

Spirituality And True Conversion

The Deception of Worldly Spirituality

Martin G. Collins

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I want to begin by reading a quote that applies to this week's terrorist attacks on the United States.

God, who gave us life, gave us liberty. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are a gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with His wrath? Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever.

—Thomas Jefferson, in 1781, who was our 3rd President of the United States

One Israeli received a lot of e-mails this week, from Americans and those in Israel, regarding the act of war against the U.S. And the most common question they asked was "Why do we deserve this?" That is an eye-opening question from people, because they do not have a clue. It may be that what we saw this week is a warning of the beginning of a time of national punishment unprecedented in the history of this nation. A time of God's wrath, because His justice cannot sleep forever—as Thomas Jefferson recognized. At the national prayer services yesterday, Billy Graham (the leader of Protestant beliefs in the U.S.) pleaded, "We need a spiritual revival in this nation."

We are a nation that professes to be a spiritual people—yet we define spirituality in our own terms. No doubt, as a result of this horrible experience there will be some that will believe themselves to be instantly converted to a new set of beliefs, or a new religion, or maybe even to Christianity. But will this conversion be a true biblical conversion or a false worldly conversion?

Today, in our society, we see an increasing trend toward spirituality. Ironically, in many cases, it is a follow-up to the "God is dead" attitude of the '60s, '70s, and '80s. People are converting over to this *spirituality without religion* by the hundreds of thousands and arrogantly replacing the God they supposedly trust—as our coinage says "In God we trust"—with, as incredible as it may seem, a "spirituality" **without God!** (I am going to prove that to you in a moment.)

According to these worldly converts, this conversion to God-less spirituality happens instantly, with a kind of spiritual "warm fuzzy" feeling. This instant conversion is not surprising since many of these converts came from a background of Protestantism (or Catholicism) where conversions to Christianity are claimed to be an immediate realization that places one in a "once saved, always saved" state of being.

For clarity, let us look at some secular definitions of spirituality, spiritual, and spiritualism so that we can understand how the world is using these terms—and, actually, how the world does not understand how to use these terms.

Webster's Dictionary says that one of the definitions for spirituality is "the quality or state of being spiritual." (That is vague.) It says to be spiritual means "of, relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit." (Still, we know nothing.) And there are other definitions. It means "related or joined in spirit" or "of, or relating to, supernatural beings or phenomena." Also, "of, or relating to, or involving

spiritualism." And then finally, Webster's says spiritualism means, "the view that spirit is a prime element of reality."

From these vague secular definitions we learn little more than that spirituality and spiritualism are related to being spiritual, where spirit is its prime element and that relates to the supernatural or unexplained phenomena. If you are confused over these definitions, you should be! But they sure can was eloquent about this subject, although it is a subject that they have no clue about.

A few years ago, *Today's Christian Woman* magazine ran an article by Ruth Van Reken, titled "The Truth About Spirituality: Can You Tell What's Christian From What's Not?" Ms. Reken related an incident she experienced that opened her eyes to a trend in this nation. A trend that we are seeing increasingly—not only in the media, not only in religions of this nation, but also on radio and television programs and talk shows.

Several years ago, I was excited that the topic of spirituality kept cropping up on talk shows, in books and magazines, in politics, even in health food stores. "What a refreshing change from the 'God is dead' philosophy so prevalent during my college years in the sixties," I thought.

In my naiveté, I believed this spiritual awakening represented a trend toward a search for a biblically based relationship with God. I accepted what I heard and read with little critical thought.

Then my nursing supervisor praised me one day for my 'deep spirituality.' I thanked her, secretly thrilled my Christian witness had been showing through. My excitement dissolved, though, when I read a book she gave me called "A Course in Miracles." Although it used Christian lingo, like atonement and sanctification, the concepts were far from Christian. I was puzzled. Weren't we speaking the same language? What had my supervisor meant by spirituality?

After that interchange, I began listening more closely to all the discussions of spirituality going on.

This newfound "spirituality" relates to a person's incremental spiritual progress—based on humanly-reasoned ethics, because the spirituality of this country is godless. God is not involved in it, as they so desire. That is, they do not want God involved in it. People are converting over to this newly found spirituality. They think it is a sudden revelation to a new deeper way of thought and personal fulfillment.

The world defines "conversion" (as I mentioned earlier, conversion to this new "spirituality") as a sudden revelation by which a hitherto divided and consciously wrong, inferior, and unhappy self becomes unified and consciously right, superior, and happy—as a result of its personal spiritual depth of understanding. Basically, what that is saying is that they base their spirituality on **intellectual vanity**.

Romans 1:22-25 Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth

of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

So they have exchanged true Christianity and the true God for a godless spirituality.

The December 6, 1999 issue of *Christianity Today* magazine ran an article by Jody Veenker, titled "Spirituality Without Religion: More Christians Attracted to Dalai Lama's Teachings. Ms. Veenker said:

With the Dalai Lama's name still on the lips of celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Harrison Ford, and Richard Gere, the Tibetan Buddhist leader ended a two-month U.S. tour in September, leaving in his wake a growing flock of Americans, including some Christians, attracted by pop Buddhism's buffet of low-commitment, high-touch beliefs.

University of Chicago sociologist Stephen R. Warner recently told the Religion News Service: "The world of American religion is going through enormous change. It will be increasingly difficult to distinguish Christians from Buddhists." But are the lines between the two religions really blurring? Wouldn't you think that Christianity and Buddhism would be such a dramatically different set of beliefs? The Buddhist teacher Jagad said, "Now it's becoming the 'in-thing' to be spiritual. It's more cool, modern, and progressive to be spiritual. But without God."

Last year, the American Civil Liberties Union brought a law suit against the United States government to try to force it to remove the motto "In God We Trust" from everything governmental—sighting the separation of church and state as their main argument, as they have been doing for so many years. So this nation, the United States, is a secular nation. It is a worldly nation. But it is still "Israel," and we are still the descendants of Israel. And I'm building a case here, so that we can understand how prevalent this is—continuing with the article by Jody Veenker:

The Dalai Lama's recent book on pursuing lasting happiness has topped bestseller charts for more than a year. His latest title, "Ethics for a New Millennium," has been praised by some book critics because it proclaims tolerance and peace without religion.

Never mind that these very teaching are a religion in themselves. But you can see how it's being painted. People are sick of 'religion,' because they blame religion for all of the faults or problems of this nation. So they are dumping the religion of Jesus Christ, and they are going for a godless spirituality. Continuing the quote:

In a book review in *The Chicago Tribune*, critic Richard Bernstein says the Dalai Lama's message of spirituality without a deity is "the perfect way to satisfy the spiritual hunger of people living in a scientific and secular age."

Buddhism, which has 358 million followers worldwide, is non-theistic. It focuses not on an individual's relationship with God, but rather on a person's incremental spiritual progress, achieved through ethical conduct and eventual reincarnation to a higher state of existence.

Patty Campbell, 52 and a United Methodist, drove from Arkansas to Indianapolis this summer with her son to see the Dalai Lama. "I'm a Christian, and I think you can take the good parts of what he says and use them," she tells *Christianity Today*. "You don't have to give up your own religion."

[That is, to follow the Dalai Lama's beliefs. Is that not syncretism for you?]

Many Catholics, Presbyterians, and Methodists attending ceremonies with the Dalai Lama during his stopover in Indiana agreed with Campbell, saying that the Dalai Lama is a wise man to be revered and respected as much as Pope John Paul II.

A recent flood of books—including "Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers" and the Dalai Lama's "The Good Heart: Buddhist Perspectives on the Teachings of Jesus"—has created a new context in which some Christians are attracted to Buddhist teaching and practice.

So you can see the syncretizing of the two religions. They are becoming indistinguishable in many ways—at least, on the surface.

Buddhist author Thich Nhat Hanh writes that although Buddhism and Christianity have many fundamentally opposed beliefs—reincarnation vs. one life; nonbeing vs. a personal God; liberation vs. love of God as the motivation for doing good to others—they still have much in common.

Hanh compares the two religions to a mango and an orange. "When you look deeply into the mango and the orange, you see that though they are different, they are both fruits." Hanh says academics have been dismantling the barrier between the two faiths in an attempt to move away from absolute moral truths and inject Christianity with "the fluidity and personal depth of Eastern religions."

This is very extensive—reaching all levels of the country, all levels of education, and all levels of Christianity and other religions as well.

What is the Bible's simple definition of **true spirituality**? Of course, in its depth, it is very complex; but God gives a very simple definition in Romans 8.

Romans 8:1-11 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin. He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit which dwells in you.

To be "in the flesh," as the word is used here in verse 8, is to be in the physical corruptible state of life. To be "according to the flesh," as used here in verse 5, is to have the way of the flesh as the

regulating principle of one's life. To "walk according to the flesh," as used in verse 4, is to carry out in conduct those things dictated by the flesh. In other words, to live "according to the flesh" is *to sin*—the opposite of righteousness.

In verses 5-8, Paul named four characteristics of sinful human beings: (1) hostility towards God, (2) insubordination to His law, (3) failure to please God, and (4) death. True Christian spirituality is summarized here in chapter 8. Those who are in Jesus Christ do not walk *according to the flesh* but *according to the spirit*, and set their minds on spiritual things—that is, righteousness. This is only possible by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And it is interesting that the world's "spirituality" has none of these factors involved in it, because it is not true spirituality. It is not a true conversion to anything godly.

Now, let us look at a biblically based **true conversion**. To be converted is to undergo a change of direction. The common denominator in all of the biblical references to conversion is that the individual recognizes his need for the one true God and rejects all other alternatives. That means the physical ones as well—such as the gods we create in our cars, and our homes, and other things that we look up to in the physical life in a reverential way.

A detailed description of the beginning of conversion occurs in the words spoken to Saul of Tarsus at the beginning of his own conversion. Luke is here recording what Paul said before King Agrippa.

Acts 26:17-20 I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me. Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, [Obedience and faith are both factors.] but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.

With respect to conversion, three key words are stated here in Acts 26: *repentance*, *obedience*, and *faith*. Conversion involves turning away from evil deeds and false worship, and turning toward serving and worshipping God. But, because we do not become perfect overnight, we must go through **a process** of being converted into being God-like.

Conversion is the process of *prolonged conflict for supremacy of conflicting motives* that are against God. Total conversion is the result of gradual spiritual growth—the consummation of a process of *discerning* ever more clearly, and *yielding* ever more definitely, and *living* righteously ever more consistently. In the process, we are set free by the truths of God that have been implanted and nurtured by Christian training with the help of the Holy Spirit. "**The truth** shall set you free"—God's truth.

This process results in the conscious acceptance of Jesus Christ as the personal Savior and in the consecration of life to His service. In our baptism we covenant with God that we have repented of our sins and accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins.

Conversion comprises the characteristics both of repentance and faith. **Repentance** is the part of conversion where we turn from the former life and from sin, in genuine sorrow, and change our former ways to agree with God's way of life. **Faith** drives the process of conversion, turning us to

God. Faith is the commitment, trust, and hope that drives us on. Since Christ is in us, it is *His faith* given to us through His Holy Spirit. Thus, conversion is more than the exchange of one set of beliefs for another. It is a wholehearted turning to God.

I Peter 1:3-7 Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials. . .

And we, in this nation, are certainly grieved by the various trials of this past week.

I Peter 1:7-9 . . .that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing [There is the faith again.], you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

That gives, in a very encouraging way, the end result of all you have to go through, and the end result of Jesus Christ working in our own lives.

Let us look at true repentance for a moment. A Christian that is a truly converted person is one who has received, and in whose mind dwells, the Holy Spirit of God. The process of conversion entails the replacement of our human spirit with the Spirit of God.

On the day the church of God was started, Acts 2:38 records that the apostle Peter said "Repent, and . . . be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." So repentance is the first step. But repent of what? I John 3:4 tells us that sin is the transgression of the law. This is the law that the human mind, hostile to God, is not subject to. It is the law of God. And in Acts 5:32, Luke tells us that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him.

These are the three conditions to receiving God's gift of the Holy Spirit: *repentance*, *obedience*, and *faith*. Being baptized is the outward manifestation of true inner faith in Christ. Repentance is not merely being sorry for something we have done, or even many such sins. It is a true repentance of what we are and have been—of our whole past attitude and life apart from God. It is a total change of mind, and heart, and direction of life. It is a change to a new way of life. It is a turning *from* the self-centered way of vanity, selfishness, greed, and hostility to authority, envy, jealousy, and unconcern for the good and welfare of others.

That is why the "conversion" that is going to take place in this nation to a new spirituality will not produce any good fruit. Repentance is a turning *to* the God-centered way of obedience, submission to authority, love toward God more than love of self, and of love and concern for other humans equal to self-concern.

In Romans 13:10, Paul tells us that love is the fulfilling of God's law. Romans 7:14 says that God's law is a spiritual law. And Romans 5:5 states that God's law can be fulfilled only by "the love of God poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit will open our minds to understanding

God's instruction on how to live, but it will not force us to live God's way. It will not pull us, or push us. Each of us, as a Christian, must take our own initiative. God's Spirit will give us help—by giving us **faith** and **power**! But we have to take the initiative. And if our initiative is only when a crisis happens (such as what happened at the Pentagon and in New York this week), then our repentance is going to be not a true one; but it will only last for maybe a few days.

Romans 8:14 tells us, it is "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." This requires *submission* to the will of God. And this is something that we are not going to see in this nation as an overall trend. A few may—and hopefully so. I hope it will be more than a few.

The three previously mentioned conditions to becoming a Christian—repentance, obedience, and faith—we ourselves perform. It is our faith *before* our baptism and Jesus Christ's faith *after* baptism that draws us. But these do not make us Christians—do not convert us. It is **what God does**—giving His Holy Spirit by His grace as His free gift—that converts us. Our repentance, obedience, and faith do not earn the receiving of God's Spirit. God does not give us His Spirit because we repent and believe. He gives His Spirit because He wants to give it! But He requires repentance and faith as conditions.

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:64-69 "But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Now, God grants repentance. He calls us, and convicts our mind and conscience by His Spirit working on the mind externally. Usually, a fierce struggle goes on within us. I think every one of us can attest to that fact—that a fierce struggle goes on between our human reasoning and God's way of life. We are usually shaken to know we have done wrong, that we are wrong, that we have sinned, and that we are a sinner.

We are brought to true repentance—not only for what we have done, but also for what we now see that we are personally. This is a very tough time for us—to actually have to admit that we have been wrong. The self never wants to die! Our repentance is **an unconditional surrender** to God—to obey His Law.

Yet we, ourselves, must make the decision. If we do repent, surrender to God, and in faith accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior—then, upon performance of these conditions, God promises to put within us the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is *the very life of God*—spirit life within us. It imparts to us *the very divine nature*—something no amount of "conversion" in the world can come to. (Not without His Holy Spirit.)

Then, at that stage, what happens? We are a new convert that has been born from above. As a new convert that has not received the full measure of God's Spirit that Christ had, at this point we are only

a spiritual babe in Christ . That is, when we first receive the Holy Spirit. Then, we must grow spiritually—just as a newly conceived embryo in its mother's womb must grow physically large enough to be born as a human.

But what if a Christian sins? Is he lost forever? We in God's church know that he is not, providing certain circumstances are met. A Christian convert is one who has received God's Spirit—which is indwelling in him, leading him—and he is following God's way of life. As a converted Christian, we have forsaken our former *habitual* way of life, our selfish ways unconcerned with God. Now we live in the habitual way of God's Word, in the light of the Word of God. This is at the beginning of our conversion.

But (like an 8 or 10 month old baby, trying to learn to walk) as he [the new babe in Christ] "walks" in this new way, suppose he stumbles—falls down, as it were (as an analogy)—and sins. Is he then condemned, lost, no longer a Christian? Of course not!

Speaking of Christ as the "Word of life," in his opening salutation the apostle John was inspired to write that our fellowship is with the Father and Jesus Christ.

I John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life [That is, Jesus Christ.]—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

We have been reconciled to God through Christ. And, having God's Spirit, we enjoy actual **fellowship** with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. Even our fellowship with fellow-Christians (with each other) is through God and Christ. Let us look at Jesus' analogy regarding the vine in John 15.

John 15:1-8 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Christians, then, are actually walking with Christ. And as Amos 3:3 points out, two cannot walk together unless they are in agreement. It is clear that we must **bear much fruit** if we are abiding in Christ. If we do not, we are cut off from the vine. And we can only fellowship with Jesus Christ if we walk in the light. *Light* represents *truth*.

I John 1:5-6 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

He, the living Christ, is *walking in the light*, as if on a brilliantly lighted path. But, if we are walking in darkness, we are walking on a different path altogether—where it is dark. Therefore, we are not walking with Him at all; and if we say we are, we are lying. But suppose while walking with Him *in the light*, one of us stumbles and falls down. (This is not a case of having turned away from Him and the path.) If we genuinely say, "I'm sorry," would He not give us a hand and help us get up and continue on the lighted path with Him? Would He become angry and say, "Get off My path. Go walk down a darkened path"? Of course not! What we are talking about here are *habitual ways of life*.

In other words, we—the true Christians—have turned from our former life of habitual sin and from our former attitude of selfishness and self-seeking (when we had no serious intentions of living God's way). Now we have turned from our former way. Our life, in general, now is the habitual way of Christian life in our walk with Him. But we are not perfect the minute we are called and receive God's Spirit. We have to grow spiritually—in grace and knowledge of Christ, as Peter explains.

II Peter 3:14-16 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless. And consider that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

And do we not see that in this nation today? If anyone in this nation, or the world, turns to the Scriptures, they tend to pervert them for their own gain. I do not know if you have ever come across some of these religious programs, but you can listen to them for ten minutes and they are not saying one thing of any value or that is related to God's way of life.

II Peter 3:17-18 You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked [That includes this worldly spirituality that we see taking on such a firm hold.]; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

We are creatures of habit, and all old former habits do not just automatically leave us without any effort on our part to overcome them. We have to learn to overcome sin. It is inevitable that we may be caught off guard and make mistakes. Anyone who has been converted and baptized for any length of time—even for a few minutes or a day—realizes this. We can very quickly go back to thinking wrong thoughts.

Remember that *light* represents *truth*. Walking in truth is God's way of life.

I John 1:7-8 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we are fellowshiping with each other, with the help of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ within us—then we, as brethren, can help each other to overcome problems and to show that outgoing concern for each other that helps us make it to the end and to endure.

Verse 7, "but if we walk in the light"—that is, even though we may stumble occasionally, it is now only an occasional slip and not a turning back to the habitual and constant way of sin. Look at the immense difference. We, the true Christians, intend to live God's way. We want to live God's way. We try to live God's way. And, in general, it is now actually our habitual new way of life. The occasional slip, or sin, does not mean that in our mind and heart we have rejected God and His way of life. It is the habitual sin that does that. It is the flagrant sin that does that.

If God's way of life is now our goal, and purpose, and habitual way of life—then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. But IF (and it is a big "if") we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. IF we say that we are already perfect—that we never slip up and make a mistake or commit a sin—we are deceiving ourselves.

And you will find very, very often—hearing out of mouths of people of the world, and this nation—that they do not see that there is any sin. What are the mainstream churches teaching? That they have been saved, and they do not have to worry about sin. Sin and repentance are very rarely heard about in our nation. Only in passing. As a matter of fact, yesterday when Billy Graham mentioned that, I got the idea that the word **repentance** was only under his breath.

I John 1:8-9 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Notice the "if." **If** we confess our sins... When we stumble, we must admit it. We must repent of it. We must ask forgiveness. If we deny it, or blame somebody else, we will not be forgiven. We must confess it to God. "IF we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." The context continues right on into the second chapter of I John.

I John 2:1-3 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the unconverted in the world only when they come to real repentance and faith in Christ. ***True conversion is a process.*** Mainstream Christianity has the false belief that a Christian is one who becomes perfect at one instance, or that one cannot become a Christian until he has broken all wrong habits and made himself righteous. That is what they believe Christianity is. It is an immediate conversion to Christianity. But it is not. It is a long, long process of overcoming and living God's way of life.

For nearly 6,000 years, humanity has been going in the way of pride and vanity, selfishness and greed. Generally, human beings lack outgoing concern for others. The spirit of competition, opposition, and strife come from an effort to exalt the self. And that is what we have seen so much in this society. Humans have been filled with self-gratification, jealousy, envy, resentment toward others, and a spirit of rebellion against authority and hostility toward God and the law of God. Paul refers to these characteristics as "the works of the flesh." This is a summary of the way that the world lives its life.

Galatians 5:19-22 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The true Christian must **overcome** these tendencies and more. As Christians, we have to develop the righteous character to choose the right way and resist the wrong—to **discipline the self** in the way we ought to go, instead of the way of self-desire and vanity.

Truth is the difference! Truth is the difference between false spirituality and true conversion. This society is having a very hard time distinguishing between false spirituality and true conversion. They lack the discernment necessary to tell whether the things they hear and read are truly "Christian." They lack the wisdom and knowledge to know the difference between false worldly spirituality and true Christian conversion, because the truth is not in them.

Romans 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

This nation is without excuse. It knows deep down that there is a God. We have heard the statement that in a war, in a foxhole, there are no atheists.

Romans 1:21 Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

In the article that I mentioned earlier, "The Truth About Spirituality," the author Ruth Van Reken relates an incident that involved suppression of truth at school:

Many statements about spirituality being passed off as "truth" today are not only lies—they are logically impossible.

I discovered this when my daughter's public high school class planned a field trip to a meditation center known for its psychic readings. [Mind you, this is in school—where there is supposed to be no religion.] I objected, but the teacher justified the trip by saying this center taught spirituality—not religion. He claimed spirituality doesn't endorse one set of beliefs. ? That's simply not true.

The basic belief system behind the whole false concept of this world-endorsed spirituality is that each person has a right to his or her own "truth"—that there is no such thing as objective absolute truth. That is why they have to get God out of the picture, because they have to remove God's morality—so that they can have their own morality. This view essentially makes each person responsible for deciding what is right or wrong, good or bad, truth or lie. The result is that people believe there is no truth. They do what is right in their own eyes.

Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes. . .

Another popular false belief is that all religions and spiritual quests lead to God. We have seen that as a pretty strong push in this world today as the main religions of the world tend to meld into one world religion. Yet that belief denies the claim of Jesus Christ in John 14:6.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me [period]."

We are **God's workmanship!** And through the carefully planned conversion process, we will—in due time—be completed and given the gift of eternal life.

Ephesians 2:1-10 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

We do have our work cut out for us—with the help of the Holy Spirit. A telltale sign—of whether, or not, someone's spirituality is real—is their belief or disbelief in the significance of Jesus Christ. Obviously, we have to examine every attitude and teaching—to see whether it is of God.

I John 4:1-3 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

Many religions and various forms of spirituality accept Jesus as a historical figure (as even the Dalai Lama does) but reject Him as the Christ who came in the flesh, the one whom God sent to be "an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

I John 4:7-11 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

There is a form of unity and love coming out as a result of these terrorists' attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon that we are seeing on the surface in this nation. Flags are flying, patriotism is high, and people have this warm feeling of love between each other. But it is not true

love. It is worldly love, and it is not going to last. And it will not be but maybe a few more days or weeks, or maybe as the times get hard as the economy starts to wane, that people will become shorter on patience with each other.

Others talk of a "Christ-consciousness" in some mystical global sense, but refuse to tie that down to the flesh-and-blood Person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. You hear that as a catch-phrase today—the "Christ-consciousness." They apply Christ's name to it; but Christ is not involved in it, in any way. The fact is that if a person has strong morals and values but does not embrace Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God, Savior, and resurrected Lord—his or her spirituality is not truly Christian and cannot lead to eternal life. Those who fall for, and are deceived by, this false worldly spiritual look at true Christians as very "narrow-minded" because true Christianity is not fluid and broad—as Buddhism, New Age type religions, and other who promote this **false spirituality**. "Narrow" is the way that leads to life.

Matthew 7:13-27 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn-bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 2 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

The two World Trade Center buildings were built on physically solid rock. There is hardly a better material for a foundation to be on. Its material foundation was sound. But its spiritual foundation—that is, the spiritual foundation of this nation—is not even sand. It is worse than sand. It is refuse, and refuse is even a worse foundation than sand. But *the true war* that this nation is facing is not of this material world. It is a war of righteousness vs. unrighteousness, repentance vs. defiance, obedience vs. disobedience, faith vs. disbelief, and true conversion to God's way of life vs. false spirituality.

This nation must first humble itself before God, or God will humble it—as He has begun to do. This nation's ***national pride*** was sorely hurt this week, but only partly hurt. Will it be enough to turn it around to repentance? I agonizingly say, "I'm afraid not." In Zephaniah 1, God warns of what is to happen to Israel as we near the Day of the Lord, as well as what will happen during the Day of the Lord. Although the events described here in Zephaniah 1:14-17 happen as a part of the Day of the Lord, they are also stated as a warning of what is to come prior to the Day of the Lord. Notice the emphasis that *it is near!*

Zephaniah 1:14 The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly. . .

Now, we know that the Day of the Lord is the last year of the 3½ years of the tribulation. So we know we have, at least, 2½ years before the Day of the Lord actually arrives here.

Zephaniah 1:14-17 . . . The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter. There the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. "I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD. Their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse."

Is that not an interesting description of the scene up there in New York?

Barnes' Notes comments that these events are "only a forerunner of other judgments to the end." So these are dual in the way that they are written. It is talking about the Day of the Lord, but it is also saying that the Day of the Lord is near. And these sins, on a lesser scale, will happen. We have to humble ourselves as individuals and as a nation, until we have sincerely repented—as David did, as recorded in Psalms 51.

Psalms 51:1-4 Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.

Notice that David did not try to justify himself. He acknowledged his sin freely and asked for forgiveness. God did not have to argue or 'reason' with him. David admitted it willingly. As Job, David had come to see himself as he really was, and to abhor himself. When we repent of breaking God's laws, of following human reasoning, of conforming to this society and its ways, then God requires that we offer up specific **spiritual sacrifices**.

Psalms 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise.

These are the sacrifices that God is looking for at a time of national trouble. It is a broken and contrite heart—a repentant heart. We are shaken and our hearts have been wrenched this week. This tragedy is **a call to action!** And no less so, a call to God's church—even more so than to this nation, because this nation most likely will not heed. Use this devastating attack on this Israelitish nation as a motivation to make changes in your own spiritual life. Realize that our calling and election are sure only *if* we do our part to work with the Creator God to repent and be faithful to our covenant with Him. This includes dwelling together among ourselves in unity.

We will end by reading here in Ephesians 4:1-6. This unity it is talking about is not the unity that this nation is trying and showing at this time. This is a unity based on Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit within us. It is a unity that only converted individuals can have. And it is one that we need to develop, even more so as we ever have—to weather the things that are coming upon this nation.

Ephesians 4:1-6 I, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.