

They Knew Him Not

Dave Hunt

Any person of ordinary intelligence, anywhere and at any time, can know that God exists as the Creator of the universe (Ps 19:1-6; Rom 1:18-20, etc.). Such a person also has a conscience in which God has written His moral law (Rom 2:14-16), knows that he or she has broken this law many times, and realizes that there must be judgment from God as a result. When the gospel is preached, the sinner knows by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit that this is the truth and is the only means of escape from the wrath to come.

There are, however, many persons who resist the witness of creation and of conscience. We should be prepared to reason with them. God offers to all: "Come now and let us reason together...though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow..." (Is 1:18). We must be "ready *always* to give an answer to *every man* that asketh...a *reason* of the hope that is in [us] with meekness and fear [of the Lord]..." (1 Pt 3:15).

We give skeptics valid reasons why we accept the Bible as God's Word by faith—but it is not a blind faith. As Peter indicates, there are reasons for our faith. There are many proofs for the Bible, without which we could not demonstrate to unbelievers that it is infallible. Not that we can understand everything Scripture says. That God is the I AM (Ex 3:14), for example, without beginning or end (Ps 90:2; 103:17; 106:48) who created the universe out of nothing (Heb 11:3) is more than our finite minds can understand, but we know it *must* be.

Everything in the Bible that we are able to verify (historically, scientifically, prophetically, etc.) has proved to be true. It is therefore reasonable to believe whatever else the Bible says that we cannot verify. Statements that are beyond our comprehension and thus unverifiable include that God is a Spirit (Jn 4:24), that man is made in His moral and spiritual image (Gn 1:26,27) and is body, soul, and spirit (1 Thes 5:23), that Christ will rapture us from earth to heaven as promised (Jn 14:3; 1 Thes 4:13-18), and that there is a final judgment and a lake of fire—where the damned will be eternally.

As we have often pointed out, prophecy

is the great proof that God exists, that the Bible is His Word, and that Christ is His Son and man's only Savior. Prophecies were given to indisputably identify the Messiah. Proof does not, however, guarantee faith. There must be a willing heart. In spite of hundreds of prophecies proving that Jesus was the Messiah, the Jews rejected Him and remain largely in unbelief today.

We've often given many proofs that the Bible is true. We have not emphasized, however, that, with few exceptions, Scripture honestly reveals the flaws and sins of the best saints—even when such facts could have been avoided. Such honesty gives the ring of truth to Scripture. One of the strangest accounts concerns the disciples' unbelief in the face of Christ's resurrection. In fact, their skepticism and apparent unwillingness to believe, even when Christ met them face to face, seems

The heavens declare the glory of God....There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.

Psalms 19:1,3

so unlikely that no fiction writer would have dared to portray it.

Christ indicts His disciples with "hardness of heart" (Mk 16:14). They did not believe, even when Christ appeared to them (Lk 24:36-38). Yet one of the thieves crucified with Christ believed in His resurrection, or he would not have asked, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Lk 23:42).

The disciples' doubts were without excuse in view of the many Messianic prophecies. That they could be so blind to the Scripture, even after being taught personally by Christ over several years, should cause us to re-examine ourselves lest we be guilty of the same.

There is a similar rejection of truth today, even among those who claim to be Christians. Many who say they are "born again" (including seminary professors and pastors) are not even saved. A December 2003 Barna poll revealed that 35 percent of those who claimed to be "born again" didn't believe Christ rose from the dead; 26 percent said all religions are equal; and 50 percent said good works would get a person to heaven.

All of the disciples as well as the rabbis—and even John the Baptist ("Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?" - Lk 7:19-20), who was "filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb" (Lk 1:15)—expected the Messiah to set up His kingdom when He first came to Israel. Christ's crucifixion shattered their faith. How could He have been the promised Messiah?

Yet numerous prophecies made it clear that the Messiah's first coming would be as the Lamb of God to be crucified: "they pierced my hands and my feet" (Ps 22:16); "they shall look upon me, whom they have pierced" (Zec 12:10). The prophets declared that He would be "despised and rejected...wounded for our transgressions...taken from prison and from judgment...cut off out of the land of the living...his grave [would be] with the wicked" (Is 53:3,5,8,9) and that He would rise again the third day (Ps 16:10; Jn 2:19; Mt 12:39,40).

Moreover, they also had to ignore the many times Christ himself had told them plainly that He was going to be crucified and rise from the dead the third day.

After Christ's resurrection, the angels at the tomb reminded the women: "Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words" (Lk 24:6-8). We do not have the record of every time the Lord declared this to His disciples, but it must have been more often than the recorded instances.

At least seven different occasions on which He made His death and resurrection plain to His disciples are recorded in the Gospels: (Mt 16:21; 17:22,23; 20:17-19; Mk 8:31,32; 9:31,32; Lk 13:32,33; Jn 12:32-34). Here are some examples: "For he taught his disciples, and said...the Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and...he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him" (Mk 9:31,32); "Behold...all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again" (Lk 18:31-33); "And he

began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake that saying openly” (Mk 8:31,32; Lk 9:22).

Sometimes Christ veiled His speech: “There came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee. And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected...for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.” (Lk 13:31-33). Obviously, He was referring to His death and resurrection.

Another time, the Pharisees asked, “What sign shewest thou unto us...? Jesus answered...Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said” (Jn 2:18-22).

The rabbis knew what Christ meant. Yet they sought false witnesses to twist His words at His trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin: “At the last...two false witnesses...said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days” (Mt 26:60,61). They knew, however, that He referred to His resurrection: “Now the next day...the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first” (Mt 27:62-64).

The disciples’ unbelief is itself unbelievable. Jesus spoke at length with two followers on the road to Emmaus, yet they knew Him not. Yes, it says that Christ appeared “in another form” to them. That phrase, however, does not mean that He disguised Himself. It refers rather to the disciples’ unbelief that blinded them. Luke explains: “But their eyes were holden that they should not know him” (Lk 24:16).

That they knew Him not didn’t mean that He was unrecognizable but that He was the last person they expected to see. Had they known the Scriptures, they would have been certain that He had resurrected. For that ignorance, Christ rebuked them

sharply: “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lk 24:25-27). Would He reprimand us as well for our ignorance of “all that the prophets have spoken”?

What a Bible study these two experienced as they walked with this amazing stranger! Yet having learned the prophecies concerning the Messiah from the Lord himself, they still knew Him not! Faith is a matter of the heart, and they were “slow of heart to believe....” We need to ask the Lord to search our own hearts to be certain that we, too, are not blinded in certain areas by unbelief.

At supper, “their eyes were [at last] opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Lk 24:31,32). Faith, though inexcusably slow, came at last through

To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days...

Acts 1:3

the scriptures Christ had revealed.

Not to know the Lord Jesus Christ carries serious consequences. It means a false view of the Savior and thus a false hope of salvation. We must believe in the true Christ of God if we are to have eternal life and be in the Father’s house of many mansions for eternity. As Christ declared in His high-priestly prayer to His Father, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (Jn 17:3).

He said to the rabbis, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (Jn 5:39,40). He still extends the offer to all, “Come unto me...and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28).

Though so grateful to Christ for casting out of her “seven devils” (Mk 16:9), Mary Magdalene remained ignorant of prophecy and blind to Christ’s many assurances that He would rise from the dead. In spite of Christ appearing and speaking to her beside His empty tomb, she didn’t recognize Him because she was blinded

by a needless grief caused by unbelief: “She turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her [with mild reproof], Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith...go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father...” (Jn 20:14-17).

Mary Magdalene “went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not” (Mk 16:9-11). The two disciples with whom he walked to Emmaus rushed back to Jerusalem “and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them. Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart...” (Mk 16:9-14).

The key to our lives as Christians today is how clearly we “see” by faith the resurrected Christ. Those who saw Him physically during His time on earth did not necessarily have an advantage over us. Remember Christ’s words: “Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (Jn 20:29).

Yes, “Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face” (1 Cor 13:12). Then at last, “when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:2). Nevertheless, our desire even now should be to see Him ever more clearly with the eyes of faith. As we behold Him, we become more and more like Him.

David, who only had a fraction of the scriptures we have, nevertheless “fore-saw the Lord always before [his] face” (Ps 16:8; Acts 2:25), “behold[ing] the beauty of the LORD” (Ps 27:4). Surely we can do the same: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

Like David, Paul’s passion was to “know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death...[to] press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:10-14). What better passion could we embrace for the year 2005, or for whatever portion thereof the Lord will grant us?

TBC

Quotable

America's mainline Protestant churches are...turning their political policy-making over to fringe leftists whose deepest instinct is to blame America and pummel Israel....The latest disgrace is the Presbyterian Church's...ending [its] investment in multinational companies that the church believes [cause] the sufferings of the Palestinian people [by dealing with Israel]....Apparently they cast a stern moral glance around the world, look for possible abuses in China, North Korea, and Iran, and seeing [none]...focus once again on Israel....The United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), plus the reliably leftist National Council of Churches [during] 2000 to 2003 [issued] 197 human-rights criticisms...37 percent were aimed at Israel and 32 percent at the United States....The fixation on Israel left little time and inclination...to notice the most dangerous violations of human rights around the world. Not one nation bordering Israel was criticized by a single mainline church....No criticisms at all were leveled at China, Libya, Syria, or North Korea.

America is [seen] as a malignant force in the world, while Israel is seen as nothing more than a dangerous colonial implant of the West.... Anti-Americanism is an old story in the mainline church bureaucracies. During the 1970s and 1980s, these churches generally ignored human-rights abuses in the Soviet Union and focused instead on the United States as the primary source of abuse....

John Leo, U.S. News & World Report, 10/18/04, p 81.

Q&A

Question: James White, on his Alpha & Omega Ministries web page, said that you had “repeatedly agreed in the past” to a “live debate” with him but have gone back on your word and now refuse. What do you have to say?

Answer: “Repeatedly agreed in the past” to an oral debate? When? He refers to speaking to me at my book table at a conference just after publication of *What Love Is This?* We did indeed agree to a debate. Later, we agreed to do the debate in a book. Since that book was published, I never agreed to an additional debate. It would be redundant. I don't know what that would accomplish.

White continues to claim (as on our recent radio discussion) that I agreed to an

oral debate and went back on my word. In fact, the only references to an oral debate have been one-sided false statements by White, claiming that I agreed to one.

Just after the first edition of *What Love Is This?* was printed, White put on his website an open letter in response. Here is part of my reply from our website: “James, you and I have agreed on the phone today to put this debate in writing in the form of a book....That will allow the arguments to be studied more carefully by readers than is possible in oral debates....In the book we will have the opportunity to lay out our opposing views clearly and concisely from the scriptures so that readers can weigh them carefully.”

The debate in book form is far more useful than an oral one. This I agreed to, and it was done. A written debate gives both parties time to think clearly and to express their views to the very best of their ability. Readers can go at their own pace, back and forth between the arguments, carefully and calmly. James and I each took several months to express our views as clearly as we could. I am happy with the book and see no value in an additional oral debate.

Question: Rick Warren hypes different “venues” for different styles of worship and music in his church in order to reach and accommodate people with differing tastes. He claims to take this from the NIV translation of Acts 5:42, which refers to “temple courts.” I couldn't find this in any other Bible. Is he reaching a bit here?

Answer: I do not question Warren's Christian sincerity. Sadly, however, in this instance (as throughout his book), he has misapplied Scripture. As you noted, one of his basic teachings involves “Multiple Venues,” by which he means a number of different facilities in the same church, where a variety of styles of music and worship can be offered in order to appeal to people with different tastes. The emphasis thus unavoidably becomes pleasing the audience rather than pleasing the One whom they desire to worship.

In his attempt to support this practice from the Bible, Warren is forced into some serious errors. For example, he declares: “‘On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the Word of the Lord’ (Acts 13:44 – NIV).” We want to gather all South Orange County together to hear the Word of the Lord. How do we get that many people gathered together? The same way they did in the New Testament: by using Multiple Venues.”

But, Paul *never* used multiple venues

to attract people by offering varied styles of music and worship in different places, as Warren does at Saddleback. Nor did the early church ever use this practice upon which Warren now places such emphasis. Yet the early church grew faster with new converts and edification than Saddleback—a fact that Rick is frank to admit.

Warren turns to Acts 13 for support. Yet this huge crowd came together not for the music that was offered (there was none) but to hear what Paul, empowered by the Holy Spirit, had to say in his preaching—and they all gathered together in one place (one “venue”), not in many. There weren't different styles of music and worship for those with differing tastes. Neither this passage nor any other portion of Scripture can be used to support such a practice.

Rick believes different venues breed success. Such misuse of God's Word ought to cause grave concern among God-fearing church leaders. And part of this pattern is the fact that to find biblical support for his teachings, Warren must draw from a wide variety of alleged translations and paraphrases, some of which (like *The Message*) we have documented to be perversions that actually change the meaning of Scripture in many places!

As you note, Warren quotes “temple courts” from the NIV. This is the *only* translation or paraphrase (out of dozens available) that refers to “court” or “courts” in this verse. In contrast to the NIV, all other translations or even paraphrases (including his favorite, *The Message*) simply say, “temple.” Why use a “translation” that is so clearly wrong that it isn't supported by *any* other?

There is nothing in the Greek from which the NIV could translate “courts.” No wonder that word is found in *no other* translation! Yet Rick uses this erroneous translation and declares: “Circle the letter ‘s’ at the end of ‘temple courts.’” But the word “courts” with the letter “s” is *not* in the Greek and should not be in *any* translation! Yet upon this error rests the “temple courts of Jerusalem” building campaign that culminated on Thanksgiving with so many millions of dollars contributed for new construction at Saddleback.

Furthermore, the Scripture is clear that the disciples did not practice different venues at the temple, but “were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). Peter preached that Pentecost sermon in which 3,000 (Acts 2:41) were saved. Quite clearly, he preached to this huge crowd in one place. And far from various musical styles being the means of attraction, it was the miracle of the disciples speaking in languages they had never learned that drew the crowd. As far as we know, there

was no music at all, much less a variety to attract people with different tastes, as is being practiced now at Saddleback.

Yes, there were four courts in Herod's temple: the Holy Place was called the "court of the priests," there was the court of men, the court of women, and the court of Gentiles. But the divisions were to separate different classes of people, *not to separate different "styles of music and worship," as Warren implies, in order to support what he does at Saddleback!* Indeed, there would be no way for Jews to teach in the Gentiles' court or for men to teach in the women's court or for any of the disciples to gather in the priests' court. Furthermore, the separation of priests from ordinary people, of men from women and Jews from Gentiles would contradict the "unity of faith" that Warren is trying to achieve and certainly would not fit into his "venues" program!

In attempting to promote a practice he finds successful, Warren is misleading his congregation and readers. Many other examples could be given, such as on pages 9 and 10 of *A Purpose Driven Life*, where his enthusiasm for *40 Days* causes him to make unbiblical assertions. He claims "David was transformed by Goliath's forty-day challenge." In fact, David was present only *one* day—the *forty days* of challenge were over when he arrived and had no effect upon him. Rick says, "the spies were transformed by *forty days* in the Promised Land." In fact, ten rebelled and *forty days* had no significance.

Rick further says, "Jesus was empowered by *forty days* in the wilderness." Hardly! Rather than teaching from the Bible, Warren seems prone to manipulate it to support his latest ideas.

The book's success has given Warren numerous media interviews, including some on national television. Sadly, he fails to present a clear gospel to these huge audiences that the Lord has given him. One would have to question whether Rick is fulfilling the purpose for which God has given him such opportunities.

Finally, in conjunction with his teaching that God has endowed every person with a special talent and has a unique purpose for their lives (which he claims can be discovered by following his "Forty Days of Purpose" program), Warren cites, "We should make plans—counting on God to direct us" (Prv 16:9 – TLB). But *The Living Bible* actually contradicts what God said. Here is the real Bible: "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps." To plan one's future life is contrasted with God's direction of a step at a time. Furthermore, *never* does the Bible say that we should make our own plans

and "count on God to direct us." How can He direct us if we have already made our own plans? It is such planning on our own that this verse actually warns against.

Question: There are three things that I'm not quite settled on: 1) Are the Arabs truly descendants of Ishmael; 2) Though "Allah" is said to be another name for God, it seems that it would be clearer to use the word "Allah" in speaking about the Muslim god, and if speaking of the biblical God to simply use "God"; 3) Why does the Qur'an use the third person plural, "we," instead of I, when Allah is speaking? Any information you can give me on these issues will be greatly appreciated.

Answer: The Arabs have Ishmaelite blood in them, but they are not of pure descent from Ishmael (as Jews are from Isaac and Jacob). The descendants of Ishmael were a nomadic people prone to take wives of those with whom they traded. They populated a broad region across North Africa, eventually settling in the Arabian Peninsula, where they became known as Arabs. They intermarried with the Midianites so that sometimes the designations "Midianites" and "Ishmaelites" are used interchangeably (Jgs 8:1, 12, 22, 24). They also intermarried with Esau's Edomite descendants (Gn 28:9), who intermarried with the Hittites (Gn 26:34, 35).

After Islam became the official Arab religion, imposed by the sword, there was a further dilution of Ishmaelite blood through Arabs taking to themselves wives from the many nations they conquered and enslaved in the Muslim conquest from France to China. Nevertheless, Arabs are looked upon generally as the descendants of Ishmael.

Allah is not just "another name for God"! (See Q&A in TBC for April & July 2003, etc.) Allah is a contraction of *al-ilah*, meaning "the chief god." There were more than 300 gods in the idol temple in Mecca, known as the Ka'aba. Allah was the chief god, the god of the Quraish tribe that controlled Mecca and made a fortune from the pilgrims who came to visit their various gods in the Ka'aba.

Yes, it would be proper to use "Allah" when speaking of the god of Islam. You may use "God" for the God of the Bible. But "Allah" is the *name* of a specific god, whereas "God" is not the name but a generic term. His name is Yahweh, as He declared to Moses (Ex 3:14-16). (See Index to Reprints).

As for why the Qur'an uses the third person plural when Allah is speaking, I have asked Muslims and have never

received an explanation. Since the Qur'an is very explicit that Allah is a single entity, this is simply one more contradiction to add to the many others in that book.

News Alert

<http://www.humaneventsonline.com/article.php?id=5905>, 11/30/04: A HUSH OVER HOLLYWOOD, by Pat Sajak

Picture this: Somewhere in the world, a filmmaker creates a short documentary that chronicles what he perceives as the excesses of anti-abortion activists. An anti-abortion zealot reacts to the film by killing the filmmaker in broad daylight and stabbing anti-abortion tracts onto his body. How does the Hollywood community react to this atrocity? Would there be angry protests? Candlelight vigils? Outraged letters and columns and articles? Awards named in honor of their fallen comrade? Demands for justice? Calls for protection of artistic freedom? It's a pretty safe bet that there would be all of the above and much more. And all of the anger would be absolutely justified.

So I'm trying to understand the nearly universal lack of outrage coming from Hollywood over the brutal murder of Dutch director, Theo van Gogh, who was shot on the morning of November 2, while bicycling through the streets of Amsterdam. The killer then stabbed his chest with one knife and slit his throat with another.

The presumed murderer, a Dutch-born dual Moroccan-Dutch citizen, attached a 5-page note to van Gogh's body with a knife. In it, he threatened jihad against the West in general, and specifically against five prominent Dutch political figures. Van Gogh's crime? He created a short film highly critical of the treatment of women in Islamic societies. So, again I ask, where is the outrage from Hollywood's creative community? I mean, talk about a violation of the right of free speech!

...Is it just possible that there are those who are reluctant to criticize an act of terror because that might somehow align them with President Bush, who stubbornly clings to the notion that these are evil people who need to be defeated? Could the level of hatred for this President be so great that some people are against anything he is for, and for anything he is against?

As nutty as it sounds, how else can you explain such a muted reaction to an act that so directly impacts creative people everywhere? Can you conceive of a filmmaker being assassinated because of any other subject matter without seeing a resulting explosion of reaction from his fellow artists in America and around the world?

Dave's Itinerary

Jan. 12	Berean Calvary Chapel Kirkville NY 315-656-7107
Jan. 13-16	Calvary Chapel Finger Lakes Farmington NY 585-398-3550
Feb 4-5	Bible Skeptics Conference East Whitby, ON Canada (905) 655-8381
Feb 6	Rossland Ridge Bible Chapel Ajax, ON Canada (905) 655-8381

Letters

Dear Sirs,

Keep up the good work! Your material on Calvinism, the Church-Growth movement, and *The Passion* movie has been particularly edifying....My church has launched a "40 Days of Purpose" campaign. Needless to say, your newsletter and the material on your website have been very helpful....I find that most Christians, even if they sense that something is not right, do not have the doctrinal grounding to determine exactly what is amiss and do not make it a priority to develop that grounding. PW (VA)

TBC:

May God's grace continue to give you the enlightenment of His Word in such a way to be able to teach others the jewels you have been able to uncover. This can only be done through study and the gift of teaching from the Holy Spirit. I started reading *The Berean Call* out of curiosity and now look more to this as a study aid. I am constantly learning more and more about the Word of God. AB (prisoner, TX)

Dear Mr. Hunt,

In our church...I have noticed a comment here or there from the pulpit that had a Calvinistic slant, but not until now have I realized how "slanted" toward the Calvinistic position our pastor's interpretation of Scripture and even practice of ministry actually is. This has led me on a journey to completely understand what the Calvinists believe. I have come to realize how important it is to actually study this system of theology rather than just be content to assume [that] what I thought was right, actually was. I had to admit there were some passages of Scripture on this subject that I could not explain. I began my study with your book, *Debating Calvinism*, since it presented both sides of the issue....I am grateful for your willingness to tackle this highly controversial issue....I have been encouraged and motivated once again to serve

a holy, sovereign, yet truly *loving* God. KH (GA)

Dear Berean Call,

Thank you for your booklet, "The Nonnegotiable Gospel." I have read it many times since it was given to me by a fellow Christian. [It] came at a time when the Holy Spirit directed me to realize that I could no longer continue to serve two masters—the world and Christ. I must make my choice for Christ and never turn back again. The veil had been lifted from my eyes. JK (prisoner, CA)

Dear Dave,

When I was flying here [São Paulo] from Britain, there were some Muslims on the plane in the next four seats from us. They started talking to the people all around them and when they had audience, one of them opened the Koran and started preaching from it, aloud, for a long time, saying things such as, "God has no son," and explaining the religion in general (in Portuguese). In the airport were women wearing the burka....being the first day of Ramadan. It seems to me they are spreading to South America now. I'm a Brazilian and this is the first time I saw such a strong group of Muslims. LB (Brazil)

Dear Brothers,

Thank you for upholding God's Word—so many ear-ticklers out there! My husband and I were blinded and served the devil for 23 years as active Jehovah's Witnesses (out since 1980). I lost my husband to the Lord [in 2001]. I'm so thankful I know where he is. MM (FL)

Dear Sirs,

How sad it is that you would be critical of the "Purpose Driven" ministry and *The Passion* movie. Both of these have brought thousands of unsaved into the kingdom of God (Romans 14:12,13). If you judge these men, who, like Paul, are using "all means to save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22), you will have to give an account for that. RC (VA)

Dear Berean Call,

I have enjoyed reading the October 2004 issue of *The Berean Call*. T. A. McMahon's article, "Let the Biblical Buyer Beware," was thought provoking. It has certainly been the topic of conversation among my Bible study group. Of course we don't all agree, but it gives us lots of room for thought. CS (OR)

Dear Bereans,

Each month I look forward to the newsletter for the information on the "state of the church" and for spiritual stimulation....T.A. McMahon's *Showtime for the Sheep*

[May '04] is very well written. I enjoyed the distinction of the physical suffering of Jesus from the spiritual suffering of being alone away from God's presence. The unbeliever may suffer the same aloneness, being cut off from God for eternity. PL (WA)

TBC,

The October TBC Extra page with Tozer's comments [was] most refreshing, but what was really neat was the rest of the TBC Extra—it was *all Scripture*, and you can't get any better than that. Each following verse supports what's been said and points to what more is coming. Truly the greatest thing I've ever seen—better than any man's book and right in step with God's words—wow! But almost nothing on Scripture's sufficiency and God's sovereignty—otherwise, truly great, great, great. JA (WI)

TBC Notes

The Word for the Wise

As I've reflected back on the issues TBC has addressed in 2004, they all seem to be related to and symptomatic of one thing: evangelicals are being weaned off the Word of God. Certainly it didn't just start last year, but it seems as though the process took some giant steps, thanks (or no thanks) to Hollywood helping us "understand" the Scriptures, and business gurus and psychologists helping us re-"S.H.A.P.E." the church.

Ironically, those pastors driving the sheep in that direction see it as a means to a great new national and international "spiritual awakening." To the contrary, evangelical Christianity is being "drugged." The so-called revival pill is the "form of godliness" devoid of God's power that the Apostle warned would characterize the "last days perilous times" (2 Tm 3:1,5).

"To the law and to the testimony [God's Word]" (Is 8:20). Let this be our wakeup call!

Pray for pastors that they might truly feed their sheep God's Word. Pray for churches that they make the Word himself and His words their most important program. Pray for yourself that God would give you a greater hunger for His Word and help you to minister to others through it.

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The following contains excerpts from a critique of Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life* by T. A. McMahon. (The critique is available in its entirety on our website at www.thebereanall.org. If you don't have access to the internet, write to us at PO Box 7019, Bend, OR 97708 or call us at 1-800-937-6608 and request a free copy.)

Generally speaking, *The Purpose-Driven Life* is a pastor's dream. Rick Warren issues exhortations that most pastors rarely challenge their congregations with, but with which most pastors would very much like to have their members comply. Warren offers some teachings that are biblically sound when used in scriptural context. Throughout the book, the reader will find many things to challenge him in his walk with the Lord.

On the other hand, there are a number of teachings and other content found in the book that could easily lead the reader away from the truth of God's Word. My chief concern is that the undiscerning reader will buy into much of what Rick Warren presents that is unbiblical. Given his worldwide influence, he is sowing much error among the sheep, in spite of (and possibly because of) the good content he presents.

Additionally, I had a sense of uneasiness that transcended the particular problems with the book. I felt that I was being ushered into a developing program that has an agenda beyond just helping the Christian to grow in his relationship with the Lord or teaching the local church to glorify God and to bear fruit as it functions as a body in obedience to the Scriptures....

Following are, in my opinion, some of the more troubling aspects of the book. Bear with me if some of the things pointed out seem inconsequential. Although I purposefully tried to avoid nit picking, nevertheless, some seeming "nits" are recorded because they reveal a tendency on Rick Warren's [RW] part that indeed has critical consequences. For instance, if it were a rare exception that RW misrepresented a Bible verse as a proof text for a concept he was teaching, it would be unfair to him to make an issue out of it. However, he does that with great frequency throughout *The Purpose-Driven Life*. Sadly, there are many other such "nits."

Page 15 begins with a verse from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase Bible version, *The Message* (Msg): "A life devoted to things is a dead life, a stump; a God-shaped life is a flourishing tree" (Proverbs 11:28). Here (and throughout) Peterson seems more interested in poetic language than in accurately rendering God's Word. Read what the KJV actually says: "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch."

Notice the serious distortion of God's Word via *The Message*. Romans 8:6: "Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life" (p. 18), versus the KJV: "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Rick says, "Every other path leads to a dead end," using Peterson to reinforce his point. It's this kind of "management language" that reinforces the view on the part of many that TPDL is simply a "how to be successful in life" book. "It's about becoming what God created you to be" (p. 19).

On page 20, we find another man-centered Message interpretation: 1 Corinthians 2:7: "God's wisdom...goes deep into the interior of his purposes....It's not the latest message, but more like the oldest—what God determined as the way to bring out his best in us," versus the KJV: "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: [and verse 8] which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Where is "his best in us" to be found here?

The emphasis is on "you" and "your value" on page 24: "We are the focus of his love and the most valuable of all his creation." The Bible says, God decided to give us life through the word of truth so we might be the most important of all things he made." (James 1: 18, *New Century Version*). However, the KJV says, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." Hardly a "valuable" or "most important" emphasis there. Nevertheless, RW adds, "You were created as a special object of God's love!"

It's puzzling to read on page 48, "God is very blunt about the danger of living for the here and now and adopting the values, priorities, and lifestyles of the world around us." It's puzzling, because the church-growth methods he uses at Saddleback certainly seem to reflect "adopting the values, priorities, and lifestyles of the world around" the Saddleback community in order to attract the unchurched.

One never gets the essential truth necessary for salvation that humans are sinners under condemnation and face God's wrath and separation from Him forever in the Lake of Fire. There is no explanation of why it was necessary for Jesus to go to the cross. RW explains nothing about the cross that is related to divine justice and divine love. Instead, he states that those who haven't received the gospel and are not in line with God's purposes for them are "just existing."

RW tells us that there are "five acts of worship that make God smile" (p. 70). Here we have another set of "how to" principles to support an erroneous concept.

RW also seems to be encouraging the reader's self-orientation and self-esteem: "You only bring [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).

Throughout TPDL, RW continually feeds the reader doublespeak (persuasive contradictions) in appealing ways, [e.g.] as we've pointed out, this book is "not about you" yet the focus is more often than not on "you": "...I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses inner strength into me, that is, I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency" (Philippians 4:13, *The Amplified Bible*), (p. 83).

(cont'd next month)