

Bill Gothard 1934 - ?



Bill Gothard is the founder of the **Institute for Basic Life Principles**, a training organization with a focus on parenting. His basic teaching is that Christians are to live under the absolute, unquestioned authority of superiors, including arranged marriage and life-long submission to parents in all things. God's will is revealed **and His grace is earned through such submission. Gothard also believes that circumcision and portions of the Old Testament ceremonial law are morally binding on all Christians. Gothard's seminars have declined in popularity as a result of several scandals and legal entanglements.**

Writings by Bill Gothard:

- Our Jealous God;
- The Power of Crying Out;
- The Power of Spoken Blessings. (IBLP-related titles are only available to attendees of the seminars.)

Note: Gothard's organization is becoming increasingly cult-like. Recommended is the book **A Matter of Basic Principles** from *Midwest Christian Outreach* for its documentation of the most troubling aspects of Gothard's ministry.

At "Bill Gothard's" website we find the following description of how he started out in his now famous seminars: "**Institute of Basic Youth Conflicts**", which have received worldwide acclaim.

"An Invitation to Develop a College Course In 1964, Bill's alma mater, Wheaton College, invited him to design and teach a course based on his work with youth. The course was given the name Basic Youth Conflicts; two hours of upper-division undergraduate and graduate credit were awarded to students completing the course. Forty-six students, youth pastors, and teachers registered for that first class. The next year 120 students enrolled in Basic Youth Conflicts." Expansion Through Word-of-Mouth Recommendation. In the years that followed, Basic Youth Conflicts was offered in several new locations. Alumni were informed of the dates and told their friends about it. Soon seminar attendance averaged between 10,000 and 20,000 youth and adults. Today, hundreds of smaller Seminars are being conducted in cities throughout the United States and other nations. Today he has spoken to millions of religionists all over the world through these seminars.

"But what really is Bill Gothard presenting? Is it theologically sound? Is it according to the "Gospel of Grace" as presented to us in the Bible by the Lord Jesus Christ, or is it just a bunch of well sounding humanistic humanism? These questions have to be asked and answered, when one man is permeating his teaching on such a large scale, irregardless of sound and biblical it sounds. But is it biblical? The answer would have be given in the negative for several and many diverse reasons.. **the main one of course is that Mr. Bill Gothard is presenting once again as all false prophets do, an "Arminian Pelagian False Gospel".**

True.. Mr. Gothard presents many practical lessons from the book of Proverbs, as this author can attest to.. as having sat through one of his seminars, this can be picked up on quite distinctly.. he also has issued several quite thick volumes filled with quite elaborate and well illustrated object lesson from nature, using the animal kingdom to illustrate his teachings.. so yes he has put a lot of work into his seminars, his books.. and his teachings.. no doubt.. this of course is what makes it so deceptive... especially in light of the fact that **he adorns and glorifies a false gospel of "free will" theology.**

Bill Gothard and the Bible

A Report by Ronald B. Allen, Th.D.1
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The week that I spent at Basic Youth Conflicts in 1973 (Portland) was one of the most difficult of my life. In this seminar I was regularly assaulted by a misuse of the Bible, particularly of the Old Testament, on a level that I have never experienced in a public ministry before that time (or since). All speakers, including myself, fail to interpret and apply the Bible rightly from time to time. But in the Gothard lectures, Old Testament passages were used time after time to argue points that they did not prove. I was as troubled by the errors made from the lectern as by the seeming acceptance of these errors as true and factual by the many thousands of people in attendance.

At the time, I made my complaints known to Dr. Radmacher who proposed a meeting with Mr. Gothard in Portland. Gothard subsequently told Radmacher that the two of them might meet together, but that he had no interest in meeting with me to discuss these issues. I am setting these issues down on paper at this time at the request of Dr. Radmacher for a meeting that he will be having with Mr. Gothard on May 31, 1984.

I do not raise these issues with any desire to deny that God has been pleased to bring blessing to many thousands of people through the ministry of Bill Gothard. But I do raise these issues to demonstrate--willful or not--Gothard's use of Scripture is so suspect as to render him a poorly informed and untrustworthy teacher. To cite letters of approval based on success stories is beside the point, unless one wishes to argue that the end justifies the means.

Here are a few of the issues that concerned me then and which have been added to over the years:

1) A mechanistic approach to human personality.

There are ten steps for this and five steps for that, yet eight steps for another. Such an approach to human personality accords neither with the variations in people or with the dynamics of Scripture. The listing of these "steps" is pure human invention, but Gothard presents each of the lists as though they were the direct teaching of the Bible. This is my principle objection to his ministry.

For example, the wisdom literature of the Bible uses many terms to describe the fool. One word *peti* (Prov. 1:4; 14:15; 22:3) describes the naive, the one who is inexperienced and is at a crossroads, drifting along to temptation, but still within hearing of wisdom. Another word is *les* (Prov. 1:22; Psalm 1:1), to describe the scorner who is unteachable, idle, foolish and irrational. These two words depict two extremes in folly, but the Bible does not spell out the steps that leads from the stage of *peti* to the stage of *les*. The Bible uses various terms at various times to describe differing people, or even the same person in differing aspects. That is, the presentation of folly in the Bible is dynamic and relational, not mechanistic and impersonal.

Gothard's approach is not that of the careful exegete who wishes to determine the meaning of the text, but of the engineer who wishes to use the material in his own programmatic approach which is mechanical and not personal, mechanistic and not dynamic. Gothard does not really teach the

Scripture; he really uses the Scripture to fit into his own categories.

It is particularly in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, a section that Gothard uses often, that Gothard is at his weakest from an exegetical and theological point of view. He uses the Proverbs not as general maxims, but as specific, predictive, authoritative predications. He has not really entered into the world of biblical wisdom, a world which does not present the simple answers to the complex questions of life that he imagines.

Qohelet,² for example, presents quite a different picture than Gothard's simple lists. Qohelet presents a world of ambiguity, of uncertainty, of questionable value--but a world in which the man or woman of God may demonstrate resolute faith in God even when one cannot pin down the nature and value of reality.

The Book of Job presents a point of view that is dramatically different from Gothard's lists. In fact, Gothard is a splendid modern example of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar--each of whom approached the problems of Job from a mechanistic, cause-and-effect, point of view. Here was their principle error: while there is a cause-and-effect approach to reality that is found at times in the wisdom literature of Scripture, that is not the only approach to life that the Bible teaches.

The clear teaching of the Book of Job is that a mechanistic, cause-and-effect, approach to life may be way off base! Is it any wonder that Gothard tries to evade the clear teaching of the Bible that Job was a righteous man (the only reading on which the book works!), and finds many sins and character flaws in him (overwork in Christian! causes, neglect of his family, embittered sons, estranged from family, wrong attitudes toward the workers). In this way the book is turned inside out and by this strange alchemy Job supports Gothard's lists.

Given Gothard's low view of the body and his repressed views of human sexuality, it is not surprising that he neglects entirely the Song of Solomon with its beautiful eroticism and its delight in human sexuality. For Gothard, the things done between a man and a woman are the secret things of Ephesians 5:12, a disgrace even to speak of such. Only on the basis of his own negative, programmatic approach to human sexuality would Ephesians 5:12 refer to the marriage bed. Serious exegesis matters little in such an approach.

Similarly, only one having a point to prove, and not a passage to understand, would say that the Chain-of-Command applies in all cases to commands from parents whether they are regenerate or not. Gothard says: "Notice that the spiritual condition of the parents is not listed as a factor in obeying these clear commands." Then, without giving the source, he quotes Prov. 6:20-21:

My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother; bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.

To assert that the spiritual condition of the parental teachers of wisdom is irrelevant in this text is an absurdity, a mark of sheer incompetence of biblical interpretation. The writer of Proverbs 1-9 is presenting teaching that is in the mold of the Torah of Moses. These words of Proverbs 6 (see verses 22-23) are reflective of Deuteronomy 6 and are responsive to Psalm 119. To say that they may be applied indiscriminately of unregenerate parents in a chain-of-command mentality is not to interpret the Bible, but to use the Bible for one's own ends.

2) A dogmatic presentation of personal opinions as though they were the word of God, when in fact they are countered by the Bible itself.

Paramount among these is the terrible picture of the chain of command in the family with the husband as the hammer, the wife as the chisel and the children as the gems in the rough. (In my Red Notebook, this is page 3 of the "Chain-of-Command" Notes). The ghastly picture is that he beats on her and she chips on them. If ever there were a reason for a women's movement in the evangelical church--this is it. This illustration is simply not reflective of biblical theology; it is a parody of patriarchy.

Lost is all concept of mutual submission and inter-relatedness of wife and husband which the Bible

truly presents; instead there is the basest form of male chauvinism I have ever heard in a Christian context.

Women are stripped of dignity other than that which they have in their husband; children are to be broken; the husband is to be permitted tyranny over the grin-and-bear-it little woman. Gothard has lost the biblical balance of the relationship between women and men as equals in relationship. His view is basically anti-woman.

3) Presentation of discredited opinions of Scripture as correct evangelical insights and "new discoveries" for the church today.

I will never forget the presentation made in the seminar I attended where the Torah's injunction not to boil the kid in its mother's milk (the mistaken basis for the Jewish tradition of meat-dietary laws) was applied to the Christian church!

"Why do Christians get sick?" he asked. "Because they do not eat as God has commanded!" He then proceeded not only to lay the burden of the Levitical dietary law on the people, but the non-biblical injunction of meat-dairy distinctions as well! I cannot understand why people did not rise en masse and object to this error then and there. But all wrote these notes in their red notebooks as another insight from his peculiar mount. Even Jewish authorities now admit that Maimonides was correct, that the passages on boiling a kid in its mother's milk had nothing to do with diet but with an abominable sacrificial practice of the Canaanites from which Israel was to abstain. But in the teaching of Gothard an ancient bad turn of Judaism was made the new path for Christian people.

4) A surprising use of Scripture texts to produce guilt on the part of godly people.

Women with rebellious sons are made to believe that these heartaches are the direct result of their own lack of submission to their husbands. Guilt is piled on guilt.

Surpassing even my credibility level is the audacious new teaching reported to me that Gothard now warns parents of adopted children that they may be under the injunction of God's displeasure because the children they have adopted may be visited by God for the iniquity of their fathers. The only result of such a teaching is guilt--something Gothard seems to desire to produce in his people.

That the Bible never ties adoption and the "sins of the fathers" is not a consideration. Imagine the consequences in the life of both the adoptive parents and the adopted children of such a pernicious teaching. This is an example of a mechanical use of the Bible that shows no sensitivity to context, culture, theology or the character of God. What could be the motivation for such a teaching? I really do not know.

5) A hypocrisy of life standard.

Gothard makes an issue of a low personal profile. He shuns magazine and news reporters, refuses to allow interviews or photos. But somehow he does make it well known that he lives on a sub-standard wage (about \$600 per month, as I remember), without mentioning that every creature comfort is provided by company funds. A person who does not think through these issues would imagine Gothard to be living at a poverty level--as a modern monastic.

I have no brief for low wages, nor any compelling complaint against a very high wage when it is earned by true industry and when it is used with compassion for the needy and not only for a fine life-style. My complaint here is against what is said and what is real--the disparity of statement and life-style.

6) The personal problems in the life of Bill Gothard and his organization were not a matter of public record when I attended the seminar in 1973. It appears to me that these sad problems--and the failure to rectify them--are the results of using the Bible but not really learning from it. When the Bible becomes something that one can manipulate, then personal difficulties can be rationalized away with impunity.

I close with this quotation from Wilfred Bockelman, Gothard: The Man and His Ministry: An Evaluation:

One final example should be sufficient to warn the reader against distorting the scriptures to support a preconception. In one of his lectures I heard Gothard say:

"There are those who say, 'What's wrong with drinking a little wine? Doesn't the Bible say that Jesus himself made wine?' It is inconceivable that Jesus made wine. Wine comes about through a process of decomposition. Decomposition is a part of death, and Jesus was the exact opposite of death. He is life himself. It is inconceivable that Jesus could be party to something that involved death. It is inconceivable that Jesus made wine." It should be obvious to the reader that when scripture is treated like this, it can be made to say anything. [Santa Barbara: Quill Publications, 1976, (p. 56)]

Endnotes

1. Dr. Allen is currently Professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, USA. [Back to Text]

2. Qocholet refers to the narrator of the book of Ecclesiastes. It is a Hebrew name word meaning "Preacher," and is sometimes used as the title of the book. [Back to Text]

Bill Gothard's Ecumenicalism

by John E. Ashbrook

Bill Gothard was a 1957 graduate of Wheaton College. For several years he worked with teenage gangs in the Chicago area. In 1965 he developed a six- day seminar which has become known as the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts. Gothard presents this seminar in person, or on videotape, in cities all across America. The crowds are tremendous-ranging up to ten thousand people. One report I read said that "in the first decade and a half, there were 350,000 red notebook-carrying alumni." I am certain that is true.

From whence come these large crowds? One of my ministerial brethren here in Ohio began his ministry in the United Brethren Church and left that church, because of its apostasy, about the time of the United Methodist merger. In conversing about Gothard he told me of accepting an invitation to a Gothard Pastors' Seminar in Dayton. Much to his chagrin, he found himself surrounded by his former Methodist and United Brethren associates--all of whom enjoyed the seminar tremendously. There is something wrong here. The ecumenical crowd does not enjoy fundamentalist meetings. It must have been something else.

What I know about the sponsorship of a Gothard seminar I learned a few years ago, when there was a movement to bring a seminar to Cleveland. The groundwork was laid by General Association of Regular Baptist pastors. I received a letter from one of them who seemed to be serving as chairman of the effort. His letter said that "Over 75 pastors have written a letter of interest and invitation for a seminar to be brought to the greater Cleveland area. We have now generated enough local interest that we may move to the next step toward having a seminar here." Included with that letter was a sheet titled, "THREE PHASES IN SELECTING A SEMINAR LOCATION." Three steps were given and one was headed "Phase II - Petition for Seminar by Local Christian Leadership." The first sentence under this heading reads as follows: "This phase begins when the seminar headquarters receives personal letters of invitation from the majority of pastors representing the various denominations in a city's greater metropolitan area." That is the same policy Billy Graham uses. That explains the mixed crowd at a Gothard Seminar, which will run the gamut from Catholic priests and nuns, to the ecumenical crowd, to the new evangelical crowd. That is bad, but the tragedy is that the audience will be well sprinkled with professing fundamentalists. The fellowship of sitting for six days with that mixed multitude makes the fundamentalists layman go home saying, "The priest I sat beside was a very nice fellow." Attitudes toward false religion and plain unbelief are softened by participation.

In the margin of the sheet from which I have most recently quoted I find that I had jotted down at some time a quotation from Dr. Charles Woodbridge. It asks a question: "Does it spurn, or does it promote, the deadly ecumenical compromise of today?" The question makes the needed point.

The Projector for August 1981, carries a statement from the church bulletin by the pastor of the

Metropolitan Baptist Church of Atlanta, Georgia. I do not know the name of that pastor. However, I agree with what he says:

Second, I cannot support Gothard because he does not identify himself as a fundamentalist and does not teach his hearers that remaining in liberal and neo-evangelical churches is a sin.

I have talked with men across America who have voiced the same concerns. Others have said he is going to change. Unless and until he publicly identifies himself as a fundamentalist, exposes the liberal churches, and changes his teaching on authority, I cannot support him.

For years I have heard of good fundamentalists who have gone to convince Bill Gothard to be a fundamentalist. They have come away saying, "Gothard really wants to be a fundamentalist ... just give him time." Much time has been given. Gothard may believe the fundamental doctrines, but he does not act like a fundamentalist. As long as he acts like a new- evangelical and serves that cause, I will have to treat him as one. He seems to believe in the Southern Baptist doctrine of parity, for I know of at least one instance in which he combined the SBC's Dr. Charles Stanley and a well- known fundamentalist on the same program. I count Bill Gothard as a new evangelical popularizer

[New Neutralism II, John E. Ashbrook, pgs. 73- 74].

A NOTE FROM BILL...

Dear Alumnus,

Now, more than ever before, God has placed you and me in a position where we can turn the tide of American history.

The message of the Basic Seminar is being looked to by a growing number of judges, mayors, governors, and international leaders as the only answer to youth crime and family breakdown.

"We have no answers," these leaders say to us, "but we see the results in your families and young people, and we will do whatever it takes to have the same results."

"...When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him" (Isaiah 59:19). God is fulfilling this promise in our day. I urge you to take hold of this exciting opportunity to be a part of that standard.



P.S. As encouragement to first-timers, we are offering a \$15/person discount to groups registering by the Early Registration Deadline. Call the Seminar Office: (216) 252-0001 or (330) 893-3553 to order brochures or to request more information on group rates.

