

Christ Confronts the New Age

Rich Nathan

March 13-14, 1999

Christ Confronts the Culture Series

Deuteronomy 18:9-13

Richard Mouw, who is the President of Fuller Theological Seminary, a Christian seminary out in Southern California, tells a story of how he pulled up in back of a car and the driver had one of those playboy bunny symbols hanging from the mirror. Richard Mouw was curious. What kind of guy puts one of those things in his car? I don't know if you have ever felt that way, but you just get curious – who is this guy? And so he decided to pull around the car. He sped up and got to the side of the car to look in to see what this driver, who so obviously advertised his macho status, looked like. When he looked in, he said he was shocked to see that underneath the playboy bunny was a statue of the Virgin Mary. He said to himself, "I can't think of two more different symbols than the Playboy Bunny and the Virgin Mary. Talk about representing two different approaches to femininity." What was this guy thinking? How did he hold these two things together?

And then he went on to talk about a time when he was on a radio show debating with a very liberal Christian professor and they were debating the trustworthiness of the Bible. Mouw, of course, was arguing that the Bible was, indeed, trustworthy based on historical records and archaeology and internal consistency, fulfilled prophecies, etc. Mouw was arguing for the trustworthiness of the Bible and the fact that Christ literally did raise from the dead. The other professor was arguing against all of that. He said that it was a call in show, and this girl named Heather called in and said, "I am into Wiccan Witchcraft. I have been a practitioner of it for years, but I totally agree with the guy from Fuller that Christ was raised from the dead. I believe in the resurrection of Christ."

Now, Richard Mouw said that he was totally tongue-tied when he heard these comments. He didn't know what to say or how to react. He didn't know whether to say to this practitioner of witchcraft, "Thank you for your support" or "How can you say that?"

Well, you know, as we survey the American religious landscape right now, there are literally millions and millions of people like the guy who has the Playboy Bunny and the Virgin Mary in their car, or like Heather who dabbles in Wiccan witchcraft but also believes in the resurrection of Christ. The Wall Street Journal recently ran a piece called "The Age of Divine Disunity: Faith Now Springs from a Hodgepodge of Beliefs." This is how the article begins:

"I am a Mennonite-Unitarian Universalists, who practices Zen Meditation," says Ralph Imhoff, 57, a retired educator from Chandler, Arizona.

'I call myself a Christian Buddhist,' says Maitreya Badami, who works in a California Public Defenders' office.

If America has always been a melting pot, these days its religious practices have become a spiritual hash."

Churches that use both Eastern and Western scriptures are growing; one example is the Unity Church. Fifteen years ago, there were 400 Unity Churches, and now there are

a thousand catering to people who “don’t feel comfortable using one particular label for a Higher Being.” There is an Episcopalian Church in San Francisco called St. Gregory of Nyssan, where the two senior ministers have created a service that includes the worship of Jesus Christ and the ringing of Buddhist symbols. This church was built to the two ministers specifications four years ago. The Wall Street Journal reports, “St. Gregory’s has an interior decorated to Eastern Orthodox icons, a Shinto shrine and Tibetan gongs. The ministers wear tie-dyed African vestments. The congregation sings the Shema, which is an ancient Jewish prayer. People dance forward to partake of the Eucharist, which is open to believers in every religion, not just Christians. And the Episcopalian priests and the congregations invoke many different deities, not just Jesus, because as the pastor says, “In the end, they are all the same.”

This is not just happening in Christian circles. There is a rabbi out in LA that does a Sabbath service at the Zen Buddhist Center of LA. The congregation meditates for a half an hour and then the rabbi does Hebrew prayers over the bread and wine.

While there is no one denomination or one organization that covers the bewildering array of beliefs and syntheses that have become known as the New Age Movement, it is absolutely clear that New Age spirituality and New Age concepts have gone from the fringe of American society in the early 80’s to mainstream viewpoint as we enter the next millennium. More people are interested in spirituality, but the spirituality that they are seeking is not biblical spirituality or Christian spirituality. It is spirituality with a distinctively Eastern religious flavor. There are now over 5000 New Age bookstores in the United States.

If one looks at alternative health therapies, many of them are rooted in Eastern religious practices of balancing energy forces in the body, which has become a multi-billion dollar industry. Aroma therapy sales alone are estimated at over a half a billion, dollars and it is growing at 30% a year. Even the Avon catalog features an aromatherapy calming gel that “helps to restore inner peace and harmony.”

The National Institute of Health has begun significant funding of alternative medicines which combines, very directly, Eastern religious practices like Tai Chi and transcendental meditation. If you look at best-selling books in the last five years, you will see books like *The Celestine Prophecy*, which has a distinctively anti-biblical message, or *Conversations with God*, or the writings of Depak Chopra, who has sold over 10 million copies of his books and whose seminars are massively attended by business consultants. Much of his teaching and writing is traditional Eastern religious thoughts flavored with very clear attacks on Christianity.

Thousands of people in the US report near death experiences, which were popularized through TV and various books of testimonies. These people report that during an operation they perceive that they have left their bodies. Often they see their bodies below them as if they were watching from a vantage point near the ceiling. They report that they are free from pain and they watch a doctor’s frantic efforts to try to save them. Often they say that they are taken through a dark space or a tunnel, through which they move rapidly toward this source of light. They will often hear whooshing noises, music, or humming. Many of the people say they are guided toward the source of light by some spirit, and they emerge in this brilliantly lit other worldly environment, met by spirits who radiate love, joy and acceptance.

Now there are naturalistic explanations for some near death experiences and for some out of body experiences. 10% of Americans claim to have had an out of body experience – things that used to be called astro-projections. 14% of Americans claim to have seen a UFO, with thousands and thousands of documented cases of people who claim to have seen UFOs and hundreds of people who claim to have been abducted and who have actually seen aliens.

These UFO reports, as well as out of body and near death experiences are widely reported in the media. Oprah Winfrey, on a number of occasions, has had New Age practitioners on her show demonstrating channeling for an audience of millions. One woman, who claimed she was a vehicle for a spirit named Seth, was on the Oprah Winfrey show several years ago. On the show she got in touch with this spirit. Her face contorted, and she began speaking with a masculine voice. The voice had a very odd accent.

Doctors are beginning to provide meditation for folks who are stressed or who have high blood pressure—guided imagery to fight cancer. Many of the alternative healing techniques have gained wide currency in nursing schools. Doris Krieger, who was on the faculty of NY University, developed a healing technique known as therapeutic touch, which is taught in many mainline nursing schools. One of the practitioners of therapeutic touch at San Francisco State University School of Nursing said that “it is a form of psychic healing, a channeling of super conscious energy that is the source and intelligence center of all of life.”

I could go on and on speaking with you about all the various manifestations of some kind of New Age belief or practice, whether we are looking at yoga being taught as a required part of a high school gym class, or meditation being a component of a corporation’s wellness program, or near death experiences shaping the American public’s understanding of what happens when a person dies. What I am going to attempt to do today is show you how much of the current openness to spirituality in the US and much of the Western world has a distinctively non-biblical, indeed, anti-Christian flavor to it, and it results in leading people precisely away from Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. As I wrap up this series that I have called Christ Confronts the Culture, this week I want to deal with the issue of spirituality and the confrontation of Christ with dominant forms of spirituality in our culture that plainly contradict the scriptures and actually lead people to great spiritual and physical danger. I am calling today’s talk Christ Confronts the New Age. Let’s pray.

If you have a Bible turn with me to Deuteronomy 18 and we will take a look at certain practices that are forbidden to the people of God. Here is what God told Moses to tell the people.

When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in a fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord and because of these detestable practices, the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God.

Now, if you look back at the ancient world, what you will find is that there was a tremendous involvement of the world in magic and spiritism and contact with the dead.

And we read a list of the sorts of things that the children of Israel should not be involved in including in verse 10, "Let no one be found who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire." In the ancient world the sacrifice of human beings was widely practiced as offerings to the gods, and a common feature of Satanism and witchcraft includes blood letting from a human being and occasionally human sacrifice. And this was not only seen in the ancient Near East to gods like Molech, but you see it in Aztec cultures and Mayan cultures and various African tribal religions. It is a part of certain kinds of Hinduism. Human sacrifice has regularly been practiced outside of biblical religion and it is becoming a feature in satanic ritual abuse.

The Lord goes on and condemns divination. Divination is basically the attempt to gain secret knowledge apart from the senses and apart from God. To know the future, to know the sex of one's baby, to know what is going to happen in your business.

And God condemns sorcery, which could be translated "magic." It is an attempt to influence people and events by supernatural means – whether we are talking about black magic, which is an attempt to produce evil results through curses and spells or the destruction of a model of the enemy or white magic, which is using spiritual power for a good end – to get a more abundant harvest, to get a better business.

Deuteronomy goes on and talks about interpreting omens. There was a tremendous interest in the ancient world in trying to figure out the future by observing some sign – by interpreting an eclipse or a rainbow or the flight of birds.

And the one last thing that is forbidden is consulting a medium or spiritist. Mediums were people who were used to communicate; they were mediators who were used to get a person in touch with the other world – the other world includes the world of the dead. So mediums would be consulted to get in touch with a widow's dead husband, or a man's dead mother. Mediums would often be used with the spiritual world. They would be the rough equivalent of spirit guides today or New Age channelers. If you read other lists in the Bible astrology, the reading of horoscopes, is also forbidden.

So we have this lists of activities where the Lord tells the children of Israel, his people, "You stay away from these things. This is not for my children. You don't go seeking spiritual experiences apart from me. You don't read horoscopes. Don't cast spells. Don't seek to receive healing from someone supernaturally apart from Jesus Christ and apart from the Holy Spirit. Don't let your curiosity draw you into forbidden practices."

Of course, in the Bible we have a record of how the children of Israel regularly disobeyed God. One of the kings of Israel sacrificed his son. The last king of Israel, Hoshea, in 2 Kings 17, was heavily involved in witchcraft. In the book of Acts, we see a number of folks encountered by Christians who were involved in magic or in fortune telling or in telling the future or in ESP or clairvoyance. And just to wrap up this point, I would simply note that the practice of magic and witchcraft and spiritism and channeling – many of the things that are many of the aspects of New Age religion will be a major feature of worldwide religion and worldwide spirituality in the last days before the Lord returns. If you read Revelation 9:21 it tells us that people are going to be involved in the last day in magic arts and the practice of magic, and anti-Christ, in particular, will lead people into various occult practices. The Bible regularly tells us that alongside of true spiritual experiences, there are spiritual counterfeits, and I have listed these on the overhead.

Counterfeit Christs – Mt. 24:5
Counterfeit Prophets – Deut. 13:1-4
Counterfeit Miracles – Ex. 7:8-13
Counterfeit Angels – 2 Cor. 11:14
Counterfeit Gods – Gal. 4:8
Counterfeit Good Works – Mt. 7:15-23
Counterfeit Godliness – 2 Tim. 3:5
Counterfeit Converts – 1 John 2:19
Counterfeit Spirits – 1 John 4:1-3
Counterfeit Doctrine – 1 Tim. 4:1-3
Counterfeit Gospels – Gal. 1:6-10

Because there are so many counterfeits, God's people need discernment to distinguish true from false. Now, again, the New Age is simply an umbrella description that embraces everything from astrology to holistic health associations to people who have near death or out of body experiences to folks interested in UFOs to practitioners of various kinds of meditation and yoga to aroma therapists to people involved in various kinds of witchcraft or pagan rituals or Wiccan witchcraft. But let me give you some of the common elements and beliefs. Underneath much of what you are seeing and the kind of consciousness or new spirituality, let me list a few of the common denominators.

The first element is the desire to create your own reality. One of the most basic, philosophical elements behind all of what you are seeing is what theologians call monism. Monism is the idea that there are no distinctions in the whole universe, but that everything is ultimately one and everything is ultimately God. Monism is an attack on the most basic element of Christianity. If you were to say what is the most fundamental belief of Christianity, what is at the rock bottom below everything else, rock bottom, below everything else, I would say is the notion that there is a difference between God the Creator and his creation. That God the Creator is distinct and separate from the creation. That the creation is not an extension of God. God didn't ooze into creation. Creation is not a part of God and we are not a part of God's being. A tree is not a part of God's being. A rock and a tree are not in essence one being. And the essence of sin, according to the Bible, is to worship the creation, worship the creature, rather than the creator. To blur the distinction between the creator and the creation. At rock bottom, in biblical religion, we start off with the statement, "In the beginning, God, who reveals himself as a personal being, created the heavens and the earth, which are separate from himself."

Underlying all New Age beliefs and concepts and underlying all Eastern religion and all occult practices is the blurring of the distinction between God and the creation and the suggestion to people that all is one, all is God and ultimately the God-defying statement that you are God. If you meditate, if you get in touch with that God-consciousness part of yourself, you will realize that there is really no ultimate separation between you and God, that you are, indeed, the Lord. The cosmos is God. The animals have this divine being in them, and so as part of this we worship nature, the earth, the Amazon Rain Forest, whales.

Let me try to get this down there for you. If you want to understand what is happening spiritually, just take a look at the people who our country throws millions and billions of dollars to. What you will find in the 80's and 90's is that a lot of our heroes are people who have obliterated distinctions – people like Michael Jackson, who you can't tell anymore if he is a man or a woman, black or white. He looks more like his sister than like himself. Or Madonna, who reinvents herself every two years. She is Madonna the Virgin Mother, who appears nude in a book on sex – now with blond hair, now with black hair, now with a baby named Lourdes. Monism. The obliteration of distinctions. Create your own reality.

A second common element New Agers have is you create your own God. God is not thought of as a personal being, but rather as an impersonal force sometimes called the Life force or pure consciousness or undifferentiated energy. The God of the New Age is the Star Wars force—this energy, this power that we can tap into through various practices like meditation and various healing techniques.

The third thing you see underlying all New Age beliefs and practices is that you create your own afterlife. Death is simply a transition to a higher plane of existence. Often New Age practitioners will hold to an Eastern religious view of reincarnation saying that the human spirit survives death and reincarnates from time to time in various physical bodies or exists as some sort of a God or spiritual being populating the cosmos. It is directly at odds with what the Bible teaches, which is that we have but one life with which to make our peace with God through Jesus Christ. We do not have an unlimited number of opportunities to evolve spiritually and get it right. The Bible teaches today if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart, but the New Age says that you have plenty of time to perfect yourself. We get to create our own future and after life.

And the New Age teaches that you can create your own morality. Since all is one you can't slice life up into good and evil. One spirit guide named Ramtha, who was channeled by this New Age channeler said, "God doesn't judge. No one sins and there is no need for forgiveness." He went on to say, "Every retched and vile thing you do broadens your understanding. If you want to do any one thing regardless of what it is, it would not be wise to go against that feeling for there is an experience awaiting you and a grand adventure that will make your life sweeter."

New Agers create their own reality. They create their own God. They create their own future. They create their own morality. There is a denial that there is anything objective out there that goes beyond our own minds. And in the area of morals you can break an objective law. You can violate an objective standard, something that is not just in your mind, but is as concrete as this podium.

I told you earlier that this week I broke a bone in my leg. There is a crack in the bone. Whatever my mind says, the objective fact is that when I fell a bone cracked. And however conveniently we rearrange our consciences or rationalize or redefine thing or substitute non-judgmental words, when we are cruel to someone, when we have sex outside of marriage, when we lie on a resume or on our taxes, when we gossip about a person behind their backs, when we break a promise to a roommate or a vow to a spouse we break a law of God that is as real and objective as the bones in yours and my body are. It is not just a mental thing. It is not just something that is subject to debate and interpretation – that's just your view of morality. My broken bone showed up on an x-ray and could be read by my orthopedic surgeon. And our breaking of God's

law shows up in the x-ray called the Bible, and the pain of our broken law shows up in our damaged and destroyed lives.

The last common denominator that I would say is a mark of much New Age belief and much New Age spirituality is the tendency to create your own biblical interpretation. The bible is viewed by many people today in America as being like a Rorschach Ink Blot test. Many people who are into New Age spirituality will find in the Bible some really unusual and esoteric interpretation of a verse. The perspective is that everyone's interpretation of the Bible is equally legitimate. Well, that is just your interpretation of God or of Christ, or death, or heaven or hell, or God's law, or creation. It is like a Rorschach Ink Blot. Each one of us looks at it and sees something from our own mind. You see a bat or a Porsche or a parent screaming at you or the face of an angel. Every interpretation is equally valid.

The Bible was never meant to be an ink blot test, and having your own interpretation doesn't make your interpretation legitimate anymore than your interpretation of the Internal Revenue Code is going to be validated by the Internal Revenue Service at tax time. You can't fill out your taxes according to your unique interpretation. You may find yourself arguing your unique interpretation from behind a set of prison bars.

And many New Age practitioners, many people who are into UFOs and near death experiences, many folks who are absorbed with angels and spirits, will have a completely esoteric and really individualistic and idiosyncratic interpretation of a verse in the Bible. They will try to pull out of the Bible a view of reincarnation or UFOs. The proper way to interpret the Bible, if you are claiming biblical authority for an idea, is to show that your idea is what was intended by the writer of the text. To show from the language and the grammar and the context and the history behind the passage and the culture that the writer of this passage intended the interpretation that you are claiming. Otherwise, when someone comes up to you and says, "Look here, Ezekiel 1 teaches UFOs" or "Jesus believed in reincarnation," you can say, "Friend, those ideas were never taught by the Bible. You have no biblical authority for them because the writers never intended to teach what you are teaching. The authority for your ideas comes from your own mind or from a book you just read or from a teacher of New Age spirituality, but it does not come from the Word of God."

You say, "Rich, why is it that there has been such an explosion of interest in some form of New Age spirituality? Why so many shows about UFOs and near death experiences and channeling? Why so many bookstores that sell New Age books? And why does virtually every woman's magazine have a section in it on astrology and your horoscope and love life? It is as mandatory a part of a woman's magazine as fashion or diet. Why is New Age spirituality so much a part of movie experiences today – like Patch Adams?"

America is incredibly fertile soil right now for New Age spirituality. It is incredibly fertile soil. It is almost impossible for a New Age idea in America to not grow and sprout and spread. Throw the seed down almost anywhere in the US and it is going to grow. Why?

I told you when I taught on postmodernism that we were ending a 200-year period of rationalism. The modern age, enterprise, was materialistic. It attempted to explain everything in terms of natural phenomena and natural causes and effects, but the rationalism, the naturalism, of the modern age didn't account for spiritual experiences

and spiritual longings. And built into the wiring of every human being is the knowledge that we are not just material beings, that we have a spiritual side to us. In the book of Ecclesiastes we read that God has put eternity in our hearts. In our wiring we know that we are eternal beings. When Paul preached in Athens, he told the Greeks to whom he was preaching, that God did this so that man would seek him and reach out for him and find him. He is not far from each one of us for in him we live and move and have our being.

Rationalism. Materialism. Science has not met the spiritual thirst that is hard wired into every human being. We have a longing for experiences that go beyond this world. We have a desire to know what is going to happen to us after we die. We have a need for healing that goes beyond what doctors can prescribe through medicine. We have a need for love that goes beyond what other people can give us. We have a desire for knowledge that goes beyond what we can gain through the five senses.

Churches in America, by and large, have not met the spiritual hunger that is there in people. We have been afflicted by what I call Sadducean Christianity - Christianity as it would be practiced by Sadducees. The Sadducees that existed in Jesus' day were practitioners of anti-supernatural religion. So here Americans have wholesale abandoned rationalism and materialism as an adequate explanation in the world, and when they look at Christianity what they find is an anti-supernatural message. In many churches they just discover another statement of rationalism and materialism. They go into churches where there is nothing known of spiritual power or the good side of the supernatural, the good side of healing. Churches talk about politics and repackage psychological answers. And very often churches, in their lack of spirituality, will search around for some kind of spirituality to meet the hunger of people and what they feed them is New Age spirituality. The New Age course in miracles or New Age creation spirituality.

And certainly Americans are open to the New Age Movement because it is so compatible with our worldview. We have seen in many of the discussions on postmodernism and pluralism that Americans have become very at home with the concept of tolerance, the obliteration of distinctions. C.S. Lewis, a great Christian writer from Cambridge University, said there is a reason why people turn to a God who is a life force, an impersonal being, some New Age conception of God rather than the personal God of the Bible. He wrote this:

"If you want to do something rather shabby, the life force, being only a blind force with no morals and no mind will never interfere with you like that troublesome God we learn about in the Bible."

The life force is a tame God. You can switch it on when you want, but it will not bother you. You get all the thrills of religion and none of the costs. The life force is the greatest achievement of wishful thinking the world has yet seen.

See, the God of Christianity interferes with your behavior. The God of Christianity sticks his nose in your marriage. The God of Christianity meddles with your sex life. To use C.S. Lewis' phrase, "he is a troublesome God." And this is the world's great benefit and blessing that God is a troublesome God, that he is a meddler, that he interferes. It is to our blessing and our benefit that God does not say to the world, "Hey, it is all just a matter of interpretation. Go ahead, practice apartheid in South Africa. Go ahead and abuse children in Pakistan and make them work 15 hours in a factory making cheap

clothes so that we can buy clothes less expensively at the Limited. It is a wonderful thing that our God is a troublesome meddler – that he doesn't say that it is okay to sexually abuse your child, if that is what you are into. Or it is okay, Afghan Muslims, treat women as slaves and prevent them from going out on the street. If that is your interpretation of life, go with it. It is good that there is someone who stands above humanity and sticks his nose in our business because we have made a mess of the world and we have made a mess of our little part of the world, haven't we?

You say, "Rich, why is God so opposed to the New Age practices? Why does he call these various things detestable in the book of Deuteronomy?"

There are lots of reasons. But when a person gets absorbed in astrology or TM (Transcendental Meditation) or yoga or UFOs or out of body experiences or ESP or seeks physical healing from some alternative healers they are turning away from the one true God that deserves to be worshipped and opening themselves up for spiritual deception and unbelievable spiritual danger. And at a time when consumers have 200 choices of cough syrup and 150 brands of sneakers, we like a religion with a smorgasbord, Playboy and the Virgin Mary, Tibetan gongs and the Eucharist. New Age religion was slickly packaged and marketed – perfect for our American consumer claims that Yoga or TM or many alternative health remedies are not religious. They are sold for health benefits or relaxation or stress reduction. Much of New Age spirituality is promoted as personal development or person growth. God condemns New Age practices because of God's profound love for us. He loves us so much that he hates whatever wounds us or destroys us.

Now occasionally you can step on a land mine and not set it off. And occasionally people will be involved in various kinds of things and there doesn't seem to be any long term affects. But sometimes just a little contact will set the mine off. And you or someone you love decides to meditate or consult a psychic or get hands laid on you by a false spiritual healer or you investigate occult phenomena and get drawn in and opened up to the demonic. There are surveys of people who have near death experiences and out of body experiences. Often, after the experience the person will begin to have demonic encounters and will reject Christianity. Over and over again the common thread of folks who have had out of body experiences or near death encounters is that those folks drop out of church and reject Christ as the only Savior. And for all the discussion of love and acceptance and being embraced by this wonderful being of light, the studies of people who have had these experiences indicate that many of the people have had emotional breakdowns afterward. They feel suicidal. Often they will get divorced. They experience profound relational breakdowns.

In all the discussion of UFOs, what people on the TV shows don't tell you is that many of the folks who have had encounters with UFOs and encounters with alien beings were practitioners of some kind of occult activity before hand or were extremely curious or interested in the occult. What the TV shows don't tell you is that after their encounter, the folks' religious perspectives took on a very anti-Christian bias. You can check studies of people who say they have had UFO encounters and do you know what you will discover? They have all adopted some type of New Age spirituality. We are all a part of God; there is no heaven or hell; we don't need a Savior; there is no law of God that we can objectively break; all of life is just a matter of perspective.

We are constantly told about the supposed health benefits of transcendental meditation. They have done scientific studies of the effects of meditation. Let me tell you about the health benefits of meditation because they are virtually in every health magazine that you get. Almost every YMCA around the country is now offering a meditation class, and many of the large hospitals are offering meditation. There is the allure that this is good for your health.

The studies indicate that meditation will relax you, but you can get the same benefit of relaxation by just resting for the same amount of time that you meditate. Do you know why TM practitioners are so relaxed? Because in one study of experienced practitioners, TM meditators spent 40% of their meditation time falling asleep. That is why they are so well rested and relaxed.

It is absolutely true that we Americans live stressed out, burned out lives, but the answer is not to empty your mind and open yourself up to potential spiritual powers that can hurt you. The answer is not to disengage the conscious mind, but to engage yourself with God and God's Word. Most of us spend our relaxation time staring at the TV. Real relationship with a friend or a spouse, or a child, or a God – real prayer or unburdening of yourself on God will refuel you. Do you know what they won't tell you about TM? Nearly 50% of all meditators say that they suffer some kind of physical problem – headaches, insomnia, anxiety attacks, horrible headaches and some type of gastro-intestinal problem as a direct result of meditating.

God hates New Age practices because they injure people. Read what the teachers of yoga say—not the marketers to Americans who call it just a form of stretching and limbering up—read what the teachers of yoga say. I am aware that there are lots of different types of yoga, but all of yoga was designed to alter your consciousness in a way that allows you to experience a sense of unity with God, to break down the distinctions in the universe, to get you to see that all is one and all is God. Some forms of yoga are designed to release what the teachers of yoga call the serpent power that is coiled at the base of your spine—this dormant spiritual energy. And you practice moving this serpent up your spine until it invades your brain. People feel this energy flow through their bodies with tingling, itching vibrations on their skin. Many people who are practitioners of yoga find themselves becoming increasingly emotionally disturbed. Yoga masters have known this for generations and warn about psychotic episodes and hallucinations.

I would never allow one of my children to take part in a yoga class in school or to meditate or to play any games that involve the casting of spells or to play with a Ouija Board or to receive prayer from a psychic healer. No Christian or anyone who is wise should read their horoscope or check out astrology or go to someone who is going to adjust the energy balances in your body or get really curious about or get involved in all the stuff around UFOs or near death experiences or out of body experiences. This stuff is off limits because it is dangerous. All spirituality is not good spirituality.

Much of what is going on right now is deception. It is fraud. It is being packaged to meet the legitimate spiritual yearning that is in the heart of folks, but the result is bondage and spiritual confusion.

The apostle John writes in 1 John 4, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit. But tests the spirits to see whether they are from God because many false prophets have gone into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God – every spirit that

acknowledges Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. But every spirit that doesn't acknowledge Jesus is not from God. It is the spirit of anti-Christ, which you have heard is coming and even now is already at work in the world." The bible teaches us to use discernment. Not all spirituality is good spirituality.

What you ought to be looking for in any spiritual experience, in any seeking of knowledge that goes beyond the senses, in any feeling that you are looking for or any power, you ought to be looking for specific biblical content with the Bible rightly interpreted. Does this experience point to the Jesus who was revealed in the Bible? Does this experience lead you to a deeper relationship with Jesus, who is the only Savior and Lord of the universe? Does this experience cause you to hate your sin more? Does this experience cause you to say, "I will do anything you ask, Lord God?" Is the experience specifically forbidden in the Bible? Is the experience specifically taught in the Bible?

If you want some simple tests of what spiritual doors to open, what practices to get involved in, what practices to avoid you ask yourself, "Does this practice lead me to love Jesus, the Jesus that I read about in the New Testament? Does this practice cause me to love Jesus more and to acknowledge him even more as the only Savior and Lord of men and women? Does this practice and experience cause me to hate my sin even more and passionately desire to put whatever sins I have in my life to death? Does this practice cause me to want to obey God's Word even more? Avoiding what God forbids and doing what God commands – does this practice cause me to want to obey God's Word even more?"

Friends, if something is a question mark in your mind, I would err on the side of caution and avoid it. Better that your backache continues than to submit yourself to some sort of alternative healing practice that may open a door that you don't want opened. Better that you remain a bit stressed and burned out, than to practice some sort of meditation technique which opens a spiritual door that should not be opened. Better that all your curiosity about UFOs and what your horoscope says and your out of body experiences and the powers of the mind – better curiosity goes unsatisfied than that you ignore the warning signs of the Bible and plunge over spiritual cliffs to your own destruction.

God loves us. He tells us that certain spiritual doors should remain shut and closed forever in our lives. He offers us real spiritual experience, real spiritual satisfaction, real spiritual connectedness, real spiritual knowledge—the kind that makes us healthy, holy and fit for the kingdom of heaven. Let's pray.