

Syncretism in Modern Evangelicalism

I. Intro

- A. Victor did a great job last week of examining the differences between Saul and David and even David and David (during different seasons of life).
 - 1. When David walked out his identity by faith, he killed giants
 - 2. When he walked out his identity by fear, he turned into the enemy's servant
 - 3. When King Saul operated by fear, he dipped into forbidden practices of necromancy
 - a) For the Thundercats generation, you might picture Muhmra the Everliving,
 - b) For the video game generation, you probably picture a wizard with skeletons following him around to do his bidding
 - c) For everyone else, you think we're a bunch of nerds.
- B. Necromancy is conjuring up the dead, trying to contact the deceased.
 - 1. In modern terms, it's seances, asking your local psychic to get lotto numbers from your uncle, an Ouija board, or ghost-hunting
 - 2. This is where you go, "Uh..."
 - a) Yes, Ouija boards, good old-fashioned fun, are about contacting the dead... during high school sleepovers in between pillow fights
- C. Brief history...
 - 1. Spiritualism grew in popularity in the United States and Europe during the mid-19th century, especially after the rise of the Fox Sisters in 1848. The sisters claimed they could communicate with spirits by interpreting rapping sounds. Seances and spirit communication became common, and people sought methods to contact deceased loved ones.
 - 2. One method of facilitating spirit communication was "Talking boards," featuring letters, numbers, and a movable pointer.
 - 3. In the early 1880s, talking boards similar to modern Ouija boards were documented, and people started using them at seances.
 - 4. In 1890, Elijah Bond, a Baltimore attorney, filed a patent for a "talking board." The patent featured a board with the alphabet, numbers, and a planchette (the small, heart-shaped piece that moves).
 - 5. The Ouija board gained immense popularity in the early 20th century, particularly during and after World War I, when many sought to contact deceased loved ones. In 1966, Parker Brothers bought the rights to it
- D. What do we do with things like this? Is it harmless? Is it demonic?
- E. Our lives are littered with influences and w/ tiktok and social media, they are literally being fed to you on a regular basis
 - 1. Law of Attraction, Manifesting (thinking things into reality), tarot cards, crystals, meditation, horoscope, spirit guides, plant medicine, ayahuasca mushrooms, fortune telling, the evil eye, and on and on

- F. I through my back out on Thursday and Friday, after laying on my kitchen floor for more time than I'd like to admit, I went to the doctor
 - 1. They gave me a shot and some meds, and sent me home w/ some post-care information
 - 2. Do you know what was on the list? Meditation
 - G. Probably at least one person here is going, "Yes, that's good advice. Calm yourself down"
 - H. Today, many believers in modern evangelicalism unknowingly walk a path similar to Saul's by turning to Eastern practices, New Age ideologies, and syncretistic spiritual trends.
 - 1. What seems like harmless may, in fact, be giving the enemy a dark foothold in your life.
 - 2. I want to have an honest conversation today about the infiltration of New Age / Eastern thought into Modern Evangelicalism
 - I. Before we begin, Scripture gives us clear boundaries on many spiritual practices, but it also leaves room for personal conscience and discernment in certain areas
 - 1. Paul unpacks this in Romans 14 (food, holidays, etc)
 - J. Some things are black and white. Some things are left to personal conviction. I will do my best to point them out as we go
- II. What is Syncretism? It is the blending of different religious or spiritual beliefs into one system, is repeatedly condemned throughout Scripture.
- A. Story: Artemis & Mary
 - B. What does the Bible say about it? From the earliest days of Israel, God warned His people not to adopt the pagan practices of the nations around them. In Deuteronomy 18:9-12, God explicitly prohibits practices such as:
 - 1. **Divination:** Fortune telling, astrology, tarot card reading, and other forms of psychic practices can be considered modern forms of divination
 - 2. **Witchcraft:** Modern witchcraft, such as Wicca, or other practices that involve casting spells, using potions, or calling on spiritual entities to manipulate the natural world, fall into this category
 - 3. **Sorcery:** Modern forms of sorcery include things like the use of hallucinogenic substances or spells to summon spirits or alter reality, as well as practices involving spiritual objects [amulets, crystals] believed to hold supernatural power.
 - 4. **Necromancy:** Practices like séances, spirit channeling, or mediums who claim to communicate with the dead all fall under necromancy.
 - 5. **Soothsaying:** A form of divination specifically aimed at predicting the future through interpreting signs or omens.
 - 6. **Astrology:** Uses the stars and celestial bodies to predict future events or guide decisions.
 - 7. **Magic:** spells, charms, or objects to invoke supernatural power.
 - C. In Isaiah 8:19-20, the prophet reinforces this warning, questioning why anyone would seek guidance from mediums and soothsayers when they could seek God, who speaks clearly through His Word: *19 Someone may say to you, "Let's ask*

the mediums and those who consult the spirits of the dead. With their whisperings and mutterings, they will tell us what to do.” But shouldn’t people ask God for guidance? Should the living seek guidance from the dead? 20 Look to God’s instructions and teachings! People who contradict his word are completely in the dark.

- D. 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 says that light has no business with darkness
 - E. Colossians 2:3 argues, *“In CHRIST lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”*
 - F. I want to comment here. The Bible doesn’t say that necromancy, reading the stars, horoscopes, manipulation of spirits, or anything like these practices are FALSE. The Bible says they are FORBIDDEN.
 - G. The Bible isn’t saying, “This doesn’t work.” The Bible says, “This isn’t allowed.”
 - H. So when we embrace some of these things and simply fold them into our evangelical faith b/c “the experts say…” or “the internet said…” or “My romanian nanny told me…” we are on dangerous ground
- III. What are some examples in real life?
- A. **Meditation:** taught in every public school in NJ. In Hinduism and Buddhism, meditation is a practice designed to achieve an altered state of consciousness by emptying the mind to reach spiritual enlightenment.
 - 1. Historically, the goal is to merge with a universal spirit (think of the movie Avatar when they plug in to the Mother Tree).
 - 2. The biblical definition of meditation has been ransacked by eastern thought. When the Bible calls believers to meditate, it is not by EMPTYING their minds but by FILLING them with Scripture.
 - a) Psalm 1:2 says, “His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.”
 - b) Romans 12:2, Biblical meditation involves reflection on God’s Word, allowing it to shape and renew the mind
 - B. **Yoga:** Oh boy. Now this one is gonna get some debate. Remember, some things are cut and dry and some things are harder to navigate. Pray and ask GOD for wisdom and investigate the Scriptures
 - 1. While yoga is often marketed as a simple form of exercise, its roots are spiritual, originating from Hinduism as a means of uniting the body and spirit with divine energies.
 - 2. Each yoga pose is linked to a different Hindu deity designed to tether you to a hindu god
 - a) Warrior Pose → Virabhadra, incarnation of Shiva
 - b) Monkey Pose → Hanuman, the monkey god
 - c) Lord of the Dance Pose → Shiva
 - d) Tree Pose → Krishna standing under the tree with a flute.
 - e) Cobra Pose → Shiva w/ a cobra around neck
 - f) Upward Dog → Narasimha, the lion-man avatar of Vishnu
 - 3. In recent years, some Christians have embraced Christian yoga, retaining the physical benefits. What do we say?

4. Clear = I would not go to a yoga studio that clearly embraces the eastern spiritual roots (mantras, incantations, meditation, etc)
 5. Personal Conviction = What about the poses themselves? IDK. Some Christians here would say NO and others would say NO BIG DEAL
 - a) Rather than asking me for the rule, you should ask God for wisdom. The question is, "God, should I be bothered that these forms are originally related to worship?"
 - b) Let me pose another question: "Would you be bothered if next week you came in and every person here was facing East and praying like they do in a Mosque even if we were praying to Jesus?"
- C. **The Enneagram:** Rooted in sufi mysticism and new age psychology, the Enneagram is marketed as a way to discover the "true self."
1. Problem: The Enneagram can shift the focus from looking for our identity in Christ to looking inward towards self-exploration, elevating personality typing as a form of spiritual insight.
 2. Again, this is hazy and we should ask the Lord for personal conviction. One person may not be distracted by it, yet another might define themselves more by their personality test than Christ
- D. **Centering Prayer:** Encourages believers to empty their minds or repeat a mantra to connect with God. This has obvious roots in mysticism .
1. Problem: While the Bible encourages meditation on Scripture (Psalm 1:2), centering prayer often downplays this in favor of silence or repetitive phrases. The danger is emphasizing mystical experiences not grounded in biblical truth, potentially leading to spiritual deception.
- E. **Manifestation and Positive Confession:** Manifesting is the idea of speaking things into existence through belief and words, and it draws from the New Age belief in the Law of Attraction. The idea is that by focusing positive energy or thoughts, individuals can attract success, health, or material blessings into their lives. <Good vibes only, anyone?>
1. Problem: You see this in the prosperity gospel movement, where people believe that speaking positive declarations can bring them to reality. However, this shifts trust from God's will and sovereignty to the believer's own power of speech, which is contrary to biblical teaching (James 4:13-15). We are called to pray, not to call things into existence.
- F. **Energy Healing:** Reiki and other forms of energy healing focus on manipulating an unseen life force energy (often called "chi" or "prana") to bring about healing.
1. Problem: Energy healing introduces a worldview that relies on spiritual energy manipulation, which is incompatible with the biblical teaching that God alone is the source of healing and that Christians are to rely on prayer and the Holy Spirit for healing (James 5:14-15).
- G. **Crystals and Healing Stones:** This is the belief that crystals and healing stones contain spiritual energies that can be harnessed for healing, protection, or attracting positive energy.

1. Problem: This is literally the definition of witchcraft and magic in the Bible, and it shifts trust away from God as the healer and protector, toward objects believed to hold power
- H. **Astrology and Horoscopes:** Astrology, which claims that celestial bodies influence human affairs and personalities, has seen a resurgence in popular culture. Some Christians have begun engaging with horoscopes or zodiac signs, seeing them as harmless fun or insightful tools.
1. Problem: Astrology is explicitly condemned in Scripture (Isaiah 47:13-14), as it seeks to gain insight into human life and the future by relying on created things rather than the Creator.
- I. How do you navigate it?
1. The Bible doesn't say, "That doesn't work. That's not real. That's dumb." The Bible says, "That's forbidden; it's not allowed."
 2. Some is super clear: Astrology, for example, or manifesting
 3. Some is more vague: yoga as just physical exercise
- IV. The Reality of the Holy Spirit and Supernatural Works
- A. The danger is not in acknowledging the existence of supernatural experiences (we are so ignorant to this) but in seeking them through unbiblical means
 - B. What we need to realize is that the Holy Spirit is a person, not a power.
 1. He is the third person of the Trinity, actively working in the life of every believer.
 2. His role is to convict the world of sin (John 16:8), to empower believers for ministry, guide them into all truth, and produce spiritual fruit (Galatians 5:22-23).
 3. He dwells within each Christian and equips the church with gifts for building up the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).
 4. We see evidence of His power throughout Scripture - from the parting of the Red Sea to the transformation of believers today.
 - C. What is the Purpose of the Supernatural in Christianity? To authenticate the gospel and point people to God. GOD does it (Joel 2)
 - D. What's the difference between biblical Spirit supernatural and other powers?
 1. The difference lies in the source and purpose of these experiences.
 2. The supernatural power of God always originates from Him and is meant to glorify His name and advance His kingdom.
 - a) It is not a tool for personal gain or spiritual elitism.
 3. The opposite is true of other powers. Energy healing, for example, doesn't bring glory to God, but the practitioner. It says, "I don't need God to heal"
 - a) It is self-glorifying, not God-glorifying.
 - E. We need to be discerning as we consider these supernatural powers
 1. Scripture provides clear warnings that not all signs and wonders are from God. Jesus Himself warned that false prophets would arise, performing great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect
 2. Christians must be careful not to seek the supernatural as an end goal.
 3. Experiences should never take precedence over the truth of God's Word.

4. The Bible and the work of the Holy Spirit are sufficient for guiding believers in faith and godliness.
5. When God chooses to act supernaturally, it is always consistent with His revealed Word and will serve to glorify Him, not to promote human elitism.
6. The Bible teaches that God often works supernaturally in response to the prayers of His people and faith in a great God.
7. Yet, it is important to note that supernatural answers to prayer always rest in God's will.
 - a) Believers don't manipulate God or control him
8. God answers prayer according to His perfect plan
 - a) Our role is to ask with great faith and to trust in His wisdom and submit to His will, knowing He works all things together for good
9. The bottom line is that it can feel a lot easier to control a power than to submit to the Great God of the Universe.
 - a) Why? B/C if I can do it, I don't need to turn to him. I don't need to rely on him.

V. CONCLUSION

- A. We should view all of these issues—whether the Enneagram, meditative prayer, energy healing, yoga, crystals, astrology, or manifestation—with discernment and caution.
 1. These practices often originate from New Age, Eastern religious, or occult traditions and contradict the Bible's teaching on trusting solely in God for spiritual growth, healing, and guidance.
- B. What should we do?
 1. **Test Everything Against Scripture:** Evaluate all spiritual practices by measuring them against the clear teachings of the Bible (1 Thessalonians 5:21). If a practice doesn't align with Scripture or the work of the Holy Spirit, reject it.
 2. **Trust in God's Sovereignty:** Place your faith in God's will and His sovereignty, not in techniques or rituals that promise control over outcomes or deeper spiritual insight (James 4:13-15). The Bible provides all that is needed for spiritual growth and godliness (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
 3. **Rely on the Holy Spirit:** Allow the Holy Spirit to guide your spiritual journey (John 16:13), rather than relying on mystical practices or self-focused methods. Spiritual growth comes through the renewal of your mind and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:2).
 4. **Pray with Faith, Not Technique:** Focus on biblical prayer, trusting that God hears and answers according to His perfect will (Philippians 4:6-7). Avoid practices like centering prayer or visualization that shift the emphasis from God to personal experience.
 5. **Reject Syncretism:** Be careful not to mix non-Christian spiritual practices with your faith, no matter how appealing they may seem (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). Stay committed to the purity of the gospel and the teachings of Christ.