
DISCERNMENT NEWSLETTER

“...how is it that ye do not discern this time?” Luke 12:56

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The Gelding is Castrated Evangelicals and their cultural “fixing”

By Dr. Orrel Steinkamp

A gelding is a male horse born wild and free who has been “fixed.” The gelding, having been fixed, becomes preoccupied with eating and consuming. He is happy, and doesn't even know what he was or could have been. He is happy, lazy, and making himself useful to his handlers and providers. He has become a cultural pet.

Regrettably, a gelding is becoming an all too apt metaphor for pan-evangelicalism in our postmodern world. Now I know that there are many born-again believers who themselves would never see themselves as “culturally fixed.” Many believers are living authentic Christian lives. There are many local pastors who are doing their utmost to stave off the cultural infections that are entering the churches. But all too many local pastors have been swept along by the rapid cultural changes entering the church nationally.

Local believers themselves, being immersed in the culture, happily give to their shepherds (local pastors) the role of discernment and choosing the menu for living the Christian life. Most church-attending evangelicals are so busy living the postmodern life that they are happy to have their pastors sort out what is acceptable belief and practice in the Christian life.

There remain many pastors who guard their flocks with both a staff, and also a rod, with which to beat back the wolves in sheep's clothing. But local pastors have no trans-local voice in the larger church. They are not the ones who—broadly speaking—set the agenda. Conversely, many local pastors have themselves bought into various postmodern versions of Christianity. These pastors then in turn look to their leaders above them in the food chain. These regional and national leaders

look to the image-making celebrity and media-driven class.

These published authors, and media-driven leaders, and successful megachurch personalities then become the ones who promote their success stories. Unfortunately, many of the evangelical celebrity class eventually set the agenda and mindset for the church at large. The evangelical sheep in the pews look to their pastors and media icons, and have no idea that many of these image makers have long since been culturally “fixed.”

These media celebrities keep churning out materials and TV programs. Regrettably money becomes a factor for if you become a bestselling author, the publishers are pushing them for more books. Their own financial success becomes like a successful verification – and a standard of truth. If a lowly Christian correctly questions these media leaders he will often be seen as dividing the body of Christ. Too many in the pastor class—rather than protecting the flock—up drinking the KoolAid themselves, hoping to become smaller versions of the current celebrity media icons.

This being the case, what can a sincere evangelical in the pew do?

I just recently received the “preferred customer catalog” from Christian Books Distributors out of Peabody, MA. For decades CBD has provided a discount market of Christian books. On the first pages they post the bestsellers and favorite authors. It is their business to know what is currently selling to evangelical customers. In the recent catalog, on the first pages you will find Sarah Young's *Jesus Is Calling*. It is offered in a deluxe edition, women's edition, the kid's edition and even a teen edition.

Sarah Young, inspired by the anonymous authors of *God Calling* of a period past, wondered if she could receive verbatim audible revelations from God as did the writers of *God Calling*. One

day a warm mist enveloped her and she decided to listen to “God,” pen in hand, just as the authors of *God Calling*. She decided that Jesus was not only speaking to her but she must pass these new revelations on to others. She found that the Bible was not sufficient.

Young does not suggest that her revelations are Scripture. But if her revelations were the actual spoken words of Jesus, and she provides these revelations to the general public, the implication is that there can be no difference between her transcribed supposed words of Jesus and the words of Jesus in the Bible. It seems to be like channeling, in that she found the words were coming faster and faster as she wrote the book. If these were the actual words of Jesus they would have to be, by definition, authoritative even as Jesus words in Scripture. But we know that the Canon of Scripture is closed. So who is speaking in and through Sarah Young? Channeling is a form of occult mediumship used in witchcraft, where a spirit speaks through a person to deliver a message.

Nearby in the CBD catalogue is Gary Thomas' book *Sacred Marriage*. Gary Thomas's book is very popular. Focus on Family endorses it. In the book he recommends eastern mystical tantric sex. (This is terribly demonic!) But even more alarming is his description and recommendation of Catholic Monastic Contemplative Prayer. Thomas writes:

centering prayer works like this: Choose a word (Jesus or Father) for example as a focus for Contemplative Prayer. Repeat the word silently in your mind for a set amount of time (say 20 minutes) until your heart seems to be repeating the word itself, just as naturally and involuntary as breathing.

Interesting that this is essentially the same method for inducing altered states of consciousness in Transcendental Meditation and other eastern prayer techniques. Entering into an altered state makes people more susceptible to the demonic realm.

Mark Batterson's popular book *The Circle Maker* is also prominently featured in the CBD

catalog with a journal, DVD curriculum and a 40 day “Draw the circle” edition. This bestseller presents a new spin on prosperity teaching. Batterson discovered this new method of praying while reading from the Jewish Talmudic *Book of Legends*. He discovered one Honi, a miracle worker in the first century B.C. During a drought, is said that Honi drew a circle around himself in the sand and commanded rain from heaven. Batterson is now promoting this Honi prayer legend and its method. Batterson states:

“Your job is not to crunch numbers, your job is to draw circles in the sand and if you draw the circle God will multiply the miracles in your life.”
(Quoted at *The Beginning and the End*, September, 2012.)

Now, apparently, the power is not just in your tongue, *a la* Word/Faith teaching, but also in the chalk in your hand. Sounds magical to me. Honi was a magical legendary person. He reportedly questioned a young lady about why she was planting a carob tree. It takes 70 years to bear fruit. Well! A strange sleep came upon Honi and then 70 years later he awakened to see the carob tree bearing fruit. Was Honi a Christian? No! He was a Hebrew mythical legend. No more no less.

Political Cultural “Fixing”

Evangelicals as a religious/political subculture in America have been touted by the wider-culture, especially the non-Christian pundit class, as a rising political power. But having failed to elect a Mormon cultist to the presidency, suddenly some within the evangelical community itself began to see pan-evangelicals as having already crested and the floodwaters of influence falling rapidly. After basking in the political sunshine and credited with electing George Bush president, suddenly the past election revealed that all the “Save America” political evangelism efforts were apparently over-reach and hype.

Suddenly neo-evangelicals seem to have come down with degenerate heart failure. *The Christian Science Monitor* on March 10, 2009 published an article by Michael Spencer, an online commentator with the moniker “The iMonk,”

which called for “The Coming Evangelical Collapse.” In this article he direly predicts a collapse that will in a few decades lead to an “evangelical dark age.” Phil Johnson of the Pyromaniac website reflected:

Everyone including Matt Drudge is talking about iMonk's op-ed piece in the *Christian Science Monitor*.... I say Amen to his article.... I agree the collapse he predicts is well underway... and I agree that the thing is so far sunk already that it's not going to be possible to salvage the ship... man the lifeboats. Just put me in one with real oars. (“Evangelical Down the Drain” Phil Johnson, Pyromaniacs, March 10, 2009).

Some are making the call that evangelicalism is dead. Others want to it plugged into life support hoping the patient will revive. Neo-evangelicalism was birthed 50 or 60 years ago with Charles H. Henry, Harold Ockenga and Fuller Seminary leading the way by putting distance between them and separatist fundamentalists. The mid-life of this movement was Billy Graham and his ecumenical evangelistic rallies. The movement then transitioned into church growth and market-based strategies popular in the culture. Marketing schemes and experts became the harbinger of apparent cultural success. In 1976, *Time* magazine declared the year of the evangelical.

After half a century of unprecedented growth in both evangelicalism's adherents and its cultural visibility, and after the development of a vast network of evangelical seminaries and colleges, publishing houses and periodicals, para-church organizations an increasing vocal cluster of evangelical leaders is questioning whether American evangelicalism can survive its success... [All] perceive a theological declension in which the movements' theo-centric theology has been replaced by an anthro-centric and experience-driven faith without a theological grounding. (“Evangelicalism's Insecure Calvinists,” Gregory Johnson, St. Louis University, Fall 1999)

Linking with popular culture so directly, however, carried with it dangers not noticed at the time. Instead of capturing the culture, and the political power of the culture, and political activism began to capture them. Like Israel in the

past they relied on Egypt. They forgot that the Egypts of the world need to be served and paid tribute to annually.

As in the cultural/marketing world, to increase relevance requires alliances and new investments. But these alliances come with a price. They change things. In the negotiations certain features must be diminished or given a secondary status. It's like a Christian concert, where an artist is given a lesser stage on which to perform. The big name gets the big stage.

To shore up evangelical unspoken weaknesses ad hoc alliances were and are still being made with Catholics, Mormons (*a la* Glenn Beck) and unbelieving Jewish institutions (John Hagee), and political operatives (David Lane and James Robison). But these alliances require dialing down and truncating aspects of the Gospel message.

To play the culture card you have to “mix and match.” Having put the focus on the culture as “evangelism” bait you find you then need the new and brighter and bigger bait. But then the unintended consequence – the bait itself becomes the message. This is a sign of the death of a movement. It is tacit acceptance that the Gospel is insufficient in itself without cultural additives and adaptations. We are informed we need the new and improved version of our Gospel line in order to make the sale to a culture of addicted consumers. We could go on and on about the mixing and matching....

Can the evangelical Humpty Dumpty be put together again? I think not. What was started in the 1940's both in America and in Europe has had a wonderful run, has created a multitude of churches and para-church organizations, an immense and impressive array of scholarship, seminaries, colleges, social relief, missionary work and a massive enterprise in believing. However, today it is sagging and disintegrating. (David Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, Eerdmans, 2008, p. 8)

Indeed! The gelding has been castrated. Now the gelding can grow fat and live out his day consuming whatever the culture provides. Our

youth pastors can pick up the latest cultural toys, hoping to impress Christian young people with the newest and latest the culture provides (current example, “The Harlem Shake.”)

But geldings cannot reproduce. They are sterile by definition. We need more than a C. S. Lewis “Mere” Christianity. A minimalist gospel, outwardly decked out with cultural paraphernalia, is too easily ignored by both unbelievers and believers. Our Gospel of salvation by Jesus Christ cannot be reduced to the role of a back-up singer to the main attraction just off stage, partially hidden so as to survive in the culture. Sell or die has replaced preach or die.

A “Cleavage” in the Church

By Sarah Leslie

Recently *Charisma* magazine – of all places! – published an article by a female writer, Jennifer LeClaire, who asked a very simple and bold question: “Why Do So Many ‘Born-Again, Spirit-Filled’ Women Show Off Cleavage in Church?” (7/25/13). She commented:

Some women—and I am talking about so-called “mature believers,” not lost souls or baby Christians—come into God’s sanctuary on Sunday morning wearing clothes you might rather expect to see them wearing at a dance club on Saturday night. Their blouses cling to their bodies, their necklines dip so low and stretch so wide that they reveal cleavage, and the slits up the sides of their skirts offer more than an innocent glimpse of their thighs. Again, I’m not talking about sinners seeking God or new believers who plain don’t know better. I’m talking about those who claim to be “born-again, baptized, blood-bought” (even tongue-talking) members of the church!

The article started a firestorm of controversy. It seemed as if people were intentionally exaggerating what she wrote, and purposefully over-reacting. Quickly one of the editors, Shawn Akers, weighed in, expressing his agreement with her article. He jumped into the fray with a follow-up article titled “Churchgoing Men Would Appreciate Less Cleavage in Church Too.”

What did LeClaire say that was so controversial? She wrote what the Word of God has to say:

Paul instructed Timothy that women should “*adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation*” (1 Tim. 2:9), and he told the church at Corinth that “*our unpresentable parts have greater modesty*” (1 Cor. 12:23). Regardless of how hot it is outside or how busy we are, there’s no justification for **Spirit-filled** women to come to church wearing clothes that cause some men to pay more attention to the things of the flesh than the things of the Spirit. [bold in original]

She also explained that this wasn’t about legalism, it was about purity, modesty, holiness and a having a good testimony:

...[I]t is our responsibility to speak the truth in love to those who may not know better and to lead by example. In too many ways—including sometimes our wardrobe—Christians have conformed to the world. Paul warned us not to “*be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*” (Rom. 12:2).

It’s not about being the fashion police, and it’s not about condemnation. If the Holy Spirit convicted your heart about the way you dress as you read this, don’t let the devil beat you up. Just buy a few new modest outfits and keep praising God! It’s about not purposely opening the door to the spirit of immorality.

Quite obviously this struck a nerve in our fad-addicted, consumer-driven, Mall-Mart culture. Less clothing and more skin is the fashion of the day. But is skin-tight a holy way to honor Jesus Christ? In his response to all of the hoopla, the *Charisma* editor wrote frankly as a man:

The last thing we need is to walk into church—a place where we have come to worship God freely and love Him with all of our hearts—and to have our attention diverted by the way some women are dressed.

He explained that during a men’s study in his home that his friends openly talked about how difficult this is for them. To have a constant temptation to sin – right in front of their eyes!

Right in church—a place where they should be focusing on worshipping the Lord! The editor gently suggested that women consider this:

So, what is the solution? I believe it can be found in Romans 14:13, which says, *“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way.”*

A stumbling block. Hmm... When was the last time you heard a sermon message warning about causing a weaker brother (or a child, or a teenage boy) to sin?

It seems that cleavage is causing a cleavage – a deep division that marks a profound difference amongst evangelicals. There is a tiny remnant who still teach and believe in biblical separation and non-conformity to the world. But what is the “world”? The culture-at-large—accepting the idea that “everybody is doing it so it must be okay.” Trying to fit in and be popular by compromising and adapting, even watering down the Gospel.

Dr. Francis Schaeffer referred to this as “accommodation.” Accommodation to the ideals, the values, the practices, and the fads of the modern culture. He warned that accommodating ourselves to the culture, the world, would water down and neutralize the Gospel of redemption. And it would also dilute the church’s ability to be salt and light to a lost world. His prophetic warning is just about the opposite of the seeker-sensitive drivel we get these days:

Here is the great evangelical disaster—the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word for this—namely accommodation: the evangelical church has accommodated to the world spirit of the age....

This accommodation has been costly, first in destroying the power of the Scriptures to confront the spirit of our age; second, in allowing the further slide of our culture. Thus we must say with tears that it is the evangelical accommodation to the world spirit around us, to the wisdom of this age, which removes the evangelical church from standing against the further breakdown of our culture.

(The Great Evangelical Disaster, p. 320-321)

This “cleavage” problem is more than just about how people dress, but dress is definitely a symptom of the disease. The root problem is, of course, that evangelicaldom wants to make itself enticing, alluring and attractive to the mass culture. It is like a publicity stunt. The church tries to reinvent itself in a worldly mold in hopes that it will “attract” unbelievers. It copies every new thing that comes along in culture. The church is no longer standing on the solid rock of Jesus Christ, but the shifting sand of modern marketing. But is this what people are looking for? A church that is indistinguishable from the world? A church where people seem to be frantically trying to imitate the world? We forget that people need Jesus.

Why is there this incessant push to be “hip” and “cool” and “cutting-edge” in the world? Part of the reason may be our human inclination to be peer-driven. We desire to be like others, to be liked, to have approval, to seem special. We want others to like us. We don’t want to appear “different” or weird. So we emulate the world. Even to excess! This despite the clear biblical admonitions:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1 John 2:15)

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. (John 15:19)

Evangelicals are also leader-driven. We put our leaders on pedestals and worship our stars. These gilded idols are esteemed as our “experts,” and we try to keep up with every new thing that they say, do and publish. Some obsessively even follow their tweets! Don’t be naïve! These leaders make money doing this! Many of these polished elites have perfected the art of distorting and confusing Scripture – to their own peril. Here is where most people get deceived. They don’t know that many, many evangelical leaders are simply re-packaging “spirituality” that comes from the world—or even the occult—and dishing it out to a receptive audience that craves new things, new teachings,

new titillations... and who exhibits no biblical discernment. So much recycled pagan spirituality.

Wearing Spotted Garments?

When was the last time you felt SHAME? Shame for yourself, or shame for someone else? Immorality and indecency doesn't cause shame anymore. And our addictions to media and entertainment have desensitized us so that we can no longer even recognize immodesty.

In the Old Testament era a harlot was easily recognized by both her appearance and her adulterous and idolatrous actions. We seldom use this word anymore, but think about it. In the Old Testament idolatry was referred to as harlotry. Ezekiel 16 grieves the loss of the innocence and virtuous beauty of God's betrothed, Israel:

But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was. (verse 15)

The evangelical church, also betrothed to the Lord, has accommodated itself to the world. It is a polluted place today, filled with idols and idolatry. This is why the Lord admonishes his disciples to be as wise as serpents, but as innocent as doves (Matt. 10:16). We are to warn others but protect ourselves from filth:

*“And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; **hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.**” (Jude 21-22)*

Did you catch that? “Hating even the GARMENT spotted by the flesh”? Think about it. Is this simply talking about being dirty with sin, or is there a possible literal application? There are other verses that talk about garments, too. Putting on the “garment of praise” (Is. 61:3), for example. How can we praise God wearing a spotted garment? How can we praise God when we are tainted with sin? Furthermore, if we look like and act a harlot how can we minister to the lost? Isn't that sending a mixed message? Yet we only have to turn on the TV church channels to see this very thing depicted before our eyes.

Isaiah 61:10 paints a more beautiful picture of a ready bride, awaiting her groom and covered in the robe of righteousness:

*“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the **garments of salvation**, he hath covered me with the **robe of righteousness**, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.”*

Aaron and the priests in ancient Israel were said to be clothed in “holy garments” which, by the way, covered them completely. In Zechariah, Joshua the priest was discovered to be “*clothed with filthy garments*,” indicating sin, and when his iniquity was pardoned, he was clothed with a new “*change of raiment.*” (Zech. 3:3-5) Lest you dismiss this is just Old Testament legalism, James soberly warns the church that they are not ready for the coming of the Lord:

*“Your riches are corrupted, and your **garments are moth-eaten**.... Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been **wanton.**” (James 5:2)*

Several verses in Revelation also warn:

*“Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that **watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.**” (Rev. 16:15)*

*“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which **have not defiled their garments**; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.” (Rev. 3:4)*

Some of these verses are symbolic, but can't we also take them as literal? Imagine what would happen if Jesus were to clothe you. Are your current garments acceptable unto the Lord? Could you stand before Jesus without shame, knowing that your appearance is honoring to him? We know that when Jesus comes again, we will be clothed in a way that gives honor to Jesus, in a purity that that speaks of His cleansing blood:

*“And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in **fine linen, clean and white**: for the fine linen is the **righteousness of saints.**” (Rev. 19:8)*

*And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, **clothed in fine linen, white and clean.** (Rev. 19:14)*

Isn't it about time we stopped emulating the world and started walking in holiness? It begins with repentance, and letting the Holy Spirit convict our hearts about where we need to die to self. It starts by asking ourselves: ***"Where is our focus?"*** On self? Or on God and His holiness?

Terri Mulberry sent us a helpful checklist to examine our clothing so that we have a good Christian witness. Here she raises pertinent and frank questions about dress: ***"Where do the eyes focus?"*** Below is her church attire advice, slightly modified for general application:

Although we have liberty in the Spirit to dress comfortably as we choose, we must not allow that liberty to give an opportunity to the flesh of others. We are responsible to love our neighbor as ourselves giving each other the liberty to receive freely from the Lord without unnecessary distraction.

In general, ask yourself: **"Will the outfit I am considering—or the way I wear it—draw attention to my physical body, or will it allow others to focus attention on the Lord whom I desire to worship and honor?"**

Tops

- Is the top tight fitting? Does it conform to every curve and contour of your body? Does the fit draw excessive attention to your figure? Take care that nothing shows through!
- Does the cut of the top either at the neck or sleeves show undergarments or reveal the lack of? Spaghetti straps/sundresses reveal a bare back/shoulders and tend to be very sensual. Shoulders and backs should be covered.
- Does the cut of the neckline show cleavage? Does it reveal your breasts at the neckline or under the arm? Does it gape when you bend over?
- Is the top buttoned modestly? Is there any pulling or gaping at the buttons?
- Do the top and bottom garments meet comfortably without revealing skin?—especially important when the activity calls for much movement. Outfits that reveal the belly are not appropriate.

- Is the top made of a sheer fabric, mesh or open weave? Multiple layers of fabric are more modest.

Bottoms

- Are they tight fitting? Does it conform to every curve and contour of your body? Does the fit draw excessive attention to your figure? Is it so tight (or droopy) that it reveals your undergarments—or lack thereof? Check yourself in a mirror, front and back.
- Is the length of the skirt or shorts modest? Any article of clothing that reveals thigh, particularly when you sit, should be considered inappropriate.
- If there is a slit in the skirt, how high does it come up on your leg? In button-front skirts, is it buttoned modestly or does it open high?
- Do the top and bottom garments meet comfortably without revealing skin—especially important when teaching children or participating in physical activities? Outfits that reveal the belly are not appropriate.

Books for the Theological College of Southern Africa (TCSA)

Good news! Ken Myers has been collecting the books and raising funds for this project. He is a Grand Rapids retired teacher who traveled with Anton Bosch to Zimbabwe to minister to the students in 2012. He writes:

After many postponements over the last year and a half it appears that the books for the Theological College of Southern Africa (TCSA) will be on their way to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in September.

A ministry that supplies books to churches, Bible Schools, etc., in foreign countries has offered to ship a container of books to Zimbabwe for the cost of \$10,000. So instead of one pallet of books, TCSA will be getting fourteen pallets of various kinds of materials which includes Bibles, Concordances, study books and Sunday School materials. The finances have been coming in to cover the costs involved and we only have to raise \$3,000 more. By shipping time I am believing that this will be covered. We thank God for the privilege of being used of Him to bless the school in Zimbabwe.

If you would like to help, you can send a donation to Discernment Ministries and designate it for the book shipment project.