

# SHACK ATTACK- OR A CALL TO DISCERNMENT?

“Discernment is not simply a matter of telling the difference between what is right and wrong; rather it is the difference between right and almost right.”  
Charles Spurgeon

At the encouragement of friends, I recently read *The Shack* by William P. Young. A national bestseller widely embraced by some churches and many professing Christians, *The Shack* is a work of fiction that embodies lengthy conversations between the main character, a man named Mack, and three persons who represent a version of the Trinity.

Frankly, I was dismayed at many messages conveyed by *The Shack* and have been surprised that many of my Christian friends have read the book uncritically, finding it a charming and heart-warming story. Some say that it is unfair to have theological expectations since the book is fiction. However, *The Shack* is marketed as a spiritually transforming book, and it being received that way by many.

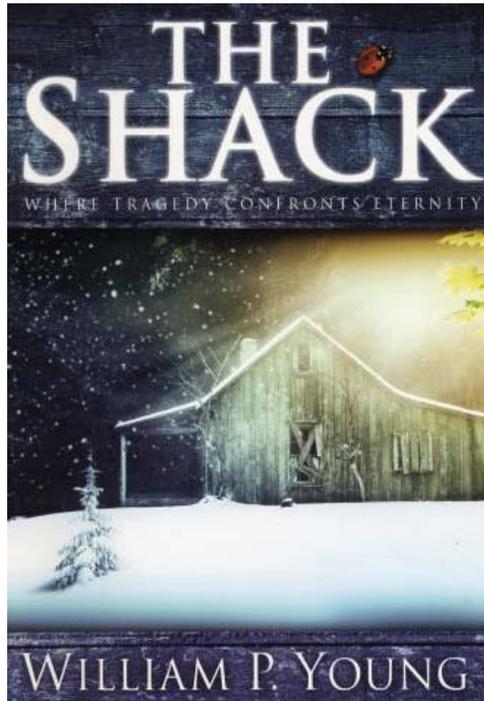
It seems to me that a more critical reading is required of *The Shack* than a secular work of fiction because the author creates characters that purport to speak as God and to guide Mack on his spiritual journey. The fictional story becomes a device to have characters representing the Godhead explain a particular theology. As believers, our spiritual antennas should be fully deployed when we approach such a book.

In *The Shack*, God the Father appears to Mack as a large, jovial black woman whom Mack calls “Papa.” The Holy Spirit appears as a small Asian woman, and Jesus appears as a Jewish man. Putting aside gender confusion and the attempt to give human form and voice to the Father and Holy Spirit (“no man hath seen God at any time,” John 1:8), it is critical for the Christian reader to carefully consider the message author Young has those voices bring and to weigh their message in the light of the clear teaching of the Bible. That is to exercise discernment, a requirement – not an option – for Christians.

When we read *The Shack* with discernment, I submit that we find many distortions and untruths. Consider just a few of the words Young puts in the mouths of his created Trinity (my comments are within the parentheses):

Papa to Mack: “We [the Trinity] have limited ourselves out of respect for you.” (Isn’t this Open Theism – God choosing to limit Himself?)

Jesus: “God, who is the ground of all being, dwells in, around, and through all things. . . .” (Isn’t this Pantheism – God in all things?)



Sarayu (Young’s Sanscrit name for the Holy Spirit): “We [the Trinity] carefully respect your choices, so we work within your systems even while we seek to free you from them.” (“Neither are your ways my ways . . . my ways are higher than your ways.” Isaiah 55:8-9. Does God respect man’s choices, or does His Word demand that we repent of our ways and that we enter His narrow way?)

Sarayu: “Both evil and darkness can only be understood in relation to Light and Good; they do not have any actual existence . . . Light and Good actually exist.” (Really? Does the Bible teach that evil has no actual existence? Was the biblical Jesus aware of that when He conversed with Satan in the desert temptation?)

Papa: “I don’t need to punish people for sin. Sin is its own punishment, devouring you from the inside. It is not my purpose to punish it; it’s my joy to cure it.” (Certainly there are consequences of our sin which we realize in this life and which impact other people. And certainly God has provided the cure for sin. That “cure” is the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross. Most certainly there is punishment for sin. Christ suffered the punishment for us. However, the implication of Papa’s statement is that the only punishment for sin is sin’s own punishment in a person’s life. The Bible is clear that punishment for the unredeemed, those who refuse Christ’s atonement, is the sting of spiritual death and eternal separation from God. *The Shack* makes light work of the cross.)

Young’s Jesus character states that he, Papa, and Sarayu are “indeed submitted to one another and have always been so and always will be . . . . In fact, we [the

Trinity] are submitted to you [Mack] in the same way.” (Why, then, did the biblical Jesus submit Himself to the will of His father? Does the Bible teach submission to authority in spiritual and family and secular environments? What do you make of the claim that the Trinity is submitted to us? I believe that Young’s anti-authoritarianism is risky in human terms and that it is blasphemous to attribute such egalitarian sentiments to God.)

When requested by Papa to forgive the murderer of his young daughter, Mack balks. Papa says, “Mack, for you to forgive this man is for you to release him to me and allow me to redeem him.” (So God can only redeem those whom humans have forgiven and have released to God for redemption? The effectiveness of redemption for the unrepentant murderer is to be accomplished with Mack’s participation? Find biblical support for that, my friends!)

Christian, what about this assertion by the Jesus of *The Shack*? “I am the best way any human can relate to Papa or Sarayu.” (This is a false Jesus. The Jesus Christ of the Bible does not say that He is the best way, He says “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.” John 14:6. He is not the best way – He is the only way.)

*The Shack* evidences a low regard for Scripture. When Mack mentions biblical events or concepts, Papa brushes them off and glibly explains how it really is, thus suggesting that the Bible is the work of man, not the divinely inspired work of God. Yet, some argue that *The Shack* has value in that it demonstrates a loving God of grace who invites man to a relationship. But it does so with grievous distortions about the nature of God, the nature of the Trinity, the authority of God’s Word, God’s hatred of sin, the requirement of repentance, and the nature of conversion and salvation.

My brothers and sisters, even in reading and discussing a work of fiction, we must be prepared to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), and to do so without apology to the world. *The Shack* may, from its human author’s viewpoint, be in all sincerity intended as an inviting look at a highly relational God, but would you place even a drop of poison in pure water and invite others to drink? As Dr. Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said, *The Shack* “contains undiluted heresy.” Don’t you and I have a responsibility to be equipped to recognize heresy and to shine the light of truth so that we and others are not deceived?