

Cleansing Stream



Personal Impressions and Biblical Review

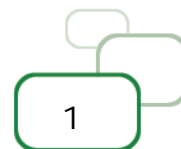
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Cleansing Stream Impressions

For a year or more one of our church members has been asking if we could do a video series called “Cleansing Stream’ at our church. Initially she said that it needed to be done by a staff person or an elder. She shared an introductory video with me and the leader’s notebook. I perused through it, but knew that I did not have time to add another long-term class and I didn’t have the propensity to lead a class that I had not been through.

She suggested that I attend the semi-annual retreat that they held so I could understand the material. Pastor’s are allowed to go at no charge. I checked into it, but neither of the retreat dates last year worked for my schedule.

When I asked her more about the content, she gave me a list of churches that use the material. All but one were Foursquare churches. The exception was the Christian Church in Monmouth. I called a couple of the Foursquare churches, but either the person I talked to did not know anything about the course or did not know who led the course, or was very vague about it.

This summer the same member approached one of our elders about her doing the class herself. I was much more open to that. She has been through the course (although I learned this past Sunday that she had never been to the retreat).

She again raised (through the elder) the possibility again of me going to the CS retreat. It was to be held in Roseburg Nov. 14-15. That worked OK into my schedule and I thought I would go. The elder and I agreed that being aware of what was taught doctrinally was essential to allowing it into TCC.

I arrived at New Life Christian Center in Roseburg just minutes before the scheduled meeting time. While I had pre-registered, they did not have a record of it and so I had to take time to re-register all over again. Meanwhile, the opening worship time had begun. After registering, I went into the auditorium. As I entered the room, I had to pass through a gauntlet of white-shirted men & women. They all stared at me as I came in. No greeting, no smile, no nothing except a blank stare at me. I figured that they were folks who were there to make sure I had paid and was not trying to sneak in without paying. Later, I came to believe that they were intercessors who were (perhaps) praying for me as I came in, but it was frankly, a little off-putting. To have two lines of people stare at you as you walked through the door and through the middle of the two lines without greeting or smiles, felt very, very weird.

There was a man who helped me find a seat because the auditorium was fairly full. The worship music was good. Most of the songs I didn’t know, but that is OK with me. The congregation was typically expressive along charismatic lines, and again, that is not off-

putting to me. I enjoy enthusiastic and expressive worship music and this certainly was that.

The main leader/teacher for the weekend was Pastor Debbie Sayovitz. Sayovitz is an accomplished and very personable speaker. She led about half of the teaching times and others on the staff led the rest. Two of the teachers were from the local church there in Roseburg.

Teaching topics included:

- Overcoming Rejection
- Abuse
- Guilt, Shame and Condemnation
- Fear
- Passage to Purity
- Death
- Anger (added, but not in the notebook)

Material in the notebook provided, but not covered were

- Addiction
- Bitterness
- Free Masonry
- Mind Control
- Poverty

There was much about the teaching to appreciate. It was heavy on scripture, which I appreciated. The format was basically this:

- Teaching time, followed by
- Declaration time (leader gave a line and everyone repeated it, next line, repeated, etc.) binding the demon of the specific topic inside everyone and breaking any vows, covenants, “soul-ties” or “generational-ties” that had held them bound.
- “Ministry time” –time of casting out demons. I will describe this in more detail below.

There were several pastoral issues and two core theological issues that concerned me.

Pastoral Issues.

1. Forced “ministry.” At the end of the teaching time and the group declaration, a group of anointers came forward and lined up in front of the auditorium. Then everyone present was escorted row by row to the front and assigned an anointer to work with them. It was not optional whether or not you came forward. A guy in front of me (60-ish) refused to go forward. The man dismissing each row so they could get in the line to go forward signaled to one of the men encircling the room, who came and harangued him about coming forward. It was expected.

“Why would you come to this if you refuse to go forward?” Debbie had stated earlier that everyone was going to come forward so that no shy persons would feel intimidated about walking forward to receive “ministry” when those around him/her were not. But it was very “group think.” Everyone was told what to do and when to do it. I don’t understand why they would force someone to go forward who either did not believe that they needed this “ministry” or who did not believe in it. I don’t know what good would have come from that.

2. The actual “ministry” up front. The procedure was: when you got to your assigned anointer, you were to confess to them how you had sinned in this area. (It was not “have” you sinned in this area, but “how have” you sinned in this area. Then they either gave a ritual prayer that you echoed back to them (like above), or they simply said, “You cast the demon out of yourself.” The ritual prayer was designed to cast out the demon of whatever topic had just been taught about. Apparently I had not learned the ritual prayer, because a couple of times when I went forward and commanded any spirit to leave and then prayed to God to make any spirit leave and to put a hedge of protection around me, I was interrupted and told “You’re not doing it right. You’re supposed to only speak to the demon, not to God.” (I guess I thought that God was much more powerful than the demon). There seemed to be much more focus on speaking to the demons than to God. When I balked at talking exclusively to demons, one lady turned me over to her “supervisor” and we spent a long time with him trying to convince me that I had sin in a certain area and that I needed to follow their prescribed plan. He kept trying to convince me that I had “a choice”: I could do it “God’s way” or forever remain bound by this demon.

Maybe related and maybe not. The hotel where we stayed was mostly (or all) Cleansing Steam people. I engaged the desk clerk in conversation and he commented on “the group” that was staying here. He said they all move as one, and act as one. His words were that there is a definite “herd mentality among them.” That concerned me.

3. While much of the teaching was good, some of it had the potential to do great harm to individuals. Examples:
 - a. Under rejection-“when children call one another names at school, we think that ‘children can be cruel’. In fact children are not cruel, but there is a spirit of rejection being manifested.”
 - b. Under abuse- you are to repent (repent was the definite word used) of all abuse you have RECEIVED. You need to “repent” of all the pain you have felt that was caused by abuse.
 - c. Under abuse-if you had abused others you could be forgiven of abusing, either by Debbie or by the anointer, without having to ask forgiveness of the person you have hurt. That is blatantly unbiblical.

- d. Under death-if you have had a miscarriage it is because you have exposed yourself to a spirit of death. The unnecessary guilt that this can cause woman who have miscarried is atrocious.
 - e. Under death-the cause of diabetes, high blood pressure, etc is that you are oppressed by a Spirit of Death which you need to have cast out. (Can I then stop taking my medicine??) When you went forward, the anointer was to ask you, "Where has a spirit of death been killing you?" (Not HAS IT, but WHERE HAS IT?)
 - f. Under purity-a woman "caught" mental illness because she had sex with two mentally ill men who were not her husband.
4. The exclusion of psychological care. The issues dealt with are mostly (at least related to) psychological issues. To credit every emotional problem to the oppression of a demon is very naïve. To cast out the demon presumes that someone does not still need psychological help. I would compare it to the faith healers who believe that God will heal all physical diseases and so you do not go to physicians or hospitals: "God will heal if we ask/command him to", even to the point of waiting until your child dies. I don't see any difference except one is in the physical realm and the other is in the emotional/psychological.

DOCTRINAL ISSUES

There were two main doctrinal issues that I believe were the root cause behind the pastoral abuses listed above.

1. Personification of emotional problems as evil spirits or the belief that all emotional/mental health issues are caused by demons in your life. They never stated that Christians could be "possessed" by evil spirits and the lady from our church reiterated that they believed that this was not possible. But a spirit could still reside in a Christian, "oppress" him/her and force him/her to behave in certain ways. I am not positive what the difference is between a spirit living in you and "possessing" you and a spirit living in you and "oppressing" you is. But I can even live with that question. The main problem I have is the teaching that demons cause all your emotional/mental problems. I firmly believe in demonic activity and influence. And while CS disavows believing that there is a demon under every rock, I don't know how their behavior would be any different than it is, if they DID believe there was a demon under every rock. To say it, does not make it true.
2. Buying into the Word of Faith movement. This movement is led by Kenneth Copeland and Kenneth Hagin and found in the teaching of such public figures as Joel Osteen, Robert Tilton, Paul Yonggi Cho, Benny Hinn, Marilyn Hickey, Frederick K.C. Price, John Avanzini, Charles Capps, Jerry Savelle, Morris Cerullo and Paul and Jan Crouch.

This is too complex an issue for a brief review like this. A popular name for the Word of Faith movement is "the Name It & Claim It" gospel). One website describes the Word-Faith movement like this: (<http://www.gospeloutreach.net/whatwordfaith.html>)

The "force" of faith, an unbiblical view of faith, is the foundation of Word of Faith theology. Proponents believe they can use words to manipulate the faith-force, and thus actually create what they believe Scripture promises (health, wealth, etc.). Laws supposedly governing the faith-force are said to operate independently of God's sovereign will -- God Himself being subject to the "laws" of faith.

Another describes the Word of Faith doctrine like this:

(<http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/Psychology/char/more/w-f.htm>)

As is implied by the title "Word-Faith," the supporters of this movement believe that faith works like a mighty power or force. Through faith, we can obtain anything we want -- health, wealth, success, whatever. However, this force is only released through the spoken word. As we speak the words of faith, power is discharged to accomplish our desires. Hagin's theme, as found in his booklet *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God*, can be summarized as follows (*Christianity in Crisis*, pp. 74-75):

In the opening chapter, titled "Jesus Appears to Me," Hagin claims that while he "was in the Spirit" -- just like the apostle John on the Isle of Patmos -- a white cloud enveloped him and he began to speak in tongues. "Then the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to me," says Hagin. "He stood within three feet of me." After what sounded like a casual conversation about such things as finances, ministry, and even current affairs, Jesus told Hagin to get a pencil and a piece of paper. He then instructed him to "Write down: 1,2,3,4." Jesus then allegedly told Hagin "if anybody, anywhere, will take these four steps or put these four principles into operation, he will always receive whatever he wants from Me or from God the Father." That includes whatever you want financially. The formula is simply: "Say it, Do it, Receive it, and Tell it."

1. Step number one is "Say it." "Positive or negative, it is up to the individual. According to what the individual says, that shall he receive."
2. Step number two is "Do it." "Your action defeats you or puts you over. According to your action, you receive or you are kept from receiving."
3. Step number three is "Receive it." We are to plug into the "powerhouse of heaven." "*Faith is the plug*, praise God! Just plug in."

4. Step number four is "Tell it so others may believe." This final step might be considered the Faith movement's outreach program.

Kenneth Copeland states the faith formula this way: "All it takes is 1) Seeing or visualizing whatever you need, whether physical or financial; 2) Staking your claim on Scripture; and 3) Speaking it into existence" (*Christianity in Crisis*, p. 80).

Paul Yonggi Cho, borrowing from the occult, has developed what he calls the "Law of Incubation." Here is how it works: "First make a clear-cut goal, then draw a mental picture, vivid and graphic, to visualize success. Then incubate it into reality, and finally speak it into existence through the creative power of the spoken word" (*Christianity in Crisis*, pp. 83-84).

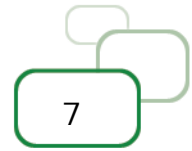
I would see this manifest at the Cleaning Stream retreat in their emphasis on verbally commanding spirits and the belief that because we have commanded a spirit to leave, that all of our sicknesses and diseases have to be cured. I am not sure what "demon" Paul had that resulted in his thorn in the flesh, but despite repeated prayers, God told him, "My grace is sufficient for you." It would seem that our time would be much better spent getting to know God better and entering into intimacy with him that trying to scour out all of the demons that we imagine might be causing all of our problems.

There is a long section on the connection between Cleansing Stream and the Word of Faith movement at <http://www.letusreason.org/Curren21.htm>. It is too long to duplicate here.

There are other minor doctrinal problems (like picking up the Hellenistic notion of the three-part nature of humans instead of the Hebrew understanding that humans are made up of two parts), but these are of much less significance than the first two.

CONCLUSION

When I shared a few of my concerns with the member of our congregation, she was understandably disappointed and distressed. Although before I went to Roseburg, she said that I would understand the course after being at the retreat, when she saw that I was concerned about the course, she backpedaled and said that I was pulling the retreat out of context. I couldn't understand the retreat unless I had been through the course. I acknowledged that this was a possibility and so requested that I be a part of the first class that she teaches so I CAN fully understand it. But she said that she was not willing to teach the course unless I was totally supportive of it. Finally we agreed that she would get me some of the DVD's of the actual class sessions for me to review. Hopefully THAT would (now) put the RETREAT in context.



At this point, before reviewing the specific video class sessions, there is no way I could recommend that we allow this video teaching series to be used at our church. At the retreat I changed my views on it 180 degrees. Where as before I thought that a lot of people could genuinely be helped by this, now I am convinced that a greater number of people would be hurt and confused by it.

Written 11/17/08

Update as of 12/11/08 –The church member has not given me any videos to preview. I asked her husband about it and he that she was concerned that I would just take the videos out of context. I don't know how else someone is supposed to become familiar with the material than to preview it and attend their retreat.