



“Never Trust a Skinny Person”

by Ron Benson



Can you trust a skinny person to give you the truth? In some cultures around the world it's the fat people that have prominence. They're fat because they can afford food, and if they can afford food that means they are successful and blessed. If they are successful, it must mean they are wise, diligent and cunning. I'm fat. Sometimes, I wish I lived in such a place.

In those same places, however, skinny people are the norm. If I lived there I'd probably be skinny. The skinny are not considered wise or diligent or cunning. Just kind of slow. They haven't succeeded in life, otherwise they'd be fat because

they'd have more to eat. Please remember, this is not my appraisal; I'm attempting to think like a starving citizen of some forlorn country where food is scarce.

Not America, of course. Food is not scarce here. Skinny people are the privileged folk here. But still the question lingers on my plate: Should skinny people be trusted? Let me give you an example of the problem.

Gwen Shamblin is skinny. She's the author of *The Weigh Down Diet*, a diet book that, like most others, claims it is not a diet. She's the founder of the Weigh Down Workshop, a weight loss program that a few years back was selling like hotcakes (with lots of butter and syrup), establishing itself in churches of tubby folk. Some churches still sponsor a Weigh Down Workshop, many workshops are now held in homes, and the diet still has many adherents.

Ms. Shamblin claims her diet is not a diet. All skinny people claim this. She claims her diet is based on sound physiological principles. All skinny diet entrepreneurs say that. She claims that her diet is God's way to eat. Many skinny Christians would say the same thing. She claims that her diet comes "right out of the Bible." A slew of books, also selling like the aforementioned hotcakes, written curiously enough by skinny Christians, also claim to have the biblical solution to eating problems. Does this sound like a conspiracy to you?

Losing Weight and Finding *The Truth*

However, Ms. Shamblin leaves the diet-guru-author-pack and takes a decidedly dramatic left turn. She claims her diet will lead you to understand *The Truth*. She claims to know *The Truth*. She claims that only those who agree with her truth are "in *The Truth*." She believes you don't know *The Truth* unless you're a part of her special, elite clan of skinny people, called "Remnant Fellowship."

Skinny Gwen claims that most churches in America do not know

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The Truth and are teaching lies. She says that the modern American church is the Great Whore of Babylon described by the apostle John in Revelation. She claims that most of the pews of those churches are filled with fat people infested with fat demons. She claims to teach the only real way to salvation. She says that you're not going to heaven unless you believe in what she says and join her cult, the Remnant Fellowship.

Did I mention she's skinny? Skinny as a rail. Do not trust her. How do I know all these things about Skinny Gwen? Years ago the church I was pastoring at the time started using the Weigh Down Workshop. I joined because I am overweight. Other people joined, too. We listened to cassette tapes of Gwen talking. We watched videos of Gwen talking. We talked about Gwen talking.

The Weigh Down Workshop works. I know because I was in it once. When I followed the rules, did the work, watched what I ate—I lost weight. The diet has the premise that God designed the body in such a way that it will tell you when you've had enough to eat. I think that's probably true, although Scripture to support it is ambiguous at best. Except for that one spiritual nugget, the rest of the "diet that's not a diet" is just about like any other diet out there. I've not tried them all, but I've tried some. My hunch is that most of them work, and most of them work the same way. Less eating calories, more burning calories. Simple.

The group at church ordered the second set of tapes from Gwen, the advanced course. As I listened to a tape in my car one day, I began to be concerned. The things Gwen was saying were veering toward the edge, claiming an authority from God which she didn't have. And the scripture she was using to back it up was clearly out of context, twisted to fit her peculiar slant. I warned the group leader to be careful. Before long, we learned more about the direction Weigh Down was taking, and we ditched the program.



Since 2000, Gwen Shamblin has openly admitted to not believing in the Trinity.

Since that “outing,” Ms. Shamblin has encouraged the spread of her unique doctrine in the form of new churches, collectively known as The Remnant Fellowship.

The success of Weigh Down Workshops and Shamblin’s book supplied the investment capital to start her new religion. The Remnant believe they’ve got an edge on salvation, advocating that obedience to their views of the rules of the Bible, along with trust in Jesus, will get you to heaven, where all people are skinny. Grace is a nice concept, but more than just grace is required. You must obey,

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follow the rules, be righteous, live right, be skinny. It’s not just what Jesus did for us; it’s Jesus—*plus*.

So, can you really trust a skinny person to give you the truth?

Following the Carrot of Legalism

Whenever God’s grace is rejected, something else must take its place, and that’s where cults start. A short examination of Gwen Shamblin, the Weigh Down Workshop and The Remnant Fellowship points to a common journey that threatens all of us, especially when we get together in groups and begin to feel good about it. Here are some danger signals displayed in this diet movement, which can be found anytime we follow the carrot of legalism:

1. The carrot is hung: In almost every cult, the carrot comes in the form of a solution to a felt need. In the case of Ms. Shamblin, the felt need that was addressed was health and weight loss. The truth is that God does want us healthy—not skinny, but living well. We who struggle with weight issues and overeating are looking for help. Many of us have tried the diets offered by the world. Gwen offered us a carrot: A non-diet based on God’s Word that would result in weight loss and healthy living. Nothing wrong with that.

2. The carrot is pursued: We followed the carrot. Not too far into the program we noticed that the non-diet had rules and regulations that needed to be kept. Cut your portions in half, set your fork down after each bite, fast until you recognize stomach-hunger, drink your water. We followed the rules because we heard, read and saw on video people who had been where we were and lost weight by following these simple laws of eating.

3. The carrot is tasted: It worked! We lost pounds. We gathered with joy every week, excited about our success. It must be that carrot! We saw that the rules were good, and we determined to stick to them.

4. The next carrot is hung: Ms. Shamblin, eager to help us, took the next step on the road to legalism. She suggested that, if we

keep the rules in other areas of our lives, we would be just as successful there. If we just did God’s will in every way, we would be the blessed, happy recipients of his abundant and amazing grace.

WARNING! Whenever a teacher, preacher, group, organization, club, class, congregation or dietician makes this claim, get away from them as fast as your chubby little legs will take you!

The apostle Paul encountered a similar movement in the region of Galatia. After the church there had heard and believed the gospel, the good news about God’s grace, a group of people (probably skinny) came into the church and convinced them that God’s grace was not enough, that it was not sufficient. What they needed was grace *plus* following the rules.

Paul reacts strongly to this. He tells the church, “You are already following a different way that pretends to be the Good News but is not the Good News at all!” (Galatians 1:6-7, NLT).

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5. The church of the carrot: The next step in the process is that those who follow the carrot of legalism begin to claim that they are the ones who really have it together, that they are the only people who really know the secret, the hidden truth now revealed to them, the only way of salvation. They begin to point fingers at

everyone else and claim that they are evil.

This is the route of legalism, taken by a multitude of groups and cults and religions over the millennia of Christianity's existence.

Can you trust a skinny person?

There are, of course, many skinny people who can be trusted. But

you can't trust anyone (skinny or chubby) who claims to have a corner on God's secret truth, or who suggests that the only way to heaven is to follow a certain set of rules and regulations.

That's not grace. It's just another carrot dream.

I struggle with weight. But I have discovered that God loves me anyway. I don't have to lose ten pounds to get in good with God. I don't have to be skinny in order to earn his favor. I am saved by grace; it is a gift from God. If I earned his grace by weighing a certain amount, I could claim that I did it by myself—that my salvation was due to my successful weight loss. It isn't. It never will be. It's because of his mercy that he saved me.

I have a desire to be healthy, not because in doing so I will get God's attention, but because he shows me his attention anyway. I love him because he loves me, even though I'm not skinny. I continue to love him, and as that love grows it will lead to even more good health, and that's a good thing.

You can trust me on that. I'm kinda chubby. □

For further reading :

- Spirit Watch Ministries' research: <http://www.spiritwatch.org/>
- Articles from *Christianity Today*: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/>
 - 1) "Faith-Based Child Abuse?" Corrie Cutrer, April, 2004.
 - 1) "Gwen Shamblin's New Jerusalem," John W. Kennedy, December, 2002.
 - 3) "Shamblin Faces Religious Discrimination Suit," Todd Starnes, October 2000.
 - 4) "The Weigh Is Narrow," Jody Veenker, September, 2000.
- "The Birth Of A Cult?" Gregory Koukl, Nov/Dec 2000, Stand to Reason: <http://www.str.org/index.htm>

Ron Benson has never been a skinny person, but has aspirations. His wife Linda loves him anyway, and they have four children. Ron writes and speaks, and you can find him on the Internet at www.ronbenson.net.