

## VII. Results and Conclusions

The similarities between the types of distorted thinking found in the literature, in the pertinent pericopes of Luke, and among the people within the Esimbi culture are discussed here. There were no significant contrasts between these three according to the standard list of fifteen types utilized in this study. As mentioned in chapter two, any given culture or subculture, such as the two above investigated by this study, has an agreed upon set of acceptable or at least tolerable beliefs, several of which may be based upon various types of distorted thinking, since no individual (except for Christ) or society has known the truth about everything.

Several other conclusions and implications were derived from the results of this study. Some of them have already been alluded to on previous pages. It is hoped that the results below will be sufficient for the Esimbi and any reader of this study to gain a sense of empowerment from God to determine whether or not he or she (or some significant other) is in bondage to one or more types of distorted thinking so good progress can be made in minimizing or eliminating them.

The research question for this study was: What types of distorted thinking was Jesus correcting by his responses to people in the gospel of Luke, which types are utilized among the Esimbi of Cameroon, and how can people be informed to avoid them?

The results of this study will be shown below each of the five proposed hypotheses:

## **1. Several types of distorted thinking were displayed by the various people Jesus confronted in the book of Luke.**

Each of the fifteen common types of distorted thinking was confronted by Christ throughout the various pericopes investigated in Luke. Although further study could expand on this list which was the standard used for comparison, these were broad enough in range to achieve the objective of the study. This was confirmed by an investigative sample done with a list of fifty-five types.

The unexpected finding was that in some cases, all fifteen types of distorted thinking (thoughts or motivations behind the words or actions) were possible in a given pericope, thus demonstrating the truth of James 2:10 (KJV): “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one [point], he is guilty of all.”

The types of distorted thinking utilized by most of these people or groups could be summed up in the word “Me-ism,” which could include any of the following:

Asceticism – belief that one “can attain a higher spiritual and moral state by practicing self-denial self-mortification, and the like.”<sup>1</sup> The Jewish religious leaders seriously believed that they were more righteous than others because of their strict discipline.

Authoritarianism – belief that demands complete obedience of people to rules or traditions, thus, banalizing or trivializing what scripture actually says. These same leaders tried time and again to shame Jesus and his disciples into following their sect’s traditions.

Antisubstantialism – belief that substantial noumena do not exist as a basis for phenomena, also known as phenomenalism. These leaders did not believe there was any substance to Christ or to his claims. Even his miracles were of no consequence to them since they believed Jesus was not honoring the Sabbath and was therefore labeled a sinner in their thoughts.

Escapism – belief in the need to escape the drudgeries and unpleasanties of the reality of daily life and relationships. The purpose of escaping is to dull the pain of unfulfilled needs, wants, or expectations. The means for this is by experiencing the thrill and challenge of

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<sup>1</sup>*Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (San Diego, CA: Thunder Bay Press, 2001), 121. Most definitions on this page and the following were quoted or adapted from this dictionary.

discovering loopholes in the establishment's laws, or taboos. The objective is to provide a more comfortable, exciting, or at least interesting lifestyle. Some prefer to escape into isolation, or perhaps secret pleasure, while others prefer to join a relatively likeminded community.

The lawyers Christ confronted were a fairly close and closed group. They were guilty of loading “men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers” (Luke 11:46). While all the people were listening, Jesus summarized more of their distorted thinking, saying to his disciples:

Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely (Luke 20:45-47).

Formalism – belief in “strong attachment to external forms and observances ... acts are right or wrong regardless of consequences.” One's devotion to prescribed rituals supposedly indicated one's status or spirituality. Many were ignoring the importance of cultivating inner attitudes such as compassion, empathy, and mercy.

Isolationism – belief in independence, doing what seems right according to one's own understanding, with no interdependence, or reliance on God or others outside, and not caring about other's perspectives. Many trusted only their own judgment and hoped Jesus would agree with them or at least make allowances for some of their excuses (Luke 9:59, 61). They were not used to depending upon God or sufficiently trusting others. They were not involved in a safe and empowering Christian community.

Legalism – belief in strict adherence to principles or the letter of the law, not the spirit of it. Many ignored the relational parts of the law by not loving their neighbors, much less their enemies. To religious leaders and lawyers, the rule of law, specifically their traditions, had supremacy over mercy or love.

Materialism – belief in, or preoccupation with, or emphasis on material objects, comforts, and considerations, with a disinterest in or rejection of spiritual, intellectual, or cultural values. Money, wealth, or the things gained from them such as pleasure, popularity, power, or fame, had become their idol. God was not to be fully trusted to provide their needs.

Monism – belief “in any of various theories that there is only one basic substance or principle as the ground of reality, or that reality consists of a single element.” The principle which the religious leaders used as their ground of reality blinded them to actual reality. They wanted nothing to do with the incarnation of truth (Luke 22:2, 5): “And the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus.” When Judas accepted their offer to betray Jesus, “they were delighted and agreed to give him money.”

Secularism – belief that does not recognize forms of religious faith or worship as having any usefulness in daily business or life. Although Peter and his fishing companions had a

religious upbringing, they considered themselves professional fishermen and did not see how trusting God would help them fish any better (Luke 5:1-11).

Somatism – belief that all sicknesses are of physical or genetic origin. For example, though not actually in Luke, the disciples asked Jesus regarding the man who was born blind (John 9:1-3): “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents ...?” But Jesus replied, “Neither ... so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.” Part of God’s purpose in making the blind, deaf, or mute (Exod. 4:11) was to enable Jesus to fulfill prophecies about himself (Luke 4:18; 7:21-2), such as healing these as well as the lame and the sick (Isa. 61:1-3).

Of course there could be many other generalizations which could be used to categorize the types of distorted thinking mentioned in the book of Luke, many of which could not be labeled as an “-ism,” but the above are hopefully sufficient to demonstrate the seriousness of Christ’s concern for us to conform our thinking to his so that we may progress in our ability to face reality as God sees it.

## **2. Jesus appropriately addressed each type of distorted thinking that was mentioned in Luke.**

He did not always clearly identify or name the distortions people used, but he did offer them sufficient feedback in each encounter for them to realize the errors in their thinking if they were receptive to the truth. If they were not receptive, it may only have served as a teaching device for those in the audience (both then and listeners or readers since) to understand better how to think, believe, and behave in a godly manner.

## **3. Most types of distorted thinking are based first and foremost upon an erroneous understanding or misbelief about God, the result of a nonexistent or less than an optimally intimate relationship with him.**

The results of the study showed that what is referred to in the literature as vices, addictions, abuses, or enablement of the same could be summed up as the result of distorted thinking about God, a misconception of who God really is. When a person seeks fulfillment in anyone or anything apart from God or those he has delegated to meet desires he honors (such as

a spouse, etc.; 1 Cor. 7; Heb. 13:4), it is simply idolatry—trusting in a very inadequate, unfulfilling, and unhealthy substitute.

This appears to be the perspective Jesus Christ portrayed nearly each time he addressed someone, who attempted to confront him with a certain issue. God expects everyone to rely upon him and others he has delegated (spouses, friends, siblings, parents, guardians, authorities, fellow students or workers and fellow believers) for our genuine needs (not necessarily wants) to be met. He may also have delegated us as his means to meet one or more of the real needs of at least close family and significant others, but we will not know how to do this adequately without an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

If people really knew God first hand in an intimate relationship as implied in the first commandment, perhaps no other rules or guidelines would be needed. But our distorted thinking tends to center the focus of the universe on ourselves, our actual beliefs (as opposed to those we profess to believe), and our selfish preferences. We tend to take on the role of God, taking charge of our own life and destiny. This idolatry prevents us from developing a deeper intimate relationship with the only one who will never let us down or forsake us—the main person our heart ultimately yearns for.

Even Peter's relationship to Christ and to God, though deeper than that of the religious leaders of that time, was shallow and needed to be deepened. Christ had to rebuke him at least twice (Matt. 16:22-27; John 21:15-17). He had much to learn, and many misunderstandings to overcome.

The former General Secretary of the Cameroon Baptist Convention has stated (as have others) that Christendom in Africa is like a river that is a mile wide but only an inch deep. Many

of the trained Esimbi pastors have confessed their surprise of how little their church members know or understand about God.

**4. Distorted thinking is a deep and dangerous rut that people today just as easily fall into and often have as much difficulty avoiding.**

This study showed clearly that the same types of distorted thinking used in the past are still commonly practiced in this century. These are indeed dangerous ruts that we all need to learn how to extricate ourselves from as quickly as possible and avoid falling into in the future by means of supporting friends (and counselors if available).

The Esimbi, whether Christians or not, have actually used all of the types of distorted thinking mentioned in the Luke texts. The Bible is clear that the Esimbi are no different from anyone else in the world as declared in Ps. 14:2-3:

The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men  
to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.  
All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt;  
there is no one who does good, not even one.

Everyone has gone astray, each individual, family, clan, tribe, and nation doing what they felt like doing instead of doing what is right in God's eyes. Knowing there was no other hope, God laid everyone's iniquities on his one and only son, Jesus Christ, who was punished on our behalf for what we each deserved (Isa. 53:6). Because of a growing awareness of God's gift of eternal salvation, there are several Esimbi who have repented, received this gift, rejected the Esimbi gods mentioned below and are now worshiping the one true God.

The topics of distorted thinking which were not mentioned in the pericopes of Luke but greatly affect the Esimbi still today include the following two:

Occultism – belief in witchcraft, wizards, familiar spirits (such as ancestors), fortune telling, and in divining.

Hyllothism – belief that identifies a god or gods with matter.

The Esimbi who follow their traditional beliefs associate certain gods with certain objects, in which some of these gods are believed to reside. Hyllothism may actually be a subdivision of Occultism, though many in the West who consider themselves occultists may not accept this classification.

Occultism is condemned in many places in the Bible.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the biblical warning against it and God plainly hating it, occultism continues to be accepted as if true and legitimate not only among many in the West, but in most other societies as well, including the traditional and the syncretistic Esimbi to one degree or another. Among the older men, who are committed to the practicing their traditional religion, there are some who at funerals of their peers boast about how many people they have killed, either directly or through witchcraft, in their lifetime. Those who have killed very few are embarrassed to mention their number in the presence of the more respected ones who have killed many. It is hoped that this practice will soon end, either by the transforming power of the gospel or as the older generation passes on. There is clearly no love for enemies in such gatherings (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35).

There are some aspects of their worldview, however, that still seem strange to this writer as a follower of Christ with Western “baggage.” These may be strange even to non-Christian Westerners. But some of these may not actually be distorted thinking. It will be important for the Esimbi to study their culture in light of the Bible to understand these as well. Perhaps these may be a major factor in enabling them to develop a deeper relationship to God and deeper relationships with others. It is hoped that those striving to become better pastors and Christians

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<sup>2</sup>Lev. 19:31; 20:6-7; Deut. 18:10-13; 1 Sam. 15:23; 28:3-25; 2 Kings 21:6; 23:24; 1 Chron. 10:13-14; 2 Chron. 33:6; Jer. 27:9-10; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8.

will eventually be willing to acknowledge and make great strides in overcoming their preferred types of distorted thinking within a safe empowering Christian community.

**5. Most types of distorted thinking can be overcome and can often be avoided within the body of Christ without the expense of professional counselors.**

Everyone needs trustworthy, safe, empathetic, non-condemning people to come up along side of them to encourage them to be more honest and transparent about themselves. This will promote empowerment within Christian community to overcome the common distorted thought processes that enslave one to harmful lifestyles. The results can be truly freeing. We all need to be reminded that we are not in this battle alone. It is much bigger than any of us (Rom. 8:28-37; 1 Cor. 10:4).

Some who are bound up by distorted thinking may need someone daring and bold to give them “tough love” or a “wake-up call” just shy of verbal abuse as Christ did when He derogatorily labeled several religious leaders: “You **hypocrites!**” (Luke 12:56; 13:15, NRSV); and perhaps in a sarcastic tone “**lawyers**” (NRSV; or “experts in the law,” NIV) chiding them that they should have known better (Luke 11:46, 52); “inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You **fools!**” (Luke 11:39-40, NRSV). But much prayer and care is recommended for this approach to be successful because they need to know that you care about them and are not condemning them (Rom. 8:1).

Apart from partially trained pastors there are no professional Christian counselors in the Esimbi area. As these pastors develop a deeper intimacy with Christ, who is truth (John 14:6) and who is fully aware of every distortion in each person’s mind (Luke 5:22; John 2:24-25) they will join with God in the work he began in the lives of the Esimbi Christians, which he will continue until he returns (Phil. 1:6), through his Spirit who will lead them into all truth (John

16:13). Realizing that people are but clay (Isa. 45:9; 64:8; Rom. 9:20-1), not yet perfect or holy in this life, the Esimbi pastors are committing themselves to becoming transformed and conformed to Christ, to think and love like him (John 13:34-35; Rom. 12:1-2; Phil. 2) so that they can empower others to do likewise. These pastors are learning to identify the types of distorted thinking they tend to use and are working within the community of fellow pastors to overcome them.

### **Conclusions**

Every lie is a distortion of the truth. In reality, every type of distorted thinking is a wrong or false conclusion<sup>3</sup> and could therefore be considered a lie. Although lies could never be considered as “realis (‘fact’) tense,” the perpetrator may attempt, one way or another, to claim, rationalize, or label them grammatically as an “irrealis tense, dealing with hypothetical, possible, uncertain states or events that have not yet occurred.”<sup>4</sup> Then, if the possibility does not become reality, one may attempt to excuse it as a “joke,” but the victim may not accept that excuse.

Addicts, such as reforming alcoholics mentioned in chapter two for example, refer to their set of beliefs as “stinking thinking” once they have decided that they could begin to improve their life and their relationships by minimizing or eliminating their indulgence in their drug of choice as well as curtail the accompanying aberrant behavior.<sup>5</sup> They realize that this “stinking thinking” is actually based upon several lies they have accepted as true in order to deceive themselves and perhaps others—but actually, it rarely deceives others.

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<sup>3</sup>Kies, Internet.

<sup>4</sup>T. Givon, *Syntax: A Functional-Typological Introduction*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984), 285.

<sup>5</sup>Rosenau, 364.

A major unexpected result of this study was the conclusion that everyone alive today is or has been addicted consciously or unconsciously in one degree or another to meeting their own perceived needs or wants by their own chosen means and in their own preferred manner. Once addicted, the temptation to relapse never goes away, though it may become less intense with prudence. Though one may have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, relapses do occur from time to time, consciously or unconsciously.

As descendents of Adam and Eve, who followed Satan's example of distorted thinking by doubting God's concern and ability to provide for him either directly or through others, we too often have followed Satan's example in believing such lies (John 8:42-47). We have all been guilty of "stinking thinking." Many books on marriage, teamwork, and relationships reviewed in the course of this study list several damaging and unhealthy games people or partners participate in because of poor communication skills such as the "Nothing's Wrong Game" and the "Blame Game."<sup>6</sup> The process of distorted thinking always begins with a lie, in spite of the commands against lying (Exod. 20:16; Col. 3:9).

For addicts who are not yet committed to recovery, lying to themselves and others to cover up their addiction seems to them to be necessary. But "lying reduces intimacy"<sup>7</sup> in any relationship. Not only does distorted thinking begin with a lie, but further lying and deception are often the results of the same. Distorted thinking is utilized by every person except Christ (Jer. 17:9, Rom. 3:23). So, lying is not a foreign phenomenon in any country or people group. For example:

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<sup>6</sup>Ferguson, 1997, 93-112. Three other unhealthy games are mentioned.

<sup>7</sup>Glass, Internet.

As the [Wall Street] Journal has surmised, the lying problem is larger than simply the affected individuals and companies. All of society suffers when liars are put in positions of responsibility. Lying is a classic slippery slope.<sup>8</sup>

The more crafty and cunning a people may be in lying or deception, the more pleased some may be with themselves and the more others (who admire such skills) respect them. In every society, just as in the West, many tales are told of such daring schemes or encounters. But in the West, some are recorded on paper, on the web, or portrayed in movies purposely to enable the public to comprehend the hurtful and injurious consequences of such rude, unkind, or inhumane words or actions so as to discourage such thinking or behavior. Lieberman wrote:

The easiest person to lie to is someone who wants to be deceived. While several factors can get in the way of our getting to the truth, the worst offenders are usually ourselves. If you don't want to see the truth, you often will not. ... The truth is the same from every angle. A lie always needs to be facing forward.<sup>9</sup>

Lying is also often resorted to if there is some doubt as to whether or not anyone within close range actually knows the truth about a given thing and could provide sufficient feedback to expose a lie (or a guess, whether wild or "educated"). Lying is a popular means of evading responsibility, of controlling, and of promoting a perception of final authority on a given topic or situation:

What is missing from most authentic situations and from most real-life situations is systematic and corrective feedback about the consequences of various actions. When jurists have many experiences where they believe that they can tell if someone is lying and they receive feedback as to whether or not the individual is lying, they can learn that they are not good judges of truth telling. In real life, the systematic feedback is usually missing, so they continue to believe that they are good at the task of identifying liars when, in fact, they are not. Similarly, in the absence of reliable and regular feedback, we tend to believe that our

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<sup>8</sup>Craige McMillan, "The truth about corporate lying," posted 6 June 2002 [article online]; available from [http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE\\_ID=27856](http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=27856); Internet; accessed 20 November 2006. This article was written in response to "Stocks Slump in Late-Day Selloff on round of ugly corporate news" in the *Wall Street Journal*, A1, 4 June 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Lieberman, 183, 189.

interpretations of social events are accurate or the reasoning behind a political belief system is valid when it may not be.<sup>10</sup>

Reuters reports that researchers at the University of Texas at Austin used a sophisticated word-analysis program to determine that people communicate differently when they are lying.

A liar's words will betray him in three distinct ways: First, liars usually don't use the pronouns "I" and "me" when telling their tales. This distances them from the lie. Second, a liar's story will have a few bold facts and not much elaboration of detail. Making it convincing is hard enough without adding color to the tale. Third, the strain of lying often shows in negative emotions, such as anger or anxiety. "Liars probably feel some guilt" about lying, researcher Matthew Newman told Reuters, and they may worry about getting caught so their words denote anger and fear. ... it's not individual words or phrases that will point to a lie, but rather the whole tone of the narrative. If you've lied ... you need to fess up and apologize.<sup>11</sup>

Another unexpected discovery of this study was that every conscious person is promoting something or someone—perhaps themselves, a cause, a creature, an idea, or one or more material objects—trying to convince one or more creatures of its truth or value (whether or not it is true or valuable). "No matter what area of life we're in, we're always selling something ... When credibility can't be gained through the facts, distortion of truth is what often follows."<sup>12</sup> Many attitudes, beliefs, and opinions considered by the seller to be good or true may not be. These, as well as prejudices, instead, block out the truth. Regarding others lying to us, we can learn many of the tricks and not be fooled just as when we understand particular magic tricks, they will never surprise us again.<sup>13</sup> Every lie, infraction, or secret will be exposed at some point in time (Num. 32:23; Luke 12:2-3; Rev. 20:11-12).

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<sup>10</sup>Diane F. Halpern, "Applying the Science of Learning: Using the Principles of Cognitive Psychology to Enhance Teaching and Learning" [article on-line]; available from <http://www.house.gov/science/research/may10/halpern.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 November 2006.

<sup>11</sup>Cathryn Conroy, "Is Your Lover Lying? 3 Ways to Tell" [article on-line]; Internet; accessed 4 February 2002.

<sup>12</sup>Lieberman, 185.

Just as God himself laughs in derision at national leaders who seriously believe in their own personally defined reality and laughs at their feeble attempts to fight against each other or against him (Ps. 2), he is very disappointed in his prideful children whose own personally or denominationally defined realities cause them to quibble, quarrel, or separate over doctrines, forms of worship, and other things he intentionally left ambiguous, never intending them to be “dying points.” For example, mode of baptism was once considered a “dying point.” Those who did not accept the mode held by the ruling class of the area were considered heretics. Many who refused to recant their “deviant” view were imprisoned or killed.

Although no one in evangelical circles in recent history<sup>14</sup> has killed another person over points of doctrine, many within the circle do have clearly delineated teachings on eschatological or dispensational issues and have been known to disfellowship even long time members who have begun to slightly waver from the major particulars of a given accepted view. Although some of these teachings or doctrines could not be classified as physical “dying points” they have become so at least socially.

Such an interruption of a person’s community support in minimizing or eliminating specific types of distorted thinking (and resulting sins) may force them back into isolation until they can develop sufficient trust and transparency within another fellowship. But once betrayed by someone in one church-related support group during their period of uncertainty, they tend to be henceforth more cautious and less transparent in subsequent ones, proving once again the view that “secular” groups are “safer” than many church groups because they are more concerned about supporting each person in overcoming his or her problem or addiction.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 191.

<sup>14</sup>Apart from debatable wars such as those between the “Christians” and “Catholics” in Ireland.

**Further study**

It is hoped that others will become intrigued and motivated to continue the investigation to more thoroughly mine the other Gospels and the other books of the New Testament on the topic of striving to think as Jesus thought because he desires us to conform our minds and thinking to his (Rom. 12:1-2; Phil. 2:5ff). This may provide further insights about avoiding distorted thinking we could all learn and apply to our various ministries.

It is hoped that the body of Christ will become a much safer refuge for people to appropriately admit to reliable, trustworthy, empathetic, and godly fellow believers their weaknesses, failures, addictions, abuses, faults, secrets, and crimes. In this environment, real repentance may more likely occur, people may be more empowered to recognize their tendencies toward distorted thinking, and they may more seriously avoid enslavement to it as well as avoid the pain from its devastating consequences.

It is also hoped that this study will be beneficial to anyone who wants to avoid the faulty or distorted thinking patterns Jesus addressed in the gospel of Luke as well as others that have been mentioned in the literature. Understanding these patterns and others to be pointed out by future researchers of other passages of scripture may empower more believers to escape the old rutted distorted thinking paths they may have fallen into by default or by poor choices. May we all strive to conform our way of thinking to that of Christ.

For such cases, this study is pleading that churches allow several months at least, combined with ample amounts of love, care, and counseling sessions to allow a person to study out the issue personally and in a group setting for loving feedback before disfellowshipping them. The old maxim is pertinent here: "In essentials unity, in nonessentials diversity." This, of

course, should be balanced with sufficient caution and insight as to the potential for strife, terrorism, sexual abuse, and disruption of the whole body.