

effort to better understand our *own* Christianity? And *that's* not even the worst of the problems with this book that's filed under the heading of Christian reading.

*Blue Like Jazz* is surely one of those books that should be read *only* by those who are *well grounded* in the faith and have a *thorough* knowledge of the Scriptures. Without that *secure* base, readers could very easily come away with a Post Modern belief concerning Christianity — i.e. there is no Absolute Truth — Christianity is simply a feeling based on one's experiences.

Like leaders in the Emergent Church Movement, Miller *confuses* the difficulties faced by Christianity in today's culture and various social injustices with the *Gospel* and then *manipulates* the Gospel to meet those injustices. In *Blue Like Jazz*, it appears that the author — through his own doubts and experiences, *attempts* to relate Christianity to the world in a more understandable way but instead, ends up letting the world define Christianity. This is of course what the Emerging Church has set out to do in an effort to make Christianity more appealing to our culture. *Blue Like Jazz* not only *encourages* a complete lack of excitement for the Truth, but actually creates *suspicion* of *anyone* who would claim that the Word of God is Absolute. *Blue Like Jazz* at best, presents shallow Post Modern theology and at worst, turns the Gospel into a social gospel that completely ignores the *authority* of the Scriptures. It seems that Mr. Miller has no understanding whatsoever of the difference between being "Spiritual" and being "Christian." To him — they are one in the same — and so all are free to *assemble* their belief from a smorgasbord of their own choosing rather than from the Word of God.

"I was watching BET one night, and they were interviewing a man about jazz music. ... The first generation of slavery invented jazz music. It is a music birthed out of freedom. And that is the closest thing I know to Christian spirituality. A music birthed out of freedom. Everybody sings their own song the way they feel it, ..." (pg. 239 - *Blue Like Jazz*)

Miller is nothing more than a tripped out hippy who hasn't found Christ and is stuck in a time warp that has frozen his maturity at the same level as "Jenny" in *Forest Gump* during her hippie years.

Hopefully, these two examples have made the point we want to make — that is — if it's *called* Christian or filed under the heading of Christian at the book or music store or on the web — it *may* — or may *not be* Christian. The *only* way we can be able to discern whether or not the item, web site, book, CD, etc. *accurately* handles the word of truth is *if* we actually *know* that Word — very well. Christians simply can not allow themselves to be duped into accepting false teaching because it *sounds* like it makes sense. (II Tim. 4:3-4)

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# DILIGENCE

*"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure." — Hebrews 6:11*

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## Christian — Whatever

There's Christian Music, Christian Radio, Christian Fiction, Christian Nonfiction; Christian Dating Services, Christian Rap, Christian Poetry, Christian Websites, Christian TV channels, Christian Myspace Layouts, Christian Universities, Christian Hip-Hop, Christian — Whatever. You name it and *someone* has put the word Christian" in front of it, thereby creating a "target" market.

It should be pretty obvious to all of us that merely placing the word "Christian" in front of another word does not necessarily *make* whatever it is, "Christian." In fact, while most of the things listed above *may* contain *some* element of Christianity, most of them probably fall far short of being *entirely* true to their "Christian" name. Much of the world *calls* itself — or *identifies* itself as "Christian" when in fact — that designation couldn't be further from the Truth. Many — not *all* — have done nothing more than target a market for the purpose of marketing their product or service.

That's why it is *extremely* important for Christians be in the Word daily. Sometimes — it's not *easy* to separate the "Christian" from the "not so Christian." The senses of Christians have to be *trained* to tell the difference

*"For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." (Heb. 5:14 NASB).*

Sometimes — whatever it is *sounds* good and we *like* it, but as Christians, we have a responsibility to be able to *discern* whether or not it *accurately* handles the word of truth (II Tim. 2:15). Far too many individuals obtain whatever meager knowledge they have of the Bible from nothing more than t'he lyrics of Contemporary Christian music or from web sites they occasionally visit or the latest "christian" book they've read or even TV evangelists they watch. The Biblical knowledge attained in such ways may or may *not* be anywhere *near* the Truth.

We're not saying that listening to "Christian" Music is not a whole lot better than listening to "Gangsta" rap. Neither are we saying that "Christian" Myspace Layouts are not a whole lot better than "near porno" Myspace Layouts. What we *are* saying is that as Christians, we *have* to be able to discern — or sift out — what is — and what is *not* an *accurate* handling of the word of truth. Without a working knowledge of the Bible, it's *impossible* to do that — and we're apt to fall for anything that *sounds* like it makes sense.

To further illustrate our point concerning this subject, we could probably choose something from just about any one of those categories listed above but we're going to begin by taking a look at a new Christian Fiction book that has recently hit the bookstore shelves. We've chosen to begin there because of the growing popularity of a new book called *The Shack*.

The popularity of *The Shack* began on the West coast about a year ago and is just now starting to gain status in this area. *The Shack* debuted at #1 on the *New York Times* Trade Paperback Fiction Bestseller List on June 8 of this year. It is also quickly becoming a bestseller at numerous retail book dealers.

For sake of space, we'll not give a synopsis of the story line, but a church that identifies itself as "an 8,000 member nondenominational" church has been buying literally *cases* of the book to sell to its members. The pastor of that church stated that it was "one of the most remarkable books I've read in years." Not everyone however shares his enthusiasm. Rev. R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, calls it "deeply troubling" and asserts that it undermines orthodox Christianity." *Both* of these views can't be right. So we got the book and *read* it.

It's a *perfect* example to use for demonstrating the *necessity* of having a working knowledge of the Bible in order to *discern* an *accurate* handling of the Word verses an *inaccurate* handling of the Word. The author (William Paul Young) uses *fiction* to dive into deep theological issues. His handling of those issues is however *completely* inconsistent with the Scriptures. The danger lies in the fact that an *undiscerning* reader who lacks a good knowledge of the Word, is *very* likely to come away from this book thinking: "Oh, I see now. *That's* how that works with God. I think I get it now" Problem is — that reader's understanding would not be *at all* consistent with the *Scriptures*. Young's handling of *numerous* complicated theological issues is *very* entertaining but simply not in accordance with the Scriptures.

For example —

*Anyone* choosing to read *The Shack* should have *sufficient Bible knowledge* to understand that God *no longer talks directly* to His people but rather through the inspired words of those who penned the Scriptures. (See II Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 1:1-2; Luke 10:16; Acts 17:1; Jude 3; and on and on).

*Anyone* choosing to read *The Shack* should have *sufficient Bible knowledge* to understand that God expects us to have a godly fear, reverence and awe for Him. — (See Heb. 12:28; Eccl. 12:13; Deut. 6:13 and 24; Deut 6:24; I Peter 2:17; Rev 14:7; and on and on)

*Anyone* choosing to read *The Shack* should have *sufficient Bible knowledge* to understand that we can not *re-create* the Godhead in *our* image by metaphorically

casting God the Father as a large black woman named "Papa," Jesus as a laid back Middle Eastern man, and the Holy Spirit as a calm, cool and mysterious Asian woman.

And *that's* just the beginning. We could list *numerous* theological inaccuracies presented as if they were factual in this book. "But, it's a *novel*," You say. Yes, it is. The problem however lies in the fact that the falsehoods are so delicately interwoven with that which *is* truth, that they only become apparent *if* discernment is blatantly initiated *because of* a working knowledge of the Word. Otherwise, the falsehoods are absorbed as factual while the reader concentrates more on the story-line than on discernment. One of the reviewers on Amazon.com put it this way —

"This book is a Trojan horse subtly infiltrating the Christian community — one that makes our God extremely small and completely manageable, a God who, in the final analysis, is no God at all." (Michael Burton)

Another reviewer said it this way.

"Because of the sheer volume of error and because of the importance of the doctrines reinvented by the author, I would encourage Christians, and especially young Christians, to decline this invitation to meet with God in *The Shack*. It is not worth reading for the story and certainly not worth reading for the theology. (Tim Challies)

This reviewer, Tim Challies, has an extensive review of *The Shack* on his web site ([www.challies.com](http://www.challies.com)) as well as a book he has written entitled *The Shack: Unauthorized Theological Critique*. If you are thinking about reading *The Shack*, we *highly* recommend that you *also* either visit Mr. Challies website and read the complete review or buy his book.

Now, lets look at another book (not as new) that can also be found in the "Christian" reading section of your local bookstore. It's called *Blue Like Jazz* and is an auto-biography dealing with the "christian" faith of its author, Donald Miller. The "Christianity" presented in this book is by *far* the most perverted, contorted, bizarre and just *weirdly warped* view of Christianity we have ever seen. Mr. Miller apparently never matured past his hippie, Volkswagen van, wandering days, nor did he ever recover from too many drunken stupors. An honest assessment of *Blue Like Jazz* reveals that Donald Miller was apparently *not always* in full control of his faculties. One of several examples of this in the book is the "conversation" he had with Emily Dickenson during which she was offended because he asked her if she was a lesbian — to which she responded that she was not. (pg. 155) Having real conversations with dead people would, to *normal* people, seem to be the product of either a mind in need of psychiatric help or a mind damaged from too many drug or alcohol trips. Miller also later writes in his journal: "I saw Emily Dickinson step out of a screen door and look at me with dark eyes ..." Now we ask you — Is *this* an auto-biography of one's faith that we would want to read in an