mysticism, telling you "Christ is not enough.

You need Christ + some other experience."

Father, how thankful we are for the sufficiency of Christ, that in all the complexity of the world, in all the din of voices and words, all the analyses and solutions notwithstanding, we are complete in Christ. He is all and all. How we thank Thee. Help us to be content with Him, and discontent until, even as Paul said, we are fully formed into His image.

Help us to seek Him, to know Him, to love Him, to be like Him. Jesus is ALL I need.