

Doctrinal Issues in The Purpose-Driven Life

By Richard Bennett

Dear Friend,

Degrading the Gospel to a formulated whispered prayer and find one's "true self" is part of what one finds in Rick Warren's The Purpose-Driven Life movement. With concern I have written on the true Gospel of the Lord Christ Jesus, and in its power, precision and light, thus exposing a widespread movement that is afflicting many souls. This is Part I of a two-part presentation.

Thousands across the world who are deceived by this new "success" movement of Rick Warren need the true Gospel!

Yours in the grace of the precious Savior,

Richard Bennett

Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life* "is more than a bestseller, it's become a movement."¹ In the words of the author himself his megachurch program is "Revival awakening or miracle ... Over 12,000 churches from all 50 states and 19 countries have now participated in 40 Days of Purpose. Many of these churches have reported that it was the most transforming event in their congregation's history."² "Rick is also the founder of Pastors.com, a global Internet community that serves and mentors those in ministry worldwide. Over 60,000 pastors subscribe to *Rick Warren's Ministry Toolbox*."³ On this Webpage he states, "Our Purpose is to encourage pastors, ministers, and church leaders with tools and resources for growing healthy churches...Every resource you purchase helps provide free resources to the over 1.5 million pastors and lay pastors in third world countries. God has allowed us through your support to reach over 117 different countries on all 7 continents."⁴ The movement is becoming a global empire. Warren asserts, "God is a global God ... Much of world already thinks globally. The largest media and business conglomerates are all multi-national...Get a globe or map and pray for nations by name. The Bible says, 'If you ask me, I will give you the nations; all the people on earth will be yours.'"⁵ (Warren, however, has overlooked the fact that this promise was made uniquely to Christ Jesus, and not to megachurches seeking expansion). Even the business world is looking on with awe. Forbes.com in an article called "Christian Capitalism Megachurches, Megabusinesses" acknowledged that,

Maybe churches aren't so different from corporations...Pastor Rick Warren, who founded Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., in 1980, has deftly used technology as well as marketing to spread his message ... No doubt, churches have learned some valuable lessons from corporations. Now maybe they can teach businesses a thing or two. Companies would certainly appreciate having the armies of non-paid, loyal volunteers.⁶

The empire of influence of which Warren boasts is echoed by thousands of pastors and Christian leaders around the world. At least eighteen million copies of his book have been sold since its release in September 2002. It is now selling in many translations. Literally thousands of churches have used the book and the materials that accompany it during special campaigns called 40 Days of Purpose. The book is divided into forty chapters purporting to explain in 40 days the five purposes of one's life. Indeed, the thesis of the book is found on p. 136,

He [God] created the church to meet your five deepest needs: a purpose to live for, people to live with, principles to live by, a profession to live out, and power to live on. There is no other place on earth where you can find all five of these benefits in one place.⁷

Warren is dead wrong in his list of “deepest needs.” On the authority of the Bible, the first and foremost need of any man is perfect righteousness before the All Holy God. It is Christ Jesus’ righteousness alone that God will accept as a propitiation for any man’s sin and sin nature. This primary need of man is constantly shown in the Bible but Warren does not even mention this foundational truth in his list of “deepest needs.” Warren’s quick switch from God’s purpose to man’s methods falls under the first temptation ever recorded in the Bible. Satan offered to Eve the fruit as the way of achieving a spiritual purpose, “*in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*”⁸ Warren teaches that God “created **the church** to meet your five deepest needs” just as the Roman Catholic Church says, “**The Church** is the mother of all believers.”⁹ Warren, like Rome, has switched from obedience to the Word and Person of the Living God to submission to a church to achieve one’s needs. It is the oldest and cleverest temptation known to man.

Warren’s gospel, the root flaw

The Apostle Paul showed the need for the Gospel by the fact that whole the world is guilty before God. He said, “*now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*”¹⁰ All are “*by nature children of wrath*”¹¹, guilty before the all Holy God. To appear before Him, therefore, each needs a perfect righteousness. James summarizes the whole condition of man when he says, “*for whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*”¹² Guilt before God shows the need for the Gospel and as such is the basis for the Gospel. Conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit drives the sinner to trust truly on Christ Jesus alone, as the publican in the parable of the Lord cried out, “*God be merciful to me a sinner.*”¹³ With Warren, this conviction of guilt is reduced by psychological terminology to the condition of “unconsciously punishing of oneself.” He states,

Many people are driven by guilt... . Guilt-driven people are manipulated by memories. They allow their past to control their future. They often unconsciously punish themselves by sabotaging their own success. When Cain sinned, his guilt disconnected him from God’s presence, and God said, ‘You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.’ That describes most people today — wandering through life without a purpose. (pp. 27-28)

Rather than sin being shown to be an evil of infinite significance because it is committed against an infinite Person, Warren’s pop psychology defines sin as acts of people “sabotaging their own success.” He continues,

“God won’t ask about your religious background or doctrinal views. The only thing that will matter is, did you accept what Jesus did for you and did you learn to love and trust him?” (p. 34)

“If you learn to love and trust God’s Son, Jesus, you will be invited to spend the rest of eternity with him. On the other hand, if you reject his love, forgiveness, and salvation, you will spend eternity apart from God forever.” (p. 37)

Biblically speaking, it is absolute folly to tell an unconvicted sinner merely to “learn to love and trust God’s Son, Jesus.” No one can be saved without recognition of his own sin personally against Holy God, and without turning away from that sin. So while it is true that the only thing that matters “is to learn to love and trust Him,” this love and trust is impossible unless the Holy Spirit has convicted a person that he is a depraved sinner without any hope in himself. Warren does endeavor to define sin when he states,

All sin, at its root, is failing to give God glory. It is loving anything else more than God. Refusing to bring glory to God is prideful rebellion, and it is the sin that caused Satan’s fall — and ours, too. In different ways we all lived for our own glory, not God’s. The Bible says, ‘All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’” (p.55)

While this is true, Warren still has not acknowledged personal guilt and personal need for Christ’s perfect righteousness and perfect sacrifice. Warren’s persistent declarations one’s “self worth” and “true self,” as we will shortly document, totally negates what he says about “prideful rebellion.” The book and movement, on the contrary, major in upholding “self worth” and “true self” thus endorsing the very “prideful rebellion” it states is cause of our fall, even as it was Satan’s. This type of a contradictory statement made by Warren makes it difficult to analyze the book. While this is so, it is all the more necessary to do such an analysis. Without the Apostle Paul’s conviction, “*I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing,*”¹⁴ there can be no true faith in Christ Jesus, nor even a growth in sanctification before God. The first key flaw in the Warren’s gospel message is the negation of the very basis needed for salvation. As the Lord Himself proclaimed, “*they that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*”¹⁵

The heart of Warren’s gospel

Warren’s gospel message gets worse as he proceeds in the book. He assures his readers,

Real life begins by committing yourself completely to Jesus Christ. If you are not sure you have done this, all you need to do is *receive* and *believe*. The Bible promises, ‘To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.’ Will you accept God’s offer?” (p.58)

What Warren has neglected in his teaching of John 1:12 is that the following verse, v. 13, explains how a person is born again, “*which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*” Warren has completely ignored the fact that to receive and believe is not of the will of man, but of God. It is the grace of God that makes a person willing to believe, for the heart is changed by God’s power alone. To leave out this essential point changes the focus from God to man. Such a change of focus from God to man is lethal to salvation because there is no power within man to change himself. This grace must come from God. If, however, Warren had taught his readers to look to God for His grace, he would not have a ready-made message that is marketable. For Warren it is advantageous to leave out “*not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*” In leaving out this essential factor of the Gospel he can in fact propose that which this verse of Scripture rules out! The Lord is consistent in His Word, “*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have*

compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."¹⁶ Eternal life is bestowed on a person not because man begins the work, but it is because God gives salvation out of His mercy and grace. Such is the written purpose of God. Warren's written purpose is the opposite. It begins, he says, with man, "Real life begins by committing yourself ..." But this is a deception for which Warren will have to pay before the All Holy God. "*Be not deceived; God is not mocked...It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*"¹⁷ The power and dread of God's vindictive wrath is great. There will be eternal misery for those who teach a false gospel, their punishment shall come from God's own hand.

Warren progresses in his bogus gospel message,

First, *believe*. Believe God loves you and made you for his purposes. Believe you're not an accident. Believe you were made to last forever. Believe God has chosen you to have a relationship with Jesus, who died on the cross for you. Believe that no matter what you've done, God wants to forgive you.

Second, *receive*. Receive Jesus into your life as Lord and Saviour. Receive his forgiveness for your sins. Receive his Spirit, who will give you the power to fulfill your life purpose. Wherever you are reading this, I invite you to bow your head and quietly whisper the prayer that will change your eternity: 'Jesus, I believe in you and I receive you.' Go ahead. If you sincerely meant that prayer congratulations! Welcome to the family of God! (p. 58-59).

According to Warren's teaching, it is the prayer that one whispers that changes a person for eternity. Instead of magnifying the enormity of sin and setting forth its eternal consequences, Warren says, "Believe that no matter what you've done, God wants to forgive you." With one sweet lie he attempts to wipe out all the teaching of the prophets in the Old Testament and the Lord Christ Jesus and the Apostles in the consistent teaching on the abhorrence of sin and the need of repentance. In place of the Gospel as "*the power of God unto salvation*" "*in which the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith,*"¹⁸ Warren merely gives a whispered prayer. It is difficult to envisage a greater insult to Christ Jesus, whose perfect life and perfect sacrifice are the basis of genuine salvation.

The Apostle Paul declares that the righteousness of God is manifested, "*But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.*"¹⁹ Before God, sin had to be punished and true righteousness established. God's holiness demanded the perfect life and perfect sacrifice of Christ Jesus to satisfy His wrath against sin. But for Warren, as we had seen, sin is said to be "sabotaging ... success" so the whole concept of perfect righteousness being manifested before God is totally missing. With the omission goes the omission of the concept of grace as the means of obtaining that perfect righteousness. According to Warren's doctrine, salvation is "bow your head and quietly whisper the prayer that will change your eternity." In Scripture, salvation is God's action based on Christ's finished work on the cross that is credited to the true believer, "*being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*"²⁰ God's direct action shows His grace so that our eyes are fixed on Him in faith. Understanding Warren's bogus gospel, and outrageously presumptuous "welcome to the family of God," we can but repeat the words of the Lord, "*woe unto you...for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men.*"²¹ By a false gospel and

false assurance of admittance into the family of God, Warren has excluded further seeking for the truth, “*woe unto you...for ye have taken away the key of knowledge.*”²² The Gospel, in which the finished work of the Lord is proclaimed, is such that it cannot be changed by a lie that ignores repentance and adds a whispered prayer that insults the meaning and application of redemption. This replacement of Warren’s purpose for God’s purpose has dreadful consequences: “*though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*”²³ Christ Jesus the Lord and His Gospel cannot be insulted with impunity. As the receiver of stolen goods is as accountable as the thief, so one who promotes such a pretended gospel is as accountable in the sight of God as the impostor himself.

Self worth: the Glorification of Man

Basic to Warren’s program is the strong appeal of promised instantaneous results in the enhancement of one’s imaginations of his own self worth. What is completely ignored is the solemn fact that by nature man is a fallen creature, alienated from the life of God, dead in trespasses and sins, and that his only hope is outside of himself and in Christ Jesus alone. Although Warren states that the book is “not about you” (p. 17), the main focus is persistently on building up one’s “self worth.” He continually appeals to the reader’s self-interests. The following are some examples,

“The way you *see* your life *shapes* your life. How you define life determines your destiny” (p. 41).

“You are a bundle of incredible abilities, an amazing creation of God. Part of the church’s responsibility is to identify and release your abilities for serving God” (p. 242).

“The best use of your life is to serve God out of your shape. To do this you must discover your shape, learn to accept and enjoy it, and then develop it to its fullest potential” (p. 249).

This equates exactly with the Hinduism in its teaching, “By understanding your true Self, by coming to know one’s own undying soul, one then arrives at the knowledge of Brahman itself...”²⁴ While Warren’s teaching is comparable with Hinduism, the most likely source of Warren’s teaching is Carl Jung. Discovering one’s “power of the inner voice” or one’s fullest potential is what Jung taught, “Only the man who can consciously assent to the power of the inner voice becomes a personality.”²⁵ What is much more serious is that Warren’s teaching has the same basic premise as Roman Catholicism. The Vatican’s official foundational starting point is man himself. Rome states,

It is man himself who must be saved: it is mankind that must be renewed. It is man, therefore, who is the key to this discussion, man considered whole and entire, with body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will. This is the reason why this sacred Synod, in proclaiming the noble destiny of man and affirming an element of the divine in him, offers to co-operate unreservedly with mankind in fostering a sense of brotherhood to correspond to this destiny of theirs.²⁶

“Discovering one’s shape accepting and enjoy it developing it to its fullest potential” is same basic foundation as the Church of Rome and Hinduism have, as we have already seen, but the

same is true also of Islam and Buddhism — all of them have for their focal point the basic goodness of mankind. Warren summarizes this basic foundation in the following words,

If you are *that* important to God, and he considers you valuable enough to keep with him for eternity, what greater significance could you have? (p. 63)

The Scriptures, however, depict no such value or goodness within man. Rather the Holy Spirit teaches that “*the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?*”²⁷ “*Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD.*”²⁸

Warren even goes so far as to distort a Scripture text to uphold his treasured concept of “true self.” He states, “The Bible says, ‘Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self’” (p.19). The passage he quotes is a contrived paraphrase of Matthew 16:25 from *The Message*. The Lord in fact said, “*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.*” The Lord clearly taught that we are to consider our lives dead in order to follow Him. This passage does not teach anything about “true self” or self esteem. Warren used the counterfeit paraphrase to fantasize that the Lord had spoken of “finding yourself, your true self.” The craze of finding your “true self,” one of the hallmarks of the 1960’s hippy crowd, has now made its mark in this popularized debasing of Christianity.

Self-exaltation “salvation” is worthless

This same glorification of man Warren teaches in many different ways.

“You only bring him [God] enjoyment by being you. Anytime you reject any part of yourself, you are rejecting God’s wisdom and sovereignty in creating you” (p. 75).

“When you are sleeping, God gazes at you with love, because you were his idea. He loves you as if you were the only person on earth” (p. 75).

But Warren does not stop here with his adulation of man. The height of his glorification of man is found in the statement that makes the personal worth of the reader the purpose of Christ’s death on the cross. In doing so, “self-worth” is pushed to the point not only of perverting the Gospel but also of insulting the Lord Himself. Warren states,

If you want to know how much you matter to God, look at Christ with his arms outstretched on the cross, saying, ‘I love you this much! I’d rather die than live without you’” (p. 79).

These words “I’d rather die than live without you” are part of a lyric of the “backstreet boys.”²⁹ These words, put into the mouth of the Lord Christ Jesus by Warren, are a blasphemy. Christ Jesus the God-man, does not have a love that is dependant on man. If he had such a dependency, He would not be God. To teach that the love of the Lord Jesus Christ is unholy, as Warren has, is both an insult and irreverence. It exalts sinful man to a position of control regarding the eternal Son of God. Can such an imagination be anything other than profanity? “*He opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name.*”³⁰

In Scripture, Christ's love and sacrifice were to demonstrate that God is "*just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*"³¹ Nevertheless, Warren's doctrine makes living with sinful man the centerpiece of God's purpose. In Scripture, the focus of God's purpose was the demonstration of His justice and holiness in the Person and sacrifice of Christ Jesus. Sinful man was included in this great manifestation of the righteousness of God as a recipient by grace of the redemption paid. Warren's grandiose glorification of sinful man to the extent that Christ Jesus would rather die than to live without him totally reverses the biblical message that God does all for His own glory. All is of Him and from Him, and therefore all is to Him and for Him. He made all creation according to His will and for His praise. The Lord God Almighty's purpose exposes the ridicule, vainglory and even blasphemy of Rick Warren.

Fallen man is depraved in every part of his nature and being, and it is not within his power to undo his depravity, to save himself or rescue himself. To try to aggrandize the fallen man, as Warren does, is futile because there is no moral salvation in man's worth. A person's only hope lies outside of himself, in divine worth and power. Human nature as such is dead in trespasses and sins. Water cannot flow uphill, nor can the natural man act contrary to his corrupt nature. All human beings are destitute of the principles and powers of spiritual life. They are cut off from God, the fountain of life. They are spiritually dead as a condemned criminal is said to be a dead man. Thus the Lord Christ Jesus declared, "*for from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness, all these evil things come from within, and defile the man.*"³² Christ declared, "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh.*" He signified that that which is propagated by fallen man is depraved. If the principle of self-worth and the ability to choose Christ were true, the conclusion would inevitably follow that those who used their ability to choose Christ could lawfully boast of their active participation in their salvation. But the truth is that faith itself is God's gift, "*for by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*"³³ Until one realizes his personal condition of being spiritually dead before the All Holy God, one will never properly appreciate God's grace. Salvation begins not in self-worth and self-movement but by divine power. Scripture is utterly clear on this matter: "*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.*"³⁴ "*For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*"³⁵ God gives life to the spiritually dead will of man by giving His grace. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that overcomes the pride of the natural man, so that one is ready to come to Christ to receive life. In the Lord's own words, "*the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.*"³⁶ As the Lord also explained, "*It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes unto me.*"³⁷

"Self-salvation" promoted on the basis of human worth and dignity is ingrained in human nature. It is found in all man-made religions. It is pivotal to the message of Warren's book and movement. Warren's teachings deny the biblical truth that man is totally depraved. Subsequently, he denies the absolute necessity of God's grace. The relationship between spiritual death and grace is graphically given in Scripture, "*that as sin has reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.*"³⁸ Without understanding the total depravity of those to whom the Gospel is given, the Gospel will remain a

dead letter. In leaving out the biblical truth that “*there is none righteous, no, not one*”³⁹ and substituting for it the self-worth of man, Warren’s arrogance has reached a level predicted in the Scripture, “*I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.*”⁴⁰

Conclusion

Now that we have documented that a bogus gospel message is given in the 40 Days of Purpose in *The Purpose-Driven Life* we are obliged to “*earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*”⁴¹, and to “*stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.*”⁴² Through the Warren movement, multitudes are being deceived on the very meaning of the Gospel of salvation. Vast numbers sincerely believe that they have received Christ as their personal Savior while in fact all that they have received into their right hand is a man-made ritual and “covenant” commitment to a church, which they have obligated themselves by vow to fulfill. While many of the articles regarding Warren commend the good things Warren has had to say, they forget that Lord Himself and His Apostles utterly condemned the presentation of a false gospel. How can we expect any true revival and the bringing of the everlasting righteousness of Christ Jesus into the lives of men and women, if we are not willing to exposed pretensions of him who embraces a “christ” unknown in the pages of Scripture, who presents a sham gospel and who is willing to commend the devotees of the apostate system of Rome? He is a deceiver who willfully defrauds, after all the light of the Gospel of grace has been clearly set forth. It must not be thought strange that there are deceivers of the Lord Christ’s name and dignity now, for there were such of old, even in the Apostles’ times. The danger and evil of departure from the true Gospel is in effect and reality a departure from God Himself. “*Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.*”⁴³

Notes

1. Bruce Ryskamp, president of Zondervan.
<http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/s03110083.htm> 10/22/04
2. <http://www.purposedrivenlife.com/thebook.aspx> 10/16/04
3. <http://www.pastors.com/aboutus/> 11/15/04
4. <http://www.pastors.com/aboutus/> 10/22/04
5. <http://www.pastors.com/RWMT/?id=74&artid=3099&expand=1> 10/22/04
6. http://www.forbes.com/2003/09/17/cz_1k_0917megachurch.html 10/22/04
7. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002) Page numbers only in succeeding citations.
8. Genesis 3:5
9. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), #181 (Emphasis ours.)
10. Romans 3:19
11. Ephesians 2:3
12. James 2:10
13. Luke 18:8
14. Romans 7:18
15. Mark 2:17
16. Romans 9:15-16

17. Galatians 6:7, Hebrews 10:30-31
18. Romans 1:16-17
19. Romans 3:21
20. Romans 3:24
21. Matthew 23:13
22. Luke 11:52
23. Galatians 1:8
24. Atman and Brahman as explained on
www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/GLOSSARY/BRAHMAN.HTM 12/2/2002
25. *The Development of Personality* Collected Works 17 as quoted on:
http://www.sacredsandwich.com/warren_jung_chart.htm 11/18/04
26. Vatican II Documents No. 64, *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 Dec 1965 in *Vatican Council II The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Austin P. Flannery, ed., 1981 edition
(Northport, NY: Costello Publ. Co. 1975) Para 3
27. Jeremiah 17:9
28. Jeremiah 17:5
29. <http://sozluk.sourtimes.org/show.asp?t=ill+never+break+your+heart> 11/16/04
30. Revelation 13:6
31. Romans 3:26
32. Mark 7:21-23
33. Ephesians 2:8-9
34. James 1:18
35. Philippians 2:13
36. John 5:25
37. John 6:45
38. Romans 5:21
39. Romans 3:10
40. Isaiah 14:14
41. Jude 1:3
42. Philippians 1:27
43. 2 John 9

Part II

Dear Friend,

In the light of the true Gospel in Part 1 of our analysis of Rick Warren's "The Purpose-Driven Life" movement, we documented that his "gospel" consists of a formulated whispered prayer and finding one's "true self." In this Part 2, we highlight God's true love as seen in the maintenance of His law and in the manifestation of His justice. In Christ Jesus, God's love and righteousness compliment each other. This emphasis on the true love of God is necessary to reveal the demeaning of this divine attribute that is evident in Rick Warren's writings. The involvement with the Catholic Church with the movement and the connection with Catholicism is also documented.

Yours in the grace of the precious Savior,

Richard Bennett

There is an underlying feature of Rick Warren's book and movement that makes an analysis of it very difficult. It stems from the fact that Warren presents some basic teaching regarding God's purpose to glorify Himself and what man should do in relation to God. The fact that none of these purposes is presented in a biblically accurate way makes Warren's work all the more dangerous to the true understanding of Who God is and His Gospel in Christ. In the first part of our analysis we documented the way in which the Gospel was vitiated by the exaltation of man and so called "true self." This error together the corresponding neglect to show that man is in fact spiritually "*dead in trespasses and sins*" showed that the book is both a hindrance and a deceit. The most dangerous of heresies have always been those that have been presented in the context of general basic truth. In this section, too, we must continue to analyze the saving purpose of God from all eternity in Christ Jesus. Salvation comes from God to sinful man in and through Christ Jesus alone. The origin of free grace and eternal purpose of God is in Christ Jesus alone, "*Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*"¹ This elementary truth would not need to be emphasized were it not for the fact that Warren misrepresents God's saving love for mankind as being in a man himself.

The nature of God in Scripture is proclaimed to be All Holy, thus the Bible states "*Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.*"² To inspire utter reverence for God's nature, the question is asked, "*Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou only art Holy: for all nations shall come and worship before Thee...*"³ One of the most flagrant sins of Warren and his movement is the failure to respect the nature of the Almighty, All Holy God. For example, in his chapter entitled "Becoming Best Friends with God," God is portrayed as if He were in need, "Almighty God yearns to be your Friend!"⁴ "Yearns" signifies "craves," "hankers," or "covets," basically meaning He needs to be your Friend. The love of God, however, whereby He gave His only begotten Son, is totally sacrificial and giving. It in no way signifies a lack in God. On the contrary, the giving of His only begotten Son is the total outpouring of His perfect love and certainly not needed to complete or perfect His love. The fact that God demonstrates His love to unworthy sinners in no way implies that God needs sinners to satisfy something lacking in Him! Warren's terminology misrepresents the nature of God.

Warren builds on this serious error by means of a modern corruption of Exodus 34:14, “He is a God who is passionate about his relationship with you.”⁵ The verse should read, “*for thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.*” The jealousy or passion of the Lord God is against those who would worship another god. Such worship is utterly condemned. It is significant that the first part of this verse, “*for thou shalt worship no other god,*” is totally absent from Warren’s chapter. Yet when the terms “jealously” or “passion” are used of God in the Bible, it describes His fervor for the true worship due to His holy name. It demands exclusive devotion to Him. By teaching that God has a passion or infatuation with the reader of Warren’s book rather than a perfect zeal for His Holy Name, Warren has gotten the meaning of the verse literally backwards. His use of a corrupted and partial Bible text to depict his notion that God has a passionate devotion to man renders his work an attempt to flatter men rather than present them with God’s truth concerning their depravity. Thus Warren teaches as truth the very idolatry that a faithful rendition of the whole text condemns. This type of Scripture twisting that degrades the nature of God runs throughout Warren’s book.

Love is not the essence of God’s character apart from His righteousness

Warren’s teaching that God has a saving love for everyone demeans the very nature of God. Such particular love for everyone is stated to be “the essence of God’s character.” Warren teaches,

You were created as a special object of God’s love! God made you so he could love you. This is a truth to build your life on. The Bible tells us, “God is love.” (I John 4:8) It doesn’t say God has love. He is love! Love is the essence of God’s character. There is perfect love in the fellowship of the Trinity, so God didn’t need to create you.” (pp. 24-25)

This is still another contradiction by Warren, who had just previously implied that God was somehow lacking. Now Warren has given his readers the heady notion that God loves each one “as a special object.” With this type of assurance, the reader has security in himself and in his sins. According to Scripture, however, we cannot know that we are the objects of God’s saving love until after we have fled from His wrath against our sin, repented of it, and turned to put our faith in Christ Jesus alone. Warren’s type of god, who loves everyone as a special object of His love, is utter heresy. Love apart from His righteousness is not the essence of God’s character. Rather in Scripture God’s saving love is always in accord with His righteousness, “*mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*”⁶ We must accept God’s love as He himself has defined it rather than how Warren has presented it!

In Scripture God’s love is seen in the maintenance of His law, and in the manifestation of His justice. In the Messiah there is a harmony of the divine attributes, love and righteousness. In Christ, God’s righteousness and peace have kissed each other. In the work of the Redeemer, God’s love is shown in the Messiah being “*wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.*”⁷ The demonstration of God is love is “*that He might be just and the justifier of him, who believes in Jesus.*”⁸ God is true to His wrath against sin and He is just in His government to both love and pardon sinners in Christ Jesus. He is just because Christ Jesus’ blood paid the penalty, satisfying God’s justice. He is “justifier” in that Christ’s righteousness is credited to believers. But

unbelievers remain under God's wrath because of their own unrighteousness. In that state they have no reason to believe they are special objects of God's love.

Warren's so-called love of God for unrepentant sinners as "a special object of God's love" is an insult to the true love of God because it attempts to redefine the very nature of God.⁹ The true love of God upholds His truth, His commands, His Word, and His righteousness. For example consider the preaching of C. H. Spurgeon, "O Sinner, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God! Think how often He has shown His love to you by bidding you come to Himself. Think how often you have spurned His Word and refused His mercy. Think how you have turned a deaf ear to every invitation and have gone your way to rebel against a God of love. Think how often you have violated the commands of Him that loved you."¹⁰ If Warren wrote and preached as Spurgeon did above, he would not be as popular with the thousands of so called "carnal Christians" across the world. However, when the commands of God are preached together with His love, true conversions are seen as righteousness and peace come together in Christ Jesus. God's saving love is always particularized to those who are in Christ. It is always declared to be in Christ and because of His grace. Thus the Bible proclaims, "*according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him: in love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself... To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved.*"¹¹ Without exception, human beings are the objects of God's saving love only in Christ Jesus; otherwise, and without exception, they are objects of God's wrath! "*Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength.*"¹²

God's focus on Christ is changed for Warren's focus on man

In Chapter 2, "You Were Not an Accident," Warren emphasizes God's sovereignty in appointing every detail of each person's birth. Warren seems to equate being born with being a child of God for he states, "While there are illegitimate parents, there are no illegitimate children....God never makes mistakes... . God made you so he could love you."¹³ Leaping over the huge difficulties such as "the vessels of wrath" in Romans 9:22, Warren moves to Ephesians 1:4 to make his case, "*according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him.*" He teaches a distortion of its meaning, however. Citing The Message he teaches,

God's motive for creating was his love. The Bible says, 'Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love.' (p. 24)

This corrupt text allows Warren to exclude the true focus of the Bible text that God's choice of individuals is "*in Christ*" and not in unrepentant people who, Warren teaches, are loved in themselves. Nowhere in the book does he deal with Ephesians 2:1 nor any of the great passages speaking of being born dead in trespasses and sin. He totally omits dealing biblically with the problem of justification. By disregarding this central issue, Warren utterly fails to acknowledge that Paul is not addressing people who are loved in themselves but rather to "the faithful in Christ Jesus"¹⁴, telling them of the riches of His grace which are theirs precisely because they are "*in Him [i.e., Christ].*" As a magician who with one wave of his hand changes what one sees, so Warren has with one contrived paraphrase of Scripture changed "chosen us in him" to read "he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love." With this switch from "*the faithful in*

Christ” to sinful individuals as they are in themselves, Warren has removed the one Mediator and His redemption as the means by which God’s active love has procured its goal. In the context of salvation, which is the whole theme of Ephesians chapter 1, this removal of the Person of Christ Jesus means that Warren presents a god who has saving love for sinful individuals as they are in themselves. His god is not the God of the Bible. Outside of God’s choice in Christ Jesus there is no salvation.¹⁵ The love of God finds satisfaction and delight only in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. His love is not only particularized in Christ Jesus, but His express purpose is to uphold His own righteousness, as the Apostle Paul proclaimed, “*being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*”¹⁶

In all things we rejoice that God is almighty and that there is good news for all who are “dead in trespasses and sins.” In the light of God’s Word we know, “*the gospel of Christ...is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth... .*”¹⁷ By nature we are all children of wrath, and by practice we are rebels against the Lord God and His Word. The perfect and just law of God condemned us all and the Lord God is not responsible to rescue any of us from His just wrath. Despite our sin nature and personal sin, the Lord God has given His beloved Son for all true believers. God is the All Holy One. His holiness is the distinguishing factor in all His essential characteristics. This is the reason why we need to be in right standing before the one and only All Holy God on the terms He prescribes. Turn to God in faith alone for the salvation that He alone gives, by the conviction of the Holy Spirit, based on Christ’s death and resurrection, and believe on Him alone, “*to the praise of the glory of his grace.*”¹⁸ The understanding of the Gospel causes us to proclaim in loving gratitude, “*not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake.*”¹⁹

The consequences of Warren’s trifling with the Holy and Just nature of God

Warren’s saving love applied universally to all degrades God’s holy and just nature. His love is specifically “*in Christ,*”²⁰ and for the express purpose of showing forth His righteousness. God cannot and will not accept our sin. Thus Warren significantly distorts the biblical doctrine of the just and holy God and thus disfigures the biblical concept of the nature of God. If God loved man as he is in himself He would be unrighteous. Such a concept is sacrilege. “God is light” as well as “love,” “*and in him is no darkness at all.*”²¹ His love is a holy love, as are all His attributes. In the Scripture His Holiness is every bit as important as His love. “Be ye holy; for I am holy.”²² Equal to God’s love is His wrath and judgment which produces healthy fear and awe of the Creator, “*despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*”²³

A sinner ought not to be comforted by assurances of the love of God apart from repentance and faith in Christ. Rather a sinner should be reminded that God hates sinners as Scripture insists, “*the boastful shall not stand before thine eyes; thou dost hate all who do iniquity.*”²⁴ “*I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked.*”²⁵ Without Christ Jesus “*the wrath of God is revealed from heaven ...*”²⁶ God clearly depicts His Holy and just nature in the pages of Scripture. Great is the guilt of anyone who makes it seem that God’s saving love is indiscriminate, rather than focused on sinners as they are in Christ Jesus. The Lord’s glory and

redemption in Christ Jesus are what is at stake, “let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.”²⁷

Involvement with the Catholic Church and more similarities

Since Warren’s policy is to implement church growth without respect to biblical doctrine²⁸, it is no wonder that Catholic Churches such as Saint Michael the Archangel Catholic Church in Cary, NC are now enthusiastically joining in the Warren church growth program. The webpage for this Catholic Church states, “Having finished the first 21 days of the book, our growing group decided to push on to the end (so if you’ve already read parts of the book and weren’t able to join us in November, now’s the time to hop aboard!) ...”²⁹ Another example: “In the Chicago area, more than 200 churches are participating in ‘40 Days of Purpose’ (some used it as a Lenten series). Among them is St. Walter’s Catholic Church in Roselle which had hoped 100 people would sign up for small home groups for the ‘40 Days of Purpose’ program studying Warren’s book. Instead, 700 got involved.”³⁰

Warren quotes from Catholic mystic Brother Lawrence, endorsing Catholic contemplative prayer techniques, which he says are “helpful ideas.” Brother Lawrence was not only traditionally Roman Catholic but also disseminated teachings that have similarities with Hinduism in the Bhagavad-Gita, and with many New Age writers. Warren endorses him and goes on later to recommend “breath prayers.” He teaches,

Many Christians use ‘Breath Prayers’ throughout their day. You choose a brief sentence, or a simple phrase that can be repeated to Jesus in one breath: ‘You are with me.’ ‘I receive your grace.’ ‘I’m depending on you.’ ‘I want to know you.’ ‘I belong to you.’³¹

For centuries Catholic mystics have practiced “breath prayers” such as these. They are simply the Catholic form of old Greek mysticism and akin to the mantras of Hindus. In this same book, Warren cites approvingly the famous Catholic mystic Madame Guyon (p. 193). He approves also of St. John of the Cross (p. 108) and the Catholic priest mystic, psychologist and ecumenist Henri Nouwen (pp. 269- 270). He warmly agrees with Mother Teresa (pp. 125, 231). These misleading techniques are thus propagated and lead further into the whole mystic plague that presently is threatening believers. This plague is the imagination that there is a unity consciousness with God apart from the Person, unique life and sacrifice of Christ Jesus.³² Warren presents a mystical agenda, which the world loves and accepts, but which is an abomination before the Lord God.

Displacement of Pastors and the Consequences

The “40 Days of Purpose” campaign of purpose and community is distinct from other movements we have seen in recent times. Warren asks pastors to devote their church and their people to an intensive forty days of reprogramming their understanding of God, Christ, and how one becomes a Christian. He promises at the end of forty days that the church will be transformed. Through his book and the agenda laid out, he teaches for forty days on nearly every aspect of the Christian life. This type of interference in the running of a church opens the way for an insidious take-over of that church. In Scripture the function of pastors is to teach and to be watchmen and guardians of the flocks the Lord has given to them. “*Take heed therefore unto*

yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.”³³ To hand over their position before the Lord to another who will for seven weeks teach his own doctrinal messages based on a multitude of flawed paraphrases of Scripture is utterly unbiblical. The church is the pastors’ and elders’ charge. It is not theirs to bring in debased ideas that infiltrate every important area of the church life. In Warren’s book and movement, God’s absolute sovereignty is flatly denied as men are counseled to determine their own destinies.

Conclusion

Warren and all who associate with his plans and purposes ought to fear the All Holy God for, *“thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.”*³⁴ This is just one of the Ten Commandments Warren breaks. Another is *“Thou shalt not bear false witness.”* Rick Warren’s book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, is replete with fraudulent claims. The fact, however, is that the All Holy God reigns as proclaimed by the Holy Spirit, *“The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble.”*³⁵ *“The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.”*³⁶ The Lord God is ruling with complete dominion, fulfilling His eternal purpose, not only in spite of but also by means of those who would misrepresent His nature and that of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His glorious and invincible Gospel. The essence of sin is forsaking the Lord as truly the sovereign God and presenting Him as less, in this case a god who has needs and thereby can be manipulated.

The message for our day is the same as ever: if people do not repent and believe the true Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, they will die in their sins. If people continue to run after worldly methods to propagate debased forms of what is called Christianity, they will personally or corporately experience what the Apostle Paul wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit, *“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.”*³⁷ The Evangelical decline into doctrinal and practical apostasy expressed in sentiment and fleshly experience should be one of our gravest concerns. Warren’s book and movement is a vivid example of what is now so popular and devastating. Hundreds of thousands of souls, likely now millions, around the world have succumbed to the presentation of a false gospel flowing constantly from Neo-Evangelical pulpits and presses. Consequently grandiose Evangelical church buildings, Christian colleges, seminaries, and teaching institutions are presently overrun with people that have been taught by their leadership to confuse manufactured human religious feelings with a genuine work of the Holy Spirit. Multitudes blindly credit themselves as being “born again Christians” while rejecting the Lordship of Christ and authority of His Word, which are the marks of authentic discipleship.³⁸ Only a gracious outpouring of the Holy Spirit to turn the hearts of His people back to Him is the sufficient remedy to answer the assault on the true Gospel that is before us. Pray then that the Lord may be pleased in mercy to heal the affliction of doctrinal compromise and subsequent spiritual blindness that plagues the contemporary Evangelical Church rather than to permit it to run further into darkness. It is mercy for which we are praying. Given the age-old pattern of compromising the Gospel to please the world, and joining hands in the dark with Rome, it is certain that the Evangelical Church deserves nothing but a more severe dispensation from Lord’s hand. This is no time to presume upon the grace of God. Rather it is time to pray urgently for it! The Lord’s glory, Gospel, and promise are at stake! Yet we rejoice that we have a High Priest over the house of God, the Lord Christ Jesus! *“Come now and let us reason together, says the*

Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword.”³⁹

The Lord God demonstrated His love for sinners in the death of Christ. “*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*”⁴⁰ His love is magnified and made illustrious in that His holy love upheld His righteousness. The biblical Gospel is that the sinners are loved in Christ Jesus. The teaching of the Apostle Paul gives the exact meaning of the Gospel, “*For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*”⁴¹ God’s purpose was that we might be made the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. As the Lord, who knew no sin of His own, was made sin for us, so we, who have no righteousness of our own, are made the righteousness of God in Him. The love we receive from God and our subsequent reconciliation with God is only through the Gospel of Christ Jesus. Our great privilege as believers is to be accepted by God, which shows His love and care for us. God cannot thus accept us, except in and through Jesus Christ. He loves His people because of His Beloved. “*To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*”⁴² We take heed against resting on any worth within ourselves and against any platitudes that change the Gospel’s focus away from Christ and towards ourselves as special persons. Multitudes have been so deceived and have perished eternally with a lie in their right hand. The Lord made the will of the Father abundantly clear when He said, “*this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*”⁴³ Where there is true faith and love of the Lord, there is in the midst of all things a joy unspeakable and full of glory. “*For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.*”⁴⁴

Notes

1. II Timothy 1:9
2. Isaiah. 6:3
3. Revelation. 15: 4
4. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002) p. 85. Page numbers only in succeeding citations.
5. P. 86. Verse quotation taken from Holy Bible, *New Living Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996).
6. Psalm 85:10
7. Isaiah 53:5
8. Romans 3:26.
9. The love God had for believers while they were as yet unrepentant sinners was in Christ Jesus and not in themselves, “*that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*” (Eph 2:7)
10. The *C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, “Sovereign Grace and Man’s Responsibility,” Sermon #207, Ages Software
11. Ephesians 1:4, 5, 6
12. Psalm 85:10
13. Pp. 23, 24

14. Ephesians 1:1
 15. There is a consistent Biblical teaching that justification is positional legal righteousness in Christ. Jeremiah 23:6, Romans 1:17, 3:21-22, 4:6, 11, 5:18-19; I Corinthians 1:30; II Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:6; Colossians 2:10, 3:3; II Peter 1:1, and elsewhere.
 16. Romans 3:24, 26
 17. Romans 1:16
 18. Ephesians 1:6
 19. Psalm 115:1
 20. Ephesians chapters 1 and 2, such phrases as “*in Christ*,” “*in whom*,” “*in him*,” “*in the Beloved*” are spoken of 18 times. This is the same in all of the letters of Paul the Apostle. Likewise the Apostle John consistently teaches that eternal life in Christ Jesus, e.g. “*And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*” (I John 5:11) God’s love seen in salvation is always expressed as being in Christ.
 21. I John 1:5
 22. I Peter 1:16
 23. Romans 2:4
 24. Psalm 5:5
 25. Psalm 26:5
 26. Romans 1:18
 27. Hebrews 12:28-29
 28. For a very insightful perspective on the church growth movement, of which Warren is cited as a major player at the moment, see <http://www.crossroad.to/News/Church/Klenck1.html>
 29. <http://www.stmichaelcary.org/adulteduc.shtml> 11/12/04
 30. http://www.saddleback.com/flash/s_PDFs/ChicagoTribuneLivingwithpurpose42504.pdf 11/13/04
 31. <http://www.pastors.com/RWMT/?ID=71> 10/22/04
 32. See our article on *The Mystic Plague* on our webpage: www.bereanbeacon.org
 33. Acts 20:28
 34. Exodus 29:7
 35. Psalm 99:1
 36. Psalm 103:19
 37. Romans 1:18
 38. Luke.6: 43-49; Matthew 7:21-27
 39. Isaiah 1:18
 40. Romans 5:8
 41. 11 Corinthians 5:21
 42. Ephesians 1:6
 43. John 6:29
 44. Romans 11:36
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For more information on the false teachings of Rick Warren, the legion of false teachers he promotes, and the false translations he uses in his *Purpose Driven Life* book, I recommend the documentary book entitled: *Who's Driving the Purpose Driven Church?* by James Sundquist. It is published by Bible Belt Publishers and available at Southwest Radio Church Ministries at:

<http://www.swrc.com/offers/index.htm#h616>. Or call Toll Free 1-800-652-1144.

Richard Bennett of "Berean Beacon" WebPage: <http://www.bereanbeacon.org>

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