

Consumer Christianity

Part II

T. A. McMahan

Consumerism was introduced to humanity in the Garden of Eden. Satan had a self-serving concept that he wanted to sell to a potential customer who had no need—one who, living in a perfect environment, had it all, materially and spiritually. His strategy (comparable to the prevailing methods of 21st-century marketing) was to create a desire where no real need existed, convincing Eve not only that she needed something more but that what she had was somewhat deficient. Moreover, in an effort to beat the Competition, Satan began his pitch by sowing doubt regarding God's command and its resulting penalty for disobedience.

By calling God a liar, the adversary no doubt rattled Eve's trust in Him: "And he said unto the woman, Yea, *hath God said*, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?...And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die." Then, in the wake of further maligning the Lord's character, came the irresistible "do it for you" sales pitch: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gn 3:1, 4,5).

Consumerism, being all about profit, must include a profit-oriented buyer as well as seller. Eve certainly had her own desires stirred, for without them, no sale could have been made: "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat" (Gn 3:6). Thus, the cry of the soul of consumerism, "How will it profit me?" birthed itself in Adam and Eve and all their descendants.

Consumer Christianity is a mentality or methodology that attempts to enrich Christians both temporally and spiritually, as well as to attract converts to the faith, through ways and means that are true neither to the Word of God nor the work of the Holy Spirit. Whether introduced subtly or overtly, wittingly or unwittingly, it always involves what appeals to human-

ity's fallen nature. Furthermore, consumer Christianity ultimately indulges and glorifies self rather than God.

History is replete with instances of man's consumerism and selfism. Let's briefly survey the history of God's chosen people, the Jews (Dt 14:2), and His church (Ti 2:14), for a few such examples by those who should have known better. Sarai, Abram's wife, attempted to solve her childless circumstance by coming up with *her own way* to have the son that God had promised (Gn 16:2,3); "her" child Ishmael by her servant Hagar became the son of grief for the Jews to this day. Centuries later, right after the Israelites had experienced God's deliverance from the Egyptians in spectacular ways, they nevertheless formed a golden calf to worship in order to gratify their immediate spiritual desires. God's response to Moses was that

I AM COME IN MY FATHER'S NAME,
AND YE RECEIVE ME NOT: IF ANOTHER
SHALL COME IN HIS OWN NAME, HIM
YE WILL RECEIVE.

—John 5:43

they had thereby "corrupted themselves" (Ex 32:4-7). Joshua was deceived and made peace with the Gibeonites, contrary to God's command; his presumption of doing good for his people was in reality rank disobedience: "And the [Israelites] took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD" (Jos 9:14). The entire book of Judges characterizes God's people during that time period as having a consumer mentality: "...every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jgs 21:25). Later, David's "eyes" for Bathsheba led him to satisfy his lustful felt needs in spite of what it would do to his personal relationship with God.

The New Testament gospels and epistles abound with examples of consumer "Christianity." Peter's objection to what Jesus said He would have to suffer for our salvation demonstrated more than just fleshly sympathy; Jesus intimated that it was disobedience of a satanic nature (Mt 16:21-23). Furthermore, Christ's response to Peter defines what consumer Christianity is all about: "for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of

men." Our Lord's other disciples were also given to the "what-could-best-benefit-me" mentality.

Blinded by self-interest to what Jesus told them of His impending suffering and death, James and John reacted by seeking an elevated position in His coming kingdom: "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory" (Mk 10:37). The Apostle Paul rebuked Peter, who, along with Barnabas, drew back from the Gentiles in order to accommodate those of the circumcision (Gal 2:11-14). Paul identified his own struggles, as well as ours, with putting self before God: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom 7:18,19). He then declared his solution, which is the believer's *only* solution: the Spirit-led life in Christ (Rom 8:1).

Consumer Christianity, whether manifested in the early churches or in today's assemblies (from mega-churches to home fellowships), is simply doing things man's way rather than God's way. The history of the church from the first century on is a distressing chronicle of true and false Christians deviating from the Word of God, doing what seemed right in their own minds while professing to be doing it in the name of Christ and to His glory. Although the results have often been spiritually devastating, God has been faithful, merciful, and longsuffering with His own. As we draw near to the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, however, consumer Christianity will so transform the professing church that it will be shocking to any true believer unless, of course, he or she has been desensitized by the gradual acceptance of many of the appealing "new products and processes" (i.e., unbiblical teachings, practices, and worship forms) being "sold" today.

Following the Rapture of the Bride of Christ to be with Him (1 Thes 4:16-18), a professing Christian church will remain that has been groomed to accept the Antichrist. This apostate church does not just appear overnight, but its preparation has been ongoing for two millennia and will increase with great intensity up until the Rapture of truly born-again Christians. The deception at that time

will be like nothing humanity has ever experienced, including Hitler's seduction of, and absolute control over, civilized, highly educated, and technologically sophisticated Germany. What will be the major difference? This deception will be worldwide and, more astonishingly, *facilitated by God himself*.

After giving information about the coming apostasy and the Antichrist, "whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders," the Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, further explains why the deception will be so pervasive and powerful: "...because they received not *the love of the truth*." He then gives us reason to be astonished: "And for this cause *God shall send them strong delusion*, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thes 2:9-11). This "strong delusion" affecting the lost is comparable to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. It neither induced sin nor subjugated Pharaoh's will; yet it allowed circumstances to develop that his wicked heart could not resist.

There is no reason to assume that *only* "them that perish" (v. 10) will be caught up in the Last Day's delusion. As we've noted from the Scriptures, many of the heroes and heroines of the faith at times opted for their own ways rather than God's way. They let their own desires override God's only antidote for spiritual delusion: a love for the truth. As it was then, so it is even more today, as the apostasy gathers unprecedented momentum.

In the third chapter of Second Timothy, Paul speaks prophetically, identifying some of the characteristics that we need to urgently heed concerning the end-times deception: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous...lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof...never able to come to the knowledge of the truth...[A]s Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth" (2 Tm 3:1-8).

Let's consider these things in light of what is taking place in evangelical churches today. Humanistic psychology, with its emphasis on self-love and its brood of other selfisms, has become an accepted and promoted doctrine among pastoral counselors and "Christian" psychologists. Prosperity evangelists have turned covetousness into God's foremost commandment for millions of professing Christians. Seeker-friendly churches are working at filling their pews with lovers of pleasure while discouraging (and in many cases dismissing) lovers of God. Purpose-driven churches are marketing formulas of

godliness in place of the power and leading of the Holy Spirit. The growing adulteration of God's Holy Scriptures in the form of subjective paraphrase and visual "translations" is creating both a resistance to the truth and an anemia regarding spiritual discernment. Finally, regarding the ingredients of apostasy, the magicians "wowed" those crowding Pharaoh's court with their pagan showmanship, mystical presence, and counterfeit signs and wonders (Ex 7: 11,12). So, too, are we seeing entertainment, experientialism, and contemplative (Catholic) mysticism seducing multitudes of churches that formerly majored in preaching, teaching, and sound doctrine.

Has "strong delusion" made inroads into the evangelical church? If you don't think so, you may have difficulty finding another explanation for the following agenda and participation at the 2004 National Pastors' Convention.

This event, sponsored by Youth Specialties (America's most influential evan-

AND THROUGH COVETOUSNESS SHALL THEY WITH FEIGNED WORDS MAKE MERCHANDISE OF YOU...

—2 Peter 2:3

gelical organization for youth pastors and leaders) and Zondervan (publisher of *The Purpose-Driven Life*, the *NIV-Message Parallel Bible*, and evangelical distributor for Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* DVD) began its daily program with contemplative prayer (see "Please Contemplate This!" *TBC* Mar '00) and "Yoga & Stretching" exercises. Emerging church liturgies based upon Roman Catholic and Orthodox rituals and sacramentals were introduced, including daily "labyrinth prayer" opportunities. The latter is a meditative prayer walk around a circular, maze-like pattern copied from a floor design found in Chartres Cathedral. This mystical Catholic ritual dates back to the Middle Ages, when it became a substitute for journeying to the dangerous, Muslim-controlled Holy Land in order to trace the "Passion route" of Jesus. As Catholics walked the labyrinth and meditated on the sufferings of Christ in their imagination, they obtained the same indulgences (pardons that would shorten their time of suffering in Purgatory to expiate their sins) for making the actual pilgrimage.

The Convention's evening programs included Christian comedy acts, The Jesus Painter (who "paints portraits of Christ in under 20 minutes"), "Tribe Church Drumming Experience," "Personal Emotional Health Discussion," an "emer-

gent Pub with Live Music," and "Late Night Contemplative Prayer Services."

The greater percentage of speakers were practitioners of mystical Christian prayer and worship forms (referred to as "authentic faith"), and the rest appeared to be advocates of, or at least encouragers for, the development of new methodologies and liturgies for the emerging culture of the 21st century. One topic was titled "A New Theology for a New World." The double-location conference attracted thousands and featured many influential church leaders, including Gordon MacDonald, Henry Cloud, Brennan Manning, Dallas Willard, Joseph Stowell, Howard Hendricks, Gary Thomas, Tony Campolo, and Rick Warren. The 2005 convention promises to be more of the same, with Christian contemplative, experiential, and emerging church headlines such as Richard Foster, Calvin Miller, Philip Yancy, Ruth Haley Barton, Doug Pagitt, and Dan Kimball.

Most of Christianity, according to the Scriptures, will progress into an apostate church as the return of the Lord draws near. Jesus said to His disciples, "It is impossible but that offenses will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!" (Lk 17:1). He later posed this question: "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Lk 18:8) The implied answer is *no*.

How could this happen? The essential "love of the truth" is being extinguished by "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 Jn 2:16). The professing church, consisting of true and false believers, increasingly turns to the world's ways—its hedonistic philosophy, its evolutionary pseudoscience, its self-oriented psychology, its consumer-driven business methodologies, its religious ecumenism, and its pagan spirituality. Ironically, some have turned to these things in sincerity as a means of enriching and spreading "Christianity." Nevertheless, the result is consumer Christianity in any and all of its self-serving forms, when "every man [does] that which [is] right in his own eyes" (Jgs 17:6).

As for the signs that would adversely affect the generation at His Coming, Jesus *warned* that His disciples should "take heed that no man deceive" them (Mt 24:4). If we are not the generation that is living in the time of "strong delusion" in preparation for that day, how much worse can it get? Pray that His Body of believers will increase in their love for His way, His Word, and His truth.

TBC

Quotable

Religion has become jolly good fun right here in this present world, and what's the hurry about heaven anyway? Christianity, contrary to what some had thought, is another higher form of entertainment. Christ has done all the suffering. He has shed all the tears and carried all the crosses; we have but to enjoy the benefits of His heartbreak in the form of religious pleasures modeled after the world but carried on in the name of Jesus.

History reveals that times of suffering for the Church have...always sobered God's people and encouraged them to look for and yearn after the return of their Lord. Our present preoccupation with this world may be a warning of bitter days to come. God will wean us from the earth some way—the easy way if possible, the hard way if necessary. It is up to us.

A.W. Tozer, The Best of A.W. Tozer, p.57

Q&A

Question: What is repentance—the same as faith? How do you explain its absence in John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; Galatians; Acts 16:31, etc.? You have written in *An Urgent Call to a Serious Faith*, p. 223, that those “living in sin” have no right to assurance of salvation. Is assurance based on behavior or on the objective promises of God's Word? Please clarify where you stand on “Lordship salvation,” which ties salvation and assurance to faith and repentance as conditions for eternal life.

Answer: Faith is the only condition of salvation: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” To be saved, one must only believe the gospel. That is the promise of God's Word.

As for repentance, I agree that the word is not in the Gospel of John, nor in Paul's definition of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, etc. But Paul did preach “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20: 21); and Jesus said, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Lk 13:3). Yet to overemphasize repentance could lead the unsaved person to imagine that he somehow must reform his life before he is acceptable to God and can be saved.

Jesus didn't ask the woman at the well to repent, nor did He ask repentance from the woman taken in adultery, or from Nicodemus, or from any of the disciples that He called to follow Him. But He brought them to repentance. It is innate in the publican's guilty cry under conviction

of the Holy Spirit, “God be merciful to me, a sinner” (Lk 18:13)! In believing the gospel and thereby accepting Christ as Savior in His sacrifice for sins, one is admitting to being a sinner worthy of God's judgment, to being sorry for his sin and desiring deliverance from its penalty. In that very act of faith in Christ for dying in one's place, there is repentance and turning from sin to the Savior.

Your question reworded what I wrote. I didn't say that those living in sin “have no right to assurance of salvation.” I said, “We offer no comfort or assurance to those living in sin; we don't say, ‘You're okay because you once made a decision for Christ.’ Instead we warn, ‘If you are not willing right now to live fully for Christ as Lord of your life, how can you say that you were really sincere when you supposedly committed yourself to Him...in the past?’ And to all, we declare with Paul, ‘Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith...’ (2 Cor 13:5).”

In that section of the book, I refute the ideas that one must be baptized, speak in tongues, etc., in order to be saved. I specifically say, “Are we not then saved by our works? Indeed, not... Good works bring rewards; a lack of them does not cause loss of salvation. The person who hasn't even one good work (*all* of his works are burned up) is still ‘saved; yet so as by fire’ (1 Cor 3:13-15). We would not think such a person saved at all... Yet one who...has no good works...if he has truly received the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior, is then ‘saved as by fire’...”

What I wrote is certainly not a promotion of “Lordship salvation”—the idea that if one is not living in complete obedience to Christ as Lord, then one is not saved. I don't believe that John MacArthur, who is accused of teaching this doctrine, means that good works save. Rather, he is saying that works are an indication of whether a person is saved or not. Scripture declares that not everyone who says, “Lord, Lord,” is saved. It is not only what one *says*, but what one *believes in the heart*—and the heart is deceitful. Jesus himself warns that many, calling Him Lord, will claim to have done great works in His name and yet have never been saved (Mt 7:21-23).

Many “make a commitment for Christ” and later turn away because they had not been sincere. The person who has fallen into sin and would like to turn from that sin, but it has a strong hold on him, may be a Christian. But the person who is living in sin, doesn't care, and claims he is saved because he once made a “decision for Christ” was probably never saved. It would be wrong to comfort such persons with, “You believe in Christ, so you can't

be lost no matter how you live.”

Neither you nor I know anyone's heart. People stand before witnesses, swear their undying love, then divorce the one to whom they made the vows. Did they really understand the seriousness of the vows they made? In their hearts, did they really intend to keep them? So it can be with those who claim to receive Christ or to believe in Him. For some, these are just words they repeated. The faith and conviction has not touched their hearts. God alone knows the heart. But a good indication of whether or not one's faith ever was real can be found in present attitude and actions.

In my book I did not say (nor have I ever) that if a person is not living for Christ, he is not saved. I said then, as now, that one's attitude of heart and actions are a good indication of whether one ever really understood and believed the gospel. Those who are not living for Christ but claim to be saved ought to be warned to repent, as many scriptures declare.

Question: TBC has referred to the rebuilding of the temple in which the Antichrist will sit, etc. Has no one noticed that the verse reads, “He will sit in the temple of God...”? If the Jews rebuild the temple...will it be the temple of “God”? I don't think so....It seems more reasonable that the Antichrist will make his way into the Church, from which he will demand to be worshiped.

Answer: You raise a good question and your argument has some appeal to human reason—but it is not supported by Scripture. Jerusalem was still called “the holy city” even when unholy people in it practiced unholy things (Mt 4:5; 27:53). Jerusalem never ceased to be the “city of God” (Ps 46: 4; 87:3), in spite of being trodden underfoot by the Gentiles through the centuries (Lk 21:24). It will remain “the holy city” during the Great Tribulation, though still trodden “under foot” (Rv 11:2).

You question whether a temple rebuilt by unbelieving Jews with Antichrist's blessing could still be the “temple of God.” The temple in existence during Christ's day was built by Herod the Great. He was an Idumean, a most ungodly, wicked tyrant, murderer of John the Baptist and of countless others. Yet the Bible called the temple Herod built, “the temple of God” (Mt 21:12), and Christ calls it “my Father's house” (Jn 2:16). In further contradiction to your thesis, the temple that will be rebuilt by the Jews under Antichrist during the Great Tribulation is called “the temple of God” (Rv 11:1).

When Solomon built the temple, it was indwelt by God, who manifested His holy

presence in the cloud of His glory (1 Kgs 8:10-11). This “temple of God” was on the summit of Mt. Moriah, now known as Temple Mount. It was defiled, destroyed, and rebuilt. And in each rebuilding, it was still the temple of God.

Paul’s statement that Antichrist will sit “in the temple of God,” (2 Thes 2:4) cannot mean, as you claim, that “Antichrist will make his way into the Church, from which he will demand to be worshiped....” The church is the body of Christ with no physical location wherein Antichrist could take a seat for this declaration—but the rebuilt temple will provide such a place.

Question: In the September 2004 Q&A, you responded to criticism of your claim that Adam was the only one created in God’s image. Could you please clarify this: 1) Are you saying that Eve was not created in God’s image; 2) how do you explain 1 Corinthians 11:7 in light of Genesis 5:3? Are we ALL created in God’s image or were Adam and Eve the only one’s created in God’s image? What is God’s image? What does it mean?

Answer: We can only go by what the Bible says. We are told, “So God created man...in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gn 1:27). “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul....And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam...and he took one of his ribs, and...the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man” (2:7,21).

Adam, made in the image of God, lived for some time alone except for his animal friends—a friendship that lacked real understanding and satisfaction—before God made Eve out of one of his ribs. She was created by God in His image just as Adam had been, though the manner of her creation was different. In contrast, their children, grandchildren, et al., did not come into existence by a special creative act of God, but by natural procreation. They were in the image of their parents—an image that had been marred by sin and death. As this natural procreation of birth and death continued, the human race gathered an increasing gene pool of disease and deformity as the moral decay worsened. We are pitiful creatures compared with what Adam and Eve were at the beginning.

Jesus declared, “God is a spirit” (Jn 4:24). Therefore, “in God’s image” does not refer to physical qualities, for God has none. The image of God in which Adam

was made can only be moral and spiritual, giving man the capacity to know, love, and commune with God—and to know in his conscience when he is disobeying God and is thus alienated from Him. All mankind inherited the “image of God” in which Adam and Eve were made—not in its original perfection, however, but corrupted and distorted by sin, which the Bible defines as coming “short of the glory of God.”

Being made in the image of God gives man the ability to form conceptual ideas and express them in words. This places man on the other side of a chasm that separates him from animals—a chasm that no evolutionary process (even if there were such) could ever cross. This impassable barrier was referred to by Mortimer J. Adler in his 1967 still-in-print book, *The Difference of Man and the Difference it Makes*. At that time, Adler, a University of Chicago philosophy professor, co-founder of the Great Books of the Western World, and an editor of the Encyclopedia Britannica, was an agnostic. He later became a professing Christian. Such reasoning in the search for truth is only possible because man was made in the image of God, who says, “Come now and let us reason together” (Is 1:18).

Question: In the July Q&A, a reader asked about counseling an unbelieving sister about yoga. While you gave some very pertinent information about the dangers of this practice, you did not mention the primary responsibility of sharing the gospel and other scripture relevant to her arguments in order to turn her to the Lord. Trying to convince someone intellectually of the need of salvation is usually a losing argument, in my opinion.

Answer: Thank you for reminding me and our readers that faith comes by “hearing the Word of God” (Rom 10:17). I assumed that readers understood that, but perhaps I assumed too much. I provided valuable information about yoga, its origins, and its dangers, that should have been enough to cause anyone involved in this Hindu practice to be ready to hear the gospel. But I failed to mention the gospel.

To present the gospel to unbelievers in the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, we must give proof to those who may not even believe that the Bible is God’s Word and why it must therefore be heeded.

An apologetic must be employed, at least to some extent, to convince the unbeliever. To Jewish audiences that he met on his travels, Paul used their scriptures to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah foretold by their prophets—because every

Jew at that time believed the Scriptures. Today, however, most Jews don’t believe the Bible to be God’s Word. Therefore, in presenting the gospel to them, as to unbelievers, we must take the apologist’s approach that Paul used with the Greeks on Mars Hill.

We have just revised and improved *Seeking and Finding God*. I wrote this for myself to have something convincing to give to unbelievers who may be skeptical about God and the Bible. I highly commend it to others. The revised and expanded second printing should be available by mid-April.

News Alert

The Independent [UK] 2/16/05, EXCERPTS: HOLY BATTLEGROUND—IS NOTHING SACRED? It’s the holiest of Christian sites—the place where Jesus was buried. But the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has become a battleground where priests fight and monks stone each other.

No fewer than six different kinds of Christian[s] enjoy grossly unequal shares in the use and management of the church. Lording it as representatives of the oldest and richest church of the Holy Land are the Greek Orthodox, who control about 40 per cent of the church’s territory and contents. At the other end of the scale is the tiny community of Ethiopians who inhabit a cluster of little huts on their rooftop terrace, directly above the ground that they believe King Solomon gave to their Queen of Sheba long before Jesus was even born.

The Catholic Franciscan community that Father Athanasius belongs to only won a foothold in the 14th century, after payment of a hefty bribe, but it is now the second-greatest power. The wealth and influence acquired as merchants in the Ottoman Empire have elevated the Armenian Oriental Orthodox to third position, while the Egyptian Copts make do with one tiny chapel. The Syrian Jacobites, who boast what Father Athanasius calls the “badly beat-up Chapel of Joseph of Arimathea”, are almost as underprivileged as the Ethiopians.

Soon it will be Easter, and the vast 12th-century Crusader church will host more services, processions and ceremonies than at any other time of the year. That means more friction and more occasions for violence. This worries Father Athanasius: “I’m really scared someone’s going to get killed.”

[TBC: *Holy Land “consumer Christianity”*: Every religious group “did that which was right in (their) own eyes” (Jgs 21:25).]

Dave & T.A.'s* Itinerary

March 19	Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa Men's Pancake Breakfast Santa Ana, CA (714) 979-4422
March 20	Calvary Chapel Pacific Coast Sunday AM Westminster CA (714) 893-4141
April 1-3	Horizon Christian Fellowship South Greenwood, IN (317) 859-9099
April 9-10	Meadow Grove Baptist Church Brandon, MS (601) 825-5704
April 29-30	Last Days Bible Conference *TA McMahon Calgary, Alberta, Canada (403) 948-5401

Letters

Dear Faith Defenders,

Just before lunch we listened to your video *Israel, Islam & Armageddon*. What a backdrop it gave us for watching next the live telecast of President Bush's inauguration and the parade....It seems more than ever that the USA is indeed playing a significant role on Israel's stage. And never had we heard actual references to Christianity such as [were] spoken out at this time....We'd like to believe Bush is truly born again, but we still think he is untaught in the *whole Word of God*. Sounded like he equates the Bible with the Koran. That is what we see about almost all of the younger believers now. It's so difficult to discern who is truly born again vs. some who *think* they're born again because of raising a hand, going forward in church, etc....To recognize Jesus' complete atonement for me is the only way believing in Him as my Savior is credible....You may begin to be buffeted because of your stand for the Gospel. That, not from God, but from so-called fellow believers, is something that they will be held accountable for....We pray that critical ones will not erase you but come to realize how true to Christ you are. VG (KS)

Dear T.A.,

I want to thank you for the TBC Extra in the January letter, which is excerpts from a critique of *The Purpose Driven Life*....When I read your newsletter, I got out my book and my Bible and compared many quotes, and you are right—some phrases are misinterpreted. If it were not for your letter, I may not have noticed. You taught me a good lesson. When I see Bible quotes in a book, I should look them up in the Bible and make sure they have been interpreted correctly. CG (MT)

Dear Mr. Hunt and Mr. McMahon,

I am writing to say thank you for having the courage to address the man-centered, non-biblical teachings of *40 Days of Purpose*. The adoration of this movement is so pervasive in churches today [that] I believe it borders on cultic worship. In these churches...there is enormous pressure to "get on board," come to all the events, join a 40 Days study group, etc. I've not been able to "get on board" now in two different churches, because I recognized that there was more about man than God in this. It is also a management tool for ambitious pastors of seeker-friendly churches to grow their church, as though that equates to growing the kingdom of God. Thank you for caring more about pleasing God than pleasing man. JS (WA)

TBC,

I...heard your program. Frankly I was disgusted at the way in which you pulled apart concepts in *The Purpose Driven Life* that have helped millions of people in very practical, life-applicable ways. I have no doubt that you have some points when it comes to another interpretation of the meaning of some of the scriptures Rev. Warren quotes. However, your irreverent, tactless comments did nothing to convince me of your argument....Saying that the book "misleads" people as though it is causing harm to them is rude and thoughtless....I was totally unimpressed with your analysis....Your program was a big disappointment. I won't be listening again. CS (CA)

Dear Brethren,

As a pastor, I want to thank you for your stand on the important issues of the day that relate to the reliability and sufficiency of the Scriptures for life and godliness. Specifically, I have been troubled by some things in the Rick Warren *Purpose Driven* books....Having studied Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic in Bible college and seminary, I have real trouble with Warren and others quoting the Bible paraphrases as being authoritative and reliable as a study Bible. I also struggle with the use of pop psychology to interpret Scripture. This puts man, not God, in charge, and it lets man determine by human wisdom what is true and what is not. We must let God, in His Word, speak for Himself! JL (email)

Dear Brother Dave Hunt,

I would like to thank you for the books you've taken time to write, such as *The Seduction of Christianity* and *Occult Invasion*....I find it absolutely bizarre how the world is becoming more "spiritual"

(nothing is secular any more) and the church is becoming more secular (nothing is sacred any more) and both are *meeting together* in the middle and no one is noticing! Thank you again for fighting the true fight of faith. We will win! RD (TN)

My beloved Dave Hunt & all your dear staff,

Our trials here below turn our hearts back to Calvary in what our Savior suffered to cleanse us by His precious blood, and not only this but He prepared a place in Heaven with Him. How can we complain when He loves us so much? As I lay alone, but not alone—knowing he resides within...Excuse my writing—85 years old. NA (FL)

Dear Dave and Tom,

I am blessed that God led me to your radio program a few weeks ago. Since that time I've visited your website and subscribed to your email list....May God continue to bless you for the courage to speak the truth. JM (PA)

TBC Notes

Thank You

I remember Dave one day sadly pondering a rather disturbing trend influencing the Body of Christ that we were about to address. He added wistfully how he would much prefer that the bulk of TBC's writing could be simply devotional rather than correctional according to the Scriptures. We all feel that way here at TBC.

On the other hand, neither obedience to our calling nor the spiritual times in which we're living allow us to give in to our "druthers." Furthermore, the wonderfully encouraging feedback we receive from our readers confirms that although our discernment-oriented subject matter isn't the most joyful of content, it is being received as a blessing in these days of tremendous confusion and deception within the church.

So, thank you for writing to us with your encouragement. And forgive us that we are unable to respond to every one of you with a personal note.

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This is the third and final excerpt 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.thebereancall.org. If you don’t have access to the internet, write to us at PO Box 7019, Bend, OR 97708 or call us at 1-800-937-6638 and request a free copy. Bulk copies are also available for purchase.)

Rick Warren writes, “At Saddleback Church we have seen the awesome power...break the grip of seemingly hopeless addictions and persistent temptations through a program we developed called *Celebrate Recovery*...used in thousands of churches” (p. 213). While these pages contain some sound advice, the program *Celebrate Recovery* (as becomes clear by going to their website) is heavily influenced by psychotherapy and is a variation of the largely ineffective and anti-biblical but popular 12-Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous that comes out of the occult (See TBC, Aug. ’97).

Pop psychology often spills onto the pages at the expense of Scripture. In the midst of some good advice, Warren says: “Jacob was insecure...Joseph was abused... Samson was codependent...David had an affair and all kinds of [dysfunctional] family problems, Elijah was suicidal, Jeremiah was depressed...Peter was impulsive...” (p. 233). This is humanistic psychological terminology that undermines the example of biblical victory demonstrated in these men’s lives.

Again we meet deterministic and humanistic concepts supported by perverted versions of the Bible: “You are the way you are because you were made for a specific ministry...God deliberately shaped and formed you... He carefully mixed the DNA cocktail that created you...” Tell that to the person born with debilitating defects. God *allowed* what we are, but He didn’t design the genetic aberrations developed over generations of sinful living. The book is fatalistic, beginning with the unbiblical statements: “God...planned the days of your life in advance...” (pp. 22-23). To support this fatalistic concept, Warren quotes Psalm 139:16 from the Living Bible: “You...scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe...” Then why must I read RW’s book, spend 40 days trying to discover my purpose, and try to change my way of living if every detail of every day has already been planned?! In fact, Psalm 139 does not say that God *predetermined* the physical parts of the body or our days, but that He *foreknew* them—a huge difference!

On page 239, RW is still promoting fatalism: “The second characteristic of serving God from your heart is effectiveness. Whenever you do what God wired you to love to do, you get good at it.” Do I assume that if I “love” to do something more than anything else, therefore God has wired me that way? Can I excuse myself for not loving to share Christ at every opportunity but instead

loving to watch TV because God “wired” me that way? If I love sin, is that because God wired me that way?

RW offers a solution to a spiritual problem with no biblical support: “To discover God’s will for your life, you should seriously examine what you are good at doing and what you’re not good at” (p. 243). However, in Chapter 35 he seems to contradict himself: “God has never been impressed with strength or self-sufficiency. In fact, he is drawn to people who are weak and admit it” (p. 273).

Psychology’s humanistic delusion of “self-image” is even applied to Jesus. We’re told that He served “from a secure self-image” and His task of washing His disciples’ feet “didn’t threaten his self-image” (p. 269). The very concept of “self-image” is *not once* found in the Bible! It is an insult to Christ and undermines the teaching of Scripture to attribute His perfect life to having a “good self-image” and to suggest that a “good self-image” will enable others to serve God. Some of what RW says is good, but, sadly, it is laced with the arsenic of Schullerisms and psychobabble.

Next, Gideon is psychologically diagnosed: “Gideon’s weakness was low self-esteem and deep insecurities...” (p. 275). Again RW is promoting unbiblical humanistic psychology! Gideon said, “my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house” (Jgs 6:15). He sounds like other heroes of the faith such as Paul, who considered himself to be “less than the least of all saints” (Eph 3:8), and confessed, “in me...dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:18), yet he was the chief apostle. When Saul was “little in [his] own sight,” God made him king of Israel (1 Sm 15:17). Many other examples could be given, such as Moses saying he couldn’t even speak. *Never* were any of these men told that they had low self-esteem and that to be successful servants of God they needed to develop a positive self-image. *Never!* Then why does RW pass along such unbiblical, self-centered ideas to his readers?

RW declares throughout Chapter 37 that one’s *personal testimony* is the most important element in witnessing: “This is the essence of witnessing—simply sharing your personal experiences regarding the Lord...Actually, your personal testimony is more effective than a sermon...” (p. 290). Not only does this do harm to the importance of preaching God’s Word and the necessity of teaching sound doctrine, but RW contradicts his own foundational premise that we should “turn to God’s Word” and not to “inspirational stories” (p. 20).