

Weigh Down Workshop/ Remnant Fellowship

By Don Veinot and Tim Martin

Founder: Gwen Shamblin.

Founding Dates: 1986: “Weigh Down Workshop,” 1999: “Remnant Fellowship.”

Publications: *Weigh Down Diet* (Doubleday, 1997); *Rise Above: God Can Set You Free from Your Weight Problems Forever* (Thomas N., 2000).

Membership: Remnant Fellowship claims to have “130 churches in 130 cities throughout the continental US., Hawaii, Canada, and the Bahamas.”¹ Many of these consist of 1 to a handful of individuals who “fellowship” over the Internet with the Fellowship in Nashville. National membership figures are 1,100; the main church in TN has almost 500 members.²

HISTORY

The *Weigh Down Workshop* (hereafter called WDW) founded by Gwen Shamblin of Brentwood, TN had been an extremely popular weight loss program among Christians. Shamblin

is a registered dietitian with a master’s degree in food and nutrition, and was a full-time faculty member at the University of Memphis for five years. She worked as a nutritionist for the state health department and has focused her consulting practice in the area of weight control since 1980. In 1986 she founded *Weigh Down Workshop, Inc.*³

In the beginning, Shamblin taught the WDW seminars in person. Later, the seminars were taped. In 1992, Shamblin began aggressively distributing audio and videocassettes and workbooks of her program. Twenty churches signed up almost immediately. The program quickly crossed denominational lines and throughout 1992 the WDW added about 20 churches per month. The WDW “has been in over 60 different countries and over 60 denominations.”⁴ By January of 1993, this number grew to sixty per month and the secular media started to pay attention.

Over the next several years, Shamblin was featured in a number of major periodicals and newspapers, such as *Woman’s Day*, the *New York Times*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Self*, *USA Today*, and *National Enquirer*. In 1997 her first book, *The Weigh Down Diet*, was published by Doubleday and sold more than a million copies. Soon she appeared on *Hard Copy*, *A Current Affair*, *James Robison*, *The 700 Club*, ABC’s *The View*, *20/20*, and *Larry King Live*. She gained international renown by being interviewed on foreign media outlets.

The Weigh Down Workshop now offers a variety of programs. “Exodus Out of Egypt” is a twelve week taped seminar that costs \$118 for a first time participant, with a \$48 additional fee for a second family member.⁵ “Exodus From Strongholds” was designed to help people with addictions other than food problems. Also listed on their website is “Weigh Down Advanced,” “The Last Exodus” and “Weigh Down in the Workplace.”⁶

In 1999, Shamblin founded the church “Remnant Fellowship.”⁷ In August 2000, several discernment ministries began receiving e-mails and phone calls regarding WDW and its leader’s teaching. Some discerning women had found some odd statements by Shamblin on the WDW website that concerned them greatly, and began searching for information on the subject.

It was discovered that since at least 1998, WDW’s *Statement of Faith* had said that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three separate “entities.” This apparently raised questions and on August 10, 2000, WDW changed the *Statement of Faith* on their web-site, which resulted in a greater concern for a few WDW members which prompted their calls and emails. The new statement of faith denies the doctrine of the Trinity, which is one of the fundamentals of the historic Christian faith:

As a ministry, we believe in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. However, the Bible does not use the

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word “trinity,” and our feeling is that the word “trinity” implies equality in leadership, or shared Lordship.... If God had wanted us to refer to Himself, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit as the “trinity,” He would not have left this word completely out of the Bible.⁸

TEACHINGS

Nature of God: Remnant Fellowship teaches that God has a physical body in addition to his spirit. Using Acts 17:26-30, Shamblin states that “we are His offspring. That is the image to associate God with...not stone or silver or gold or simply ‘spirit.’ As I just stated, the image we have of God in the Bible is one who sits, talks, walks, etc.”⁹ As one may suspect, if God were a physical being, He would be very attractive. This is the case with Shamblin’s God:

God is so good-looking, so athletic, so powerful, and so charming that upon first sight, we would all immediately bow down and adore Him. So He made Himself invisible to make the contest a little more fair. On top of that, He is such a humble gentleman that He took us to Egypt and allowed us to meet His rival face-to-face.¹⁰

In addition to being limited to a physical body, Shamblin teaches that God is also limited in knowledge:

He is going to let us “date around” – that’s plan A – so we can appreciate what a great choice He is. But unfortunately, some of His children – in fact, a *lot* of His children – have lost their focus and become distracted, and therefore found their hearts enslaved to Egypt, with no idea of how to get out of this relationship. This was not part of Plan A. So God had to resort to Plan B: a duel – a boxing match – a fight.¹¹

Trinity: As discussed above, Shamblin does not agree with the doctrine of the Trinity. According to the Remnant Fellowship website,

the teaching of the trinity was formed hundreds of years after the time of Christ.... There has been many a Christian killed by the hand of professed Christians for disagreeing that God and Jesus are ‘one person’ and disagreeing that God’s Spirit is a third person. People were, and still are, dis-fellowshipped and labeled for believing that Jesus is the Son of God.¹²

Shamblin’s description of the trinity is incorrect. An orthodox understanding of the trinity does affirm the distinct personhood of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. With her flawed description of the trinity, Shamblin concludes the trinity represents a “god-head with multiple personalities and forms”; a god-head that would even talk to Himself on the cross, in the garden and during baptism.”¹³

Deity of Christ: Instead of being the second member of the Trinity, “Jesus was the firstborn over all creation, was in heaven and then came to earth, and then went back to heaven to sit at the right hand side of God.” In a phone interview with Shamblin, she was very clear that her view of Jesus being first born means that He was the first one born or created.¹⁴ He is not God; only the Father is God. Jesus is something more than man but less than God.

Salvation: Shamblin teaches that salvation is obtained through works. The first step of obtaining forgiveness of sin is to discontinue sin. This doctrine is reflected in the WDW’s weight loss philosophy. If a person overeats, they are following their own appetite, not God’s direction:

If you have been listening to the pan of brownies call your name and responding with ‘yes, oh pan of brownies’ then you need to repent of ever listening and obeying another voice. The food cannot save you. You must choose THE GOD, and your actions will reflect your decision.¹⁵

The second step in obtaining salvation is to be obedient to God and follow Jesus’ example.

If we are obedient to the teachings of Jesus-whole-hearted devotion and obedience to God Almighty, then Jesus is our Passover lamb...only when we lay down our lives and live in obedience to God’s will as Jesus did, is his blood on the side and top of the doorframe of you heart.¹⁶

When Shamblin makes these extreme statements on obedience, she is not merely holding up an ideal for people to work towards. She teaches that people have the ability to achieve this total devotion to God’s requirements.

Can you have tolerable levels of rebellion (sin) to God? How much rebellion is okay with God before He turns and becomes your enemy (like He did to Saul-1 Samuel 28:16)? What happened to Ananias and Sapphira when they sinned against the leading of the Holy Spirit? When they

dropped dead, a fear seized the whole church. (See Acts 5:1-11) It is clear that Jesus, the Apostles and the Prophets all taught us to turn from rebellion to God. Remember that someone caught in sin was taken outside the camp and stoned in Moses' day; the rebellious sinner was expelled in Paul's day (1 Corinthians 5:1-12, Hebrews 10:26,27).¹⁷

God's Prophet: Shamblin's followers regard her as God's prophet and with good reason. That is her claim: "I feel like I have the same calling that Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Amos, Zephaniah, and Micah all had..."¹⁸

The Church: As "God's Prophet," Gwen Shamblin sees herself as called to rescue God's people from the "counterfeit church."

This is the beast—people that are meeting together that are anti-authority. Chapter 18 tells us to flee the 'Babylon Church.' 'Come out of her, my people, so you will not share in her sins.' Get out quick because God is going to destroy those that are rebellious.¹⁹

Tell me why inside the church are they not wanting to get it all right and bow down? Because the great delusion infiltrated many decades ago... Truly the counterfeit church has taken over and sin is rampant and the wall is broken down.²⁰

All of the churches that use the WDW become mission fields for Shamblin and her followers to recruit for Remnant Fellowship:

Remember that your outreach can be ministered through the basic Weigh Down Workshop seminars. It is God's evangelism for His Remnant of Believers. He is snatching people out of the fire and saving them from the flimsy whitewashed walls that have been built by the false prophets. Keep these outreach seminars going at all times.²¹

How and why this message has been left out of the most basic church teaching is a mystery, but in many ways, we now have an opportunity to go back and plant the Good News inside both non-Christians AND the lukewarm pew-warmers that we all have in our own churches. In other words, this is true evangelism and true missionary work, and all of you are planting true 'holy seeds.'²²

God is calling together the scattered exiles. The false shepherds have allowed the exiles to be scattered to give their devotion to other gods. God is calling for a unified church under ONE HEAD. God is Sovereign. If there is going to be hope for the next generation, then we must unify and help rebuild the broken down walls of the New Jerusalem, just as Ezra and Nehemiah did in their day.²³

BIBLICAL RESPONSE

Trinity: Many of Shamblin's arguments against the Trinity are "straw man" arguments. A "straw man" argument is a misrepresentation of an opposing idea in a way that makes it easy to be discredited. Shamblin does this over and over when she incorrectly claims the trinity teaches "that Jesus was really just the Father incarnate."²⁴ Then she argues against this by providing verses demonstrating that Jesus cannot be the Father. For instance, she quotes Matthew 26:39 where Jesus prays to the Father: "not as I will but as you will." Shamblin concludes, "in that [Trinity] doctrine, God would be talking to Himself, saying: 'not my will but my will be done'! No!"²⁵ Shamblin is correct that Matthew 26:39 demonstrates that Jesus is not the Father. She is incorrect however, in claiming that Trinitarians believe that Jesus is the Father.²⁶

The Trinity doctrine is based on three fundamental truths of scripture. First, there is only one God (Isa. 43:10). Secondly, there are three persons in the Bible that are called God: the Father, Son (John 1:1, Heb. 1:8) and Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4). Thirdly, each of these three persons are a distinct person from the other two. (Meaning, the Father is not the same person as the Son nor Holy Spirit). Interestingly, the verses used by Trinitarians to support this third statement are the same verses that Shamblin uses to argue against it.

Deity of Christ: It is true that Colossians 1:15 calls Jesus the "first-born of all creation." But, the term "firstborn" does not mean "first-created" or that He came in to being at a point in time. Jesus never had a beginning and He created all things that ever came into being, as the passage clearly goes on to state. "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him" (Col. 1:16-17). John 1:3 adds to this by saying "All things came into existence by Him, and apart from Him, nothing came into being that has come into being." These two passages alone make it clear that if Jesus is a creature who came into existence at some point in time, He would have had to have created Himself.

Biblical usage of the term “firstborn” has to do with preeminence, the one with the right to rule. It is a title, station or position. For example, in Exodus 4:22, even though Israel was not the first nation to come into existence, God calls His chosen people the “first-born.” David was likewise called the “first-born” in Psalm 89:27, even though he was the youngest, the last born son of Jesse. We find in 1 Chronicles 5:1 that the title, the position, “first-born,” can be lost or forfeited to another. Rueben lost his rightful pre-eminent position in the family of Israel (his “firstbornness,” if you will) due to evil behavior. Esau sold his birthright as “the first-born” to his younger brother Jacob for a pot of stew. By comparing Genesis 41:51-52 to Jeremiah 31:9, we see that Manasseh was the first born of Joseph’s sons, but later God calls Ephraim the “first-born.”

Hence, the phrase, “firstborn of all creation” in Colossians 1:16-17 is a title denoting that Jesus Christ is the One who has the right to rule over creation. (Why? Because He created it.) The entire teaching of Colossians is communicating the preeminence of Christ over all of creation. He existed before anything was created, and when everything was created, He created it. Therefore, He has the right to rule over it.

Salvation: Both facets of Shamblin’s teaching on salvation are aberrant. First, the scriptures are clear that nobody will ever stop sinning completely (Ecc. 7:20, Rom. 3:23, 1 John 1:10). Secondly, a person who tries to gain salvation by works is cursed (Gal. 3:10). Instead, God justifies people apart from works (Rom. 3:20 & 28). Salvation is a free gift from God which He gives us by grace alone through faith alone and we can add nothing to it (Eph. 2:8-9, Tit. 3:5).

God’s Prophet: Jesus warned us to “Beware of false prophets” in Matthew 7:15. The people He was speaking to were Jewish and very familiar with the definitions of false prophets which Moses gave (Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 18:20-22). A false prophet is one who may speak a true prophecy but leads the people to false gods (13:2). If their view and teaching on the nature of God is false, regardless of the validity of what else they may teach, they are a false prophet and should be treated as such. Shamblin can aptly be considered a prophet; but, by the criteria of Deuteronomy 13:1-5, she is a false prophet.

The Church: As so many other false teachers have done before her, Shamblin has established a false criterion to validate her claims. Any church who does not teach exactly what she teaches and align themselves with her as God’s prophet is considered by her as counterfeit. By promoting a counterfeit god, counterfeit gospel and counterfeit salvation she exposes herself as the leader of a counterfeit church.

Notes

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- 3 Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), back inside flap.
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- 6 “The Weigh Down Workshop Official Website,” The Weigh Down Workshop, <http://www.wdworkshop.com/> (accessed April 27, 2005).
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- 14 Gwen Shamblin, in telephone discussion with Don Veinot, August 2000.
- 15 *Remnant Resources* (Remnant Publishing, 2002), 25.
- 16 Gwen Shamblin, public E-mail statement to people signed up on the WDW website, April 13, 2004.
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- 19 *Remnant Basics* Audio tape 1, Remnant Fellowship, Franklin, TN, 2000.
- 20 *Remnant Fellowship* Worship Service, 3/19/00.
- 21 *Remnant Resources* (Remnant Publishing, 2002), 25.
- 22 *Weigh Down Workshop* archive e-mail #37.
- 23 “The New Jerusalem,” Remnant Fellowship,” <http://www.remnantfellowship.org/rfthenewjerusalem.asp> (accessed April 22, 2005).
- 24 “Questions and Answers,” Remnant Fellowship, <http://www.remnantfellowship.org/rfquestionsnanswers.asp#saved> (accessed April 13, 2005).
- 25 “Questions and Answers,” Remnant Fellowship, <http://www.remnantfellowship.org/rfquestionsnanswers.asp#saved> (accessed April 13, 2005).
- 26 The doctrine that Jesus and the Father are the same person is called Modalistic Monarchianism, which first appeared during the late 2nd century. Modalism was ultimately rejected because it could not adequately explain many passages of scripture that demonstrate a distinction between the Father and the Son. See Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 334-335.



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