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The Meaning of Yoga: A Conversation with Stephanie Syman and Doug Groothuis

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Thinking in Public

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Mohler: Stefani Syman's articles on technology, media, and culture have appeared in a number of periodicals ranging from the *Wall Street Journal* to *Vogue* and the *Village Voice*. She has also been featured in two documentary films and in 1995 she co-founded *Feed* an award winning independent web magazine. She is the author of the book *The Subtle Body: The Story of Yoga in America*. The book was published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux earlier this year and it is one of the most interesting books I've read in a very long time.

Stefani Syman, welcome to *Thinking in Public*.

Syman: Thanks for having me.

Mohler: This book was so compelling as I read it because what I really love to find just in terms of even avocational fun reading is a book that tells me a story that has never really been told this way before. No one has actually traced the history of yoga in America and its quite a story. How did you get to it?

Syman: Well about fifteen years ago I began practicing yoga myself and as you mentioned I was running a web magazine, one of the first, and so I was a kind of student of culture and at a certain point not long after I began practicing yoga I realized I wanted to know how yoga had become so popular in the U.S. I mean after all it's an ancient spiritual discipline which originated in India and here it was, you know, yoga schools all over the city in New York where I live, many people who I would have never thought would take a yoga class in their lives becoming committed practitioners so I really wanted to answer the question-how did this happen?

Mohler: And you do answer it and as you set up this story you really get to I think the question many of us would ask and that is how did something as exotic as distant from American culture as deeply embedded in Hinduism as it is, come to be accepted even in 19th century America?

Syman: Yeah, I really try to understand how that happened and it didn't happen instantaneously although as soon as Americans like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau began reading books about Indian philosophy and about yoga they really were quickly attracted to it and as we know those two were quite open minded in their thinking to begin with and eclectic in their sources and so when Emerson started reading these books including the Bhagavad-Gita which is one of the first yoga scriptures he found it enormously compelling and he incorporated many of the ideas he found there in his own work and his poetry and essays. He wasn't very interested in practicing yoga but Thoreau was and he really began to practice it as far as he could understand it from these books. But you know starting from that moment you can kind of see this dance that happened where people-some generations of Americans really wanted to take on yoga as a whole spiritual discipline which includes physical practices but is really aiming toward spiritual realization and others in later generations find that those elements make them uncomfortable and so kind of strip out the spiritual dimension and really focus on the physical part of the practice.

Mohler: Now one of the things you document in your book is that the acceptance and interest that was directed towards yoga was tied to such movements as transcendentalism as you identified it with Emerson and Thoreau and later with new thought and you know in the history of religious movements in America you go to the 19th century and a lot of these movements especially with new thought really caught on in some unexpected places. For instance amongst the very well educated and the rising middle class and as I look to your book it seems that that's a part of this story too.

Syman: Very much so. I mean new thought, you know, which has permeated many, as you say, many different religious movements in the U.S. got its start, really got steam under it at the turn of the century and it was kind of at the moment that yoga began to be taught here in America by Indian swamis so it was no longer just in the book it was real teachers coming and teaching this practice to Americans and one of the first moments that this happened was in 1894 at a summer spiritual retreat in Maine called Green Acre and new thought leaders were there too and so from that moment on really yoga was pretty closely linked to new thought and I do think you see ideas from yoga and Hinduism more broadly that are kind of imported into new thought starting in the 19th century and the turn of the century and other swamis addressed new thought meetings from then on.

Mohler: Yeah, you have figures like Vivekananda and others who came and so was it that Americans had to import the, so to speak, experts to teach yoga?

Syman: Well it really helps I mean yoga is a very, first of all, very heterogeneous practice, there are a number of different types of yoga, Hatha yoga is the one many Americans are familiar with which really has the poses and puts more emphasis on physical practices but there's Karma yoga, Bhakti yoga-the yoga of devotion so and then the text which describes yoga are very coded and symbolic and meant to be transmitted from guru to disciple and that was where a lot of the information and the instruction was given so it really made a huge difference when Swami Vivekananda came in 1893 and began teaching a year later and then many other swamis followed including Paramahansa Yogananda in the early twenties and Prabhavananda a little bit later and these swamis really had experience of learning yoga from gurus in India and could transmit it more effectively but you know very quickly there began to be American gurus and Pierre Bernard was one such figure he began teaching yoga really as early as the turn of the century.

Mohler: Now you have yoga in America today and if you follow that progression and there are some very interesting figures and characters and movements that are involved in the story as you tell it, we arrive at some contemporary questions that you really address in your historical records so let me throw some of those questions out at you here. Can you separate the say, the physical aspect of yoga from its spiritual foundation in Hinduism?

Syman: Well first of all yoga is not just part of Hinduism you know it's part of Buddhism and Jainism too so it's, and Hinduism is pretty, it's a term that was applied pretty late in the game to a really diverse Indian religious practices so the answer is in some ways yes since yoga isn't really owned by a single religion and as a practical matter what people have done is sort of take pieces of it. The physical poses, the breathing exercises, meditation and really practiced them in the context of their own faiths or in kind of a more secular way. I do think it begs the question of what you get when you do that because yoga has very specific aim and slightly different theologies depending on what type of yoga you practice and with what philosophical system its associated with.

Mohler: Well when you look at your record it's clear that Americans, pretty much as we do with everything, began to act more or less as consumers when it came to yoga and it's really clear that there are people who are interested more in this aspect and others in another but you talk about the fact that the big story here clearly is that from just a kind of interesting vantage point of looking at the American psyche something happened that a practice so bizarre by say normal 18th and 19th century American standard so distant from the worldview of most Americans of that time could become well to fast forward to the year 2010 something that's a six billion dollar a year industry involving literally millions of people. That still seems to be a strange story to me.

Syman: Well I think what this is at the kind of core of what makes yoga so powerful in America in a sense which is that you can use your body to transcend mundane existence so even if you're just using practicing yoga as a form of exercise, in the back of your mind you know that if you perhaps pursued it further there's this whole other dimension, this rich field of possibility of transforming your body and having spiritual realization by using your breath and your body right now here in this life and I think that promise whether or not many people ever take advantage of it or attempt to get

those deeper layers of yoga is what really makes it so appealing.

Mohler: In your book you trace some of the rather unknown aspects of yoga to people who are not involved in it and in the history of yoga and its reception in America I was interested to read about the sexual aspect of yoga that certainly is very much a part of it in its various schools and its Indian roots. How does that get transformed into the United States?

Syman: Well as with everything because it's not part of our culture we tend to kind of take it superficial and sometimes trivializing and problematic view of it, but in contra, first of all yoga really.....particularly Hatha yoga and contra forms of yoga that you can transmute sexual energy into spiritual realization and that is by using your breath and your body to move what's called Kundalini up the spine up the chakras system which many people may be familiar with and it really transforms their consciousness. That's not using sex specifically that's using sexual energy but there are forms of contra that involve sex and much of it involves visualizing sex so sex as sort of a visual metaphor for the beautification of divine principle. But there are some forms of contra that really do enjoin theto use ritualized sex for spiritual realization. Now this comes in this very arduous ritual apparatus that's quite tedious and involved and most people, most Americans wouldn't have the patience to go even a tenth of the distance of what it requires in terms of preparation, and purification, and meditations, and chanting, and years of spiritual labor but it does involve ritual intercourse and of course that fact opened the way for less savory characters to exploit this dimension as they did and I believe some still do to seduce young women, somewhat gullible young women, to believe that they are doing something sacred and that would really give them deep realization. So someone like Pierre Bernard at the turn of the century really used contra as cover or rationalization for something like sexual predation although his sexual partners were willing at the time but he really did use contra to take advantage of women at a time when premarital sex really could ruin a woman's reputation for life.

Mohler: Let me ask you another question which is going to press upon you perhaps something that you didn't intend to address in your book but I just have to ask in the purposes of this interview and for my own personal interest, when you have this background in yoga an almost unprecedented knowledge of how it came to the United States and was received here, when you hear someone talk about the possibility of something like a Christian yoga, does that make any sense to you?

Syman: In some ways it does, in some ways it does, I mean if you look at yoga as a technology that can be used to transform your consciousness, used to get closest the divine, then it does make a lot of sense. If you're looking to have this specific realization outlined in the yoga scriptures I think it makes a little bit less sense because you have to then take on some more of the metaphysics and theology that those scriptures....and those are a bit different from what you'd find in Christianity or Judaism for that matter or Islam. So I think it makes sense up to a point is what I would say to that.

Mohler: Yeah, I think it reflects something of the confusion on the part of many people as to what yoga is or perhaps even what Christianity is and I appreciate very much your response because as I read your book I noted as a Christian theologian that the whole worldview here is so radically divergent but I wouldn't have known that if you hadn't written the story and written it so well and Stefani Syman is the author of the book *The Subtle Body: The Story of Yoga in America*. It's one of those books that tells a story you're not going to find anywhere else and frankly a story that isn't marginal at this point to American culture, you're talking about millions and millions of Americans involved in it and six billion dollar a year annual industry this is probably a story that's right down in your neighborhood, right down your street.

Stefani Syman, thanks for joining me for *Thinking in Public*

Syman: Thank you so much for having me.

Mohler: You know Stefani Syman writes and speaks both as an outsider and an insider. I mean she's looking at the history of yoga as a historian and as a cultural analyst and that's really important but you know she's also a fifteen year practitioner of yoga. That makes her candor on these issues I think all the more invaluable. You know the history of the reception of yoga in America is fascinating the earliest period it would've seemed impossible that Americans would be going for something so alien in worldview as a spiritual practice of deeply rooted in Hinduism and yet even by the middle point of the 19th century, yoga was catching on. A part of a phenomenon in this country whereby we had people turning things like yoga in order to find an alternative to traditional Christianity. By the time you reach today, well yoga's now

very much a commercialized part of American culture and Stefanie Syman helps us to see it wasn't an accident that we got here.

Mohler: Professor Douglas Groothuis joined the faculty of Denver Seminary in 1993 where he serves as Professor of Philosophy. He is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society, the Evangelical Philosophical Society and the Society of Christian Philosophers. He received his Ph.D. and Bachelors Degree from the University of Oregon, a Masters of Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. He is the author of many books including *Unmasking the New Age*. Professor Groothuis welcome.

Groothuis: It's good to be here thanks for having me.

Mohler: You know the issue of yoga is something that has been a matter of controversy within evangelical circles for at least the last twenty years and amazingly enough you have often been at the center of that.

Groothuis: Well a lot of Christians really want to know whether the practice of yoga can be incorporated into a faithful, biblical way of life and sadly, many Christians are answering yes to that. We have some emerging church leaders such as Doug Padgett and others saying that it is simply a physical discipline, you don't have to incorporate the element of Hinduism and in fact it can actually bring you closer to God, the God of the Bible, the God of the universe, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and I do not believe that is the case for many reasons but the word yoga itself means to be yoked or to be in union and it comes out of this ancient non-Christian religion called Hinduism and it's one of the essential planks of Hinduism. Hinduism is a very big tent but all forms of Hinduism advocate as a necessary spiritual discipline some type of yoga and yoga involves physical practices such as postures and breathing and chanting but the essential point, the goal of yoga is not the purification of the body or the beautification of the physique, the point of yoga is a change in consciousness, a transformation of the consciousness wherein one finds oneself at one with the ultimate reality which in Hinduism is Brahman so when people brought Hinduism to the West as is detailed in this book by Stefanie Syman, *The Subtle Body* and other books, they didn't always emphasize the overtly religious aspects. In some cases they did, in some cases they did not, in fact in the case of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi who brought transcendental meditation to the West, Maharishi sold this form of yoga when he was a guru as simply a way to be more peaceful, to become more intelligent and so on. But he was basing his teachings on the ancient Hindu doctrines of the Vedas the primary scriptures of Hinduism.

Mohler: You know professor it was instructive to talk to Stefanie Syman and even more interesting to read her book because as a theologian reading that book what struck me is that almost all of the early appropriation of yoga in the United States was not about health it was about spirituality and that continued well into the twentieth century.

Groothuis: Right, well some of these proponents of yoga such as Swami Vivekananda and others who came here the late nineteenth century and Vivekananda was the star of the first world parliament of religion were quite open about yoga was but it's interesting that now when Christians attempt to appropriate yoga they think they can separate the theological and the spiritual from the physical but in fact if it is really yoga that cannot be done because while there is a great emphasis on bodily postures, exotic forms of stretching, breathing, the point is to recognize as Syman says the subtle body and the subtle body is the spiritual essence of everything which is really Brahman. Now there are different schools of yoga but I think the one that has the biggest impact on the west is the Vedantic or the non dualistic school which says that ultimately everything is one, that's non-dual and everything is divine. So instead of the biblical view that there is a creator-creature relationship this is a monistic or non-dualistic view that says that all that exists is Brahma and Brahman is not an "I Am" not a relational, moral agent, Brahma is beyond words and beyond thought and it's interesting in this book the *Subtle Body* the author quotes one advocate of yoga who says that the goal, this is Vivekananda said this, "the highest meditation is to think of nothing if you can remain one moment without thought, great power will come" this is on page thirty-eight of her book in the chapter The Guru Arrives, that's Vivekananda. Now how different from biblical spirituality based on the character of God, a personal moral agent who has revealed himself in the universe in the conscience and supremely to the person and work of Jesus Christ. We are told to meditate on the truths that God has revealed and we are told to grow in our knowledge of God. We are told that Christ has made the Father known, John 1:18 Christ has exegeted the Father, he's made him known so we worship as Christians a personal moral God who has offered justification, salvation, redemption by his grace, through the incarnation, through the life, death resurrection of Jesus Christ and the yoga people are looking for all of this within themselves, inherently, blatantly within themselves.

Mohler: You know when you look at this picture and you look at the monism, the pantheism and the panentheism

you have to wonder why many evangelicals would not have an immediate recognition of what's at stake, but when you look to the larger picture of the appropriate of these exercises and all the rest, it appears to me through the meditation and other aspects of yoga that what we have here is the exact opposite of the Christian direction. The Christian direction is not into oneself in order to find answer, nor is it an effort to rid oneself of content, our faith has an object and the faith that saves is a faith that knows and trusts the Lord Jesus Christ and what God has done for us in Christ that seems to me to be completely incompatible with the very idea of yoga.

Groothuis: Well it certainly is because yoga tells you to go within to find the absolutes. Now scripture teaches us that we are made in the image and likeness of God however we are fallen and Jesus said that out of the heart comes all these various evils so we cannot find our true self and find salvation by looking within our true self is damaged through sin and the only cure, or the only rescue comes from outside of the self and I love the way Frances Schaeffer use to put it he said we lift up the empty hand of faith so we lift them up, up unto the Lord and their empty or as J.I. Packer put it, the only thing we contribute to our salvation is our need for salvation. Now yoga says that through these postures, through the breathing, through the chanting, you can discern and unlock the universal, impersonal power which is ultimately known in Hinduism as Brahman that is the telos that is the essential purpose of yoga and Americans want better bodies and they want to feel peaceful and that's why they're initially interested in yoga but that is certainly not the purpose of it.

Mohler: Well they're also divorcing yoga from its context not only in history but in contemporary practice that's related to everything from ridding the body of certain fluids to ritualized sexual intercourse and all the rest that's obviously most Americans, middle class Americans, don't associate with yoga but is very much a part of yoga in at least some of its schools and that gets down to the body. Professor let me ask you this question, when I look at the theory of yoga to put it that way, it's kind of a Westernized way to put it I understand but looking at the essence of yoga, it seems to treat the body as something that has to be overcome in order to achieve some kind of, for want of a better word, salvation and that's also just not Christianity.

Groothuis: Well, exactly because the Bible teaches the doctrine of creation. God created a good world and created human beings in His image and likeness. Now we're fallen but our redemption comes through the incarnation, the taking on of a true human nature of the second person of the trinity the logos and the final state will be the resurrection of the body going back to Daniel 12:2 the resurrection of the just and the unjust, those who have been declared forgiven and had the righteousness of Christ given to them through Christ and those that have not been forgiven so you have creation-physical, bodily, the incarnation- physical bodily, and the final state is the resurrection of the just and the unjust and the just being made just through the work of Jesus Christ in terms of justification, sanctification and glorification, living in a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells and the great irony here is that yoga aims at the elimination of the body, it is a depersonalizing, deindividualizing, dehumanizing practice because the ultimate reality in Hinduism is not a personal moral creator but Brahman an unknowable something that you dissolve into.

Mohler: Well you know when you look at this again it's puzzling I think to most of us that this would gain much traction among American evangelicals, we can see I think in the post-modern confusion of America around us how this might have a market and a constituency but you would think that American evangelicals would be able to spot something of this kind of worldview contradiction. Let me ask you one final question here because I think in terms of where many Christians try to think this through. I know this is the question that many are right now just itching to ask, can you separate, can you make a division between say some of the physical exercises that lead to greater health potentially for the body from the theological, spiritual and well intellectual commitments of yoga?

Groothuis: Well if something is truly yoga it has that spiritual basis and that spiritual direction and that spiritual essence. Now are there bodily postures that are similar or maybe even identical to some yoga postures that have some health benefits? Yes, but I always tell people when they ask me this question, any health benefit you could derive from yoga you can get from outside of yoga such as through Pilates or physical therapy or something like that. Yoga means being yoked with Brahman essentially and you don't want to submit yourself to that alien spiritual practice so if there are limited physical benefits they can be obtained outside of the practice of yoga itself.

Mohler: I think that's very well stated and I think the other side to that is that if you have to get into some kind of meditative state in order to assume some kind of posture you are defining as exercise you're kidding yourself if you think it's mere exercise.

Groothuis: Exactly and that is the point of yoga. It is the transformation of consciousness from the finite to the

infinite and only God is the infinite personal creator. We are the finite personal creatures and yoga wants to blend those two into this one faceless non-personal thing and yoga is the means to achieve that.

Mohler: It has been a pleasure to talk to Professor Douglas Groothuis who is a Professor of Philosophy at Denver Seminary. Professor Groothuis thank you so much for joining us.

Groothuis: You're very welcome.

Mohler: You know Professor Groothuis might be a philosopher but he's a philosopher who knows theology and I appreciate the fact that when he's dealing with the issue of yoga he doesn't just go to the worldview, as important as that is, he goes to the gospel and what we had in that conversation was an analysis of yoga that was unapologetically rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. You know the big issues there were not that yoga was at odds at point a or point b with Christianity and with the gospel, but rather that the logic of yoga is the very rejection and the very reversal of the logic of the Gospel. You know it's good to hear from a philosopher who's thinking these things through and one who also situates the yoga movement within the new age movement even as in the 19th century the yoga movement was part of the new thought movement. You know the alliances and ties there are not accidental.

Writing in the *New York Times* Michiko Kakutani says that the story of yoga in America is the story of a simulation, diversification and more recently comodification well that itself is something of an understatement. The story of yoga is a twisted tale of how something that is so essentially rooted in Hinduism could become part of American popular culture and increasingly a part of the lives of many who would identify themselves as Christians-it's a large number of persons. *Yoga Journal* suggests that at least sixteen million Americans are practicing yoga that was back in 2008. The yoga industry by the way is estimated to be a six billion dollar a year industry in the United States. We're talking about something here that isn't peripheral anymore. We're talking about something that is no, well, you know Stefanie Syman in opening her book *The Subtle Body* goes to the White House where in the Obama administration the health emphasis has included White House lessons in yoga, by the way, for school children. Yoga is becoming a part of physical education in some school districts. Yoga is becoming a part of what is taught in exercise classes at the local mall. Yoga is indeed becoming a part of even what is discussed and practiced among some Christians and in some churches. Am I concerned about that? You bet that's why I felt this conversation was important.

I think the history is important. I think Stefanie Syman has done an invaluable job and what makes her book *The Subtle Body* so interesting and helpful is that it's written not by someone who is an outside critic of yoga but by a fifteen year practitioner of yoga. Ms. Syman's work is really valuable and as a matter of fact, it's a fascinating story. As someone who has followed so many new religious movements in America, especially in the 19th century. Looking to the burned over district of New York, looking to the birth of so many alternative religions movements in America, this fits the story and just remember that every single one of those, every single one of those movements was in the main a self-conscious attempt to provide an alternative to traditional Christianity within America's religious culture. The odd thing is not that there would be a public or a market for such movements. The weirder and more concerning thing is that there would be many Christians who would be attracted to it. You know the big question is the one that we get to when we finally ask can yoga be separated from its roots in Hinduism and the answer to that is a steadfast, non-negotiable, clear as can be-no. Now that's affirmed of course by the Hindu practitioners of yoga in its various schools who insist that there is no way to divorce yoga from Hinduism but it should also be clear to any Christian with any theological and spiritual discernment because as our discussion made very clear, the entire logic of yoga is a logic that is foreign if not diametrically opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. There was in the early church an ancient heresy known as Gnosticism and that ancient heresy suggested that the body as representative of the material world represents evil, represents something that has to be overcome, that salvation is achieved by going into a consciousness that is beyond the body, that denies the body, that indeed escapes the body. Well, thus you see it's not only parallel it's very, very similar to what you find in Hinduism in particularly yoga-escaping the body, escaping the material world into the spiritual world, making that break, making that escape, making that leap. That is not what you find in the scriptures at all. The scripture is very clear that God created this world and His glory is found in it. Even though it's a fallen world human beings are still made in the image of God. Nowhere in scripture are we told that our goal and aim, that God's command, is that we escape the body into some kind of spiritual existence. We understand that there is no such notion at all and more importantly Hinduism and yoga point inward suggesting that salvation is found by going in. Well the Christian gospel is exactly the opposite salvation is found by reaching out, going out, trusting in one who is outside ourselves and a righteousness that is not ours but his, as Martin Luther the great Reformer said, an alien righteousness. We cannot go in to find salvation, salvation is that which comes to us as God saves sinners through his own son the Lord Jesus Christ. We

look to the cross and the empty tomb, we do not look within.

But you know there's something else here that seems absolutely central to this discussion. So much of Eastern mysticism, so much of yoga, if not the entirety of the entire yoga movement, of the philosophy that is summarized by yoga and similar practices is about emptying the mind. But if Christianity is about anything, it is not about emptying the mind. Just look at the Bible and see how much is about God speaking and his people hearing, about cognitive transfer of God's revelation to his creatures. Look how many times we are told to hear, and to see, and to learn, we are to study, we are to hide the word of God in our hearts, we are to find the will of God, not by looking within and meditating but by reading the scriptures and being instructed by the one true and living God who speaks to us through His word. We are to go and we are to trust, we are to know, these things are written that you may know. Saving faith has an object, saving faith has essential content, knowing about the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Romans chapter ten Paul says that salvation comes to the one who professes with the lips that Jesus Christ is Lord and believes in the heart that God has raised him from the dead. In 1 Corinthians chapter fifteen the apostle Paul says that the gospel comes down to what was delivered unto him and he now delivers unto us that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and that God raised him from the dead according to the scriptures. Saving faith is never depicted in Scripture as an emptying of all intellectual content rather it is a trust in the one we come to know as Lord and Savior.

You know when we look at yoga we can see that certainly there are physical practices, there are exercises and frankly some of them look absolutely daunting. But the amazing thing is that the exercises are relatively meaningless according to those who are trained in yoga unless it comes with the meditative practices. That leads me to another point I want to make very clear. Yoga is not the only movement or the only school of thought that comes with this kind of spiritual danger for Christians. There are Christian traditions of mysticism that come with parallel dangers. There are Christian traditions of mysticism going all the way back to the middle ages that suggests that what we need to do is to empty the mind. What we need to do is to try to reach a state of absolutely empty consciousness that's just not taught in Scripture. We are to meditate on Scripture, absolutely, but we are to meditate upon the word of God. We are to have essential biblical content on our minds as we meditate. The word of God, well, as we read it the Holy Spirit is applying it to our hearts and lives in such a way that when we meditate upon the word of God we are being drawn, and we are being trained, and we are being prepared, and we are being armed for the discipleship to which we are called.

Now the American cult of health is also a part of this picture that just has to be admitted. We are determined to extend our lives and to enhance our lives and we have become at this strange point at American history absolutely preoccupied with our bodies and if you are looking for a school of thought that gives you full license to be absolutely preoccupied with your body, well this is it. But if you're going to follow a classical yoga tradition and it comes to paying heed to the body you better be facing the reality of what that means because in classical yoga this could include everything from ritualized sexual intercourse to what are defined as elaborated enemas and any number of other practices that after all I think most middle-class Americans would find rather bizarre if not spiritually troubling. But the reality is that a lot of the attention to the body right now is not so much about respect for the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, it's not so much respect for the human being as being made in the image of God, it is a form of undisguised narcissism. It is a concentration upon the self that is not spiritually healthy and yoga for many people I think becomes the entry drug recognized or not into more troubling forms of spirituality and spiritual confusion.

You know the marketing of yoga goes on. You do not by accident have a six billion dollar industry. Many Christians are drawn into this because, by friends or neighbors, or perhaps even in their experience before they become believers, they have become practitioners of yoga, they like the way they feel, they like the limberness in their body, they like the state of consciousness, well folks, as is always the case we are to judge these things by the Scripture and the Scripture does tell us that indeed the body is not something to be despised. The body is something to be respected because it was made by our Creator for His glory but at the same time we know that our body is showing all the signs of Genesis 3 and that no amount of exercise, no amount of cosmetic surgery, no amount of Botox or forms of enhancements is going to stave off the reality of aging and the reality of death. The big question of course as we well know is what comes after death? What in the world does yoga promise after death?

One of the issues of dramatic counter-distinction between yoga and the Christian gospel has to do with the fact that the gospel is not just about this life it is about the life that is to come and that life too is not a life that is devoid of consciousness. It isn't a state of reaching absolute non-consciousness, it is a state of absolute consciousness in the glory

of God and you couldn't find a more radically distinct and divergent notion than that.

Why are so many Christians attracted to yoga? Well that's a question that will have to be answered individually but as a movement I think we can see the phenomenon within the trend of theological confusion, the trend of a spiritual smattering that is going on in so many church and in the lives of so many Christians. There is also an undeniable fadicism going on about yoga and when we look at it we recognize the most important message we can bring, the most important analysis we can offer has nothing to do with medicine, and actually very little to do just with the history of yoga but with the reality of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the fact that once we come to know Christ it isn't that we would wish to escape by any means into any state of lesser consciousness rather as the Apostle Paul says the goal of our lives should be to know Him and the power of His resurrection.

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