

As I am sure you are aware, my beliefs differ from yours in several critical places. Because of this, I have a multitude of theological concerns relating to many of the things being taught or talked about at camp. In particular, the massive amount of emphasis placed on “hearing from God” is troubling at best and false teaching at worst. A huge problem with people claiming to have received messages from God is the subjective nature associated with such claims. We know from the Bible that many false teachers claimed to speak for God but had sinful intentions. Paul warned about these people when he wrote, “For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths” (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Someone only has to say that they have heard from God and suddenly, their opinions become absolute truth regardless of what the Bible says. It is one thing for an adult to believe that God speaks to them, but teaching it to children is another matter entirely. I am sure that you know as well as I do what Jesus said about people who cause children to fall into sin. The kids who have not “heard from God” may feel left out while the ones who claim to have heard things could end up with a very skewed view of reality due to their lack of biblical knowledge and critical thinking skills. If we reject the objective truth of the Bible as the foundation for our lives, we will instead “be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching” and will “be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth” (Ephesians 4:14).

Furthermore, incorrect biblical interpretation is used to support many of the core teachings of the charismatic church. Take for example the well-known verse Isaiah 53:5, one that I have heard both you and other staff at camp use in the wrong context. In this usage, the first part of this verse is almost always ignored. Instead, many focus only on the last part which says,

“He was whipped so we could be healed.” They take this to mean that Jesus’s sacrifice has guaranteed physical healing to all believers, which was not at all the original meaning. The first part of the verse indicates the reason for the death and resurrection of Jesus; it was because of our sin and rebellion, not sickness. In fact, the entire theme of Isaiah 53 is about freedom from sin through the suffering of Jesus. Nowhere in the book of Isaiah is there any reference to physical healing, instead, every mention of healing refers to spiritual healing. During all my years growing up reading the Bible (and even memorizing the entire chapter of Isaiah 53), it never occurred to me to apply healing from sickness, injury, and disease to this verse. It simply is not the natural reading of the passage and requires twisting the message of the Bible to fit one’s preconceived ideas. When I heard on a podcast that many progressive Christians use this verse as evidence that the gospel includes the promise of physical healing, I was shocked. Peter warned about people who try to use the Bible to promote their own ideas in 2 Peter 3:16 where he wrote, “Some of his [Paul’s] comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters to mean something quite different, just as they do with other parts of Scripture. And this will result in their destruction.” Unless you want to end in destruction, it would be wise to read the Bible with the author’s intent in mind instead of distorting the meaning to fit your preferences.

Physical healing is simply not a result of the gospel. I am not denying the fact that Jesus performed many healing miracles while on earth, or that prayers for healing are sometimes answered. However, there are many instances in which Christians have died from sickness or injury. The Bible does not promise a comfortable life for those who follow God, instead, it continually reminds people about the hardships of living a righteous life and all the suffering that it entails. Many prominent figures in the early church were afflicted with sickness and there is no

mention of them experiencing a miraculous recovery. These people consist of Paul (Galatians 4:13), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25-27), Timothy (1 Timothy 5:23), and Trophimus (2 Timothy 4:20). It is certainly biblical to pray for the sick, but more often than not, making a spectacle of someone being healed gives more credit to people than God.

Another thing that I have heard people here mention is speaking in tongues. Based on some research I have conducted, some people believe that only those who speak in tongues are truly saved, and this I find to be extremely problematic. Nowhere in Scripture do we find any such statement, rather, it is a person's willingness to die to themselves and believe in Jesus's sacrifice for their sins that is required for salvation. While I do not know if any of the staff here take that position, it seems likely that the ones who do "speak in tongues" might view themselves as more spiritually enlightened than others. Such a view may remind the informed Bible reader about the second-century heresy of Gnosticism and its emphasis on having special knowledge, a teaching not supported by the Bible. Since my knowledge of many charismatic practices is quite limited, my sister has informed me that "speaking in tongues" in the modern sense consists of a bunch of gibberish nonsense and is not even a real language. This is, however, contradictory to what someone would observe from reading the Bible. When the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples on Pentecost, he gave them the ability to speak in real languages with the specific intention of reaching more people with the gospel. "When they [the devout Jews from every nation] heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers. They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! 9 Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya

around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!” (Acts 2:6-11). The apostles were given the ability to speak in real languages specifically so that others could understand them, not to spew off meaningless sounds. Paul even wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:13 that “if unbelievers or people who don’t understand these things come into your church meeting and hear everyone speaking in an unknown language, they will think you are crazy.” Talking in a language that no one can understand has no purpose and is often used for show instead of evangelism.

I must also note that mentions of hell, judgement, and the consequences of sin are few and far between. These topics are essential to a well-rounded biblical theology as their prevalence in the Bible is very frequent. To avoid such uncomfortable conversations, many people-pleasing Christians believe in a “New Testament God” while rejecting the God of the Old Testament. However, our goal is not to please people but to do what God desires. “Obviously, I’m not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ’s servant” (Galatians 1:10). Jesus and the New Testament writers repeatedly quoted from the Old Testament and saw immense value in studying the Scriptures. I became concerned that this rejection of the Old Testament might happen at camp when I received the Bible reading plan, one that is entirely Psalms and the gospels. Even the New Testament does not shy away from such themes. Jesus’s command to “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near” (Matthew 4:17) illustrates this well. In order for a person to repent of their sin, they must first acknowledge that they are a sinner, but to do that, they must first know what sin is! Just praying with kids and asking them to believe in Jesus is simply insufficient.

Interpreting dreams is another area where I see much deviance from the Bible. One of the biggest red flags for me (there were several) was the way that staff here talk about dreams and visions. While I am certainly not denying the occurrence of prophetic dreams in the Bible, they were mostly only given to people who played a big role in the relationship between God and Israel, such as patriarchs, judges, prophets, priests, and kings. Common people simply did not receive dreams from God unless there was a good reason. Furthermore, these stories of dream interpretations are only found in the Old Testament. The only dreams in the New Testament are an angel telling Joseph to take Mary as his wife, the wise men told not to return to Herod, Joseph told to flee to Egypt and Joseph told to return from Egypt. These four prophetic dreams do not justify the amount of emphasis the charismatic church places on dream interpretation. In fact, there is no indication in Scripture that these dreams had to be interpreted at all. It seems as though God spoke to these people directly and clearly, using words instead of obscure images that carry a deeper meaning. A great quote from one of my favourite theology blogs speaks on this very issue. “The vast evidence of Scripture indicates that divinely inspired dreams and/or their interpretation was a rarity and usually associated with the prophetic office. There are no indications in either Old or New Testament that believers are to discern God’s will through dreams. However, in both testaments, false teachers and false prophets are said to utilize dreams.” The only reference to dreams in the New Testament epistles is Jude 1:8. “In the same way, these [ungodly] people [who have wormed their way into your churches]—who claim authority from their dreams—live immoral lives, defy authority, and scoff at supernatural beings.” This verse states that there were people attending church meetings who lived in a way not pleasing to God and they specifically used dreams to give authority to their own ideas. Since history tends to repeat itself, it is not hard to imagine that such things have continued. Zechariah

2:10 compares dream interpretation to idolatry by saying, “Household gods give worthless advice, fortune-tellers predict only lies, and interpreters of dreams pronounce falsehoods that give no comfort.”

Although the content of this letter has been heavy and perhaps even harsh, it is not my intent to offend anyone. I am motivated by my commitment to the truth God has revealed to us through his word and not by a selfish desire to cause division and undermine your authority. Considering the fact that this is an interdenominational camp and not everyone here shares your beliefs, I ask you to reflect on some of the things that have been promoted at camp. Working here has been very hard for me as I have been struggling to find a balance between participating in worship while not doing anything that violates my conscience. As Paul wrote, “And when you sin against other believers by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong, you are sinning against Christ” (1 Corinthians 8:12). This verse is in the context of Paul advising the Corinthians on the subject of eating meat sacrificed to idols. Given the excessive amount of idolatry present, this was a common practice in the Roman Empire, and one that early Gentile converts had to wrestle with. Similarly, some of the things happening at camp have pagan origins and are practiced in the New Age. Your responsibility as a leader is to avoid promoting things that might cause another believer to stumble and make sure that all of the staff are united with a common goal.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I pray that you would follow the advice of Proverbs 13:17, which says, “If you ignore criticism, you will end in poverty and disgrace; if you accept correction, you will be honored” and 2 Timothy 3:16, which says “all Scripture (Paul was here referring mainly to the Old Testament) is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and

teaches us to do what is right.” If you would like to discuss any of these things with me, I would be open to doing so to help you understand why I refuse to endorse many charismatic practices. To end this letter off with words straight from the Bible, I suggest you read Jeremiah 23:16-40, the passage directly below.

Rachel

This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies says to his people: “Do not listen to these prophets when they prophesy to you, filling you with futile hopes. They are making up everything they say. They do not speak for the Lord! They keep saying to those who despise my word, ‘Don’t worry! The Lord says you will have peace!’ And to those who stubbornly follow their own desires, they say, ‘No harm will come your way!’ “Have any of these prophets been in the Lord’s presence to hear what he is really saying? Has even one of them cared enough to listen? Look! The Lord’s anger bursts out like a storm, a whirlwind that swirls down on the heads of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not diminish until it has finished all he has planned. In the days to come you will understand all this very clearly. “I have not sent these prophets, yet they run around claiming to speak for me. I have given them no message, yet they go on prophesying. If they had stood before me and listened to me, they would have spoken my words, and they would have turned my people from their evil ways and deeds. Am I a God who is only close at hand?” says the Lord. “No, I am far away at the same time. Can anyone hide from me in a secret place? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?” says the Lord. “I have heard these prophets say, ‘Listen to the dream I had from God last night.’ And then they proceed to tell lies in my name. How long will this go on? If they are prophets, they are prophets of deceit, inventing everything they say. By telling these false dreams, they are trying to get my people to

forget me, just as their ancestors did by worshiping the idols of Baal. “Let these false prophets tell their dreams, but let my true messengers faithfully proclaim my every word. There is a difference between straw and grain! Does not my word burn like fire?” says the Lord. “Is it not like a mighty hammer that smashes a rock to pieces? “Therefore,” says the Lord, “I am against these prophets who steal messages from each other and claim they are from me. I am against these smooth-tongued prophets who say, ‘This prophecy is from the Lord!’ I am against these false prophets. Their imaginary dreams are flagrant lies that lead my people into sin. I did not send or appoint them, and they have no message at all for my people. I, the Lord, have spoken! “Suppose one of the people or one of the prophets or priests asks you, ‘What prophecy has the Lord burdened you with now?’ You must reply, ‘You are the burden! The Lord says he will abandon you!’ “If any prophet, priest, or anyone else says, ‘I have a prophecy from the Lord,’ I will punish that person along with his entire family. You should keep asking each other, ‘What is the Lord’s answer?’ or ‘What is the Lord saying?’ But stop using this phrase, ‘prophecy from the Lord.’ For people are using it to give authority to their own ideas, turning upside down the words of our God, the living God, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. “This is what you should say to the prophets: ‘What is the Lord’s answer?’ or ‘What is the Lord saying? But suppose they respond, ‘This is a prophecy from the Lord!’ Then you should say, ‘This is what the Lord says: Because you have used this phrase, “prophecy from the Lord,” even though I warned you not to use it, I will forget you completely. I will expel you from my presence, along with this city that I gave to you and your ancestors. And I will make you an object of ridicule, and your name will be infamous throughout the ages.’”