

# Frances



## “THE MESSAGE BIBLE”: PERVERSION OF GOD’S HOLY WORD

“. . . but when your eye is evil, your body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in you be not darkness” (Lk. 11:34-35).

It is impossible to separate Jesus the Living Word from Jesus the Written Word. Therefore, one can easily see why Jesus, the Light of the World, cannot be portrayed with a **false light, a false Bible**. You will, in effect, be presenting “another Jesus,” “another spirit,” and “another Gospel” (II Cor.11:4). “The Message Bible” is just such a false light. It is actually not a Bible. It is a message from the enemy specially crafted to filter through a veil of Scripture so as to “deceive even the elect” (Mk. 13:22). Supposedly, *The Message* is harmless, just another translation in contemporary style, but one quick look should show anyone that it is a questionable paraphrase at best. However, even this is a stretch because *The Message* contains consistent error, which constantly misses the heart of what the Holy Spirit intended to express. It is nowhere close to a true word-for-word translation of the original Greek and Hebrew text. To put it another way, **its author is not the Holy Spirit at all, but a man named Eugene Peterson**. And, as if this weren’t sinful enough, *The Message* also delves into the occult. The phraseology used in *The Message* demonstrates thorough knowledge of esoteric and New Age philosophy. Peterson himself is a proponent of contemplative/mystical spirituality as evidenced in his writings and endorsements of other contemplative authors, not to mention their endorsements of his work.

### STRANGE SPIRIT

More discerning readers will be able to sense that *The Message* does not bear witness to the Holy Spirit, but rather a **strange spirit** will begin to move upon their hearts, actually making *The Message* quite dangerous to read! This satanically-inspired distortion of Scripture has arrived just in time for the advent of the Antichrist’s interfaith “church,” having sold over 10 million copies thus far. The real tragedy is that much of the “church” which is endorsing it, professes to be the Christian church. Rick Warren references it 83 times in *The Purpose-Driven Life* (published by Rupert Murdock through Zondervan Publishing). Interestingly, though, Eugene Peterson does not even consider *The Message*, the Word of God. It was never his intention to use it as such. In an interview in *Christianity Today*, Peterson says, “When you’re doing a paraphrase translation like I’ve done . . . there’s more of an imagination and poetic aspect to it, because you’re trying to re-create those rhythms or those images and metaphors in this culture . . . I would never recommend it be used as saying, ‘Hear the Word of God from the Message.’ It surprises me how many do.” I guess it does surprise him, considering that, in his own words, he tells us that part of the process involved something as blasphemous as “re-creating” the Scripture. Furthermore, he said, “. . . in a congregation where somebody uses it in the Scripture reading, it makes me uneasy.” Now, if Peterson has enough fear of God not to use his own personal paraphrase from the pulpit, where is this same respect for the Holiness of God among other “Pastors”?

### INTERPRETATION?

Perhaps, another reason Peterson is not comfortable calling *The Message* the Word of God is because He cannot even guarantee that his interpretation is accurate. He says, “**I just kind of let go and became**

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**playful . . . I did the Beatitudes in about 10 minutes.**” When asked about his feelings regarding *The Message*, Peterson says, “To tell you the truth, I’m quite **detached** from it . . . it’s almost like it’s happening to somebody else. I’m surprised at how **little emotion** I feel about this.”<sup>1</sup> This is certainly an interesting admittance considering that “detachment” is described as a psychological defense mechanism enacted to avoid emotional pain. What could have been painful about his experience of writing *The Message*? Well, beginning with its attack upon the very heart of the Gospel, we are going to explore many of such possibly distressing components.

## THE CROSS OF CHRIST

**The Cross is the working-system of Christianity.** When you do not function according to Faith in the Cross, your Christianity does not work. Satan, therefore, will be sure to distort the Message of the Cross whenever he can. With that said, let’s look at what *The Message* does to the Message of the Cross:

### I Corinthians 1:17-18

#### King James:

(17) “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

(18) “For the preaching of the Cross is to them who perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the Power of God.”

#### The Message:

“God didn’t send me out to collect a following for myself, but to preach the Message of what he has done, collecting a following for him. And he didn’t send me to do it with a lot of fancy rhetoric of my own, lest the **powerful action at the center**—Christ on the Cross—be trivialized into mere words. The Message that points to Christ on the Cross seems like sheer silliness to those hellbent on destruction, but for those on the way of salvation it makes perfect sense. This is the way God works, and most powerfully as it turns out.

This puts a contemplative/mystic spin on the Message of the Cross indicating that the Power of the Cross cannot be “trivialized into mere words.” Remember, contemplatives do not believe in the Sound Doctrines of the written Word; they believe in **experiences which transcend words**. Paul, on the other hand, was trying to convey that it is indeed in the preaching of the Doctrine of the Cross where the Power of God could be found. Paul meant for us to **preach the Word of the Cross**, because the Power of God is established in that Truth! Also, the concept of “**centering**” directly connects to contemplative spirituality, meaning that you can find the **Christ within** at the very **core, center, or deepest** part of your being. *The Message* alludes to this with the words “*the powerful action at the center — Christ on the Cross.*” Could Peterson be indicating that the Power of Christ Crucified can be found at the center of your own soul during times of **contemplative meditation**?

## CENTERING?

Calvin Miller, one mystic teacher in the “church” today, describes “centering” this way: “Centering is the merger of two ‘selves’ — ours and his. Centering is union with Christ. It is not a union that eradicates either self, but one that heightens both.”<sup>2</sup> Joseph G. Sandman, Vice President for Advancement at Loyola University Chicago teaches workshops on centering prayer in the Institute for Pastoral Studies. He points out that Vatican II called for the revitalization of the path of contemplative prayer and says that “centering prayer” is a practice of monastic spirituality that will open one to “God’s gift of contemplative prayer.”<sup>3</sup> Mystic father **Thomas Merton** added a concept to centering which involves a “**true self**”/“**false self**” crisis. **Thomas Keating** later expanded on the idea actually making it a cornerstone in the literature on centering prayer. In this teaching, a person’s truest self is the deepest part of his being, his center, which is united with God. Therefore, the essence of spiritual life was to become more deeply centered in this “*true self*” so that God may be able to further develop it while tearing down the false self. The “*false self*” is defined as the psychologically wounded part of a person that forms in order to cope with unmet needs in his life. The person’s conscious thoughts and behaviors try to satisfy these unmet needs, so they may manifest as irrational compulsions or faulty thinking at times. Of course, such are never given the simple Biblical definition — sin. Some have also found it quite simple to incorporate this Freudian-like theory into their “Christian” self-help books, one example being **Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man’s Soul** by **John Eldredge**.

## THE CROSS AND SIN

Another way *The Message* corrupts the Message of the Cross is by avoiding any explanation of Faith in the Cross as the **Spiritual Law ordained by God**, which alone can overcome the Law of sin in a person’s life.



## Romans 8:1-2

### King James:

(1) "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

(2) "For the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the Law of Sin and Death."

### The Message:

"With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ's being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death. God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son. He didn't deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In his Son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all."

Notice how *The Message* says "the Spirit of life in Christ" rather than "**the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus.**" It stops short of directing someone to the Spiritual Law which, when kept, will lead to a victorious Christian life. Also, being "in Christ Jesus" and entering into His "being-here-for-us" are two different things. Jesus did not save us by His Presence on Earth even though the Spirit of Life was indeed within Him; He Saved us by His Sacrificial Atoning Death at Calvary. The Biblical interpretation of being "in Christ Jesus" has always meant to be a true Born-Again Child of God due to correctly placed Faith in The Finished Work of the Cross. *The Message*, however, redirects you to the Holy Spirit's "**presence**" within Christ, saying that with Christ's "arrival" that "fateful dilemma is resolved."

### PRESENCE?

There is another interesting point to be made here regarding the idea of "presence." There is a doctrine in the New Age movement that refutes the Biblical concept of a "transcendent" God, a God existing apart from nature and man. Helena P. Blavatsky explains that God is a mystical, impersonal "Presence," that may manifest His living, moving Fire in many ways.<sup>4</sup> Alice Bailey said, "This inevitably brings in the concept of the Presence, or of **God Immanent** and is the result of the needed revolt against the one-sidedness of the belief in **God Transcendent.**"<sup>5</sup> God is called the "Presence" numerous times throughout *The Message*. It even refers to the sacred shewbread in the Old Testament as the "Bread of Presence" eight times.<sup>6</sup> For instance, *The Message* says, "Always keep fresh Bread of the Presence on the Table before me" (Exo. 25:30). This closely resembles the Catholic idea of **transubstantiation** in which the bread and wine mystically transform into the literal Body and Blood of Christ. Catholics kneel during mass because they believe the literal presence of Christ is among them in the form of the bread.

### DISTORTIONS

The Message of the Cross is also distorted in Romans 7:22-25.

## Romans 7:22-25

### King James:

(22) "For I delight in the Law of God after the inward man:

(23) "But I see another Law in my members, warring against the Law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the Law of sin which is in my members.

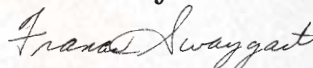
(24) "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

(25) "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the Law of God; but with the flesh the Law of sin."

### The Message:

"I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge. I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question? The answer, thank God, is that **Jesus Christ can and does.** He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different."

The King James version, again, shows us the Spiritual Law of being "in Christ Jesus" — that it is **through a mind fixed on believing what Jesus did on the Cross** that we will be able to serve God. *The Message* says, "I want to serve God with all my heart and mind," but this is different from "with the mind, I myself serve the Law of God." The King James clearly shows us how we can maintain the ability to serve God as we keep the Law of Faith in Christ's Finished Work. It is not a simple desire to serve God nor what Jesus "can and does" do, but a mind-set of believing Faith and identification with what Jesus did on the Cross. Certainly, Jesus is capable of doing anything for us; He is God. But, it is the Law of the Spirit of Life that is God's prescribed means of bringing this victory to us. Any true word-for-word translation will be able to bring this truth to our hearts, but *The Message* only describes victory as a possibility. It says Jesus is the answer, but leaves out **how He is the answer.** What an insult to the Just, Loving, and Merciful God we serve. The Lord wants us to know the **Victory of the Cross!**

  
Frances Swaggart

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