

Round Top Church Christian Fellowship

Sermon Series in James

*James Addresses New Age of his time*

*James 1:17-27*

October 23, 2016 A.D.

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(All Scripture is from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.)

We start today's lesson by giving examples of New Age teachings in our time. We will also look at opposing teaching in James' time. Both of these can be considered to be in the category of "strange teachings" which we have recently presented. James is leading his audience away from Judaism and away from Greek belief systems we call Greek mythology or the pantheon religious worldview that has its origins in Plato and other Greek philosophers. We know this because of his word choice. We read "**Father of lights**" and a reference to an **unchanging shadow**. "**Father of lights**" is used nowhere else in the New Testament. These words are chosen to place God, as Jesus Christ, to be superior to the Greek pagan or Jewish belief systems.

### **Example of New Age Today**

<https://gotquestions.org/new-earth-Eckhart-Tolle-Oprah.html>

**Question: "What is the 'church of Oprah'? Is Eckhart Tolle's 'New Earth' compatible with Christianity?"**

**Answer:** Oprah Winfrey is arguably one of the most influential women in the world. With a daily viewership that has peaked around 10 million, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* definitely has the potential to impact the lives of many people.

This more recent exposure of her beliefs revolves around the book [A New Earth by Eckhart Tolle](#), which she helped to make a best-seller by promoting it on Oprah's Book Club and on her website. Beyond simply promoting the book, Oprah has partnered with Tolle in presenting weekly online webcast classes in order to explore the ideas and principles expressed in *A New Earth*.

Eckhart Tolle, a well-known New Age author and speaker, promotes nothing short of personal divinity in his teachings. In an attempt to deceive people into thinking that his religion is compatible with Christianity, Tolle occasionally quotes from the Bible and refers to biblical principles. The problem is that Eckhart Tolle's book, *A New Earth*, is in complete opposition to biblical Christianity from cover to cover. Nearly every reference to, or quote of, Scripture is twisted by Tolle's consistent misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

Consider what can be found in just the pages of the first chapter: evolution of life over millions of years is accepted, assumed, and understood to be fact; Jesus is misquoted; flowers, crystals, precious stones, and birds are believed to be temporary manifestations of the Universal Consciousness and are themselves considered enlightened life forms; the definition of sin is misinterpreted; Jesus Christ is thought of as just one of those rare people who, like the Buddha, achieved divine consciousness; other religions, such as Buddhism, are considered just as valid and true as Christianity; an early Christian cult, Gnosticism, is portrayed as one of the few groups who actually understood the teachings of Jesus; original sin was simply a forgetting of the connectedness and oneness with the Source, along with everything else connected with the Source—a delusion of separateness; heaven is portrayed as merely an "inner realm of consciousness."

These teachings are found in just the first chapter. Obviously, Eckhart

Tolle is promoting a new religion, one which combines the most mystical aspects of every major religion. The first chapter, of course, sets the tone and direction for the rest of the book. This direction happens to be as far from biblical truth as is possible. If you are concerned at all with whether or not this book is compatible with the Christian faith, you need not read any further than the first chapter to understand what Tolle believes and what Oprah is encouraging others to believe. Below is an excerpt from Tolle's book.

*The only existence the future actually has is as a thought form in your mind, so when you look to the future for salvation, you are unconsciously looking to your own mind for salvation. You are trapped in form, and that is ego. "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth," writes the biblical prophet. [T]he foundation for a new earth is a new heaven - the awakened consciousness. The earth - external reality - is only its outer reflection. The arising of a new heaven and by implication a new earth are not future events that are going to make us free. Nothing is going to make us free because only the present moment can make us free. That realization is the awakening. Awakening as a future event has no meaning because awakening is the realization of Presence. So the new heaven, the awakened consciousness, is not a future state to be achieved. A new heaven and a new earth are arising within you at this moment, and if they are not arising at this moment, they are no more than a thought in your head and therefore not arising at all. What did Jesus tell his disciples? "Heaven is right here in the midst of you."*

*End of Example*

Now consider the philosophical writings of Plato and note the words “parent of light,” “lord of light”. Also follow the “shadow”. The “shadow” in Plato’s Republic can be the shadow of the prisoners in the cave and more importantly is the shadow of the sun, the creator. Jews in the first century were greatly challenged by Greek philosophy and thought.

James is writing to Jews who are transitioning from being justified by their works or adherences of the Law to being justified by Faith. What is the natural product of faith? This is the question James puts forth and contrasts the Law against Faith. In addition, James had other challenges to the Gospel message other than that of Judaism. The Greek philosophy, way of life and culture immersed Jewish life as it did every people group around the Mediterranean Sea and parts of Asia. Since Alexander the Great conquered the area by 329 B.C.. the Greek way of life, including Greek philosophy and religion, invaded and greatly influenced every aspect of life. With the Greeks came the writings and beliefs of Plato, Platonism or Platonic thought. Plato lived and wrote in the 300’s B.C. Plato taught Aristotle who was Alexander’s (Son of Philip of Macedon) teacher. Alexander is Alexander the Great who conquered the Persians and every other power that stood in his way.

By the time of the first century A.D., Greek philosophy had influenced religion in the region for over 300 years. The influence was so great that the Jews in Alexandria, Egypt had their sacred Scriptures (Old Testament) translated into the Greek language. This document is called the Septuagint. Biblical historians refer to this translation as the LXX for the 70 scholars who translated the work. However, it is often noted there were 72 Scholars.

The Greek religions, ideas and thoughts about this earthly life and the after-life were prevalent in James’ day. Greek ideas and philosophies about the nature of this life are refuted by James in these passages that we read today. This challenge that James had is similar to our challenge today in refuting “New Age” philosophies that we see presented in the form of Hinduism and “New Age” philosophy that prevail the public air ways and media outlets today. The above example above (Tolle/Oprah) is just one of many. They

sound motivational and inspiring, but they are not the Gospel. Below are excerpts from Plato's Republic. See website noted.

Note the key words in their application such as "shadow", "parent of light" and "lord of light". This is why James uses "Father of light". James positions Jesus as superior by using Father. Also, note how the sun is anthropomorphically used. It is an ontological (the state of being) statement. That is the assigning of a status of being, of life by using the word "him" or "he". Basically, Plato is saying that the sun is he who created. The sun is the light of the fire, and the prisoners can only see its shadow unless they are set free. This freedom is accomplished by intellectual ascent of the soul. Thus, the Gnostic bases of belief and teaching. In addition, James directs his audience to an unchangeable God who indwells us. In other words, God is not distant that we only see His shadow. God indwells us;, we do not have to turn our heads to see God. He is in us.

**John 17:23** <sup>23</sup> I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. . . . .

<sup>26</sup> and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

The Republic By Plato

Written 360 B.C.E

Translated by Benjamin Jowett

<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.8.vii.html>

Book VII Socrates - GLAUCON

And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: --Behold! human beings living in a underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

I see.

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?

Yes, he said.

And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Very true.

And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?

No question, he replied.

To them, I said, **the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows** of the images.

That is certain.

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow it' **the prisoners are released and disabused of their error**. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and **walk and look towards the light**, he will suffer sharp pains; **the glare will distress him**, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive someone saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision, -what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them, -will he not be perplexed? **Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?**

Far truer.

And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take and take in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?

True, he now

And suppose once more,

that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent,

and held fast until he 's forced into the presence of the sun himself,

is he not likely to be pained and irritated?

When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled,

and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities.

Not all in a moment, he said.

He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day?

Certainly.

Last of he will be able to see the sun,

and not mere reflections of him in the water,

but he will see him in his own proper place,

and not in another;

and he will contemplate him as he is.

Certainly.

He will then proceed to argue

that this is he who gives the season and the years,

and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world,

and in a certain way the cause of all things

which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

Clearly, he said, he would first see the sun and then reason about him.

And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow-prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

No question, he said.

**This entire allegory**, I said, you may now append, dear Glaucon, to the previous argument;

the prison-house is the world of sight,

**the light of the fire is the sun,**

and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the **ascent of the soul into the intellectual world** according to my poor belief,

which, at your desire, I have expressed whether rightly or wrongly God knows.

But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all,

and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen,

is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right,

parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world,

and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual;

**and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally, either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.**

Plato and Gnosticism and Jewish thought: see website

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/anxiousbench/2015/02/gnostics-and-platonists/>

Now consider James's words and think about what he must be addressing in his own time.

### **James 1:17-27**

<sup>17</sup> Every **good thing** given and every **perfect gift** is from above, coming down from the **Father of lights**, with whom there is **no variation or shifting shadow**.

<sup>18</sup> In the **exercise of His will**  
**He brought us forth by the word of truth**,

[Genesis 1:3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26 God Said let there be . . . ]  
Word of Truth . .

### **Psalm 119:41-43**

<sup>41</sup> May Your lovingkindnesses also come to me, O LORD, Your salvation according to Your word;

<sup>42</sup> So I will have an answer for him who reproaches me, For I trust in Your word.

<sup>43</sup> And do not take the **word of truth** utterly out of my mouth, For I wait for Your ordinances.

**Paul writes in Colossians 1:5** "because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the **word of truth**, the gospel"

Continuing in the book of James verse 18 . . .

so that we would be  
a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

<sup>19</sup> *This* you know, my beloved brethren.  
But everyone must be quick to hear,  
slow to speak *and* slow to anger;

<sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

<sup>21</sup> Therefore,  
putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness,  
*in humility receive the word implanted, [indwelling H.S.]*  
*which is able to save your souls.*

<sup>22</sup> But *prove* yourselves *doers of the word*,  
*and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*

<sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer,  
he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;

<sup>24</sup> for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away,  
*he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.*

<sup>25</sup> But one who looks intently at the perfect law,  
the *law of liberty*, and abides by it,  
not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer,  
this man will be blessed in what he does.

**Psalm 19:7** *The law of the LORD is perfect*, restoring the soul; The  
testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

**Hebrews 10:1** For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, **can never**, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, **make perfect those who draw near.**

<sup>26</sup> If anyone thinks himself to be **religious**, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man's **religion** is worthless.

<sup>27</sup> Pure and undefiled **religion** in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

### Christianity and Gnosticism mutually exclusive.

The intellectual assent in Gnosticism was a direct and opposing heresy that threatened the early church during the first three centuries. Influenced by such philosophers as Plato; Gnosticism is based on two false premises:

**Dualism** segregates spirit and matter. Gnostics teach that matter is inherently evil and spirit is good. As a result of this base belief, Gnostics believe anything done in the body, even the grossest sin, has no meaning, because real life exists in the spirit realm only. In addition, God's incarnation of himself as Jesus Christ places Jesus as a non-deity. Jesus could not have been good (sinless), or the God-head in the flesh, because the body is matter and anything that is matter cannot be good. This is why in the Gospel of John 1:14 we are told that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. John is also refuting Platonic Gnostic teaching.

**Salvation** from this world is by intellectual ascent. Gnostics claim to possess an elevated knowledge, a “higher truth” known only to a certain few. Gnosticism comes from the Greek word *gnosis* which means “to know.” Gnostics claim to possess a higher knowledge, not from the Bible, but acquired on some mystical higher plane of existence. Gnostics see themselves as a privileged class elevated above everybody else by their higher, deeper knowledge of God. It is an observation that today’s liberal secular-humanist political system appoints themselves as superior to the rest of mankind, because they are smarter and have a greater awareness of how to be a human being. There is one thing that is different. The self-proclaimed liberal secular-humanists have left God out of their equation. They elevated themselves in their own intellect to be their own god.

The Bible teaches us The Truth. We are saved by faith, not the knowledge of God. This is my experience in the world, and the Bible specifically states: Eph 2:8 and John 3:16; Romans 4. You can know about God and go to hell. The demons know and shudder, because they do not follow or surrender to God (James 2:19).

Continuing in the book of James 1:

<sup>27</sup> Pure and undefiled religion

in the sight of *our* God and Father is this:

to visit orphans and widows in their distress,

and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

How does James sum up the Gospel? In verse 1:27, he points to the Second greatest command . . . to love your neighbor. He does this by pointing to orphans and widows; who are obviously, our neighbors. James adds to keep ourselves unstained by the world. This is a tall order in a heavily-influenced Greek society where by its very nature puts forth and approves every fallen human nature. This includes the practice and worship of the fertility cult goddesses. Paul and his fellow disciples refute this in Ephesus when he speaks against the Artemis god (Acts 19:24ff). It is a challenge throughout history for

mankind to keep themselves unstained by the world. So, how do we do this? New Age directs us to look into our inner being. This is not what Christ our Lord and Savior calls us to do. In fact, Christ tells us that we need Him in us to achieve freedom from this world. We do not need more of ourselves in ourselves. This is one definition of insanity. **Keep doing the same thing and getting the same results. Keep putting more of you in yourself, which is the self-imposed intellectual assent, and you will find no peace with God.**

What should be in you . . . more of you? Paul and Jesus give us the answer.

**Romans 8:10** And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

**Ephesians 3:17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

**John 17:23** <sup>23</sup> I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. . . . .

<sup>26</sup> and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

AMEN