

A REVIEW OF ECKHART TOLLE'S *A NEW EARTH*

BY DONALD S. WHITNEY

first half of Jesus' words, and then outrageously implies that every person on earth could make the same claim. But the second half of the sentence makes plain that Jesus made this claim only of Himself. Beyond that, Jesus teaches here that each of us is separate from God the Father and that He (Jesus) is the only way by which anyone can come to God.

What Tolle seems unable or unwilling to realize is that if Jesus is not the only way to God as He claimed, then He's not a great teacher. Any person who would make such a declaration about himself falsely is either a liar or a lunatic, not a spiritual guide. But unlike anyone else who would dare assert such a claim, Jesus validated His authority to do so by rising from the dead.

Tolle's heresy regarding the Bible

Eckhart Tolle's final authority is himself, not the Bible. This makes sense, of course, to a person who believes he is god. If you fall for the "you are god" heresy, then you can deny that the Bible is the Word of God and believe that your own words are god's words. And if you are god, then with Tolle you can take authority over what you want from the Bible rather than submit to the authority of the Bible.

Like Rhonda Byrne in *The Secret*, Tolle is shrewd enough to scour the Scriptures and wrench a few verses from their contexts to give the false impression that the Bible supports his views. And yet, in the end he points his readers to themselves as the ultimate authority: "Yes, you are the Truth. If you look for it elsewhere, you will be deceived every time" (p. 71).

Jesus said that He is the truth (John 14:6) and that Scripture is truth (John 17:17). Tolle says "you are the Truth" and not to look elsewhere. These are mutually exclusive claims. Both can't be right. You choose.

The truth about Tolle's *A New Earth*

Tolle declares that "a new heaven and a new earth" are "the awakened consciousness, . . . not a future state to be achieved." He's sure that these "are arising within you at this moment" (p. 308). He believes you can achieve these with a self-centered, self-sufficient awakening based upon his teaching. You do not need Christ, the Bible, or the church for this. Do not think of death, judgment, and eternity. You are god. Just live in the "Now."

The truth about Christ's "a new earth"

Read Revelation chapters 21 and 22, the passage from which Tolle took the phrase "a new heaven and a new earth," and you'll see something infinitely better than Tolle dreams. After the judgment (Revelation 20:11-15), Jesus will welcome there all who trust not in themselves—as Tolle urges—but in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to make them right with God.

I first heard of Eckhart Tolle during a medical examination. After learning that I was a professor of biblical spirituality, the doctor asked, "Have you read Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*?"

I said no, I had not. A brilliant, multi-talented man with a Catholic background, the physician began to commend the book to me as insightful and profound.

Weeks later, in order to familiarize myself with it prior to my next trip to the doctor's office, I leafed through the bestseller at Barnes & Noble. My initial impressions were confirmed with every passing page. *The Power of Now* was just another New Age, man-centered, self-help manual claiming to be the solution to every problem. And whether by design or default, the net effect of the book was to present itself as a replacement for the Bible and the Christ-centered faith the Bible produces.

Tolle's *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*¹ is simply more of the same.

Who is Eckhart Tolle?

The German-born (in 1948) Tolle lived in Spain during his teen years, and then moved to England where he went to college. At age 29 he experienced what he called a "spiritual transformation" which delivered him from long periods of depression.

In 1995 Tolle moved to Vancouver, where he still resides with his business partner and girlfriend, Kim Eng. Four years after his move to the west coast, Tolle published in *The Power of Now* the thinking which led to his "spiritual awakening" almost twenty years earlier. Deeply influenced by Buddhism, as well as Hinduism and other Indian schools of thought, Tolle emphasizes living in the present moment—the "Now." He views this as the way to experience deliverance from the pain caused by our past. He also believes that focus on the "Now" involves a refusal to see the present as a time to prepare for some future happiness. For Tolle this means simply never thinking of death and what might be beyond it, for that's not "Now." To spend time in the present preparing for death and what follows would, according to Tolle, make you unconscious to the "Now."

Tolle and Oprah

Oprah Winfrey was one of the more visible endorsers of *The Power of Now*, gushing, "I keep this book at my bedside. I think it's essential spiritual teaching. It's one of the most valuable books I've ever read."²

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¹ Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth* (New York: Dutton 2005; Plume, 2006) 316 pp.

² http://www2.oprah.com/omagazine/olist/omag_olist_0336_bks.jhtml, accessed 4-23-08.

Energized by the success of *The Power of Now*, Tolle followed with his 2005 book, *A New Earth*. But why did a book released in 2005 become the bestselling book in America in 2008? In a word, the answer again is “Oprah.” On January 30 she made it her monthly book club (with over a million online members) selection, and immediately sales of *A New Earth* skyrocketed.

Then Oprah did something she hadn’t done with any of her previous sixty book club choices, even calling it “The most exciting thing I’ve ever done.” In addition to having Tolle on her television show, she hosted ten live webcasts with the author. Millions of people worldwide either watched or downloaded the interviews. And so in less than four months, Oprah—arguably the world’s most famous woman—made Tolle perhaps the world’s most famous guru.

Tolle’s blasphemy

“The book’s main purpose,” writes Tolle, is “to bring about a shift in consciousness, that is to say, to awaken” (pp. 6-7). The problem is that to which Tolle wants us to awaken. As is prominent in *The Secret* (which also received a major boost from Oprah’s empire) and other New Age books, Tolle wants each person to “awaken” to the realization that he/she is god.

Repeatedly in *A New Earth* we read things like this:

- The divine life essence, . . . recognize it as one with [your] own essence (p. 4).
- There is only one absolute Truth, and all other truths emanate from it. . . . Yes, you are the Truth. If you look for it elsewhere, you will be deceived every time. The very Being that you are is Truth. Jesus tried to convey that when he said, “I am the way and the truth and the life.”. . . Jesus speaks of the innermost I Am, the essence identity of every man and woman, every life-form, in fact. He speaks of the life that you are (p. 71).
- The Presence that you are, the timeless I Am . . . (p. 105).
- Your true nature emerges, which is one with the nature of God (p. 184).
- God, the scripture [here, the Hindu Upanishads] is saying, is formless consciousness and the essence of who you are (p. 219).

Tolle’s teaching is the oldest blasphemy in the world. It is the same lie to which Satan wanted Eve to “awaken” in the Garden of Eden: “You will be like God” (Gen. 3:5). Sadly, just like Eve, many still fall for it.

And if this weren’t bad enough, it isn’t the only deception in *A New Earth*. One of the quickest ways to expose a false teacher is to examine what he says about mankind, Jesus, and the Bible. Notice what Tolle says.

Tolle’s heresy regarding man

As we’ve just seen, Tolle’s chief heresy about man is his teaching that each of us is god. But how great a god can someone be if he must be informed that he is god? You don’t really believe you are god, do you?

Like roaches, uncovering one major heresy usually indicates the presence of many others. Tolle’s heretical deification of man means that our great problem is no longer separation from God due to sin, but separation from ourselves. And since there is no separation from God (a problem for us all which, incidentally, began when the lie “You will be like God” was first believed), there is no final judgment, wrath, or Hell to fear.

Tolle does mention sin, but as a word “that has been greatly misunderstood and misinterpreted” (p. 9). For him it is not the transgression of or lack of obedience to the law of God, but “to live unskillfully.” And the “salvation” (p. 13) we need is not the forgiveness of sin, but enlightenment.

So if there is no separation from God, there is no need for a Savior to restore the broken relationship with God and to deliver us from judgment, wrath, and Hell. Indeed, contrary to the Bible’s teaching that our greatest need is to hear the good news of what God has graciously done for sinners through Jesus Christ (Romans 10:13-14), Tolle says that our greatest need is to hear “the good news of the possibility of a radical transformation of human consciousness” (p. 13).

Tolle’s heresy regarding Jesus

Since Tolle rejects the idea that we need a Savior from God to save us from sin against God, then obviously he does not see Jesus Christ as Savior. Tolle clearly admires Jesus, and quotes Him several times in *A New Earth*, but only as a great spiritual teacher. The events which are not only the most important in the life of Jesus, but also the most important in the entire Bible and indeed in the history of the world—namely the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and second coming of Jesus Christ—Tolle completely ignores.

An example of how Tolle quotes Jesus for support, then divorces that teaching from Jesus’ great mission of salvation is in a section quoted earlier:

The very Being that you are is Truth. Jesus tried to convey that when he said, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life.’. . . Jesus speaks of the innermost I Am, the essence identity of every man and woman, . . . He speaks of the life that you are (p. 71).

What Jesus actually said was, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). Tolle takes just the